

Boundaries Drawn: The Cultural and Labour Politics of  
American Political Cartooning, 1945-1973

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**ABSTRACT****Boundaries Drawn: The Cultural and Labour Politics of American Political Cartooning, 1945-1974****Brandon Webb, Ph.D****Concordia University, 2021**

In the twentieth century editorial cartoons were an integral part of American daily newspapers. Readers looked to these images for pithy commentary on news events. Yet, following the Second World War, economic changes in the newspaper industry threatened to make the job of the newspaper editorial cartoonist redundant. As editors became increasingly reliant on national syndication to fill their content needs, cartoonists who supported the Cold War consensus were better positioned to maintain their staff positions. At the same time, media critics argued that editorial cartoonists had abdicated their traditional adversarial role. Responding to these challenges, editorial cartoonists in the 1950s organized to promote American cartooning as an essential vehicle for maintaining a democratic print culture and print diversity. But because they struggled to imagine their art form apart from the commercial press, mainstream cartoonists were largely unaware of their radical counterparts in the alternative press who had to contend with the twin pressures of anticommunism and economic precarity.

This dissertation is both a cultural and labour history of a niche profession that became a site where hegemony was forged and contested. By situating the medium within a changing mediascape and the volatility of print capitalism, this study draws on Marxist cultural theory and archival research of two influential groups — the National Cartoonists Society (NCS) and the Association of American Editorial Cartoonists (AAEC) — to highlight how cartoonists responded to industry change as media workers. In the early Cold War, cartooning's professional societies were fiercely anti-communist and anti-union. Many of their most prominent members also voiced broad support for US foreign policy while venerating the role of markets in shaping public policy. Departing from dominant portrayals that depict cartoonists as cultural rebels removed from the world of work, this study analyzes cartoonists' working lives in the context of their profession's racial, gender, and class dynamics. Examining both the ideological and material conditions that prompted this professional organizing, I argue that American cartoonists' support for Cold War liberalism, combined with their romanticized ideals of a "free press," strengthened a postwar status quo by failing to ask who gets to speak and why.

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**LIST OF ACRONYMS**

American Association of Editorial Cartoonists (AAEC)

American Federation of Labor-Congress of Industrial Organization (AFL-CIO)

American Communist Party (CPUSA)

Conference of Studio Unions (CSU)

Independent Socialist League (ISL)

Industrial Workers of the World (IWW)

National Cartoonists Society (NCS)

National Manufacturing Association (NMA)

National Public Radio (NPR)

Newspaper Comics Council (NCC)

Socialist Workers Party (SWP)

United Electrical, Radio, and Machine Workers of America (UE)

Workers Party (WP)

“Give me a good cartoonist and I can throw out half the editorial staff.”

— H.L. Mencken

“This is no ‘on the other hand’ in cartooning.”

— Common expression among editorial cartoonists

“Before I went to Vietnam, I wondered how we got into the situation there. Now that I’ve been there, I still wonder, but the question has become academic. We are there.”

— Bill Mauldin

## **INTRODUCTION**

On May 13, 1965, 81 editorial cartoonists assembled in the East Room of the White House to hear President Lyndon B. Johnson deliver a nationally televised address on the war in Vietnam. In town for the annual convention of the Association of American Editorial Cartoonists (AAEC), the group “represent[ed] all sizes of newspapers and syndicates” as well as a geographical cross-section of cartoonists from across North America. As part of the AAEC’s weekend festivities in the nation’s capital, the cartoonists were given a tour of the Pentagon and received briefings from high-ranking administration officials. The Association’s newsletter, the *AAEC News*, would later report that such access to “authoritative sources of government information” made for better editorial cartoons.<sup>1</sup> The convention’s main event, however, was the president’s televised speech. With television cameras and photographers ringed around them, Johnson’s guests drew sketches of him as he spoke. Before settling into his prepared remarks, the president addressed the group directly. Recognizing their place in American political and print culture, Johnson noted:

I know I am talking to the most influential journalists in America. Reporters may write and politicians may talk, but what you draw remains in the public memory long after these other words are forgotten.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> See “Convention Notes: Washington, D.C., 1965,” Box AAEC 1, folder, 15, the Association of American Editorial Cartoonists (AAEC) Records, SPEC.CGA.AAEC, Billy Ireland Cartoon Library and Museum, Ohio State University [hereafter: BICLM].

<sup>2</sup> John “Milt” Morris was an editorial cartoonist for the Associated Press. Like many AAEC members who attended the AAEC’s 1965 Washington convention, he wrote an article describing his experiences. See John Morris, “The Editorial Cartoon,” *AP Newsfeatures Report*, no. 574, May 21, 1965, Box AAEC 1, folder, 15, BICLM.

This was not the first time cartoonists had been invited to visit the White House. Previously, the much larger National Cartoonists Society (NCS) met with presidents Harry S. Truman and Dwight D. Eisenhower. Both visits were in acknowledgement of the Society's efforts in promoting the Treasury Department's United States Saving Bonds Program. The AAEC, which represented roughly 120 cartoonists who were employed full-time with North American dailies, likewise courted both political parties. In the late 1950s, it named Richard Nixon an honorary member and in 1962 gifted John F. Kennedy with a book of caricatures. It was within this context that Johnson, who was particularly sensitive to public opinion and slights in the press, invited the AAEC, and thereby recognizing their cultural influence.

The AAEC was on hand for a momentous moment in Johnson's presidency. From late 1964 through the early months of 1965, the Johnson administration had ramped up the US's military presence in the region. None of the cartoonists present for the national address in May had publicly expressed doubts about this military escalation. The president's guests, who were fiercely anticommunist themselves, likely agreed with him that national self-determination in Southeast Asia was imperiled from an international "communism [that] seeks to impose its will by force of arms." Whatever private doubts they may have shared, most accepted that opposing communism was, as the president noted, "commanded to us by the moral values of our civilization."<sup>3</sup> Thus, the cartoonists needed little convincing. Few, in fact, openly criticized Johnson's handling of the war prior to public opinion shifting against the president.

But in 1965, the war seemed both winnable and necessary to much of the established media in America. The *Christian Science Monitor* hailed Johnson's speech as "diplomacy by satellite" while both the *New York Times* and *Washington Post* published full transcripts of the address.<sup>4</sup> The AAEC likewise received media attention. Canadian member, cartoonist Blaine MacDonald of the *Hamilton Spectator*, presented Johnson with a caricature that the president described as "a mighty fine drawing." In an interview for his hometown paper, MacDonald recalled that the Columbia Broadcasting Station's (CBS) evening news broadcast "faded in a closeup of my drawing of the President while Walter Cronkite was reading the TV news."<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> "Transcript of Address by President on Vietnam War and China's Role," *New York Times*, 14 May 1965, Box AAEC 1, folder, 15, BICLM.

<sup>4</sup> Richard L. Strout, "Johnson Underlines Idealism in Vietnam Policy," *Christian Science Monitor*, 15 May 1965. Box AAEC 1, folder, 16, BICLM.

<sup>5</sup> Blaine MacDonald, "How Blaine's 'Quick Draw' Captured a President," *Hamilton Spectator*, 23 June 1965, Box AAEC 1, folder, 15, BICLM.



Figure 0.1: Blaine MacDonald meeting President Lyndon B. Johnson, May 1965.

Source: Billy Ireland Cartoon Library and Museum, Ohio State University.<sup>6</sup>

The cartoonists who attended the '65 Washington convention included the medium's most recognizable names, most of whom were Cold War liberals. Herbert Block, or "Herblock" as he was known to readers, was not an AAEC member, although the syndicated *Washington Post* cartoonist typically made an appearance whenever the Association or the NCS held events in the nation's capital. The day after Johnson's speech, Block took part in a panel for the AAEC's annual convention that focused on the importance of local cartooning. Johnson's guests also included some lesser-known cartoonists, who, nonetheless, played leading roles in promoting editorial cartooning in these years. The *Army Times*' staff cartoonist, John Stampone, who founded the AAEC in 1957, was present, as was the *Minneapolis Star's* Scott Long and *Los Angeles Herald-Examiner's* Karl Hubenthal. Later that year, Hubenthal wrote a widely circulated essay in which he quoted LBJ's remarks about the role editorial cartoons played in shaping public opinion.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>6</sup> This photo was featured in *Editor & Publisher*, 22 May 1965. See Box AAEC 1, folder 15, BICLM.

<sup>7</sup> See Karl Hubenthal, "Reflections of an Editorial Cartoonist," *The Quill: The Magazine for Journalists*, January 1966, 22. Throughout this thesis, I draw on Hubenthal's essay, which was first published in the *California Publisher* in

The AAEC's appearance for Johnson's speech was also notable for who was not there. Bill Mauldin, whose Willy and Joe characters in *Stars N' Stripes* had provided comfort and humor to soldiers during the Second World War, was an AAEC member but had largely been aloof from the Association. Earlier in the year, he had been sent on assignment to Saigon by his paper, the *Chicago Sun-Times*. Although he too was a hardened Cold War liberal, Mauldin's experiences in WWII made him skeptical of the need for direct military engagement in Vietnam during the Eisenhower and Kennedy years. But after he witnessed firsthand the Vietcong attack an US military encampment in Pleiku — North Vietnam's first major assault on American ground troops — the cartoonist turned hawkish. As he admitted years later, his pro-war stance was also personal. The only reason Mauldin happened to be in Pleiku at the time of the Vietcong raid was because he was there visiting his son, who was enlisted in the 52<sup>nd</sup> Aviation Battalion. For the next couple of years, Mauldin, like many of his colleagues, expressed broad support for the war effort until public opinion began to change in the middle of 1967. A year later, after witnessing Chicago police thrash antiwar protesters at the Democratic Convention, the famed cartoonist began to openly embrace the counterculture. Despite not drastically altering his well-honed style, Mauldin became a noted admirer of some prominent antiwar cartoonists in alternative print, none of whom would have any involvement with the AAEC.<sup>8</sup>

Women attended the AAEC's 1965 Washington convention, but no women cartoonists. Male cartoonists in the newspaper industry found American print journalism's masculinized ideals easily transferrable to their own creative domain. For their part, editorial cartoonists tended to describe their medium as being "fearless" and "hard-hitting," qualities that they predominantly associated as being male characteristics. This sexism had deep roots in the profession. In the early 1950s, members of the NCS, reluctant to shake up the Society's "old boys' club" atmosphere, had a vigorous debate over whether to admit women members. The AAEC had no such debate, in part, because no women cartoonists held staff positions with newspaper dailies during the group's first decade. Nonetheless, AAEC members' wives played an active role in organizing the Association's events as well as activities of their own.<sup>9</sup>

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1965 and later reprinted in *The Quill* and *The Cartoonist* in 1966 I quote from the *Quill* version which can be accessed online: [https://bobstaake.com/karl/hubenthal\\_ownwords.html](https://bobstaake.com/karl/hubenthal_ownwords.html).

<sup>8</sup> For more on Mauldin's changing views in this period, see Todd DePastino, *Bill Mauldin: A Life Upfront* (New York and London: W.W. Norton & Company, 2008), chapter 8, 321-330, ebook.

<sup>9</sup> Julia Warren was married to the arch conservative editorial cartoonist for the *Cincinnati Enquirer*, L.D. Warren. Julia, a liberal democrat and a professional news photographer, photographed many of the AAEC events. For a

Perhaps most notably of all, especially considering the president’s civil rights agenda and editorial cartoonists’ broad support for it, no African American cartoonists were present at the AAEC’s convention, despite many having large readerships of their own through the Black press. The NCS, for example, would not have its first Black cartoonist as a member until the mid-1960s. For the AAEC, this lack of membership diversity was all the more glaring considering that the group worked diligently to promote editorial cartooning as a democratic medium. Tellingly, one of the country’s most insightful political cartoonists, Oliver “Ollie” Harrington, appeared to be completely unknown to the AAEC, despite having a public profile prior to his leaving America in the early 1950s. At the height of McCarthyism Harrington left for Europe where he continued to publish cartoons in the *Pittsburgh Courier* and later, the *Daily World*. At the time of Johnson’s televised speech, he was living behind the Iron Curtain. Having taken up residence in East Berlin in the early 1960s, it is likely that Harrington read about the AAEC’s White House visit in one of the American newspapers that he subscribed to. If so, given his keen sense of irony, he likely would have found the episode both amusing and fitting.<sup>10</sup>



Figure 0.2: Photo of Oliver “Ollie” Harrington. Undated.

Source: Billy Ireland Cartoon Library and Museum, Ohio State University.

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profile of the pair that was written during the 1966 AAEC Kansas convention, see Harry Krause, “At Odds Except in Marriage,” *Kansas City-Star*, 27 May 1966. Box AAEC 1, folder 17, BICLM.

<sup>10</sup> For an autobiographical account, see Oliver W. Harrington, *Why I Left America and Other Essays* (Jackson, MS: University Press of Mississippi, 2010). I discuss Harrington’s work and life in in chapters 2 and 5 of this study.

Flash forward forty years and the cultural clout that cartoonists once enjoyed had become a distinct memory. Today, when cartoonists are in the news, it is typically for drawing public ire for an offensive image, whether deliberate or not.<sup>11</sup> Moreover, the job of the editorial cartoonist hardly exists at all since staff layoffs due to newspapers closures and the rise of digital media have combined to decimate the medium's professional ranks in recent years. In December 2005, the AAEC organized a day of protest known as "Black Ink Monday" to draw awareness to "the wholesale weakening of the daily newspaper."<sup>12</sup> The Association, however, could do little to staunch the job loss. In 2011, the Herblock Foundation released a comprehensive report in which it noted only forty cartoonists had full-time staff positions with American dailies.<sup>13</sup> The report urged cartoonists to adopt "a clear-eyed view" of their future job prospects and proclaimed that "the Golden Age for editorial cartoonists at the nation's newspapers is over."<sup>14</sup>

Editorial cartoonists have long struggled to imagine their practice apart from newspapers. By focusing on the medium's complex, often fraught, relationship to print capitalism, visual culture, and journalism during the long postwar boom, this thesis explains why.<sup>15</sup> In response to monopolizing trends in the newspaper industry, shifting demographic readerships brought on by suburbanization, and new technological and marketing developments spurred by syndication, cartoonists, in a variety of genres and formats, organized as media professionals in the 1940s and 1950s. Yet, in marked contrast to the class-conscious organizing attempts that characterized the AAEC's "Black Ink Monday" protest in the early 2000s, editorial cartoonists in the immediate post-WWII decades tended to close ranks rather than expand them. They did so, in part, by elaborating narrow categorizations of who counted as a "professional" editorial cartoonist. Moreover, by conceiving the "political" in similarly circumscribed ways, the editorial cartoonist job remained tethered to a highly normative view of both politics and publics.

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<sup>11</sup> See, for example, Giseline Kuipers, "The Politics of Humour in the Public Sphere: Cartoons, Power, and Modernity in the First Transnational Humour Crisis," *European Journal of Cultural Studies* 14, no. 1 (2011): 63-80.

<sup>12</sup> Tony Dokoupil, "Newspapers Are Killing Cartoonists—Another Brilliant Business Move," *Columbia Journalism Review*, 11 May 2007, [https://archives.cjr.org/behind\\_the\\_news/newspapers\\_are\\_killing\\_cartoon.php](https://archives.cjr.org/behind_the_news/newspapers_are_killing_cartoon.php).

<sup>13</sup> In 2007, the AAEC claimed that there were 275 full-time staff cartoonists in 1957. This number, however, is at odds with the AAEC's own estimates in the early 1960s. See Chris Lamb and Mark Long, "Drawing Fire: Editorial Cartoons in the War on Terror," *Journalism History* 40 no. 2 (2014): 85-97.

<sup>14</sup> "Report on Editorial Cartooning," originally published in December 2011 by the Herblock Foundation. The report featured several contributors including several current cartoonists. The full report can be accessed here: <https://www.herblockfoundation.org/editorial-cartooning/report-editorial-cartooning>. Accessed 1 May 2020.

<sup>15</sup> I use the term "print capitalism" throughout this thesis. See Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, revised edition (New York and London: Verso, 2016).

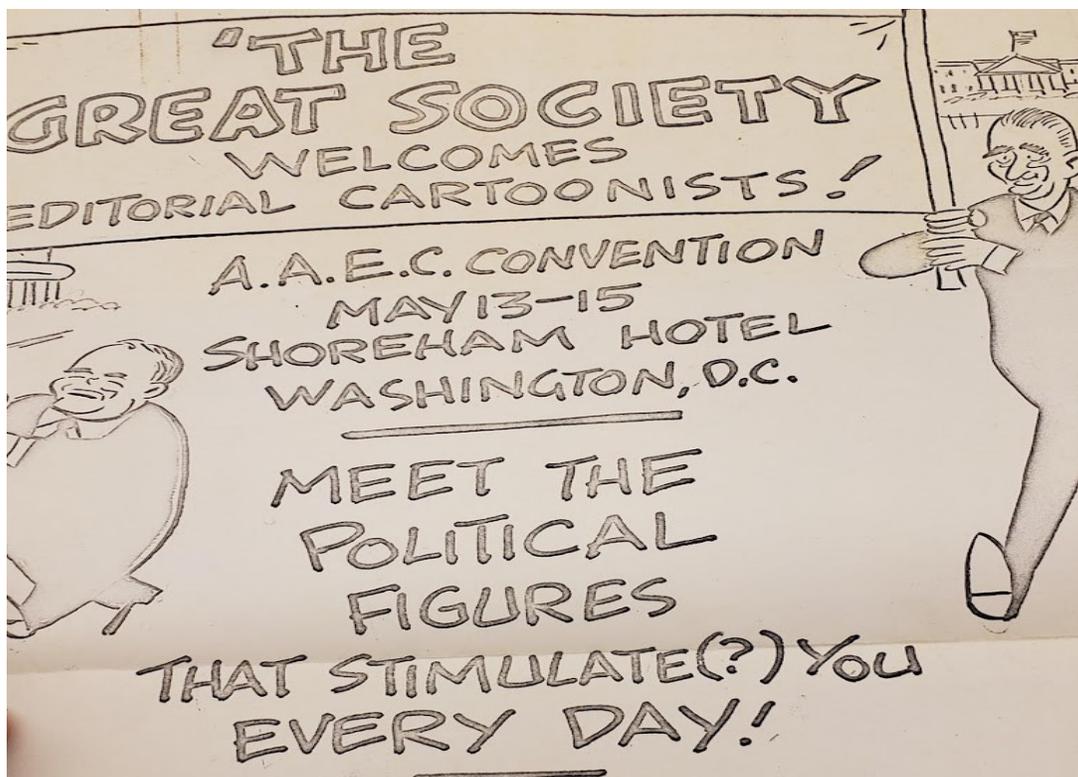


Figure 0.3: Poster for the AAEC's 1965 Washington Convention.

Source: Billy Ireland Cartoon Library and Museum, Ohio State University.

With the rise of television in the 1950s, editorial cartoons circulated in a changing visual culture. Although industry studies commissioned by cartooning trade groups showed that television reinforced comic strip readership, no similar conclusion could be drawn about the impact of the new electronic medium on audiences for editorial cartoons. While cartoonists like John Chase drew cartoons on air for local television, print remained their main mode of delivery.<sup>16</sup> As such, editorial cartoonists tended to view photography as a more immediate rival medium. In the 1950s editors began to experiment with their formats, and in some cases, substituted photographs for editorial cartoons on their editorial pages. This use of news photography, combined with the development of a distribution system that benefitted the top tier of syndicated cartoonists, threatened to make staff editorial cartoonist positions redundant.

During an era of Cold War consensus, some critics such as the *Saturday Evening Review's* Jerome Beaty Jr. also accused cartoonists of practicing self-censorship by succumbing

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<sup>16</sup> New Orleans-based cartoonist John Chase drew editorial cartoons for local television station in the 1960s. Other cartoonists made occasional appearances on broadcast television in this era. These and other episodes are referenced sporadically throughout the AAEC's correspondence.

to “institutional taboos.”<sup>17</sup> Other critics argued the medium had become creatively stagnant due to an overreliance on outworn symbolism, while others charged editorial cartoonists with abdicating the medium’s traditional adversarial role. After reading one such missive aimed at his profession, Stampone reached out to his colleagues to gauge their interest in forming an organization that would counter this narrative of professional decline.<sup>18</sup> The response was overwhelming. While most editorial cartoonists at the time were dues-paying members of the NCS, many felt this broad-based organization was too dominated by the interests of comic strip cartoonists. As a result, the AAEC took shape along narrow occupational lines and quickly became a mouthpiece for a profession that occupied a niche place in the wider context of the graphic arts. Considering that the Association held its first meeting in a hotel in Washington, D.C., in 1957, the AAEC’s mercurial rise was significant considering that eight years later the group was front and center as the privileged guest of the President of the United States for a broadcast to millions of Americans. If professional editorial cartooning appeared to be in danger of permanent decline in the mid-1950s, the AAEC believed it had temporarily staved off this trend by reviving public interest in the medium. This thesis is about that transformation.

While politically satirical art can take many forms, one of its most classic genres is the modern newspaper editorial cartoon. Along with comic strips, editorial cartoons popularized the daily newspaper. As Julia Guarneri notes, nineteenth century newspapers were “visually bland, stridently political, intended only for white male readers, and, generally, no fun.”<sup>19</sup> This gradually changed as image reproduction improved in the late nineteenth century and newsprint became cheaper. At the start of the “golden age” of newspapers, press barons like Joseph Pulitzer and William Randolph Hearst competed to sign the top cartooning talent while publishing punchy political cartoons on the front pages of their newspapers to attract a growing urban readership. In 1895 Hearst relocated the *San Francisco Examiner*’s Homer Davenport to his

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<sup>17</sup> Jerome Beatty Jr., “Humor vs. Taboo,” *Saturday Review of Literature* 40 (November 23, 1957): 11-13

<sup>18</sup> The NCS was founded in 1946 by comic strip cartoonists who had entertained troops during WWII. I discuss the founding of the NCS and the AAEC in detail in chapter two of this study.

<sup>19</sup> Julia Guarneri, *Newsprint Metropolis: City Papers and the Making of Modern Americans* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2017), 7. Throughout this thesis I draw from Guarneri’s important research which involves case studies of several American city newspapers. On syndication, see Guarneri, *Newsprint Metropolis*, “Nationalizing the News,” chapter 5, 194-233.

flagship *New York Journal*. Four years later he aggressively recruited *Puck* artist Frederick Burr Opper to his growing stable of cartoonists which he deployed for partisan purposes.<sup>20</sup>

Cartoonists' transition to daily print ushered in what Ilhan Danjoux describes as “the editorial cartoon compromise.” Danjoux argues that in exchange for “broader distribution and a steady flow of income,” cartoonists who transitioned from weekly humour publications like *Puck* and *Judge* to newspapers “grudgingly accepted editorial scrutiny and production deadlines.” Producing on a daily schedule, he argues, had “a profound impact” on the medium. With early twentieth-century newspapers' growing dependence on advertising revenue, cartoonists became wary of offending advertisers, and as a result, their “artistic freedom waned.”<sup>21</sup>

While scholars of American cartooning have highlighted how the transition to daily print simplified the medium's aesthetics, less attention has been paid to the memory of these events. Despite a clear break in the form at the turn of the century, editorial cartoonists in the 1950s and 1960s linked their craft with a longer lineage of satirical graphic art that predated the transition to daily print. This selected tradition displaced the disruptive effects of syndication — the newspaper industry's system of sharing and distributing content — that began in 1906, and which, ten years later, became a big business through the Hearst chain's King Features syndicate.

The emergence of syndication coincided with the professionalization of print journalism. As newspapers became more reliant on advertising revenue, the industry embraced “objective” reporting standards and sought to standardize an array of practices, including content distribution. Because editorial cartoons comment on news events, their widespread syndication did not take off until improvements in communications technology after the Second World War allowed for their delivery to be more prompt. In the late 1940s, syndicates advertised their “features,” which included comic strips, columns, and editorial cartoons, in industry trade publications like *Editor & Publisher*. It was through this distribution system that editorial cartoonists reached a wider audience than their nineteenth-century predecessors. Although many contemporary cartoonists assume that syndication is a recent phenomenon exacerbated by the digital age, I locate syndication's transformative impact on editorial cartooning at a much earlier stage. During the late 1950s and early 1960s, syndicate managers began to aggressively market

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<sup>20</sup> For more on how Hearst mobilized cartoons as a political weapon against opponents, see the excellent biography by David Nasaw, *The Chief: The Life of William Randolph Hearst* (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 2000).

<sup>21</sup> Ilan Danjoux, “Reconsidering the Decline of the Editorial Cartoon,” *Political Science and Politics* 40, no. 2 (April 2007): 245-248.

editorial cartoonists to prospective newspaper subscribers. As a result of these efforts, editorial cartoonists became more conscious of their professional self-image as well as the need to exert greater control over how their work was presented to the public.<sup>22</sup>

While cartoonists with large-circulating papers were the chief benefactors of syndication, cartoonists with smaller dailies also benefitted. Edmund Valtman provides as an illustrative example. During the 1964 presidential election, the *Hartford Times*' cartoonist pictured Johnson in his signature cowboy hat while carrying H-bombs and a sign that read "mightiest nation in history." The cartoon depicted the president being ambushed by an armed communist insurgent carrying a six-shooter with the tag, "conventional arms."<sup>23</sup> Thirty years later communism remained a frequent topic for Valtman. After the demise of the Soviet bloc, he drew a cartoon that showed Karl Marx presiding over "communist paradise" as Joseph Stalin and Vladimir Lenin look on through the clouds at a funeral procession led by Mikhail Gorbachev.<sup>24</sup>

A native of Estonia, Valtman, who had experienced Soviet occupation briefly at the end of World War II, was fiercely anticommunist. Syndicates welcomed anticommunist content because, unlike local cartoons, caricatures of communist leaders could be distributed widely. Valtman, for example, won the 1962 Pulitzer Prize for a cartoon that mocked Fidel Castro's calls for Latin American revolution.<sup>25</sup> That same year, columnist Walter Lippman, whose articles were distributed by the *New York Herald Tribune* Syndicate, won a Pulitzer for his interview with Soviet Premier Nicolai Khrushchev. Thus, syndication amplified Lippman's words while bringing cartoonists like Valtman into daily newspapers across the country.<sup>26</sup>

However, syndication was a double-edge sword for cartoonists since it provided editors with a cheaper alternative than paying a full-time staff cartoonist to produce daily editorial

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<sup>22</sup> The literature on American print media is vast. See, for example, Richard L. Kaplan, *Politics and the American Press: The Rise of Objectivity, 1865-1920* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002); David Rudenstine, *The Day the Presses Stopped: A History of the Pentagon Papers Case* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1996); Michael Schudson, *Discovering the News: A Social History of American Newspapers* (New York: Basic Books, 1978); Chris Daly, *Covering America: A Narrative History of a Nation's History* (Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 2012); Nicole Hemmer, *Messengers of the Right: The Origins of Conservative Media* (Philadelphia, PN: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016). *Media Nation: The Political History of News in Modern America*, Bruce J. Schulman and Julian E. Zelizer, eds. (Philadelphia, PN: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2017).

<sup>23</sup> Edmund Valtman, "Stick 'Em Up!" *Hartford Times*, 9 June 1964.

<sup>24</sup> For a sampling of Valtman's Cold War cartoons, see the online exhibit curated by the Library of Congress' Prints and Photographs Division at <https://www.loc.gov/rr/print/swann/valtman/> Accessed 1 February 2020.

<sup>25</sup> Edmund Valtman, "What You Need, Man, Is a Revolution Like Mine!" *Hartford Times*, 1 August 1961.

<sup>26</sup> Chapter three of this study delves deeper into the mechanics of syndication.

cartoons. It was in this context that cartoonists mobilized. In newsletters, essays, and conventions cartoonists frequently referenced syndication while arguing that American cartooning contributed to buttressing the nation's print diversity. While they tried, and to some extent, succeeded, at reasserting editorial cartooning in the nation's public imagination, they failed to appreciate that the postwar mediascape had been radically altered since the heyday of political cartooning earlier in the twentieth century.

This brief resurgence came at a cost. To delimit more clearly what made their craft unique, editorial cartoonists distanced themselves from what they considered to be the crass commercialism of comic strip and comic book cartooning. As professional "newspapermen," they thought it more befitting to mingle with editors, journalists, columnists, and communications scholars, many of whom were given prime speaking slots at AAEC conventions. And while the AAEC provided a venue for editorial cartoonists to share best practices with each other, by distancing their medium from adjacent cartooning genres, the Association undercut its ability to forge alliances with cartoonists working in other genres. Consequently, the professional codes that editorial cartoonists elaborated in these years left them vulnerable to the volatility of print capitalism. Despite spurring a temporary revival in the 1960s, the AAEC, in the long run, could not overcome long-term trajectories in print media.<sup>27</sup>

This dissertation is not a history of images but rather a historical analysis of how the demands of daily print, combined with the pressure to produce for a growing national audience, conditioned how editorial cartoonists conceptualized their role in a romanticized public sphere. As the AAEC's presence at Johnson's pivotal Vietnam War speech indicated, politicians courted cartoonists because they believed they had the ability to influence public opinion. Yet, in gaining access to power, editorial cartoonists lost their ability to critique it. In contrast to the medium's early years when political cartoons were wielded as partisan weapons in print, even the much-vaunted art of caricature began to lose its salience in this era. What accounts for this change? In the chapters that follow I examine how an art form premised on ridicule gradually relinquished its penchant for oppositional critique. Part of the answer is tied to the emergence of syndication, but also to increasing efforts to professionalize editorial cartooning as an occupation. Despite

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<sup>27</sup> In 1969, the AAEC placed cartoonists with the *Tulsa Tribune*, *The Montgomery Journal*, *The Raleigh News and Observer*, *Milwaukee Sentinel*, and *The Honolulu Star-Bulletin*. Quoted in "A Message from the New AAEC President," Charles Brooks, (October 1969, no. 19). In the case of *The Raleigh News and Observer*, the AAEC helped create the position. Quoted in "Co-operative Effort Helps Land Editorial Cartoonist Job" (April 1969, no. 17)

structural and technological changes to the organization of labor in print media, editorial cartoonists were never as threatened by job loss as they sometimes claimed. In fact, according to the AAEC's membership rolls, the overall number of full-time staff editorial cartoonists remained remarkably consistent in this era.<sup>28</sup> They were, however, subject to increasing market dependency that was driven by syndication, which in turn, fueled an embattled discourse.

While many histories of political cartooning highlight episodes in which editorial cartoonists enraged public officials or provoked censorship, these narratives tend to mythologize the art form. In popular culture, political cartoonists have typically been depicted as moral crusaders or advocates of social reform whose main function is to hold the powerful to account. As Richard Scully points out, this romantic framing places cartoonists in a "heroic role" that portrays them as "debunker[s] of political myths."<sup>29</sup> Ironically, most of these accounts are heavily focused on mainstream media and ignore more radical cartooning that appeared in leftist print networks. Similarly, scholars in political science have tended to register political cartoons as "an index of press freedom," a gauge for how states tolerate humorous dissent. A limitation of this approach is that it equates the medium's creative expression with liberal democracy which, in subtle ways, reinforces a narrative of progress that erases differences across varying print contexts.<sup>30</sup> Finally, American cartoonists sometimes view themselves as "a special breed" of artist that combines humour and insight.<sup>31</sup> The disarming powers of cartooning likewise present the medium in playful terms. Taken together, cartoonists are commonly seen as escaping the dreary and routinized world of work.

This study takes a different tack. By consulting archival material produced by trade groups, industry sources, and syndicates, I foreground how editorial cartoonists approached problems of visual aesthetics, topicality, genre, editorial oversight, and syndicate markets in the 1950s and 1960s through the lens of a nascent professional identity. But they did so within

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<sup>28</sup> In 2007, the AAEC claimed that there were 275 full-time staff cartoonists in 1957. This number, however, is at odds with the AAEC's own estimates in the early 1960s. Chris Lamb and Mark Long estimated roughly 150 editorial cartoonists were employed full-time in 1980, which is in keeping with other estimates. See Chris Lamb and Mark Long, "Drawing Fire: Editorial Cartoons in the War on Terror," *Journalism History* 40 no. 2 (2014): 85–97.

<sup>29</sup> See Richard Scully, "Towards a Global History of the Political Cartoon," *International Journal of Comic Art* 16, no. 1 (Spring 2014): 29–47. Also, for an excellent historical overview of nineteenth century satirical art, see Richard Scully, *Eminent Victorian Cartoonists*, 3 Volumes (London, UK: Political Cartoon Society, 2018).

<sup>30</sup> Mahmud Farjami, "Political Satire as an Index of Press Freedom: A Review of Political Satire in the Iranian Press during the 2000s," *Iranian Studies*, (2014): DOI: [10.1080/00210862.2013.860325](https://doi.org/10.1080/00210862.2013.860325).

<sup>31</sup> Stephen Becker, *Comic Art in America: A Social History of the Funnies, the Political Cartoons, Magazine Humor, Sporting Cartoons and Animated Cartoons* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1959), preface, x.

circumstances not of their own choosing. One reason the medium lost its satirical bite is because editorial cartoons competed in a mediascape where images of public figures circulated widely and often. Aware of this dilemma, the AAEC called on its members to “modernize” their styles by jettisoning outmoded symbols such as Uncle Sam and Lady Liberty. While editorial cartoonists remained fixated on the political arena, they became less partisan, and in the words of Bill Mauldin, more “gadflies” than feared social critics.<sup>32</sup> To understand what led Mauldin to this conclusion, I re-situate his profession within the space and pace of daily print to better describe the creative and political constraints that editorial cartoonists internalized.

Another critical thrust of this study focuses on editorial cartoonists’ limited engagement with alternative news sources. Because they consumed media as they produced it, editorial cartoonists were inevitably influenced by the material, physical and ideological context in which they worked with regard to their choice of topics, themes, and opinions. Situated within newsrooms, few cartoonists strayed beyond the discursive bounds of mainstream media. Viewing editorial cartoons within the narrow frame of ridicule or angry satire misses these dynamics as well as the wider conceptual fields in which cartoonists forged their perspectives. Most American newspaper cartoons published in the Cold War era articulated support for anticommunism, anti-unionism and “free enterprise.” When commenting on foreign policy, editorial cartoonists mainly took their cues from journalists who covered the Washington beat. While some, like Block, issued vague warnings about the limits of American power, the medium, in general, was devoid of critiques of military Keynesianism and US empire. Far from challenging the status quo, then, editorial cartoonists in these years reinforced a hegemonic status quo by visualizing opinions that were rehearsed and rehashed throughout American mass media.

This is not to claim that all editorial cartoonists’ opinions neatly conformed to a paper’s editorial policy. The relationship between cartoon content and publishers’ agendas was more complicated than a one-to-one correspondence between class and ideology. For those cartoonists who recalled the climate of fear that engulfed the McCarthy era, finding ways to skirt Cold War culture was considered an act of citizenship. While the medium did provide a space for skepticism, the scope for probing further into the constellation of political and social forces that shaped this era were severely limited. As Stephen J. Whitfield argues, the postwar consensus

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<sup>32</sup> Bill Mauldin, “Cartoons with a Conscience,” *AAEC News*, vol 18, no. 4 (1977). The article was later reprinted in the 1978 *World Book Encyclopedia*.

“decomposed” only after “American self-righteousness could be more readily punctured.”<sup>33</sup> Thus, while cartoonists exercised a degree of autonomy, they remained bound by imaginative, commercial, and political restrictions.



Figure 0.4: Herbert Block, “The Other Ascent into the Unknown,” *Washington Post*, 10 July 1965. Source: Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division.

Antonio Gramsci’s theory of hegemony is useful for parsing why editorial cartoonists held to the postulates of American liberalism prior to the breakup of the postwar consensus.<sup>34</sup> As Stuart Hall observed, “hegemonizing is hard work.”<sup>35</sup> In Hall’s reading of the Italian Marxist theorist, “interests are not given but have to be politically and ideologically constructed,” and thus, hegemony “depends on the relations of forces at any particular moment.”<sup>36</sup>

<sup>33</sup> Stephen J. Whitfield, *The Culture of the Cold War*, second edition (Baltimore and London: John Hopkins University Press, 1996), 205.

<sup>34</sup> My understanding of the term is derived from Antonio Gramsci’s theory of hegemony. For an historical overview of the concept, see Perry Anderson, *The H-Word: The Peripeteia of Hegemony* (New York and London: Verso, 2007). Anderson also critiques Gramsci for mainly locating hegemony in “civil society.” See Perry Anderson, “The Antinomies of Antonio Gramsci,” *New Left Review*, no. 100, November 1976/January 1977. For more on how a Gramscian conception of a hegemony differs from ideology proper, see Terry Eagleton, “From Lukács to Gramsci,” *Ideology: An Introduction, Revised Edition* (New York and London: Verso, 2007), ch.4, 177-192.

<sup>35</sup> Stuart Hall, “Gramsci and Us,” *Marxism Today* (1987): 16-21. Also republished in *The Hard Road to Renewal: Thatcherism and the Crisis of the Left* (New York and London, Verso, 1988), 224-241.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*

In Gramscian terms, editorial cartoonists were “traditional intellectuals” who gave visual form to an anti-communist historical bloc whose legitimacy was reinforced by daily headlines and editorials in newspaper dailies. By contrast, radical cartoonists such as Harrington, as well as the Trotskyist cartoonist Laura Slobe, and the trade unionist Fred Wright, sprang from political movements and can be considered what Gramsci referred to as “organic intellectuals.” But because anticommunism operated by a combination of consent and force, and “communism” itself was an elastic term that could be made to bend, forging a counter-hegemonic perspective limited their publishing reach. Operating at the margins of print media, these radical cartoonists had little interest in publishing in mainstream print, which meant their satirical critiques of Cold War culture circulated through leftist print networks. Therefore, to analyze the ideological divisions within the wider world of cartooning, it is imperative to look at professionalism and precarity in tandem. As Gramsci suggested, instead of looking for “the intrinsic nature” of cultural activities that tie disparate artists and intellectuals together into a single frame of reference, a more productive approach resides in exploring cultural workers “within the greater complex of social relations” in which they worked and lived.<sup>37</sup>

While many radical cartoonists did not earn a living wage from their graphic art, their gainfully employed colleagues in the mainstream media displayed the marks of what Erik Olin Wright called “a contradictory class.”<sup>38</sup> In the technical division of print media, editorial cartoonists were “above-the-line” workers who along with journalists, editorial writers, and copy writers produced newspaper content. These occupational tasks were distinct from “below-the-line” workers such as printers, technicians, and delivery personnel. The industry’s class composition, however, was never as stable as this rough classification would suggest. Nor did ideas about class automatically flow from structural location. Hegemony, then, which can be forged through and against the material interests of those who have been recruited into its project, provides a more supple tool for analyzing cartooning’s ideological grounding. It is also a prefigurative concept that foregrounds imaginative limits and possibilities. As Terry Eagleton argues, attempts to legitimize a given social order are only successful to the degree to which ideology becomes “habitual social practice.”<sup>39</sup> This view of hegemony comports with Barbara

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<sup>37</sup> Antonio Gramsci, “The Intellectuals,” in *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, translated and edited by Q. Hoare and G.N. Smith (New York: International Publishers, 1971), 3-23.

<sup>38</sup> See Erik Olin Wright, *Class, Crisis and the State* (New York and London: Verso, 1978).

<sup>39</sup> Eagleton, *Ideology: An Introduction*, 181.

and Karen Fields' argument that racial ideology manifests itself by way of ritual and practice. To the extent "racecraft," as they term it, becomes commonplace, practice is paramount to understanding its habitual reflex. As Barbara Fields argued:

Ideology is not a set of attitudes that people can 'have,' as they have a cold and throw off the same way. Human beings live in human societies by negotiating a certain terrain, whose map they keep alive in their minds by the collective, ritual repetition of the activities they must carry out in order to negotiate the terrain. If their terrain changes, so must their activities, and therefore so must the map.<sup>40</sup>

In editorial cartooning, the practice of producing as many as 5 to 6 cartoons per week created a demanding work schedule that made it all too easy to fall back on familiar tropes and readymade villains. As the pressures to produce for an expanding national market intensified, hegemony became encoded in practice, leading consistently to a similarity of themes, subjects, and symbols in cartooning that legitimized the postwar order. In this way, cartoonists visualized what Michael Sherry describes as "the process by which war and national security became consuming anxieties and provided the memories, models, and metaphors that shaped broad areas of national life."<sup>41</sup> Liberal cartoonists gave visual form to these "memories, models, and metaphors" in terms that aligned with "Cold War civil rights."<sup>42</sup> Even for occasional critics like Block and Mauldin, these mental maps remained the dominant frameworks for their work.

While editorial cartoonists in this era were attentive to shifts in public opinion, they hardly represented an ideologically diverse political spectrum. Yet, as part of a middle stratum of graphic arts, they were subject to alienating industry trends. Because of the widespread adoption of syndication in the post-WWII years, cartoonists in general had little say in how their images were presented to the public. Due to their lack of copyright ownership over their images, editorial cartoonists were powerless to stop editors from resizing and recaptioning their cartoons. In some cases, newspapers like the *New York Times* reprinted editorial cartoons as a form of

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<sup>40</sup> Barbara J. Fields, "Slavery, Race, and Ideology in the United States of America," *New Left Review*, 1/181 (May/June 1990). Reprinted in Karen E. Fields and Barbara J. Fields, *Racecraft: The Soul of Inequality in American Life* (London and New York: Verso, 2014), ch. 4, 111-148, 139-140.

<sup>41</sup> Michael Sherry, *In the Shadow of War: The United States since the 1930s* (New Haven, CN: Yale University Press, 1995), introduction, xi.

<sup>42</sup> For more on how international concerns influenced US policymakers' domestic policies, see Mary L. Dudziak, *Cold War Civil Rights: Race and the Image of American Democracy* (NJ: University of Princeton Press, 2011).

editorial comment without paying a reprint fee. When cartooning's trade groups debated taking collective action to curb this industry practice in the late 1950s, the AAEC's membership vacillated. Afraid they might lose a showcase for their work, editorial cartoonists instead valorized an aspirational ideal of artistic autonomy to compensate for their relative lack of authorial control. As firm believers in the democratic and civic mystique of a "free press," editorial cartoonists, in sharp contrast to the union-organizing of animation cartoonists who struck Hollywood studios in the 1940s, opted for a less confrontational approach.

Isolating editorial cartoons from other print ephemera also obscures how the medium takes shape in a limited space and form. Editorial cartoons, of course, are not meant to provide a comprehensive account of reality, but they do privilege certain interpretive framings over others. The art form is built on exaggerating one aspect of reality to explain an event's significance. As Fredric Jameson observed, all representations are "partial" insofar as "every possible representation is a combination of diverse and heterogeneous modes of construction or expression."<sup>43</sup> As such, editorial cartoonists' choice of topics, subjects, and themes is inherently political by virtue of what is excluded. What appeared in their cartoons was equally as important as what did not. And what is true of cultural production, more generally, is also relevant for discussing absences in historiography.

### **Why Cold War Cartooning?**

In contrast to jokes, which typically originate and circulate without reference to an original source, authorship is central to cartoon and comic art. A cartoon's signature line, for example, signifies a point-of-view to fans. At the same time, attribution of authorship crowds out other print workers involved in the production and creative process. The question, then, is not so much "what is an author?" as it is, who else is involved in authorship?<sup>44</sup> While a newspaper masthead stands for all workers involved in its production, the cartoon's signature does the opposite. In contrast to film, where rolling credits account for individual labours, a signed newspaper cartoon effaces its complex chain of production and distribution out of practical necessity. Yet assigning authorship obscures a wider set of social relations in cartooning, leaving the cartoonist's imagination as the sole measure by which we judge a cartoon's creative content.

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<sup>43</sup> Fredric Jameson, *Representing Capital: A Reading of Volume One* (London and New York: Verso, 2014), 14.

<sup>44</sup> See Michel Foucault, "What Is an Author?" In *The Foucault Reader*, Paul Rabinow, ed. (New York: Pantheon, 2008), 101-121.

Nikhil Pal Singh notes that the “conventional story” of postwar US empire was premised on the idea that America “went to great lengths to promote and realize the vision of a world governed by international rules, mediated by global institutions, and underwritten by the promise of consensual political order and economic growth and development.”<sup>45</sup> Undergirding this domestic “consensual political order” was the family wage, labour compromise, and anticommunism. Cultural historians have critiqued this conventional story by reference to narrative-driven visual mediums such as film or comic books that “unmasked” the extent to which the Cold War infiltrated daily life.<sup>46</sup> Editorial cartoons, on the other hand, have received a lesser historiographical billing. By and large historians mainly use them as visual evidence to gauge public opinion with little consideration of the material and ideological contexts in which these images were produced. As Singh argues, the “intense political and ideological struggles over the boundaries of civic belonging” were constantly being negotiated in the post-WWII era.<sup>47</sup>

For most editorial cartoonists, articulating “the boundaries of civic belonging” took place in the professional white-collar workplace of the daily newspaper. In a 2007 forum on the current state of the profession, Kurt Worcester described newspaper editorial cartoons as “a more or less respectable cartoon format.” Due to the spatial limits of newspaper column inches, editorial cartoons also are mainly conceived as single-panel static images with little dialogue. Beyond the use of captions, textual elaboration is limited. As Worcester explains, editorial cartoons represent “the topical outbursts of image and text that punctuate and enliven the daily newspaper editorial page . . . [and] enjoy a certain degree of autonomy from the columns of print that surround it.”<sup>48</sup>

Throughout this thesis, I show how this ideal was more aspirational than reality. Editorial cartoonists did exercise autonomy in their drawing styles, and in many cases, choice of subjects. But they were expected to comment on news relevant to that day’s edition. This tension becomes more visible by re-situating cartoonists within the space of the daily newspaper. Because

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<sup>45</sup> Nikhil Pal Singh, *Race and America’s Long War* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2017), 2.

<sup>46</sup> See, for example, Matthew J. Costello, *Secret Identity Crisis: Comic Books and the Unmasking of Cold War America* (New York: Continuum International Publishing Group, 2009).

<sup>47</sup> Singh, *Race and America’s Long War*, preface, ix.

<sup>48</sup> In addition to scholars, the symposium featured interviews with editorial cartoonists, including Clay Bennet of the *Christian Science Monitor*, Anne Telneas of the *Washington Post*, as well as syndicated cartoonists Jeff Danziger, Jimmy Marguiles, Leonard Rifas, and “Zapiro,” the pen name of Jonathan Shapiro. The idea for the forum was originally “floated” a few weeks before the September 2005 Danish cartoon controversy that was sparked by Jyllands-Posten’s publications of Islamophobic cartoons that sparked outrage across the Muslim world. For more on this, see Kurt Worcester, “Introduction,” *Political Science and Politics* 40, no. 2 (April 2007): 223-227.

researchers frequently encounter these images in archives or bound collections, this connection is often severed. Consulting the AAEC's and NCS's voluminous correspondence provides a valuable set of sources to gauge how cartoonists navigated a print climate that was being remade by marketing, syndication, and a shifting mediascape.

In general, logistical questions about how cartoons are produced and distributed have been unexamined. This might be one reason why editorial cartooning is treated as a peculiar branch of the graphic arts. In his influential *Understanding Comics*, Scott McCloud argued that multi-panel strip formats advance a story's narrative by using gaps in between frames to signal sequential storytelling.<sup>49</sup> Comics scholar Robert C. Harvey has argued that a more profitable approach to analyzing the marriage of image and text in cartooning is for scholars to consider the sophisticated "visual-verbal blend" that cartoonists deploy.<sup>50</sup> Worcester rightfully notes that McCloud's insights are less applicable to single-panel images like editorial cartoons. As he describes, centering a "visual-verbal blend" is helpful as it "highlights the important distinction between *simplification*, which [editorial] cartoonists are routinely accused of, and *encapsulation*, which uses small spaces to capture large meanings [italics in the original]."<sup>51</sup>

Worcester's notion of encapsulation presents an intriguing angle. But whether editorial cartoonists encapsulated or simplified issues, they did so as newspaper employees. These limits become more vivid when contrasting precariously employed cartoonists with those who published in the mainstream press. To help sort out these occupational categories, I use "mainstream" cartooning to denote editorial cartoons that appeared in daily newspapers or were republished in mass circulating magazines. By "alternative" cartooning, I refer to those cartoons who were published in the trade union press, Trotskyist and communist party periodicals, African American newspapers, as well as counterculture print. Two caveats should be noted: "alternative" does not automatically mean opposition. Nor were the boundaries separating mainstream and alternative print hard and fast. The terms instead provide a handy heuristic that complicates any singular tradition of cartooning while highlighting culture as a contested site. This approach also foregrounds how hegemony is both forged and challenged.

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<sup>49</sup> See Scott McCloud, *Understanding Comics: The Invisible Art* (New York: Harpers Collins and Kitchen Sink Press, 1994).

<sup>50</sup> See Robert C. Harvey, *The Art of the Comic Book: An Aesthetic History* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1996); as well as his *The Art of the Funnies: An Aesthetic History* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1994).

<sup>51</sup> Worcester, "Introduction: Symposium," 223.

Relatedly, while the terms “editorial” and “political” cartoons are typically used interchangeably, I distinguish between them for several reasons. For one, “editorial cartoonist” came into popular usage after the incorporation of cartoonists into daily print in the early twentieth century. Thus, to avoid an anachronistic usage of “editorial cartooning,” my usage of the term is meant to highlight its professional designation as it was understood by editors of newspaper dailies and syndicate managers. When referencing the broader traditions of the form, I deploy the term “political cartoonist” more generally to describe those graphic artists operating in adjacent genres both inside and outside mainstream print. It is also important to recall that in the public imagination these distinctions hardly mattered. Popular cartoonists such as *the Village Voice*’s Jules Feiffer are often referred to as editorial cartoonists. In 1967 an aide for Lyndon Johnson wrote to Feiffer requesting an autographed cartoon that was highly critical of the president’s policies. Feiffer refused, but the episode showed, among other things, that the reading public had a broad understanding of editorial cartooning.<sup>52</sup> Cartoonists also moved between genres in their careers while addressing both “counterpublics” and the dominant public sphere.<sup>53</sup>



Figure 0.5: Jules Feiffer, “First the Negroes Revolted,” *New York Post*, 23 August 1967. Source: Library of Congress, Manuscripts Division.<sup>54</sup>

<sup>52</sup> Johnson collected cartoons to document his administration. Letter from Willy Day Taylor to Jules Feiffer, 25 August 1967. Jules Feiffer Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress. A digital copy of the letter can be found here: <https://www.loc.gov/exhibits/hope-for-america/cartoons-and-satire.html>. Accessed 1 March 2020.

<sup>53</sup> See Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere: An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1962). For a critique, see Nancy Fraser, “Rethinking the Public Sphere,” in *The Phantom Public Sphere*, ed. Bruce Robbins (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993).

<sup>54</sup> The above Feiffer cartoon was the one requested by the Johnson administration.

This brings up another key distinction about editorial cartooning that needs to be registered from the outset: newspapers obviously can exist apart from editorial cartoons. Consequently, newspapers do not need editorial cartoonists' labour in the same way that animated films depend on the labour of animation cartoonists. This is one reason why the latter adopted a more militant strand of labour organizing. The idea of political cartooning, as much as its actual practice, likewise came to signify a cultural nostalgia in ways that cannot be reduced to the job itself. To investigate why this happened, I also examine the cultural activities of cartooning's professional societies. Organizing conventions, charity drives, and government-sponsored overseas trips were an extension of the workplace insofar as they mobilized cartoonists' talents for promotional purposes. These activities required enlisting cartoonists' wives and secretaries while helping build their personal brands. Centering this gendered division of labour, which was present throughout the newspaper business, informs my discussion of cartooning's masculine professional ideals while drawing attention to the material advantages that male cartoonists accrued.<sup>55</sup>

In Charles Press's widely cited 1981 survey of the medium, the political scientist grouped cartoonists into three categories: authoritarian, totalitarian, or democratic print contexts. While his crude classificatory system reproduces an American exceptionalism that has been echoed by fans and scholars alike, his research provides important insights into the long gestation of cartoonists' professionalism. As Press notes, because of the pressures of the job, editorial cartoonists cannot hope to produce "a daily blockbuster" day in, day out. Instead, they acclimate themselves to more modest aims that fit with the commercial demands of daily print.<sup>56</sup>

More recently, scholars have analyzed political cartoons in relation to wider humour publics. In his survey of post-WWII American liberal satire, historian Stephen Kercher argues that the anticommunist cartoons penned by liberal cartoonists "may have been motivated by a pragmatic rationalization." In Kercher's view, satirizing the excesses of McCarthyism, as non-AAEC members Block and Walt Kelly famously did, required some concessions to fend off right-wing attacks.<sup>57</sup> While this argument makes a plausible explanation, this perspective

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<sup>55</sup> Chapter two delves deeper into the NCS's and the AAEC's extracurricular activities.

<sup>56</sup> See Charles Press, *The Political Cartoon* (London and Toronto: Associated University Presses, 1981).

<sup>57</sup> See Stephen Kercher, *Revel with a Cause: Liberal Satire in Postwar America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006), "'We Shall Meet the Enemy': Herbert Block, Robert Osborn, Walt Kelley, and Liberal Cartoonists' 'Weapons of Wit,'" chapter two, 33-74.

assumes that liberal cartoonists strategically produced opinions that they did not fully endorse. When applied to a topic like nuclear diplomacy, this view skims over ideology as well as the mechanics of the job.<sup>58</sup> Moreover, this way of rationalizing any number of conservative positions, including hawkish Cold War stances, ignores the principle of “signed editorial comment” in the profession. In the 1960s, the AAEC’s newsletters and conventions disseminated this professional principle among its membership. Editorial cartoonists considered “signed” cartoons as being representative of their subjective opinion, which, from their perspective, distinguished their art form from being a mere instrument of a newspaper’s editorial policy. The signature line also became a source of tension between the AAEC and newspaper editors who chose to cut a cartoonist’s signature in a reprint. For editorial cartoonists, this practice was intolerable because a signed cartoon carried a professional stamp that was viewed differently from “unsigned” editorial comment.

The overriding analytical tendency in the extant literature, however, tends to treat American editorial cartoonists as iconoclasts. For example, in his historical survey of the medium, *Drawn to Extremes: The Use and Abuses of Editorial Cartoons*, Chris Lamb argues that editorial cartoonists “are supposed to keep a jaundiced eye on the democracy and those threatening it, whether the threats come from outside or inside the country.”<sup>59</sup> This description poses several problems. For one, it has been through the language of Americanism that “threats” have been defined broadly, often in racialized ways that undermine democracy rather than enlarge its scope. Secondly, like print journalism, editorial cartooning has suffered from a chronic lack of gender and racial representation within its professional ranks. As such, editorial cartoonists have tended to think of “democracy” within the narrow limits of liberal traditions of political rights with little regard to how gendered, racialized or class structures make these ideals normative. Thirdly, while some editorial cartoonists were fired, censored, or subjected to intense public scrutiny for commenting on controversial issues, conflating these exceptional circumstances under the overarching banner of “censorship” confuses the goal of cartooning with selected state responses to it. Moreover, it feeds and inflates an embattled narrative that assigns cartoonists to “the frontlines of free speech.” Finally, media commentators, archivists, and

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<sup>58</sup> See Brandon Webb, “Laughter Louder Than Bombs? Apocalyptic Graphic Satire in Cold War Cartooning, 1946-1959” *American Quarterly* 70, no. 2 (2018): 235-266.

<sup>59</sup> Chris Lamb, *Drawn to Extremes: The Use and Abuse of Editorial Cartoons* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004), 4.

researchers have all struggled at times to escape the axiomatic assumptions built into popular understandings of the medium. Part of this stems from trying to define a coherent conceptual field of study. But this iconoclasm also had a gendered cast that becomes particularly evident when examining editorial cartoons in the era of “domestic containment.”<sup>60</sup>

The connections between the symbolic and the material in political cartoons become more readily apparent by treating cartooning as a category of work. The recent state turn to crafting cultural policies that aim to attract a “creative class” for the new “creative economies” has re-engaged scholarly interest in cultural work.<sup>61</sup> Consequently, research attention in broader cultural studies has shifted from the consumption of culture to its production.<sup>62</sup> This research agenda has mostly been mapped by scholars drawn from sociology, literary and media studies. While these studies have expanded our idea of how culture is made, the bulk of this scholarship focuses on recent developments in the creative industries. Labour historians have typically ignored cultural fields as sites of work, while cultural historians have oscillated between histories of corporate mass media or histories of reception. Therefore, what Michael Denning memorably called “the laboring of American culture” has been either sidelined by disciplinary silos or overshadowed by the cultural commodities themselves.<sup>63</sup>

One of the central tensions in current scholarly debates about cultural labour is the question of why cultural workers enjoy relative autonomy at the point of production. Mark Banks, for example, argues that “the durability and necessity of craft production seems to guarantee that creative cultural work will persist as a relatively autonomous and meaningful endeavor,” so long as “market rationality” is somehow kept in check. Banks does make the important point that cultural commodities contain a “double articulation” that requires artists to produce both a utilitarian and an “aesthetic good.” Given this double articulation, cultural

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<sup>60</sup> Elaine Tyler May, *Homeward Bound: American Families in the Cold War Era*. New York: Basic Books, 1988.

<sup>61</sup> In this study I use both “cultural worker” and “creative worker.” The latter term is mostly associated with celebratory accounts of the creative class, however. See, for example, Richard Florida, *The Rise of the Creative Class* (New York: Basic Books, 2002).

<sup>62</sup> For an overview of production studies, see the volume edited by Vicki Mayer, Miranda J. Banks and John Thornton Caldwell, *Production Studies: Cultural Studies of Media Industries* (New York and London: Routledge, 2009). Also, see Marks Banks, Rosalind Gill and Stephanie Taylor, eds. *Theorizing Cultural Work: Labour, Continuity and Change in the Cultural and Creative Industries* (London and New York: Routledge, 2013).

<sup>63</sup> Michael Denning, *The Cultural Front: The Laboring of American Culture in the Twentieth Century* (London and New York: Verso, 1996). Also, see Shannan Clark, *The Making of the American Creative Class: New York’s Culture Workers and Twentieth-Century Consumer Capitalism* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2021). Clark’s work is pathbreaking and is cited throughout this study.

workers are typically granted creative latitude for them to meet the fads and styles of the cultural marketplace.<sup>64</sup> Similarly, David Hesmondhalgh argues that one distinctive feature of cultural work is its “unusual degree of autonomy which is carried over from preceding eras.”

Hesmondhalgh urges scholars to dispense with “the metaphor of the traditional factory production line” since “factory-style production is widely felt to be inimical to the kinds of creativity necessary to make profits.”<sup>65</sup> For these scholars, variation and differentiation, rather than industrial sameness, better characterize mass cultural production. This is a welcome corrective to the dominant metaphorical language that stems in part from Theodor W. Adorno and Max Horkheimer’s original formulation about the culture industry.<sup>66</sup> But while “art is an autonomous sphere” in many respects, “its autonomy exists only by, in and through its social conditioning.”<sup>67</sup> Thus, imaginative limits are both real, and in principle, transcendable.

Matt Stahl argues that defining cultural labour either in terms of “good work” or “bad work” cannot explain why cultural workers make claims on the products they create.<sup>68</sup> Intellectual property rights, Stahl notes, are ultimately tied to a juridical status that is legally bound by copyright and employment law.<sup>69</sup> In order to see “how privilege and distinction operate in the production world,” Stahl suggests greater attention to how legal distinctions define and enforce authorship, and which, in turn, create workplace hierarchies in the culture industries.<sup>70</sup>

Echoing Stahl, Nicole Cohen notes that “cultural work is most often described as the antithesis of alienation” when a more nuanced perspective would approach cultural work as “simultaneously precarious and satisfying, risky and rewarding.” She proposes a Marxian political economy framework that would help avoid “setting cultural workers apart as exceptional types of workers.” By “refus[ing] the tendency to understand cultural workers’

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<sup>64</sup> For more on how studies of craft production have reoriented understandings of cultural labour, see Mark Banks, *The Politics of Cultural Work* (London, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 29-36.

<sup>65</sup> See David Hesmondhalgh, *The Cultural Industries*, first edition (London, UK: Sage Publishers, 2002), 55-56.

<sup>66</sup> See Theodor W. Adorno and Max Horkheimer, “The Culture Industry: Enlightenment as Mass Deception,” *The Dialectics of Enlightenment*, trans. John Cumming (New York and London: Verso, 1997).

<sup>67</sup> Adolfo Sánchez-Vázquez, *Art and Society: Essays in Marxist Aesthetics* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1973), 98.

<sup>68</sup> For their model of “good” and “bad” cultural work, see David Hesmondhalgh and Sarah Baker, *Creative Labour: Media Work in Three Cultural Industries* (New York: Routledge, 2011), 1-3, 25.

<sup>69</sup> Matt Stahl, “Intellectual Property, Employment, and Talent Relations: A Media Studies Perspective,” in *Intellectual Property for the Twenty-First Century: Interdisciplinary Approaches*, B. Courtney Doagoo, Mistrale Goudreau, Teresa Scassa and Madeline Saginur, eds. (Ottawa, ON: Irwin Law, 2014), chapter 9, 206-226.

<sup>70</sup> See Matt Stahl, “Privilege and Distinction in Production Worlds: Copyright, *Collective Bargaining, and Working Conditions in Media Making,*” in *Production Studies: Cultural Studies of Media Industries*, ch.4, 54-67, 65.

actions as motivated by artistic temperament” alone, Cohen’s own research into the growing prevalence of precarity in contemporary freelance publishing demonstrates the need to identify “the links between precarious working conditions and broader transformations . . . while also recognizing workers as agents who resist, struggle over, and negotiate their labour conditions.”<sup>71</sup>

These rejoinders are helpful as they demystify cultural labour and help bring into view what Kathie Weeks has described as “the problem of work.” “What is perplexing,” she writes, “is less the acceptance of the present reality that one must work to live than the willingness to live for work.”<sup>72</sup> Weeks’ insight encapsulates how cultural work is mobilized as a disembodied ideal of labour. As she astutely observes, work’s cultural associations have larger implications: “Work produces not just economic goods and services but also social and political subjects . . . the wage relation generates not just income and capital, but disciplined individuals, governable subjects, worthy citizens, and responsible family members.”<sup>73</sup>

Throughout this study, I return to these themes by illustrating how work for editorial cartoonists produced more than an expressive object; it also produced an expressive subject. Moreover, cartoonists’ working day did not neatly divide labour from play. The two collapsed into each other, leaving creative time to blend with labour time. But while the former extended to off-hours, the latter still took place within strict temporal limits defined by the print deadline. None of this is to say that cartoonists disliked their careers; rather it is draw attention to the subtle ways that competition and the promise of creative fulfilment drew them into more work. Increased production demands as well as varying levels of editorial oversight mitigated these individual experiences. While most newspaper cartoonists enjoyed middle-class salaries and were able to procure a modest supplemental income derived from syndication, their lack of ownership, combined with a general injunction that they comment on current events, circumscribed their autonomy. By tapping into different revenue streams, many cartoonists discovered that the imperatives of the market meant new opportunities quickly gave way to new obligations.<sup>74</sup>

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<sup>71</sup> Nicole S. Cohen, “Cultural Work as a Site of Struggle: Freelancers and Exploitation,” *tripleC* 10, no. 2 (2012): 141-155.

<sup>72</sup> Kathie Weeks, *The Problem with Work: Feminism, Marxism, Antiwork Politics and Postwork Imaginaries* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2011), 2.

<sup>73</sup> Weeks, *The Problem of Work*, 8.

<sup>74</sup> See Ellen Meiksins Woods, “From Opportunity to Imperative: The History of the Market,” *Monthly Review* (July-August 1994): 14-140.

Because editors had cost-effective alternatives at their disposal, the question of why editorial cartooning persisted needs to be asked. While industry studies at the time showed that comic strips increased newspaper circulation, the evidence that editorial cartoons did the same was more ambiguous. This is one reason why the AAEC appealed to editors by referencing the medium's civic traditions. In doing so, editorial cartoonists argued that their medium was better equipped than photography to visualize ideals such as freedom, citizenship, and democracy. Thus, editorial cartooning was shaped at three levels of abstraction: one, the particular ways that editorial cartoonists concretized abstract social forces by simplifying or encapsulating their complexities in visual form; two, the abstractions that syndicate managers used to coordinate and imagine a national audience and market for cartoon and comic art; and three, the AAEC's abstract ideal of professionalism that became a lens through which the labour that went into producing newspaper content was contradictorily seen as not being work at all.

### **Marx, Mirth, and Method**

This thesis draws on an eclectic mix of Marxist cultural theory. Marxism, in general, signified different things to the historical actors that appear in the following chapters. As such, it represents a body of theory that in the context of the Cold War elicited strong reactions. For mainstream cartoonists, socialism suggested an alien body of praxis, hardly applicable to analyzing American civic norms that they believed managed class antagonisms. Radical cartoonists by contrast were more inclined to see how their creative activities were subject to commodification and market forces.<sup>75</sup> While this thesis is about a later moment in the history of American cartooning, it is important to also keep in mind the rich traditions of popular graphic art that circulated in leftist periodicals in the early twentieth century. Publications like *Solidarity*, an Industrial Workers of the World (IWW) newspaper, featured anonymously drawn cartoons by contributors who signed their images, "Fellow Worker." Radical cartoonists like the Wobbly organizer Ralph Chaplin, who wrote the labour anthem, "Solidarity Forever," likewise used cartooning to appeal to workers. This history is a reminder that cultural forms have no inherent class allegiance and can be mobilized to radically different ends.<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>75</sup> For an overview of how artistic labour figures into Marx's "law of value," see John Roberts, *The Intangibilities of Form: Skill and Deskilling in Art After the Readymade* (London and New York: Verso, 2007), 27-29.

<sup>76</sup> Michael Cohen has documented radical cartoons published in the socialist press in the early twentieth century. See Ian Thomas, "'I Felt an Urgency the Publishing Industry Did Not Share': Michael Mark Cohen and Cartooning Capitalism," in *The Comics Journal*, 22 March 2021.

Unlike other media, editorial cartoons are rarely consumed as stand-alone texts. Readers most commonly encounter them in the space of the daily newspaper, whose business model depends on advertising and whose content blends civic and commercial concerns. As Vincent DiGirolamo notes “most newspapers were privately owned, profit-seeking enterprises that employed or otherwise engaged thousands of people to transform the raw materials of life into a tangible commodity called news that required shipping, schlepping, and selling.”<sup>77</sup> Editorial cartoons helped sell this commodity. Much of this, I argue, was obscured by the aesthetics of play and the disarming powers of cartooning, more generally. While satire is a mode of critique that is sometimes associated with the carnivalesque, as Nicholas Hohm points out, the common conflation of humorous expression with dissent looms large in the liberal political imagination.<sup>78</sup> By contrast, Walter Benjamin observed that Marx was an exemplar satirist not just for his acerbic polemics, but also because of his method. Satire for Benjamin represented a “materialist art” that looked beyond surface appearances to uncover hidden interconnections.<sup>79</sup>

Marxism has experienced a revival in recent years, but questions about Marx’s method, and how it might relate to cultural production, still linger. Within Marxist historiography, visual arts have also figured somewhat less prominently than other media.<sup>80</sup> Recently, though, there has been a broader push to rethink culture in terms of labour and value. In earlier scholarship, cultural work retained a “special” status. For example, Bill Ryan argued that artistic labour “represents a special case of concrete labour which is ultimately irreducible to abstract value.” For Ryan, because “the structures of art make artists incompatible with the structures of capital . . . artists appear to capital as the antithesis of labour power, antagonistic to incorporation in the capitalist labour process as *abstract* labour [emphasis in the original].”<sup>81</sup> Ryan’s perspective, however, applies to a limited set of self-employed artists, while displacing an array of waged creative workers who opposed the introduction of work discipline in the culture industries.<sup>82</sup>

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<sup>77</sup> Vincent DiGirolamo, *Crying the News: A History of America’s Newsboys* (New York: Oxford University Press), 5.

<sup>78</sup> For an overview of the shortcomings of various humour models to contend with liberalism, see Nicholas Hohm, *Humor as Politics: The Political Aesthetics of Contemporary Comedy* (London: Palgrave Studies in Comedy, 2017).

<sup>79</sup> Walter Benjamin, “Brecht’s Threepenny Novel,” in *Understanding Brecht*, trans. Anna Bostock (New York and London: Verso, 1998), e-book, 139.

<sup>80</sup> An important exception would be John Berger’s public lectures and scholarship in the 1970s. See John Berger, *Ways of Seeing* (London, UK: Penguin Books, 2008).

<sup>81</sup> Bill Ryan, *Making Capital from Culture: The Corporate Form of Capitalist Cultural Production* (New York: Walter De Gruyter, 1992), 42-44.

<sup>82</sup> For an American study of workers’ resistance, see David S. Roediger and Philip S. Foner, *Our Own Time: A History of American Labor and the Working Day* (New York and London: Verso, 1989).

More recently, Mike Wayne has argued that “from the perspective of their symbolic products,” cultural workers reproduce ideology. But when “viewed from the point of production . . . they produce commodities which realize surplus value for media capital.”<sup>83</sup> This is a key point for parsing how cultural workers add value to media commodities. “[I]f the value productivity of labour,” David Harvey writes, “can be better secured by some reasonable level of workers autonomy, then so be it.”<sup>84</sup> Capitalism, Harvey notes, is quite proficient at commodifying the “free gifts” of human imagination through enclosure and copyright.<sup>85</sup> This offers a starting point to broach public discourse about print diversity, which in the postwar era, retained a market-centric approach toward media monopoly ownership. The idea of a commons, as a non-commodified public space that is accessible to all, asks us to reconsider claims about the “free press” and cultural work’s “special” status as they map onto discourses of American exceptionalism that both editorial cartoonists and journalists internalized as “common sense.”

Scholars in the “new history of capitalism” have been reluctant to commit to any single overriding definition of capitalism.<sup>86</sup> Yet as Louis Hyman, a leading historian in this field, also notes: “capitalism is the oddity that must be explained.”<sup>87</sup> Michael Denning suggests that one advantage of Marxist theory is its interdisciplinary and “international vocabulary” skirts “the provincialities of an American tradition” while being on the guard against rigid economic determinism.<sup>88</sup> As Denning has suggested elsewhere, because workers compete for jobs while forming associative bonds, a Marxist critique must overcome the representational limits that has historically privileged the white, waged industrial proletariat. Within this cultural imaginary, Denning argues, “the forms of life and struggle of the unwaged, the unemployed, the informal,

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<sup>83</sup> Mike Wayne, *Marxism and Media Studies: Key Concepts and Contemporary Trends* (London and Sterling, VA: Pluto Press, 2003),

<sup>84</sup> David Harvey, *The Limits to Capital* (New York and London: Verso, 2016), 116. For more on his take on value theory, see David Harvey, “Marx’s Refusal of the Labour Theory of Value,” <http://davidharvey.org/2018/03/marxs-refusal-of-the-labour-theory-of-value-by-david-harvey/> posted 14 March 2018. Parts of this article are referenced in David Harvey, *Marx, Capital, and the Madness of Economic Reason* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018).

<sup>85</sup> Harvey, *Marx, Capital, and the Madness of Economic Reason*, 97-98.

<sup>86</sup> For an overview of these debates featuring leading scholars in the field, see the JAH forum, “Interchange: The History of Capitalism,” *Journal of American History*, 101, no. 2 (September 2014): 503-536. Also, Seth Rockman, “What Makes the History of Capitalism Newsworthy?” *Journal of the Early Republic* 34, no. 3 (Fall 2013): 439-466.

<sup>87</sup> Louis Hyman, “Interchange: The History of Capitalism,” 517.

<sup>88</sup> See Michael Denning, *Culture in the Age of Three Worlds* (London and New York: Verso, 2004), 187-191.

the unrepresented are as central to this dialectic of competition and association as are the lives and struggles of those capital deems workers.”<sup>89</sup>

This study follows Denning in seeing Marxist theory and historiography not as “a fixed set of assumptions” but rather as “a set of questions . . . raised in the last instance by the politics of emancipation, [and] by the need for a critical understanding of the world.”<sup>90</sup> Throughout this thesis I deploy Marxian categories as a way to displace the idea of an expressive subject free of social constraints. By conceiving class as both a process and relation that is subject to change,<sup>91</sup> my methodology foregrounds the problematic of professionalism and the power of abstraction — as a professional ideal; through the impersonal domination of the market; and as a conceptual tool in cartooning — in order to analyze cartooning’s changing class composition and decomposition. As Beverly Best incisively observes, “abstraction and representation” are “the motor[s] of an exchange economy.” As she argues, “what makes Marxian political economy distinct from other methods of analysis is that, through its own particular movement the distinction between method and object is intentionally dissolved.”<sup>92</sup>

While Marx abstracted out the anarchy of the market in parts of *Capital* to analyze its “ideal average,” incorporating discussion of how social difference is produced within and through the racialized history of American capitalism is in no way inconsistent with his own approach to these questions found elsewhere in his writings.<sup>93</sup> This is important because in the period under discussion here, abstract representations abounded. In the Cold War imagination socialism was said to constrain human creativity while capitalism unleashed it. In more jingoistic formulations, communists enslaved while Americans liberated. This was the conceptual tug-of-war that cartoonists, among other cultural producers, jostled with daily. For most Americans, what constituted “communism” hardly mattered; the point was rather what it was not: American. In this descriptive void, “freedom” became the *lingua franca* of a historical bloc opposed to its menacing other, which allowed the state to be internalized vis-à-vis McCarthyism.

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<sup>89</sup> Michael Denning, “Representing Global Labor,” *Social Text* 92, 25, no. 3 (Fall 2007): 125-145.

<sup>90</sup> Denning, *Culture in the Age of Three Worlds*, 188.

<sup>91</sup> For her excellent account of E.P. Thompson’s approach, see Ellen Meiksins Woods, *Democracy Against Capitalism: Renewing Historical Materialism* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1995), chapter 3, 76-107.

<sup>92</sup> Beverly Best, *Marx and the Dynamic of the Capital Formation: An Aesthetics of Political Economy* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), introduction, 2-7.

<sup>93</sup> See, for example, Walter Johnson’s influential article, “The Pedestal and the Veil,” *Journal of the Early Republic* 24 (2004): 299-308. For a critique of Johnson’s somewhat truncated reading of Marx’s writings on slavery, see John Bellamy Foster, Hannah Holleman, and Brett Clark, “Marx and Slavery” *Monthly Review*, 1 July 2020.

In her classic work, *Marxism and Freedom: From 1776 to Today* (1958), Raya Dunayevskaya, whose family had migrated from the Ukraine to the United States in 1922, looked to redirect this American vocabulary of freedom to revolutionary ends. Dunayevskaya, argued that “the American roots of Marxism have remained hidden.”<sup>94</sup> To support her claims, Dunayevskaya linked Marx’s strident abolitionism with the development of his mature critique.<sup>95</sup> This lineage led her to take a different view on what Engels called “the special American conditions” that sparked Werner Sombart’s oft-cited question of “why no socialism in the US?”<sup>96</sup> Writing in the era of Taft-Hartley, she drew on her experiences with striking coal miners and autoworkers as “co-authors.” Quoting one such worker, Dunayevskaya wrote that for work to be meaningful, it must become “something totally different,” which in her view, necessitated the need to reimagine “*a new kind of labor for the producer, the worker* [italics in the original].”<sup>97</sup> In other words, “to see the crisis in production is to understand it everywhere else.”<sup>98</sup>

Harry Braverman would express similar points in his foundational research on labour processes. Yet like Marx, Braverman has been interpreted as endorsing a general deskilling thesis rather than a historically specific critique of “the degradation of work.”<sup>99</sup> In the intervening decades since Dunayevskaya’s and Braverman’s pathbreaking studies appeared, work has indeed changed.<sup>100</sup> Their attention to workers’ self-activity in the face of scientific management seems at first glance far removed from the world of professional white-collar work. Yet, in our own moment, where the hegemony of modern work has been achieved through the braiding of work with play, the conjoining of the two in “the new spirit of capitalism” was partly in response to the mainstreaming of their critiques.<sup>101</sup> Rather than coalminers, it was precarious creative workers, in many ways, who represented the canaries in the proverbial coalmine. The

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<sup>94</sup> Raya Dunayevskaya, “Preface,” *Marxism and Freedom: From 1776 Until Today* (New Haven, CN: Bookman Associates, 1958), 22.

<sup>95</sup> See Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The Civil War in the United States*, ed. Andrew Zimmerman (New York: International Publishers, 2016). Also for more on Marx’s organizing and journalism during the Civil War, see Kevin B. Anderson, “Race, Class, and Slavery: The Civil War as a Second American Revolution,” *Marx at the Margins: On Nationalism, Ethnicity, and Non-Western Societies* (University of Chicago Press, 2010), chapter three, 79-114.

<sup>96</sup> See Eric Foner, “Why Is There No Socialism in the United States?” *History Workshop* no. 17 (1984): 57-80.

<sup>97</sup> See Dunayevskaya, *Marxism and Freedom*, 275-276.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid.*, 281-282.

<sup>99</sup> See John Bellamy Foster’s introduction to Harry Braverman, *Labor and Monopoly Capital: The Degradation of Work in the Twentieth Century, Twenty-fifth Anniversary Edition* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1998), xix.

<sup>100</sup> Dunayevskaya, *Marxism and Freedom*, 276.

<sup>101</sup> Luc Boltanski and Ève Chiapello, *The New Spirit of Capitalism*, trans. Gregory Elliot (New York and London: Verso, 2018).

new “creative economies” that were carved from the husk of Fordism placed a premium on promoting work as fun, playful, and self-fulfilling. This has made it considerably harder to heed C.L.R. James’ trenchant observation that “the particular commodity that is important in the study of capital is the labour-power of the individual.”<sup>102</sup>

As part of the broad postwar anti-Stalinist left, Dunayevskaya’s and James’ collaboration in the 1940s and early 1950s scrambled the usual Cold War binaries while taking an expansive view of class struggle that encompassed gender and racial oppression.<sup>103</sup> As David Black notes, their Johnson-Forrest tendency critiqued the Soviet Union by setting out to reveal how “the capitalist value-form operated through the rule of state capitalism calling itself communism.”<sup>104</sup> For Dunayevskaya, private property meant “the power to dispose of the labor of others.” Leaving “alienated labor alone,” as she and other state-capitalist proponents argued had been the case in Stalinist Russia, amounted to creating an “abstract capitalist.”<sup>105</sup> This dissident Trotskyist strand comported with Frankfurt School economist Friedrich Pollock’s parallel state-capitalist thesis that influenced Adorno and Herbert Marcuse.<sup>106</sup> Instead of viewing the Cold War’s battle “to win hearts and minds” as a contest between two incompatible economic systems,<sup>107</sup> these Marxist critics muddled the neat ideological division between rival blocs that editorial cartoonists, and more than a few, diplomatic historians, took for granted in the postwar years.<sup>108</sup> Drawing on both

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<sup>102</sup> C.L.R. James, *You Don’t Play with Revolution: The Montreal Lectures of C.L.R. James*, ed. David Austin (Oakland, Edinburgh, and Baltimore: AK Press, 2009), 141.

<sup>103</sup> The name was derived from Dunayevskaya’s (Forest) and James’ (Johnson) pseudonyms which were used both in the Socialist Workers Party (SWP) and the Workers Party (WP). Grace Lee (Boggs) also formed part of the group. See Harry Cleaver, *Reading Capital Politically, Second Edition* (New York: AK Press, 2000), ebook, 237-243.

<sup>104</sup> David Black, *The Philosophical Roots of Anti-Capitalism: Essays on History, Culture, and Dialectical Thought* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2013), introduction, x.

<sup>105</sup> Dunayevskaya, *Marxism and Freedom*, 61-62.

<sup>106</sup> While Dunayevskaya was a harsh critic of Adorno, she remained in contact with Marcuse and former Frankfurt School theorist, Erich Fromm, throughout the late 1950s into the late 1970s. See Kevin B. Anderson, “Marcuse’s and Fromm’s Correspondence with the Socialist Feminist Raya Dunayevskaya: A New Window of Critical Theory,” *Logos: A Journal of Modern Society & Culture* 11, no.1 (Winter 2012).

<sup>107</sup> The literature on the cultural Cold War is extensive. See Scott Lucas, *Freedom’s War: The American Crusade against the Soviet Union* (New York: New York University Press, 1999); Frances Stoner Saunders, *Who Paid the Piper? The CIA and the Cultural Cold War* (London: Granta Books, 1999); Walter Hixson, *Parting the Curtain: Propaganda, Culture, and the Cold War, 1945–1961* (Palgrave Macmillan, 1997); Yale Richmond, *Cultural Exchanges and the Cold War: Raising the Iron Curtain* (University Park, PA: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 2003); David Cate, *The Dancer Defects: The Struggle for Cultural Supremacy during the Cold War* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005); Penny M. Von Eschen, *Satchmo Blows Up the World: Jazz Ambassadors Play the Cold War* (Cambridge, MA: University of Harvard Press, 2004).

<sup>108</sup> A narrow view of what constitutes “private property” often serves as a point of distinction to determine whether Cold War states were democratic or not. See, for example, John Lewis Gaddis, *We Now Know: Rethinking Cold War History* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 198.

contemporaneous debates within “Western Marxism” — a sometimes derisive term whose coinage stemmed from Soviet critics’ who criticized Georg Lukács’ seminal *History and Class Consciousness* (1922) — and movement radicals such as Braverman, James, and Dunayevskaya puts cartooning’s structures of feeling in conversation with questions of labour organizing.<sup>109</sup> Additionally, I draw on cultural theory and a Gramscian notion of hegemony to show that cultural work is an underexamined site of contestation. What united these critical perspectives was a shared rejection of party orthodoxy and dogmatism. Yet, as American studies moved away from what C. Wright Mills dubbed “the labor metaphysic”<sup>110</sup> and the problems posed by a base/superstructure model, the Frankfurt and Birmingham schools tended to be counterpoised to each other.<sup>111</sup> Reading the former through the latter sheds light on what Lukács described as the inability of mass media to “consider the problem of the present as a historical problem.”<sup>112</sup>

Alienation became a fashionable, yet polarizing, concept after Marx’s *1844 Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts* resurfaced in the early 1930s. For the early Marx alienation manifested itself in four distinct ways: workers alienated from the products of their labor; from the labor process; from each other; and from their creative selves.<sup>113</sup> In the 1960s, Louis Althusser, whose rejection of alienation signaled a theoretical anti-humanism, posited an “epistemological break” in Marx’s work.<sup>114</sup> This sparked a famous debate in which E.P. Thompson, in *The Poverty of Theory* (1978), defended historical practice against what he saw as theoretical obscurantism. While this episode is well known within cultural studies, little attention has been paid to how earlier Marxists, such as Dunayevskaya and James, had reconciled questions of agency with critiques of the value-form. For Dunayevskaya, Marx’s earlier concepts of “alienated labor” developed into a theory of “abstract or value-producing” labour. This, she

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<sup>109</sup> Quoted in Harry Hootunian, *Marx After Marx: History and Time in the Expansion of Capitalism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012), ebook, 12.

<sup>110</sup> C. Wright Mills, “Letter to the New Left,” *New Left Review*, no. 5 (September-October 1960).

<sup>111</sup> In the cultural studies of the 1990s, the Frankfurt and Birmingham schools were often pitted against each other. For an excellent overview of these debates, see Douglas Kellner’s chapter “Theory wars and cultural studies,” in his *Media Culture: Cultural studies, identity and politics between the modern and the postmodern* (London and New York: Routledge, 1995), ch.1, 15-54.

<sup>112</sup> Georg Lukács, *History and Class Consciousness: Studies in Marxist Dialectics* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1970), 157.

<sup>113</sup> *Marxism and Freedom* contained the first English translations of the manuscripts. I quote from *The Marx-Engels Reader, 2nd Edition*, Robert C. Tucker ed. (New York and London: W.W. Norton & Company, 1978) 66-125.

<sup>114</sup> This characterized the structural Marxism that came out of France in the 1960s. See Louis Althusser, “Marxism and Humanism,” in *For Marx*, trans. Ben Brewster (London and New York: Verso, 2005), 218-248.

described, as “not a labor theory of value, but a value theory of labor.”<sup>115</sup> At stake in these debates over alienation was not so much continuity or discontinuity in Marx’s work but how to adapt his insights to present politics. What Dunayevskaya recognized was that alienation could be read across Marx’s oeuvre. Similarly, Diane Elson in the late 1970s, would argue that “what is specific to capitalism is the domination of one aspect of labour, abstract labour, objectified as value.” For Elson, Marx had incorporated “subjective, conscious” aspects of concrete labor into his critique of political economy to point the way towards struggles against the value-form.<sup>116</sup>

Marx’s value theory is commonly interpreted as a universalizing process that homogenizes the labour process, thus making workers interchangeable and undifferentiated.<sup>117</sup> This reading largely ignores the role of competition in his mature theory as well as the history of capitalist accumulation. While alienation may appear more visible in the factory assembly line, it is considerably harder to detect in cultural work. This is one reason why artistic practices are often counterpoised to routinized labour, and why Marx’s early “moral economy” writings tend to be favoured by researchers of creative work over his later writings.<sup>118</sup> Such an approach tends to overlook the forms of exploitation that cultural workers share with other workers. Even within the Marxist tradition, a broad romantic anti-capitalist perspective can be found in more recent trajectories in Italian post-*operaismo*. For recent autonomists who have taken cues from “The Fragment on Machines” found in the *Grundrisse*, immaterial labour, which “produce[s] the informational and cultural content of the commodity,” has created a crisis of measurability in

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<sup>115</sup> Dunayevskaya, *Marxism and Freedom*, 138.

<sup>116</sup> My understanding of value theory is derived from Michael Heinrich and David Harvey as well Elson’s discussion. See Diane Elson, “The Value Theory of Labour,” in *Value: The Representation of Labour in Capitalism* ed. Diane Elson (London and New York: Verso, 2015), 161-241, 236.

<sup>117</sup> For example, Lisa Lowe, in her important work, argues that in Marx’s formulation “capital accumulates through universal homogenization rather than through than differentiation.” Quoted in *Immigrant Acts: On Asian American Cultural Politics* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1996), 27-28. Lowe’s critique is quoted favourably in David Roediger and Elizabeth Esch, “‘One Symptom of Originality’: Race and the Management of Labour in the History of the United States,” *Historical Materialism*, 17, no. 4 (2010). For more on how Roediger and Esch’s historical insights are compatible with Marx’s notion of abstract labour, see Paul Hiedeman, “Capitalism and Racial Difference,” *International Socialist Review*, issue 93. <https://isreview.org/issue/93/capitalism-and-racial-difference>. For an in-depth reading of postcolonial theory’s reading of “abstract labour,” see Vivik Chibber, *Postcolonial Theory and the Specter of Capital* (New York and London: Verso, 2013), chapter six, 176-203.

<sup>118</sup> See, for example, E.P. Thompson, *William Morris: Romantic to Revolutionary* (Oakland, CA and Wales, UK: PM Press and Merlin Press, 2011). Also, from a cultural labour standpoint, Mark Banks notes that “the Marx of the *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts* (1844) is a moral economist of work par excellence.” See Mark Banks, *Creative Justice: Cultural Industries, Work and Inequality* (London, UK: Rowman & Littlefield, 2017), 64. For more on Marx’s Hegelian and romantic roots on labour and art, respectively, see Sean Sayers, “The Concept of Labor: Marx and His Critics,” *Science & Society* 71, no. 4 (October 2007): 431-454.

post-Fordist economies. This, they argue, has made Marx's "law of value" obsolete.<sup>119</sup> But as many critics have noted, this assertion rests on a traditional reading of Marx's value theory that overstresses the novelty of immaterial labour while downplaying workplace surveillance.<sup>120</sup>

Sarah Brouillette argues that similar to liberal proponents of the creative class, recent autonomists share a "pervasive vocabulary that fathoms creative expression as an essence of experimentation emanating from an internal and natural source." Much of this stems from an "idealized apprehension of artists' ostensible resistance to routine, to management, to standardization, and to commodification."<sup>121</sup> In a similar vein, John Roberts argues that while "romantic anti-capitalist[s] . . . fetishiz[e] artisanal skills as the cornerstone of the emancipation of labour," autonomists fail to appreciate that "whether immaterial labour is tendential or systemic," it cannot "alter the downward pressures of a capitalist time and the value-form."<sup>122</sup>

Conceptualizing newspaper cartooning as a form of value-producing abstract labour skirts these problems by emphasizing cartoonists' employment status. According to Marx, labour in capitalism is two-fold: concrete labour, which produces use-values, has no set limits, while abstract labour, which consists of socially necessary labor time, or a social average that producers must conform to in order to remain competitive, is the source of surplus value. Marx argues that in a market society fundamentally different concrete labours that produce a commodity, whether a physical object or immaterial service, are abstracted away in the process of exchange. Furthermore, workers themselves are subject to abstraction to bring their output in line with competitors. The larger point for Marx was to show that abstract labour was not about a particular kind of work, but rather that value is a social relation historically specific to capitalism and that labour with the same content could be either "productive" or "unproductive."<sup>123</sup>

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<sup>119</sup> See Maurizio Lazzarato, "Immaterial Labor," in Paulo Virno and Michael Hardt, eds., *Radical Thought in Italy* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), 133. For more on how immaterial labour plays into theories of empire and the "multitude," see Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Empire* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000); and *Multitude: War and Democracy in the Age of Empire* (New York: Penguin Press, 2004).

<sup>120</sup> See, for example, Frederick Harry Pitts, "Measuring and Managing Creative Labour: Value Struggles and Billable Hours in the Creative Industries," *Organization* (2020): 1-18. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1350508420968187>

<sup>121</sup> Sarah Brouillette, "Creative Labor," *Mediations: Journal of the Marxist Literary Group* 24, no. 2. (Spring 2009). <https://mediationsjournal.org/articles/creative-labor> Accessed 1 May 2020.

<sup>122</sup> For more on his critique of the Romantic anti-capitalist tradition, see John Roberts, "Labour, Emancipation, and the Critique of Craft-Skill," in *Joy Forever: The Political Economy of Social Creativity*, Michał Kozłowski, Agnieszka Kurant, Jan Sowa, Krystian Szadkowski and Jakub Szreder, eds. (London and Warsaw: MayFlyBooks 2014), 101-114.

<sup>123</sup> See Karl Marx, *Capital, Volume 1: A Critique of Political Economy*. Translated by Ben Fowkes (London and New York: Penguin Books, 1990), 125-177. For more on abstract labour, see Michael Heinrich, *An Introduction to The Three Volumes of Karl Marx's Capital*, trans. Alexander Locascio (London, UK: Monthly Review Press, 2012), 48-55;

In an oft-cited passage, Marx argued that from the perspective of political economy John Milton's *Paradise Lost* was "unproductive" labour whereas a writer of economic manuals was "productive." While the latter "comes into being only for the purpose of increasing . . . capital," the former produces "for the same reason that a silk-worm produces silk. It is in his nature."<sup>124</sup> Such a distinction is applicable to cartoonists who had to make multiple drafts, abandon ideas, and otherwise modify sketches in the course of their working day. While these creative tasks were not confined to office hours, they had to be calibrated to a production schedule. Moreover, newspaper cartoonists were part of a larger production world that included editors, journalists, and printers in addition to syndicate managers, secretarial staff, and delivery personnel. For cartoonists, their creative process had to conform to the dictates of the daily deadline while competition within their field ensured a steady supply of potential replacements. Put another way, cartoonists, like other cultural workers, operated within competitive job markets and had little control over their time as they produced images to help sell a material product.

Centering these dynamics focuses attention on what happens when culture is made by those who must sell their labour power. Yet, this poses the problem of how to analyze racialized forms of labour as well as the "unproductive" work that Marxist-feminists have noted is crucial to social reproduction.<sup>125</sup> As Iyko Day argues, concrete and abstract labour are dialectically related, with the former representing "the racial, gendered, and qualitatively distinct form of actual labor that is rendered abstract as a value expression."<sup>126</sup> Himani Bannerji likewise argues, "[t]he actual realization process of capital cannot be outside a given social and cultural form or mode. . . Capital is always a practice, a determinate set of social relations and a cultural one at

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Werner Bonefeld, "Time is Money: On Abstract Labour," *Critical Theory and the Critique of Political Economy: On Subversion and Negative Reason* (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2014), chapter 6. For a discussion of value theory related to creative industries, see Frederick Harry Pitts, "Creative Industries, Value Theory and Michael Heinrich's New Reading of Marx," *Triple C* 13, no. 1 (2015): 192-222.

<sup>124</sup> See Marx, "Appendix: Results of the Immediate Process of Production," *Capital*, vol. 1, 484.

<sup>125</sup> For an overview of social reproduction, see Tithi Bhattacharya, "Introduction: Mapping Social Reproduction Theory," in *Social Reproduction Theory: Remapping Class, Recentring Oppression*, Tithi Bhattacharya, ed. (London, UK: Pluto Press, 2017), 1-20. Also, see the introduction by Susan Ferguson and David McNally to Lise Vogel's foundational work, *Marxism and the Oppression of Women: Toward a Unitary Theory, Revised Edition* (Boston: Brill, 2013), xvii-xl.

<sup>126</sup> Iyko Day, *Alien Capital: Asian Racialization and the Logic of Settler Colonial Capitalism* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2016), 9-10. Day's use of value theory is influenced by Moishe Postone, *Time, Labor, and Social Domination: A Reinterpretation of Marx's Critical Theory* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

that.”<sup>127</sup> These approaches to building on Marx’s value theory are in keeping with Williams’ insight that culture is simultaneously economic and non-economic.<sup>128</sup> As he stressed:

. . . we cannot separate literature and art from other kinds of social practice, in such a way as to make subject to quite special and distinct laws. They may have quite specific features as practices, but they cannot be separated from the general social process.<sup>129</sup>

For Williams, the “concept of determination” represents a “setting of limits” as well as “the exertion of pressures.”<sup>130</sup> In editorial cartooning, these pressures emanated from editors, publishers, and syndicate managers but also from the gatekeeping performed by cartoonists’ professional societies. For cartoonists in alternative print media, deconstructing the “end of ideology” often took place outside the wage relation. This “unproductive” labour, which did not produce surplus value for capital, nonetheless was integrated into an informal print economy. Moreover, for radical cartoonists, making a living meant taking gigs as “productive” workers elsewhere in the culture industry while competing with established cartoonists.<sup>131</sup> Thus, applying this conceptual shorthand reveals the changing circumstances under which cartoonists laboured.

With these coordinates in mind, this thesis’ map is as follows: in chapter one I retrace the development of the editorial cartoonist job and the making of a selected tradition in American cartooning. Chapter two shows how this usable past was mobilized by cartoonists who blended national and vocational memory. By analyzing the institutional histories of the AAEC and the NCS, I discuss the medium’s racial and gender dynamics in relation to genre and syndication. Chapter three further sketches out the marketing strategies that syndicates used to promote cartoonists to a wider national audience. Chapter four delves into cartoonists’ work in the space and pace of daily print, while looking at the precarity that structured the job markets for graphic artists. Chapter five departs from mainstream cartooning – which viewed the individual subject as both the horizon of political life as well as the wellspring of artistic creativity – and considers

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<sup>127</sup> Himani Bannerji, “Building From Marx: Reflections on Class and Race,” *Social Justice* 32, no. 4 (2005): 144-160.

<sup>128</sup> For an excellent discussion of Williams’ approach, see Christian Fuchs, “Raymond Williams’ Communicative Materialism,” *European Journal of Cultural Studies* 20., no.6 (2017): 744-762.

<sup>129</sup> Raymond Williams, “Base and Superstructure in Marxist Cultural Theory,” *Culture and Materialism: Selected Essays* (New York and London: Verso, 2020), 66, 49-72.

<sup>130</sup> Raymond Williams, *Marxism and Literature* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1977), 87.

<sup>131</sup> See Daniel Bell, *The End of Ideology: On the Exhaustion of Political Ideas in the Fifties* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1960).

a range of alternative cartoonists who embodied the promise of a print commons while also straddling “the realm of necessity” and “the realm of freedom.”<sup>132</sup>

In charting this course, I take up both John Roberts’ and Michael Denning’s calls for scholars to consider cultural work within the bounds of a “labor theory of culture,” which, as this introduction has suggested, can also be understood as a “value theory of culture.”<sup>133</sup> The advantage of this model is that it centers artists as workers without reducing culture to the purely economic. While editorial cartoonists tended to view others’ labour as an abstraction rather than a concrete activity, in capitalism, work is both. As Denning notes, cultural labour represents “the contractionary realm of work” while offering a window into how work and play are conceptualized.<sup>134</sup> Thus, to counteract the tendency to view cartooning as being separate from work, it is necessary to consider the precarious “non-professional,” and unwaged cartoonists who, more so than their professional counterparts, turned abstractions into concrete critiques.



Figure 0.6: Anonymous cartoon originally published in *News & Letters*, December 1956.

Source: Raya Dunayevskaya, *American Civilization on Trial: Black Masses as Vanguard* (1963).

<sup>132</sup> See Karl Marx, *Capital, Volume 3*, (New York: International Publishers, 1959), part 7, chapter 48, 593.

<sup>133</sup> The idea of a “value theory of culture” is also taken from a talk that Matt Stahl gave at Western University in 2019, titled, “A Value Theory of Creative Labour? The Disciplining of Performers by the Law and/of Value.” <http://www.events.westernu.ca/events/fims/2019-01/value-theory.html>

<sup>134</sup> For more on his account of a labor theory of culture, see Denning, *Culture in the Age of Three Worlds*, 94-96.

## **CHAPTER ONE: Memory, Myth, and the Making of a Selected Tradition**

“The tradition of all the dead generations weighs like a nightmare on the brain of the living.”<sup>1</sup>

—Karl Marx

### **Introduction**

In 1961, Scott Long, the staff cartoonist for the *Minneapolis Tribune* and the president of the AAEC, laid out his case for why he believed editorial cartooning was a democratic art form. Central to his argument was his belief that photographs were “harmless substitutes” that could never “match cartoon art’s ability to visualize abstractions.” While he neglected to add that his editorial cartooning colleagues regularly consulted photographs in their day-to-day practice to improve the accuracy of their drawings, Long hit on a key point:

The cartoonist deals with abstractions, ideas and emotions that are beyond the comprehension of a lens. The photographer deals with physical objects. Ask a photographer to take a picture of the Dollar Gap or the New Deal or the Great Leap Forward or the Wave of the Future or the Separation of Church and State or the Monroe Doctrine and he will be baffled.

Long’s essay, which first appeared in *The Masthead*, and was later reprinted in the *AAEC News*, was aimed at convincing editors what many of them already believed: the political cartoon had played a central role in the historical development of American print culture. But because newspapers had become “big businesses,” Long argued, editors were forced to heed “the anguished cries from the counting rooms more and more.”<sup>2</sup> This meant that in looking to cut costs, editors were increasingly turning to syndicated cartoons or photographs as replacements. If left to continue, Long believed this trend would hurt the diversity of print, and by extension, democracy itself. Although Long argued that editorial cartoons shaped public perceptions of social reality while photographers merely documented it, he did not mention that their shared history in popularizing mass print. Moreover, Long was not petitioning for gaining media access, but rather was trying to maintain a status quo, which raises the question: how did political cartooning come to signify the presence of a healthy democratic print culture in the first place?

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<sup>1</sup> Karl Marx, “The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte,” in *Marx and Engels: Selected Works* (Moscow: Progress Publishers, 1982), 96.

<sup>2</sup> Scott Long, “The Cartoon Is a Weapon,” *The Masthead*, Fall, 1961, pp. 16. Several months after it first appeared in print, the essay was reprinted in the *AAEC News*, vol 3., no.1, May 1962. Box AAEC 1, folder, 8, BICLM.

This opening chapter unpacks this question by looking at how editorial cartoonists in the post-WWII era created a selected tradition as a way to counter a contemporary narrative of professional decline. In looking for a useable past, they positioned their medium as an ideal vehicle for visualizing democracy, citizenship, and nationhood. At a time when a wave of books, articles, and magazine profiles began probing into the medium's historical roots, editorial cartoonists assimilated past graphic art and political satire that stretched across time and place into their own tradition. I begin by broaching the problem of origins in cartooning, before surveying changes in image reproduction, circulation, and authorship over the course of the nineteenth century. I then shift to tracing the evolution of an American iconography in cartooning. For Gilded Age cartoonists this symbolism conveyed a sense of national belonging, but its implicit abstract ideals also reinforced social difference. The final section details how the transition from weekly to daily print ushered in not only an "editorial cartoonists compromise," but also a stripped-down cartoon aesthetic fit for mass consumption.

Walter Benjamin observed that, "Overcoming the concept of 'progress' and overcoming the concept of 'period of decline' are two sides of one and the same thing."<sup>3</sup> With this in mind, this chapter complicates dominant narratives about political cartooning by resituating the medium within the shifting dynamics of print capitalism. I argue that twentieth-century cartoonists, like their predecessors, continually adapted to new contexts. The difference was that the former tended to view the latter as a prelude to the "American century."

### **Imagining a Timeless Tradition**

When writing on graphic art's beginnings, many American cartoonists and commentators in the post-WWII years liked to reference cave drawings and Egyptian hieroglyphics as antecedents. These sources demonstrated a transhistorical human need for visual expression that lent what was a modern art form a sense of timelessness. But it was in history where American political cartooning formed. As Donald Dewey notes, graphic artists "honed their political blades on the technologies, opportunities, and pressures of the nineteenth-century mass media."<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, trans. H. Eiland and K. McLaughlin (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999), [N 2, 5], 460.

<sup>4</sup> Donald Dewey, *The Art of Ill Will: The Story of American Political Cartoons* (New York: New York University Press, 2008), 1.

While cartooning became a mass medium in the second half of the nineteenth century, it was an eighteenth-century printer who provided American cartoonists with an origin story.<sup>5</sup> Benjamin Franklin's colonial era prints and woodcuts were a common reference point that allowed cartoonists to link their craft with republican traditions. For instance, in the mid-1960s, while trying to secure government support for a proposed national museum for American cartoon and comic art in Washington D.C., editorial cartoonist Art Wood, who spearheaded the initiative, designed a "special brochure" outlining the proposed project for the National Council of Arts. This information packet proposed naming one of the museum's reading rooms after the founder while its front cover featured Franklin's engraving of a severed snake from 1754. The brochure also noted that cartoons and comic strips appeared in 1762 daily newspapers and 8158 weeklies in America, which testified to the popularity of this "American form of expression."<sup>6</sup>

This patriotic appeal resonated with the Director of the National Collection of Fine Arts, David Scott, who, in a letter to Wood, described the group's proposal "a significant contribution to American art." However, Scott suggested that since "[t]he cartoonist, as a commentator on society, should be able to make his statements freely," funding should derive from "private sources and Foundations."<sup>7</sup> The cartoonists agreed with this broad outline as it allowed them to request government help for maintaining the museum's site without having to rely on public monies to fund its operations. This was important to them since their previous collaboration with the Library of Congress in the mid-1950s had been a minor disappointment as it did not lead to a permanent exhibition. As the Smithsonian considered a proposal for a rival project, Wood reminded his colleagues of this earlier experience and argued that "strict government control" over a museum collection would lessen their influence. Wood suggested such an outcome "would be particularly galling to political cartoonists."<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Franklin was also referenced during the NCS's appearance before Congress in 1962. While protesting a proposed postal hike, the NCS members referred to Franklin as "the father of American cartooning" and made sure to link his support for a national mail system with his contributions to their art form. See chapter 5 of this study.

<sup>6</sup> The "special brochure," as it was referred to be Art Wood, was titled, "A Statement of Purpose," and was created in November 1965. Scott Long served as the Director of the National Center of the Cartoon and Graphic Arts, a committee of cartoonists, while Wood corresponded with government officials. The brochure as well as other documents related to the project can be located in Scott Long's correspondence: Box AAEC Pres 3, folder 2, BICLM.

<sup>7</sup> David W. Scott to Art Wood, 18 November 1964, Box AAEC Pres 3, folder 2, BICLM.

<sup>8</sup> Art Wood in a letter dated 5 July 1966. The letter was a "progress report" that appears to be directed towards the AAEC membership. Box AAEC Pres 3, folder 2, BICLM.

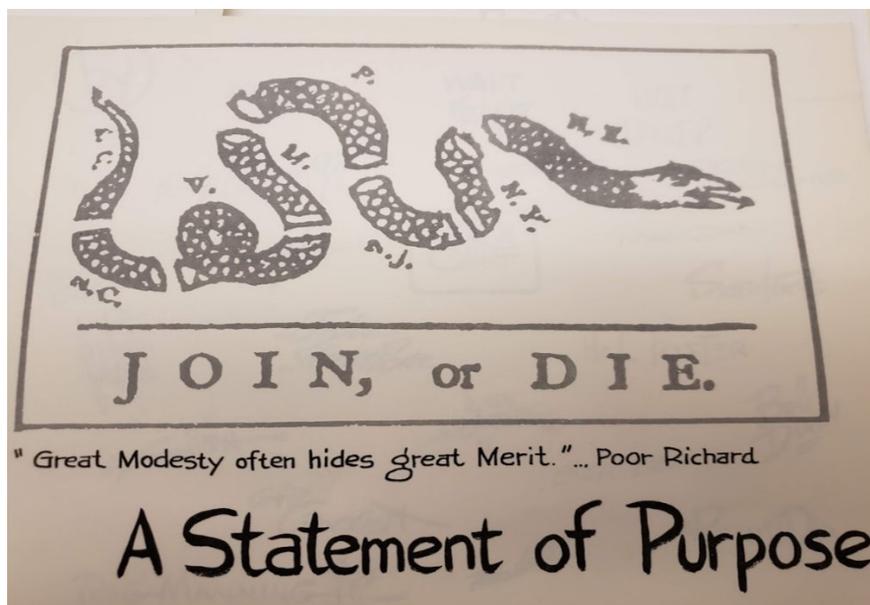


Figure 1.1: Front cover of the brochure, “A Statement of Purpose,” November 1965.

Source: Billy Ireland Cartoon Museum and Library, Ohio State University.

Franklin’s engraving of a severed snake remains an integral part of American iconography. But the image likely would not have had the circulation reach it did without the corresponding lax attitudes towards authorship that prevailed at the time. The identity of the original artist for the woodcut is still unknown. What is known is that Franklin repurposed the image in his own engraving that he then published in the *Pennsylvania Gazette* with an accompanying editorial warning of French incursions into the Ohio River Valley. The image would have a longer afterlife than his written text. After resurfacing during the Stamp Act crisis of 1765, the image recirculated on the eve of the American Revolution. In 1774 publisher Isaiah Thomas added the image to his paper's masthead, the *Massachusetts Spy*. The engraver in this instance was Paul Revere, whose own engraving of a drawing of the 1770 Boston Massacre prompted charges of plagiarism. While both engravings used visual rhetoric to political ends, Franklin’s severed snake was originally intended to mobilize American colonialists against the French and their Indigenous allies. Thus, the original meaning of the engraving’s caption— “Join or Die”— signaled settler fears as much as it tried to drum a sense of colonial unity. That Franklin made use of the era’s folklore, which rumored that a mutilated snake regenerated itself, served as a proxy metaphor to describe how the image took on a life of its own.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>9</sup> For more on the history of its circulation, see Lester C. Olson, *Benjamin Franklin’s Vision of American Community: A Study in Rhetorical Iconology* (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 2004), 27-76.

In twentieth-century use, Franklin's severed snake was wrested from its settler-colonial context. The historical developments in graphic art suffered a similar fate. After the Revolutionary War a "world-shaking explosion of letters, literacy, and democracy" flourished alongside the spread of broadsheets and weekly newspapers.<sup>10</sup> According to Eric Foner, the number of newspapers, which ranged from 100-260 in the 1790s, grew to roughly 400 by 1810.<sup>11</sup> The spread of print capitalism in North America prompted observers to proclaim the US "a nation of newspaper readers."<sup>12</sup> Despite these transformations in American print culture, the narrow columns in the early republic's newspapers provided little space for images. When publishers did print political graphics, many simply repurposed an existing print and recaptioned it to address an entirely different story. Few of these images featured caricatures. Historian Frank Weitenkamf counted only 78 political caricatures in American newspapers prior to 1828.<sup>13</sup> While early American print lacked visuals, Richard Scully notes that in late eighteenth-century England "the move from engraving to etching" replaced a "slow and laborious process" of image reproduction with a method that saw "teams of people" enter "into the production process."<sup>14</sup> While print advances in Europe slowly "liberated" stand-alone prints from "ritual" public viewing, in antebellum America the "aura" of art objects had less of a hold in a print culture where forgeries, counterfeits, fakes, and repurposed prints were the norm.<sup>15</sup>

Eventually, the gradual incorporation of graphic art into daily print gave way to a different kind of ritualized consumption: newspaper and magazine reading. The first American newspaper to publish graphic art regularly was the Washington-based *United States Telegraph*, which published caricatures of Andrew Jackson during his 1832 re-election campaign. But not until the importation of lithography in America several years later did mass prints begin to find a

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<sup>10</sup> DiGirolamo, *Crying the News*, 21.

<sup>11</sup> Eric Foner, *Give Me Liberty! An American History*, Seagull fourth edition, volume 1 (New York and London: W.W. Norton & Company, 2014), 289.

<sup>12</sup> Quoted in DiGirolamo, *Crying the News*, 19.

<sup>13</sup> See Frank Weitenkamp, *Political Caricature in the United States* (New York: New York Public Library, 1953). Quoted in Stephen Hess and Milton Kaplan, *The Ungentlemanly Art: A History of American Cartoons*, Revised Edition (New York and London: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1975), 58.

<sup>14</sup> Richard Scully, "Accounting for Transformative Moments in the History of the Political Cartoon," *International Journal of Comic Art* (Fall/Winter 2014): 332-364, 342.

<sup>15</sup> See Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction," in *Illuminations: Essays and Reflections*, trans. Harry Zohn (Boston and New York: Mariner Books, 2019), 166-195. Also, see Hillel Schwartz, *The Culture of the Copy: Striking Likeness, Unreasonable Facsimiles* (New York: Zone Books, 1996). On the history of counterfeit in America, see Stephen Mihm, *A Nation of Counterfeiters: Capitalist, Con Men, and the Making of the United States* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009).

wider audience. Nathan Currier and James Merrit Ives sold custom-made lithographs to both the Whig and Democratic parties. From the 1840s to the Civil War era, their company churned out an estimated 10 million lithographs. Lithography was cheaper and faster than previous printing methods, but it remained “the product of several hands.”<sup>16</sup> It was not uncommon for a single lithograph to feature several artists illustrating different aspects of the same drawing. This is partly why the content of American lithographs from this era exerted little creative influence over later-day cartoonists. More portraiture than caricature, commercial lithographs presented their subjects in a realistic matter with few of the stylistic flourishes that would indicate the kind of authorship that would come to define American cartoon and comic art.<sup>17</sup>

The English tradition of political satire and graphic art was a more commonly referenced touchstone for twentieth-century American cartoonists. In their oft-cited 1968 survey, *The Ungentlemanly Art: A History of American Cartoons*, Stephen Hess and Milton Kaplan argued that the early eighteenth-century satirist William Hogarth and Georgian era artists James Gillray and Thomas Rowlandson were precursors to the form. According to Hess and Kaplan, while Hogarth focused on the social, Gillray and Rowlandson aimed for the political. Gillray was also “the first master draftsman to devote himself to the regular production of political satires.”<sup>18</sup> While Gillray’s visual symbols, such as the Russian bear, became staples of Cold War cartooning, his reputation as a proto political cartoonist was equally as important. Since the hagiography of Franklin could not explain how caricature took root in America, Gillray’s caricatures of the Anglican Church and Napoleon provided a better source for imagining a co-extensive Anglo-American tradition of graphic satire. William Charles, an English-borne artist who migrated to the US during the War of 1812, popularized aspects of Gillray’s style in early nineteenth century America. But the public that Gillray was addressing bore little relations to Charles’ antebellum audience. As Scully notes, “the vulgarities and grotesqueries of Gillray-style caricature” appealed to an elite “cultural milieu” that was undergoing “greater secularization” and who could afford these expensive prints.<sup>19</sup> American cartoonists, however, preferred to imagine Gillray addressing a more democratic public rather than a niche audience.

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<sup>16</sup> Hess and Kaplan, *The Ungentlemanly Art*, 74.

<sup>17</sup> For more on the history of American comic strips, see the excellent volume edited by Jeet Heer and Kurt Worcester, *A Comics Study Reader* (Jackson, MS: University Press of Mississippi, 2009).

<sup>18</sup> Hess and Kaplan, *The Ungentlemanly Art*, 16.

<sup>19</sup> Scully, “Accounting for Transformative Moments in the History of the Political Cartoon,” 343-344.

A similar procedure was at work in American narratives detailing the French school of caricature's wide-ranging influence.<sup>20</sup> In 1830, Charles Philipon and Gabriel Aubert founded *La Caricature* after a wave of state censorship led to the closure of France's first weekly satirical magazine, *Le Silhouette*. The painter, sculptor, and printmaker Honoré Daumier, whose lithographs first appeared in *Le Silhouette*, joined the *La Caricature* workshop and quickly became its most celebrated caricaturist. In 1831 Daumier's famous depiction of the corruption in King Louis Phillippe's court resulted in a jail sentence that was later suspended. A year later Daumier was imprisoned for another devastating satire. Due to heavy fines and harassment, *La Caricature* folded in 1834. But two years earlier Philipon had founded *Le Charivari*, which quickly became the most influential magazine of the three. After shifting to a more subtle satire of French social life that resulted in images that depicted the regent as a pear, *Le Charivari*'s style softened. In 1842 the British magazine, *Punch*, or "the London Charivari," as it was known, fused these elements of the French School with existing English practices.<sup>21</sup>



Figure 1.2: Honoré Daumier, *Gargantua*, 1831, lithograph.

Source: Bibliotheque Nationale de France, Paris, France.

<sup>20</sup> See, for example, Victor Navasky, *The Art of Controversy: Political Cartoons and Their Enduring Power* (New York: Alfred A Knopf and Random House Publishers, 2009), 73-76.

<sup>21</sup> For more on the liberalization of press laws and later censorship, see Robert Justin Goldstein, *Censorship of Political Caricature in Nineteenth Century France* (Kent, OH and London, UK: Kent University Press, 1989).

While *Punch* served as an important bridge between European and American traditions, Dominic Williams argues that it was not until the 1870s that the magazine spawned imitators. In addition to publishing “parodic prose pieces, verse pastiche,” each issue of *Punch* featured a round-up of events in a full-page drawing known as “The Big Cut.” This image directed readers to what content they should prioritize, and thus, presaged aspects of the editorial cartoonist job.<sup>22</sup> *Punch* also coined the term “cartoon,” which initially referred to a “preliminary sketch for a fresco or a painting.” In 1843, the British government commissioned a project to “beautify the houses of Parliament” which prompted *Punch* to spoof the exhibition with a John Leech drawing titled “Cartoon No. 1.”<sup>23</sup> Thereafter, “cartoon” entered the popular lexicon and became a shorthand to describe myriad forms of satirical graphic art.<sup>24</sup>

Despite these more immediate links between *Punch* and American cartooning, Daumier’s plight against state censorship proved very alluring for twentieth-century liberal commentators. In a 1966 essay, Karl Hubenthal described Daumier as “the father of the ‘forceful’ cartoon.” Yet, Hubenthal, who was familiar with European trends in satirical art through his links in the AAEC, believed Daumier’s heirs “lack[ed] the finesse of American draughtsmanship.” Nonetheless, Daumier’s imprisonment in the Bastille provided Hubenthal with an example to trumpet the superiority of American standards of free speech. Ironically, because of this relative print freedom, Hubenthal noted, “[s]atire had never been the American’s dish.”<sup>25</sup> A few years prior, the American art critic Ralph Shikes suggested that “[i]f a Daumier had been allowed to exist in the late seventeenth or early eighteenth century, perhaps there might not have been a French revolution.”<sup>26</sup> Shikes’ counterfactual rested on the idea that liberal states are better equipped to tolerate humorous dissent.<sup>27</sup> American cartoonists were less interested in the history that might have happened, than they were, in finding a justification for believing in what they saw as the unique freedoms afforded to them by American constitutionalism.

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<sup>22</sup> Dominic Williams, “*Punch* and the Pogroms: Eastern Atrocities in John Tenniel’s Political Cartoons, 1876-1896,” (2017): 32-47.

<sup>23</sup> Scully, “Accounting for Transformative Moments in the History of the Political Cartoon,” 347.

<sup>24</sup> Hess and Kaplan, *The Ungentlemanly Art*, 16-17.

<sup>25</sup> Hubenthal, “Reflections of an Editorial Cartoonist,” *The Quill*, 22.

<sup>26</sup> Quoted in Navasky, *The Art of Controversy*, 75. Also see Ralph E. Shikes, *The Indignant Eye: The Artist as Social Critic in Prints and Drawings from the Fifteenth Century to Picasso* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1969).

<sup>27</sup> For an introduction to humour theory, see Arthur Asa Berger, *Blind Men and Elephants: Perspectives on Humor* (New York: Transaction Publishers, 2010).

Trumpeting the superiority of American civic traditions overlooked a crucial aspect, namely changes in how graphic artists worked. Daumier's itinerant career saw him shuffling in and between various jobs and different artistic mediums. His struggles against censorship cost him both income and stability. He likewise worked in collaborative workshops alongside other caricaturists such as Grandville, whose inventive and utopian-inspired graphic art was an early precursor to comic strips.<sup>28</sup> This wider context was largely ignored by American cartoonists and commentators who preferred to think of Daumier exclusively in terms of his political art. Yet, in making him an enduring emblem of republican virtues, they divested him of his radical politics. For one, Daumier aligned himself with the working class who originally had supported the July Monarchy before its censorious turn. Moreover, as Robert Justin Goldstein notes, after the revolutions of 1848, Daumier "mocked the rapidly growing and exaggerated panic of the middle and upper classes over minor street disorders and lower-class demands for social reform."<sup>29</sup>

In his 1930s essay on the writer and collector Eduard Fuchs, Benjamin argued that "Daumier translated the public and private life of Parisians" into a visual language that contested the fusing of bourgeoisie norms with classical sensibilities.<sup>30</sup> Fuchs, who compiled a personal collection of nineteenth-century French caricatures, likewise saw in Daumier's art a subtle critique of capitalist modernity by showing his characters "engaged in the most concentrated looking . . . gazing into the distance" or "look[ing] into their own inner selves."<sup>31</sup> Such introspection was largely absent in twentieth-century American visual culture. This made it difficult to imagine these cultural products blasting out of a historical continuum in ways similar to Daumier's work. As Benjamin argued, works of art "demonstrate how the reception of a work by its contemporaries is part of the effect that the work of art has on us today." For Benjamin, attention to this "fore-history" and "after-history" can reveal "a continuous process of change" in which discontinuity disrupts narratives of progress.<sup>32</sup>

American cartoonists did not look for these constellations so much as they assumed continuity as part of their cultural heritage. Conceiving past graphic artists' contestations of

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<sup>28</sup> For more on this context, see Goldstein, *Censorship of Political Caricature in Nineteenth Century France*, 14.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, 140.

<sup>30</sup> Walter Benjamin, "Eduard Fuchs, Collector and Historian," in *The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility and Other Writings on Media*, Michael W. Jennings, Brigid Doherty, and Thomas Y. Levin, eds. (Cambridge, MA and London, UK: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2008), 140.

<sup>31</sup> Quoted in Benjamin, "Eduard Fuchs, Collector and Historian," 140.

<sup>32</sup> Benjamin, "Eduard Fuchs, Collector and Historian," 118.

social and political authority as being not unlike their own, made it possible, for one, to claim Benjamin Franklin as the first American cartoonist. This lineage had some merit, but largely ignored how the circulation of images just as easily could confer authorship on surrogate authors. Without access to a printing press or his engraving skills, Franklin's image of a severed snake would not have taken on the afterlife that it did. By contrast, twentieth-century cartoonists had no need to learn image reproduction methods since the technical division of labour in mass print separated artists from printers. While they were certainly aware that the labour time involved in wood or stone block engraving operated by a different temporal logic than the precise print schedules that they would come to know, American cartoonists romanticized only one part of nineteenth-century graphic artists' set of duties, namely the "creative" part. The work graphic artists shared in workshops, such as image reproduction of others' images, was forgotten.

The relationship between author and audiences had likewise experienced significant shifts in the interregnum. In 1926 the *Washington Star* editorial cartoonist Clifford K. Berryman wrote that "our respectable ancestors had not the least notion of what we call decency."<sup>33</sup> Berryman was referring to the "earthly" and "scatological" humour of earlier eras.<sup>34</sup> But the cartoonist missed that audiences could double as producers, and thus, the two evolved together. Berryman and other twentieth-century cartoonists viewed individual creativity with a modernist slant. As John Roberts argues, the rise of modernism in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century produced an "asocial conception of artistic labour" that subscribed to a "theory of authorship as *subjective omnipotence* [italics in original]." Modernism in visual arts held that "[t]he painting must carry evidence of the author's hand throughout all of its production" in order for it to retain its artistic status as a unique object.<sup>35</sup> Because political cartooning came to depend on a complex technical division of labour for its reproduction, cartoonists could not claim authorship along strict modernist lines. However, traces of this ideal could be found in the preferred ways that editorial cartoonists imagined their work; whether in studious reflection or engorged in frenzied creation, they regularly pictured themselves working alone.

All told, American cartoonists and commentators tended to isolate past graphic artists from their production worlds. Reifying creativity in a way that made it appear as a personal

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<sup>33</sup> Clifford K. Berryman, "Development of the Cartoon," *University of Missouri Bulletin*, xxvii, no. 22 (7 June 1926), 5. Quoted in Hess and Kaplan, *The Ungentlemanly Art*, 67.

<sup>34</sup> Hess and Kaplan, *The Ungentlemanly Art*, 61-67.

<sup>35</sup> Robert, *The Intangibles of Form*, 144-147.

possession rather than a product of a complex interplay between an individual artist and their working relations, was, in some ways, congruent with how American courts defined authorship. The question of who actually owned the rights to printed editorial cartoons remained a murky one well into the 1960s. The codifying of copyright law in newspaper cartooning began in the early twentieth century and initially had little to do with artistic labour. In 1916 a New York court ruled that Bud Fisher, of *Muff and Jeff* fame, could claim rights to his strip's name and characters so long as he had demonstrated he was the first to use his images for commercial use. As Chris Lamb notes, the court's decision stipulated that "exclusive rights belonged not to the inventor or creator of a trademark but to the first to use it in a business."<sup>36</sup> In reality, this ruling merely confirmed that newspapers and magazines had the right to lay claim to the images they published more so than the artists who created them. In editorial cartooning, this was complicated by the fact the newspapers regularly reprinted their images as a form of editorial comment without paying a corresponding repayment fee.<sup>37</sup>

This legal and commercial backdrop explains Art Wood's remark in the mid-1960s that editorial cartoonists would find a "loss of control" over how to commemorate American cartoon and comic art so upsetting. What Wood obliquely signaled was that with the rise of mass print in the late nineteenth century, cartoonists became more dependent on an evolving division of labour to reach audiences while copyright law deprived them of ownership. The combination of the two invoked a central tension in looking for a usable past that connected European and American graphic art traditions: twentieth-century cartoonists emphasized the heroic over the prosaic, and thus, missed how previous graphic art was constantly evolving in ways that did not inevitably lead to the present. Yet, as public interest in cartooning's past heightened in the 1950s, all visual history, it seemed, was being written as if it led to its classic American form. In his 1959 essay, "The Ungentlemanly Art" — a title which Hess and Kaplan, writing a decade later, adopted for their historical survey of American political cartooning — *Saint Louis Globe Democrat* editorial cartoonist Don Hesse spoke for many in his profession when he tried to put a humorous gloss on cartooning's origins and its continual salience to the present:

Every since some oriental gentleman made the statement about a picture being worth a couple of thousand words there have been some of us trying to prove it. In the early days

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<sup>36</sup> Lamb, *Drawn to Extremes*, 195.

<sup>37</sup> Syndicates also claimed exclusive rights to syndicated strips. See chapters 2 and 3 of this study.

of history somebody decided that since there so many illiterate people around who could not read, he would draw pictures so these same illiterates could tell what was going on in the world. I guess he was the first editorial cartoonist.<sup>38</sup>

Hesse's crude take, while intended to be humorous, expressed a teleological impulse that culminated in the figure of the American newspaper editorial cartoonist. Coming at a time when many in his profession had embraced Cold War ideology, Hesse and his colleagues invoked the belief that freedom of expression was not only a pillar of "the American way of life," but also of their profession. Working in a transient mode of communication, editorial cartoonists were perhaps sensitive to the need to tell a story about their profession's roots that appeared coherent. Yet, who was left out of this narrative was equally as important as who was given priority.

By focusing on the individual white male artist as the locus of creativity, twentieth-century cartoonists abstracted away other artists and workers involved in reproducing and circulating these visual texts. This way of misremembering was a kind of "social forgetting." Frederic Jameson describes how the "effacement of all the traces of production" from an art object is a form of reification that is less ideologically driven than it is a practical response that stems from the cultural logic of late capitalism. In building an "object world," the working conditions of past living labour is conveniently forgotten.<sup>39</sup> As Marx noted, "the object of art—like every other product—creates a public which is sensitive to art and enjoys beauty. Production thus produces not only an object for the subject, but also a subject for the object."<sup>40</sup>

For American cartoonists, consuming the past produced an ideal type of a political cartoonist as an object for their historical imagination. Assimilating heterogenous traditions of past graphic art into the present likewise braided national memory with vocational memory. While American cartoonists reworked European precursors into a historical narrative of progress, they assumed that the global spread of cartooning corresponded to the strengthening of democratic print traditions. Within this cultural imaginary, the two appeared inseparable.

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<sup>38</sup> Don Hesse, "The Ungentlemanly Art," *The Quill*, December 1959, 7-8, 17-18. Box AAEC 1, folder 4, BICLM.

<sup>39</sup> Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism, or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1991), 314.

<sup>40</sup> Karl Marx, *The Grundrisse* in *The Marx-Engels Reader*, 230.

### **Abstraction and Difference, Race and Empire**

In 1961 Scott Long wrote to *New Orleans Item* staff cartoonist, and fellow AAEC member, John Chase, offering his assistance on the latter's book project on contemporary American editorial cartoonists.<sup>41</sup> Within this letter, Long briefly elaborated his views on decolonization:

. . . the French and the British have . . . for some years, been introducing their blacks to responsible self-government, and, while I realize that there is no proof of their wisdom yet, I would rather judge the capability of the black man by what he does in West Africa, in the French territories and in Ghana and especially in Nigeria. Nigeria is the acid test, for it is not only most populous of all African countries, but it also as divided by rival influences, different religions, tribalisms, different languages, etc., as any area on the continent. So far they seem be doing pretty well.

Long went on to note his sympathy for his Southern-based colleague whose cartoons on the Civil Rights movement occasionally prompted reader backlash. "It must be very tough drawing cartoons about schools and integration down your way," Long wrote. "I don't envy you!"<sup>42</sup> As a supporter of Minnesota senator Hubert Humphrey, the mid-western based cartoonist, who represented the liberal wing of the AAEC, expressed moral and political support for Black Americans' struggles against Jim Crow. In the arena of global politics, however, this same liberalism could easily be coopted to support US-backed regimes in Africa, Asia, and South America. Thus, the residual paternalism in Long's note to Chase highlighted the contradictions that came with imagining that the US was free of colonial vestiges in its dealings with the so-called Third World by virtue of its progress in race relations at home.

To a certain extent, Long's correspondence with Chase exemplified one of editorial cartooning's main dilemmas. Unlike editorial writers, who wrote on topics specific to their expertise, editorial cartoonists were expected to comment on local, national, and increasingly in the Cold War years, global affairs. This meant that they frequently waded into unfamiliar terrain. While staff cartoonists with smaller papers might be expected to limit themselves to local issues, syndicated cartoonists like Long were accustomed to commenting on a wide range of issues. This matter of cultivating authority also had deep roots in the profession.

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<sup>41</sup> See John Churchill Chase, *Today's Cartoon* (New Orleans, LA: Hauser Press, 1962). Scott Long, along with Bruce Russell and Hy Rosen, were on the book's editorial team. The project was intended to raise funds for the AAEC.

<sup>42</sup> Scott Long to John Chase, 10 January 1961. Box AAEC 1, folder 8, BICLM.



Figure 1.3: Promotional material for John Chase's *Today Cartoon*.

Source: Billy Ireland Cartoon Library and Museum, Ohio State University.

In the late nineteenth century, American cartoonists oscillated between representing racialized subjects either as pupils who required instruction in the ways of "responsible self-government" or as noble inductees into an extending American family. No pair of late nineteenth-century cartoonists represented these two strands more so than Thomas Nast and Joseph Keppler. Of the two, Nast's legacy weighed most heavily on the brains of the living. As evidenced by the cover for John Chase's 1962 book, *Today's Cartoon*, which featured the famous, yet likely apocryphal, quote from William M. "Boss" Tweed — "stop them damn pictures!"— the memory of Nast's crusades against Tammany Hall cast a long cultural shadow. However much these stories of Nast's impact on public opinion had become embellished over time, his reformist streak and penchant for distorting his political enemies, provided a template for the medium. Because Nast so skillfully blended the act of encapsulation with simplification, his visual strategies, more so than his artistic style, resonated with his successors well into the twentieth century. As Charles Press noted in his classic survey: "The political cartoon has always been an aesthetic achievement only by accident. Its purpose is propaganda, not art."<sup>43</sup>

<sup>43</sup> Press, *The Political Cartoon*, 19.

Writing in the early 1980s, a decade after the initial wave of popular histories on American cartooning had first been published, Press described the “working cartoonist in a democracy . . . [as] lack[ing] the flamboyant style of life of the authoritarian critic, or the frisbeelike existence of the flower kids of the underground. “[L]ess petted,” he wrote, “than the totalitarian cartoonist,” Press believed cartoonists in liberal democracies served a key function by “peddling realism and sanity about the humdrum world.”<sup>44</sup> Despite his thinly-veiled American exceptionalism, Press stumbled on a key point: political cartoons strive for clarity rather than ambiguity. In one of the first academic studies of the medium, Thomas Milton Kemnitz described how a political cartoon “generally convey[s] its message quickly and pungently.”<sup>45</sup> Editorial cartoonists held a similar view of their work, albeit from a more refined angle. As Hubenthal described: “it is our job to arouse the reader’s anger as well as his laughter. But it must be done with responsibility.”<sup>46</sup> This sense of public duty was apparent in the seriousness in which editorial cartoonists approached news. In a magazine profile of Bill Mauldin, John Kuenster noted that far from being an undisciplined maverick, the noted cartoonist consulted with editorial galleys daily in order “to make his cartoons part of the whole editorial page.”<sup>47</sup>

Given how Mauldin’s deliberation was a common practice in the profession, Press was right to decenter aesthetics in order to recenter cartoonists’ source material. Their topicality explains why publishers, political parties, and labour unions have historically used political cartoons as a form of public communication. Unlike visual mediums like film and comic books, which produce texts with characters, subplots, and allegories that can be read from a multitude of perspectives, forming an oppositional reading of a political cartoon is a considerably more difficult interpretive feat to sustain. Therefore, the relative symmetry between authorial intent and audience reception in political cartooning, as compared to other media, is aided by the fact that the point of the medium is not obscurity, but communication.<sup>48</sup>

These elements of the form fell into place in the second half of the nineteenth century. Within the space of fifty years, from the end of the Civil War to the start of World War One, American cartoonists saw their readerships grow by leaps and bounds as both they and their

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<sup>44</sup> Press, *The Political Cartoon*, 182.

<sup>45</sup> Thomas Milton Kemnitz, “The Cartoon as Historical Source,” *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 4, no. 1 (1973): 81-93.

<sup>46</sup> Hubenthal, “Reflections of an Editorial Cartoonist,” 22.

<sup>47</sup> John Kuenster, “The Responsible Editorial Cartoonist,” *Voice of Saint Jude*, March 1961.

<sup>48</sup> For more on the lack of reception sources in cartooning, see Webb, “Laughter Louder Than Bombs?” 261-262.

audience were remade by immigration, urbanization, and industrialization. As they became more closely identified with mass print, cartoonists both fed and captured underlining tensions and anxieties of a rapidly changing landscape, in part, by visualizing national belonging.

The making of a mass public in nineteenth century America was entirely bound up with a developing sense of nationhood. Just as John Gast's 1872 painting, *American Progress*, gave visual form to "manifest destiny," a term which had been in popular use since the 1840s, nineteenth-century graphic art established the visual conventions for literary figures such as Brother Jonathan, Columbia, and Uncle Sam.<sup>49</sup> Such "buffer characters" were typically used to represent the seat of government or the nation. Donald Dewey argues that at the turn of the century the use of these surrogate symbols slowly became eclipsed by "everyman" characters like Mr. Common, created by Frederick Burr Opper during the 1900 presidential race, and which was later rechristened John Q. Public by Vaughn Shoemaker in the Great Depression.<sup>50</sup> Missing in this account of how the public became a subject for political cartoonists is the mediating forces of nationalism and capitalism. The former became a lens through which late nineteenth-century audiences came to understand the contradictions of the latter.

The use of national symbols in American cartooning developed both episodically and gradually. Brother Jonathan, who was widely used in the graphic prints of the early republic, became replaced by Uncle Sam after the War of 1812. But the latter figure only came to adopt his familiar "Lincolnesque" features during the Civil War.<sup>51</sup> Others, such as the Greek goddess Columbia, who first appeared during an upsurge of interest in classic antiquity in the early 1800s, represented changing ideals of femininity.<sup>52</sup> Columbia, though, saw a more gradual fadeout. The Statue of Liberty, which was assembled and erected in 1886, came to signify a national mythos while becoming a tourist attraction and souvenir. Thus, in the 1950s, as editorial cartoonists modernized their styles, dropping Columbia for the Statue of Liberty implicitly recognized the joining of commercial and national culture. Thereafter, the statue in New York Harbor became the feminine figure mostly commonly associated with Lady Liberty.<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> For an overview on the history of symbols in cartooning, see Press, *The Political Cartoon*, ch. 8, 208-231.

<sup>50</sup> Dewey, *The Art of Ill Will*, 20.

<sup>51</sup> Dewey, for example, notes that British cartoonists pre-empted their American colleagues by being the first to draw Uncle Sam as a "Lincolnesque" character. See Dewey, *The Art of Ill Will*, 16.

<sup>52</sup> Lordan, *Politics, Ink*, 119.

<sup>53</sup> Rick Friedman, "American Editorial Cartoonists Told to Modernize Their Style," *Editor & Publisher*, 22 May 1965, 13-14. Box AAEC1, folder 15, BICLM.

The factors that went into determining what made some symbols more suitable over others at specific historical junctures was not solely the result of individual artistic choice. Political cartoonists, responding to shifts in visual and consumer culture, jettisoned symbols as circumstances warranted. But while their use of symbolism was never static, developing new “buffer characters” could only work if their associative meanings were identifiable to readers. Otherwise, the message of the cartoon would not translate to a diverse audience.

This is partly why the cityscape became a rich resource for Gilded Age cartoonists. As David Nasaw argues, “[r]ecreation and play were not luxuries but necessities in the modern city.”<sup>54</sup> As leisure time became more standardized, popular culture pivoted around two poles: the nostalgic and the novelty. At one end, the frontier and the plantation were mythologized and repackaged as nostalgia; at the other end, the accoutrements of urban culture and the creation of public amusements advertised the forbidden pleasures of the city.<sup>55</sup> Mass produced cameras, as Miles Orvell noted in his classic study of photography, also made urban transformations visible through a “transformed eye” that allowed social reformers to document Gilded Age inequality.<sup>56</sup> So while the transitions from a rural to urban print culture, an agrarian to industrial-based economy, remade cartooning’s audiences over the course of the nineteenth century, the rise of a consumer culture meant cartoonists navigated the antinomies of spectacle and reform. It was in this nexus that a distinctly modern form of American political cartooning took hold.

Nast embodied these contradictions more so than any other late nineteenth-century cartoonist. His visual strategies played to both consumer sensibilities as well as nationalism. During an AAEC business meeting in the early 1960s, the veteran cartoonist Carey Orr urged his younger colleagues to consider both sides of Nast’s legacy. As Orr explained:

A cartoon is not a work of art, or a drawing, or literature, but it is literature and art combined. The cartoon profession is one of the first that combined these two . . . Thomas Nast was the first cartoonist. There was nothing in England during the [American] Civil War that could even slightly compare with Nast.

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<sup>54</sup> David Nasaw, *Going Out: The Rise and Fall of Public Amusements* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993), 4.

<sup>55</sup> For more on how dime novels resonated with working-class readerships, see Michael Denning, *Mechanic Accents: Dime Novels and Working Class Culture in America* (New York and London: Verso, 1987).

<sup>56</sup> Miles Orvell, *The Real Thing: Imitation and Authenticity in American Culture, 1880-1940* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1989), 18.

Orr went on to note that Nast's popular illustrations of Santa Claus for *Harper's Weekly* in the 1870s were equally as important as his contributions to American political culture. According to Orr, prior to Nast "Father Christmas was represented as a monk-like figure. . . What kind of Christmas trade would we have today if he were representing Christmas?" From Orr's point-of-view, Nast's popularization of a modern Santa did not hamper his ability to hold corrupt public officials to account. If anything, Orr suggested that editorial cartoonists should sell editors on their art form by reminding them that Nast popularized the holiday.<sup>57</sup>

Nash's biography was a familiar one to twentieth-century cartoonists, even though they ignored how his career represented a transition point in cartooning.<sup>58</sup> Born in Bavaria in 1840, Nast migrated to the US in 1846, and a decade later, found his first illustrator job with *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper*. At the height of its popularity in the 1870s, Leslie employed as many as 300 illustrators.<sup>59</sup> But in the late 1850s, the weekly's job roles were less defined as staff artists, engravers, and journalists performed various duties. In this working environment Nast contributed illustrations to the weekly, while spending time in the engraving room where he retraced other artists' drawings onto wooden blocks.<sup>60</sup>

In addition to receiving a technical education in Leslie's workshop, Nast also received a political one. Leslie built a small publishing empire by popularizing graphically illustrated journalism that sought to overcome "the corpse-like literalness" of photography's dry realism.<sup>61</sup> Years before Jacob Riis' *How the Other Half Lived* (1890) deployed photography as a means of shining a spotlight on the cramp living quarters of tenement buildings and the squalor that accompanied urbanization, publications like *Frank Leslie's* presented a vivid picture of the city. Likewise, the "pictorial press," Joshua Brown argues, "drew its lifeblood from crisis," helping readers make sense of their place in changing social order.<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> "Minutes of the Fourth Annual Meeting of the Association of American Editorial Cartoonists." 9 April 1960. Box AAEC Sec 3, folder 7, BICLM.

<sup>58</sup> For a recent biography of the cartoonist, see Fiona Deans Halloran, *The Father of Modern Political Cartoons* (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 2018).

<sup>59</sup> Joshua Brown, "The Great Uprising and Pictorial Order in Gilded Age America," in *The Great Strikes of 1877*, David O. Stowell, ed. (Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2008), 19.

<sup>60</sup> See Halloran, *The Father of Modern Political Cartoons*, 24-25.

<sup>61</sup> For more on this history, see Joshua Brown, *Beyond the Lines: Pictorial Reporting, Everyday Life, and the Crisis of Gilded Age America* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2002). Brown is also an illustrator who contributed "visual essays" in his collaboration with Eric Foner on *Forever Free: The Story of Emancipation and Reconstruction* (New York: Vintage Books, 2006).

<sup>62</sup> Brown, *Beyond the Lines*, 62.

In the 1860s Nash would adapt this reformist impulse to a middle-class readership that shared his concerns about the headlong rush into modernity. But before he came to national prominence, the *New York Illustrated News* sent Nast to London on assignment where he studied *Punch* cartoonists like John Tenniel.<sup>63</sup> When Nast returned stateside during the Civil War, he joined the staff of *Harper's Weekly*, "A Journal of Civilization," and helped popularized European style cartooning for American audiences. In 1864 a Nast cartoon titled, "Compromise With the South," served as a rallying cry for Abraham Lincoln's then failing re-election bid. A master propagandist, Nast's cartoon was reprinted by the Republican party as a campaign poster. After the war ended, Nast decried white violence and briefly joined radical Republicans in opposing Andrew Johnson's conciliatory Reconstruction-era policy toward the South.

While Nast attacked the Ku Klux Klan and the New York Democratic party machine in equal measure, in the latter case, traces of the nativist Know Nothing movement of the 1850s, which fused hatred for the planter class with nativist sentiments, ran through Nast's virulent anti-Catholic and anti-Irish cartoons.<sup>64</sup> Having witnessed firsthand violence directed towards the local black community during the New York draft riots in 1863, Nast's depictions of Irish characters, which were drawn with ape-like features, had a complex backstory. Fiona Dean Halloran argues that the cartoonist "believed that Irish immigrants could not integrate into the culture of civic duty, personable responsibility, and educated progress" necessary for American democracy.<sup>65</sup> This ideal of citizenship was contingent on which groups Nast believed were ready for responsible republican citizenship. For his self-styled successors, this view became replaced with a generic civic tradition. The symbols that Nast invented – the Tammany Tiger and the Republican Elephant— and the ones he reinvented—the Democratic donkey and Uncle Sam— were stock characters that they tried to move away from. Similarly, Nast's "bold designs and elaborate crosshatching were ideally suited for crimes of Tammany proportions,"<sup>66</sup> was less suitable for daily print. Nonetheless, in villains such as Boss Tweed editorial cartoonists found a template for their caricatures of the nation's enemies.

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<sup>63</sup> Halloran, *The Father of Modern Political Cartoons*, 101-102.

<sup>64</sup> See Tyler Anbinder, *Nativism and Slavery: The Northern Know-Nothings and the Politics of the 1850s* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992). Anbinder uses a Nast cartoon from the 1870s to demonstrate the cultural staying power of nativist sentiments which fused with anti-slavery. See Anbinder, *Nativism and Slavery*, 126.

<sup>65</sup> Halloran, *The Father of Modern Political Cartoons*, 33.

<sup>66</sup> Hess and Kaplan, *The Ungentlemanly Art*, 95.

Nast's knack for combining civic messages with sentimentalism also reverberated in American cartooning. In his famous depiction of Thanksgiving in 1869, Nast pictured a racially diverse cast of characters breaking bread together while being hosted by Columbia and Uncle Sam. In this portrait of national unity, Nast tagged the bountiful table spread with the slogans "self-government" and "universal suffrage."<sup>67</sup> A century later these themes were echoed by AAEC founder John Stampone in a cartoon he drew for the American Federation of Labor-Congress of Industrial Organization (AFL-CIO). Only in this later cartoon Stampone depicted a presumably union household enjoying the "benefits of democracy." Substituting Nast's multiracial feast for a white nuclear family could be read as a critical comment on the nation's history of racial exclusions. But given that Stampone's cartoon was intended for an AFL-CIO readership, the cartoonist was likely paying homage to the holiday's symbolic meanings.

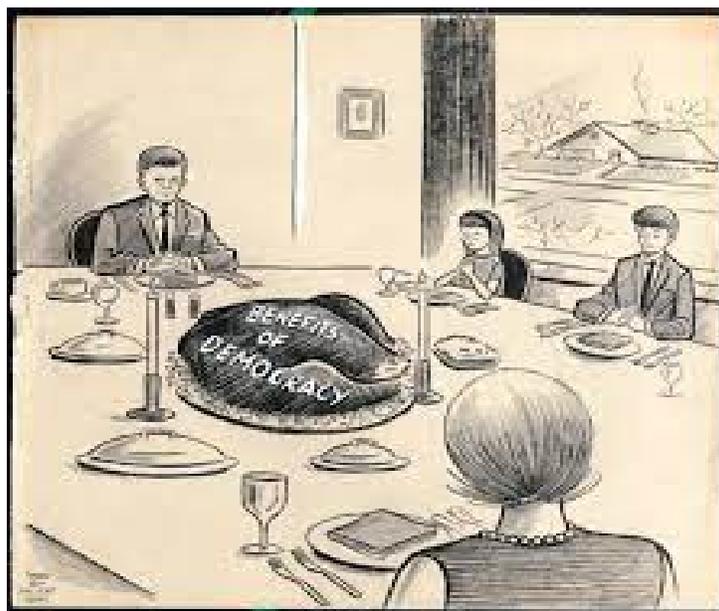


Figure 1.4. John Stampone, "Benefits of Democracy," *AFL-CIO News* vol. 11, no.47, 19 November 1966. Source: University of Maryland, Digital Collection.

While Stampone and his colleagues operated in an atmosphere of Cold War consensus, Nast came of age in an era of dissensus.<sup>68</sup> This complicated the idea of Nast as a crusading cartoonist since it also involved ignoring his situational use of cultural stereotypes. The cartoonist's commitment to racial democracy appeared firm in the abstract, although in the scrummage of everyday politics, his targets proved fungible. Halloran argues that Nast recycled

<sup>67</sup> Thomas Nast, "Uncle Sam's Thanksgiving Dinner," *Harper's Weekly*, 20 November 1869.

<sup>68</sup> Lordan, *Politics, Ink*, 51.

racial and religious imagery from his Tammany Hall cartoons to make his commentary on the colonialization of the west legible to his urban-based audience.<sup>69</sup> In cartoons like “The Noble Red Man,” Nast depicted Indigenous characters lying low in the weeds while stalking settlements.<sup>70</sup> At other times, he condemned settler violence towards Native Americans and Chinese migrants. Depending on what political message took precedence in the moment, Nast used “stereotypical characteristics [of one group] to attack another group.”<sup>71</sup>

A similar pattern could be detected in Nast’s shifts in how he chose to represent African Americans. Whereas in 1865 Nast had showed Columbia gesturing toward a wounded black soldier in a sign of support for civil rights and Reconstruction-era amendments, by the mid-1870s Nast showed her hectoring Black legislators.<sup>72</sup> In an 1874 cover image for *Harper’s Weekly*, Nast placed a frustrated Columbia presiding over a ruckus scene that suggested Reconstruction had become a failure. The caption for this cartoon read: “You are aping the lowest whites. If you are disgracing your race in this way you had better take back seats.”<sup>73</sup> These cartoons appeared at a time when Nast’s northern audience was being inundated with similar media messages. The *New York Daily Graphic* noted as much when it ran a cartoon that turned Nast into a caricature. Cartoonist Theodore Wust pictured Nast being unflatteringly drawn by a cartoonist. To underscore his point about representation, Wust’s caption read: “I Wonder How Harper’s Artist Likes To Be Offensively Caricatured Himself?”

To the extent that editorial cartoonists in the post-WWII era were aware of the critiques that were levelled at Nast in his own time is unclear. What can be ascertained is that they firmly believed he not only pioneered a modern political cartoon format, but also articulated the scope of American citizenship in terms that comported with their own democratic ideals. The difference was editorial cartoonists in the 1950s had to contend with audience expectations in ways he did not. Whatever shock or novelty that late nineteenth-century audiences derived from deciphering Nast’s pictorial journalism, had long since passed by the mid-twentieth century.

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<sup>69</sup> Fiona Halloran, “‘Every Dog’ (No Distinction of Color) ‘Has His Day,’” in *Comic Empires: Imperialism in Cartoons, Caricature and Satirical Art*, Richard Scully and Andrekos Varnava, eds. (Manchester, UK: Manchester University Press, 2020), 135-157.

<sup>70</sup> Thomas Nast, “The Noble Red Man,” *Harper’s Weekly*, 10 August 1878.

<sup>71</sup> Halloran, “‘Every Dog’ (No Distinction of Color) ‘Has His Day,’” 150.

<sup>72</sup> Thomas Nast, “And Not This Man?” *Harper’s Weekly*, 5 August 1865.

<sup>73</sup> Thomas Nast, “Colored Rule in a Reconstructed (?) State,” *Harper’s Weekly*, 14 March 1874.



Figure 1.5 Theodore Wust, *New York Daily Graphic*, 11 March 1874.

Source: Joshua Brown's website at <http://www.joshbrownnyc.com/hayes/53.jpg>

Despite Nast furnishing public attitudes about the Irish and Reconstruction's failures, editorial cartoonists measured their contemporaries against his legacy. For instance, after Bill Mauldin was featured on the cover of *Time* magazine in 1962, editorial cartoonist Burges Green wrote in the *AAEC News* that while Mauldin deserved praise, Nast remained the standard. According to Green "symbolism . . . was a pretty good tool in the hands of Benjamin Franklin and Thomas Nast."<sup>74</sup> Nast's scathing attacks on Confederates was another likely factor that insulated him from criticism a century later. At a time when editorial cartoonists like *Kansas City Star's* Bill Sanders were receiving death threats from readers for pro-Civil Rights cartoons, Nast's career likely served as a source of inspiration.<sup>75</sup> Paradoxically, though, in clinging to an abstract ideal of citizenship whose bar for entry was contingent on meeting a set of qualifications, Nast created his most concrete images of race. Such sentiments were widely vented in American popular culture in the years ahead, including D.W. Griffith's *The Birth of a Nation* (1913), which advanced a "lost cause" narrative that Nast had rejected. But the parallels in how southern blacks were portrayed in both media meant that Nast reaped what Brown describes as "the bitter fruits of exploiting somatic signs."<sup>76</sup>

<sup>74</sup> Burgess Green quoted in "Cartoonists Agree Mauldin Good, But—" *AAEC News*, vol. 3, no. 1, March 1962.

<sup>75</sup> Rick Friedman, "Cartoonist Suffers 'Fringe' Harassment," *Editor & Publisher*, 19 December 1964.

<sup>76</sup> Kensington Hatcher, "Interview with Joshua Brown: The Historian as Illustrator (Or Illustrator as Historian)," *History News Network*, <https://historynewsnetwork.org/article/29834>. Accessed 1 July 2021.

While he is rarely remembered for it, Nast was one of the few cartoonists to comment on westward expansion. Like Gast's *American Progress* painting, which showed a telegraph line being laid by Columbia, Nast recognized the importance of railroads in this nation-building project. Elliot West argues that as momentous as the Civil War and Reconstruction were in defining the legal and normative basis of American citizenship, these events were tied to a process that began with the conquest of Mexican territory in the mid-1840s. "The greater the political inclusion," West writes, has often meant that "the greater the apparent need for cultural exclusion — and the greater the need to tighten what it has meant to be American."<sup>77</sup>

Popular culture played a decisive role in defining these cultural boundaries. As Nasaw observes, "Racial segregation and racist parody . . . became constituent elements in commercial amusements" by the end of the century.<sup>78</sup> In his study of the Sambo figure, a stereotype of black masculinity which originated in minstrelsy, Joseph Boskin recounts how from the 1870s to the 1920s literary journals like *Harper's* "fed their readers constant morsels of comic imagery." The weekly published short stories that featured black characters in subservient roles to whites. Typically, these caricatured characters spoke in an exaggerated dialect, were addicted to "alcohol, gambling, superstitions," and pictured eating "watermelon, 'taters, possum, and fried chicken."<sup>79</sup> Likewise, cartoonists like Thomas Worth, who published widely in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, created the popular "Darktown" series which was a "vicious, thoughtless lampoons of African Americans as clumsy fools and clowns."<sup>80</sup> Worth was far from alone. Surveying the period's visual landscape, Boskin writes:

Sambo appeared in posters, on sheet music covers, postcards, wooden pegboards, in illustrations, paintings, cartoons, comic strips, children's games, on postage stamps, in advertisements, on magazine covers, playing cards, stereoscopic slides . . . the projector and nickelodeon, movies, and television.<sup>81</sup>

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<sup>77</sup> Elliot West, *The Last Indian War: The Nez Perce Story* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 319.

<sup>78</sup> Nasaw, *Going Out*, 47.

<sup>79</sup> Joseph Boskin, *Sambo: The Rise and Demise of an American Jester* (New York and London: Oxford University Press, 1999), 108. For more on the rise of advertising in this era, see Susan L. Mizruchi, *Multicultural America: Economy and Print Culture, 1865-1915* (Durham, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2008).

<sup>80</sup> Quoted in Stephen Hess and Sandy Northrup, *American Political Cartoons: The Evolution of a National Identity, 1754-2010* (London and New York: Routledge, Taylor and Francis Group, 2011), 18.

<sup>81</sup> Boskin, *Sambo*, 127-130.

Joseph Keppler, who immigrated from Austria in the late 1860s, had a hand in mainstreaming racialized images in cartooning, partly through his own work, and partly by employing cartoonists like Worth. Keppler started several German-language publications while living in Saint Louis in the 1860s, including a short-lived *Puck*. He relocated to New York in the 1870s and began working for Frank Leslie. In 1876, Keppler and fellow Leslie employer and Austrian émigré Adolph Schwartzmann resurrected *Puck*, whose title and motto — “What fools these mortals be!” — came from Shakespeare’s *A Midsummer Night Dream*.<sup>82</sup> A year later, the pair rebranded the humour weekly as an English-language publication. At its peak in the 1880s *Puck*’s circulation reached 125, 000. In its early years, *Puck* skewered politicians of all ranks, but generally backed Democratic presidential candidates until populist William Jennings Bryan won the party’s nomination in 1896.<sup>83</sup> In 1902, Theodor Roosevelt wrote to Schwartzmann and Keppler’s son, Joseph Keppler Jr., who had taken over the family’s publishing business after his father’s death in 1894, to thank them “for the attitude *Puck* has taken since my coming in.”<sup>84</sup>

Robert Fisher points out that in contrast to Nash’s “strident moralism,” Keppler’s magazine, which mixed commentary on politics, sports, and public amusements, took a more lighthearted approach to satirizing urban life. But like Nast, Keppler saw his work championing the “common man.” Such populist rhetoric did not necessarily translate to support for progressive causes. For instance, Keppler depicted early suffragettes “as geese waddling to save Rome.”<sup>85</sup> In the early 1880s *Puck* featured anti-monopoly cartoons, but the magazine distanced itself from unions while largely supporting a merchant capitalist perspective that was opposed to corporate consolidation.<sup>86</sup> Despite these idiosyncrasies, or perhaps because of them, *Puck* became the most financially successful American humour weekly in the late nineteenth century as well as a launching pad for cartoonists.

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<sup>82</sup> For two collections of *Puck*, see Richard Samuel West, *Satire on Stone: The Political Cartoons of Joseph Keppler* (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1988); and Michael Alexander Kahn and Richard Samuel West, *What Fools These Mortals Be!: The Story of Puck* (San Diego, CA: IDW Publishing, 2004).

<sup>83</sup> Kahn and West, *What Fools These Mortals Be*, 13-14.

<sup>84</sup> Theodore Roosevelt to Joseph Keppler Jr. and Adolph Schwartzmann. 2 January 1902. From Library of Congress, Manuscripts Division. The letter can be located in the Theodore Roosevelt Center at Dickinson State University digital collection. <https://www.theodorerooseveltcenter.org/Research/Digital-Library/Record?libID=o181006>

<sup>85</sup> Robert A. Fischer, “Political Cartoon Symbols and the Divergence of Popular and Traditional Cultures in the United States,” in *Dominant Symbols in Popular Culture*, Ray B. Browne, Marshall W. Fishwick and Kevin O. Browne (Bowling Green, OH: Bowling Green State University Popular Press, 1990), 181-208.

<sup>86</sup> For more on late nineteenth-century anti-monopoly cartooning, see Richard R. John, “Proprietary Interest: Merchants, Journalists, and Antimonopoly in the 1880s,” in *Media Nation*, 10-35.

Part of *Puck's* appeal to New Yorkers, Patricia Marks argues, was the magazine's ongoing attention to changes in the cityscape. Throughout the 1870s *Puck* featured running commentary on the construction of the Brooklyn Bridge, highlighting the project's ongoing safety concerns and budget overruns. Such cartoons granted readers an insider view of city politics while spoofing local politicians.<sup>87</sup> Irreverence, however, could cut both ways. In 1893 Keppler travelled to Chicago to report on the World Fair. From the grounds of the Columbia Exposition a special "Puck Building" was erected where Keppler published the magazine for six months. Ian Rydell describes the popular Chicago fair as a site for elites to propagate "the proper interpretation of social and political reality," including scientific racism, Social Darwinism, and moral uplift.<sup>88</sup> While ostensibly there to demonstrate the technique of chromolithography that was responsible for *Puck's* innovative colour reproduction, Keppler promulgated elements of this racialized worldview in the magazine's coverage of the fair. In one cartoon titled, "'Darkies' Day at the Fair," Black attendees were pictured as a spectacle for white readers to gaze at.<sup>89</sup> Several years later, the cartoonist for this *Puck* cartoon, Frederick Burr Opper, was lured away by William Randolph Hearst to draw cartoons and strips for his newspaper chain.

Such malicious stereotypes were commonplace in late-nineteenth century visual culture. Ellen Sebring notes that humour weeklies, in particular, "ranged in opinion and style from partisan to thoughtful to gruesome."<sup>90</sup> While Keppler Sr. died not long after the Chicago fair, his son, a notable cartoonist, shepherded the magazine in the late 1890s. During the War of 1898, *Puck* regularly featured cartoons showing John Bull and Uncle Sam, Britannia and Columbia working together. *Puck* cartoons sprinkled quotes from Rudyard Kipling's "White Man's Burden" while depicting Cubans, Filipinos, and Puerto Ricans as schoolchildren being instructed in democracy by Uncle Sam. Collectively, these images conveyed a message that "the inescapable march of progress in the form of Western civilization" would bring prosperity to colonized peoples.<sup>91</sup>

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<sup>87</sup> Patricia Marks, "What Builders These Mortals Be: *Puck's* View of the Brooklyn Bridge," *American Periodicals* 29, no. 1 (April, 2009): 43-62.

<sup>88</sup> Robert Rydell, *All the World's a Fair: Visions of Empire at American International Exhibitions, 1876-1916* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), 3.

<sup>89</sup> For more on *Puck's* cartoons from the fair, see "World's Fair *Puck*," *Driehaus Museum*.

<http://driehausmuseum.org/blog/view/worlds-fair-puck>. Accessed 1 June 2021. Also, for a sampling of *Puck* cartoons, see Kahn and West, *What Fools These Mortals Be*, "Race and Religion," chapter 7, 207-228.

<sup>90</sup> Ellen Sebring, "Civilization and Barbarism: Cartoon Commentary and 'The White Man's Burden,' 1898-1902," *The Asia-Pacific Journal* 13, no. 1, issue 27 (July 2015): 1-42.

<sup>91</sup> Sebring, "Civilization and Barbarism," 2.

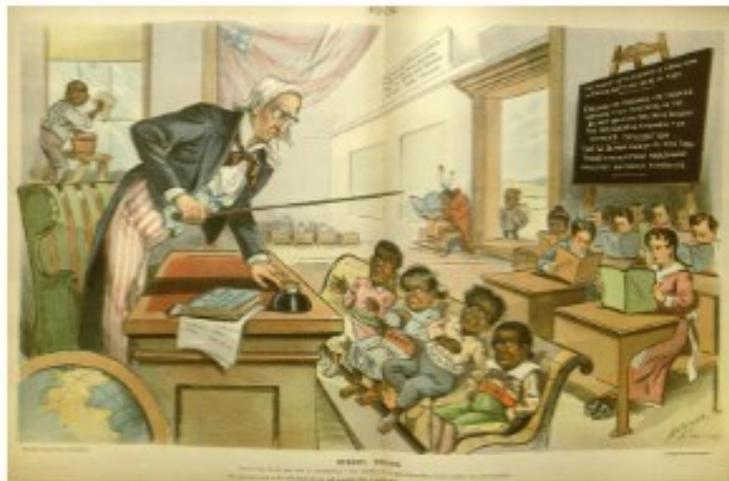


Figure 1.6: Louis Dalrymple, “School Begins,” *Puck*, 25 January 1899.

Source: Beinecke Rare Books Collection, Yale University.

*Puck's* circulation numbers dwindled with the advent of newspaper strips in the 1890s. The “funnies” in the lavishly expanded Sunday supplements echoed *Puck's* comic imagery. Although, by the 1910s newspapers standardized comic strips’ sequential panels which made their narrative form distinct from earlier cartoon art.<sup>92</sup> Newspaper editor Joseph B. Bishop once remarked that “[*Puck's*] weekly cartoons were anticipated eagerly, were passed from hand to hand, and were the subject of animated comment in all political circles.”<sup>93</sup> The strips, by contrast, eventually become daily affairs. Ironically, in 1918 Hearst bought *Puck* and transferred its name to his Sunday section. After its ignoble death, *Literary Digest* paid tribute: “*Puck* had no real rival in its best days. Fallen from its fine estate, it has left no real successor.”<sup>94</sup>

Despite Keppler inspiring a generation of cartoonists, many of whom he would employ, editorial cartoonists in the post-WWII years identified more closely with Nast, whose more narrowly defined topical terrain bore closer resemblance to their own practice. *Puck's* highly imaginative drawings, which were featured in full-page spreads and reproduced in colour with the aid of chromolithography, straddled the line of what would become cartoon and comic art. Despite Keppler’s considerable influence on both forms, his magazine’s *mélange* of visual commentary did not fit the neat genre classifications that would become a mainstay of twentieth-century American newspaper cartooning.

<sup>92</sup> For more on this development, see Joseph Witek, “The Arrow and the Grid,” in *A Comics Study Reader*, 149-156.

<sup>93</sup> Quoted in Hess and Kaplan, *The Ungentlemanly Art*, 104.

<sup>94</sup> Quoted in Kahn and West, *What Fools These Mortals Be*, 15.

Another key difference between Nast and Keppler was that the former was an employee while the latter managed cartoonists. In *Puck's* early years Keppler drew all the magazine's illustrations and cover art. As the magazine grew, he hired talented illustrators. At weekly editorial meetings Keppler decided the weekly theme for each issue. In 1881 some *Puck* cartoonists, dissatisfied with this working arrangement, created the rival weekly, *Judge*. By contrast, after leaving Leslie's employ, Nast famously battled with *Harper's* editor George William Curtis and after leaving the magazine in 1885 started his own publication that floundered soon after.<sup>95</sup> Nast's conflict with Curtis, rather than his own ill-fated business venture, resonated with editorial cartoonists. When the *Saint-Louis Post-Dispatch* endorsed the Republican candidate Alf Landon during the 1936 presidential campaign, their staff cartoonist, Daniel Fitzpatrick, refused drawing pro-Landon cartoons. In 1952 Herbert Block famously "took a vacation" from the *Washington Post* when the paper endorsed Dwight D. Eisenhower for president.<sup>96</sup> These stories, however exaggerated over time, fed an aspirational ideal of the embattled, principled cartoonist who refuses to bend to editorial authority.

While Nast had a more direct impact on editorial cartooning, Keppler arguably had the wider resonance in American popular culture. *Puck's* mix of satire, playfulness, and civilizing discourse remained influential, even if by the 1960s cartoons like Opper's "A Darkies' Day at the Fair" would not have been published in a mainstream print. But its sentiments did not disappear. In the same AAEC newsletter that republished Long's essay on editorial cartooning as a democratic medium, then NCS president and AAEC member, Bill Crawford, wrote that editorial cartoonists' "greatest lift" came from "the headlines themselves." To this he added that "Tarzan's playmates addressing the whole world from the UN" provided cartoonists with material.<sup>97</sup> That the cartoonist made his casually racist remark by reference to Tarzan, a character, who remained ubiquitous in various media, was not surprising.<sup>98</sup> More startling was Crawford's suggestion that the profession benefitted from having his "playmates" to mock. As different in tone this comment was from Long's reflections on colonialism, the history of American cartooning contained both these strands.

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<sup>95</sup> For more on Nast's relationship with Curtis, see Holloran, chapter 10, 221-243.

<sup>96</sup> For a recap of other famous incidents, see Press, *The Political Cartoon*, 186-187.

<sup>97</sup> Bill Crawford quoted in *AAEC News*, vol 3., no.1, May 1962. Box AAEC1, folder 1. BICLM.

<sup>98</sup> For more on Tarzan and masculinity, see Gale Bederman, *Manliness and Civilization: A Cultural History of Gender and Race in the United States, 1880-1917* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1995), 217-238.

**“The Pleasant Uniformity of American Life”**<sup>99</sup>

In 1961 Carey Orr won the Pulitzer Prize for editorial cartooning. That same year he appeared on the hit television show *This Is Your Life*. Reflecting on the changes to the newspaper business during his long career, Orr recalled that “[f]ormerly cartoonists just happened.” After saving up money as a semi-professional baseball player in the 1910s, Orr studied at the Chicago Academy of Fine Arts before landing an illustrator job with the *Chicago Examiner*. In 1917, at the age of twenty-four, he became a full-time editorial cartoonist for the *Nashville Tennessean*. He came to national prominence after being awarded a prize from the US government for a patriotic cartoon supporting the Fourth Liberty Loan drive. He soon received offers from the Pulitzer and Hearst paper chains, which he declined, and instead took the “number two man” position on “Colonel” Robert R. McCormick’s *Chicago Tribune* cartooning staff. After several years of drawing the popular *Kernel Cootie* strip for the *Tribune*, Orr graduated to the paper’s top editorial cartoonist position in the mid-1920s where he would remain until his retirement in 1963. Along the way he mentored Vaughn Shoemaker, Herbert Block, and Shaw McCutcheon, whose father, editorial cartoonist John McCutcheon, had first recommended Orr to McCormick.<sup>100</sup>

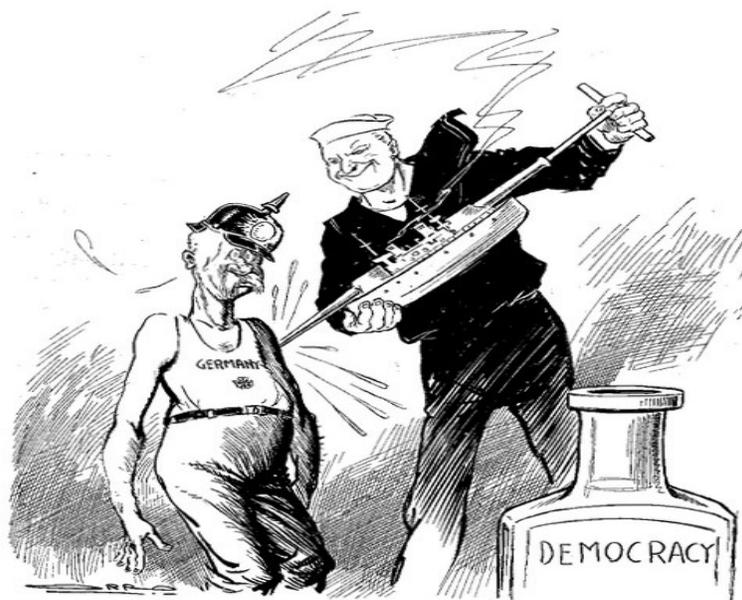


Figure 1.7: World War One Cartoon by Carey Orr, 1 January 1918.

Source: *The Great Lakes Recruit: A Pictorial Naval Magazine*.

<sup>99</sup> Ad for the *Minneapolis Journal* in *Editor & Publisher*, 15 January 1920, sec. 2, xxiv. Quoted in Guarneri, *Newsprint Metropolis*, 218.

<sup>100</sup> George A. Brandenburg, “50 Years at the Drawing Board: Orr Says Cartoons Utilize 2 Basic Arts,” *Editor & Publisher*, 29 July 1961, 48-49.

Orr got his professional start in an era when the newspaper industry was still expanding and the fluidity between various cartooning genres meant he worked in various roles until graduating as a staff editorial cartoonist. This career arc was not unusual, as many cartoonists of his generation who began their careers during the “golden age” of print advanced similarly in the profession. Typically, cartoonists would be promoted from within a newspaper’s art department. In some cases, a cartoonist would be called upon without any notice. In 1935 Jim Berryman, who worked in the *Washington Star*’s art department drawing “pots and pans” and other illustrated graphics for the paper at the time, briefly replaced his dad, Clifford, after the elder Berryman became suddenly incapacitated. In 1939 the younger Berryman graduated to illustrating cartoons for the paper’s sport page. A decade later, he earned the top cartoonist spot after the senior Berryman retired.<sup>101</sup> What distinguished Orr’s career trajectory was that he was a relatively unknown before his pro-war cartoons during WWI launched him to fame.

Twenty years later, Orr conveyed a different war message to readers. In 1939 Orr echoed the *Tribune*’s isolationist line in a cartoon that showed Lady Liberty pleading with Uncle Sam to keep out of “war mad Europe.” Despite priding himself on being one of the few in his profession who did not have to run his cartoons by an editor, Orr’s independence had limits that were conditional on his publisher broadly sharing his political opinions.



Figure 1.8: Carey Orr, “The Only Way We Can Save Her [Democracy],” circa 1939.

Source: Granger Academic Educational Picture Archive.

<sup>101</sup> Hess and Kaplan, *The Ungentlemanly Art*, 18.

Orr's profession was forged in the material and ideological firmament of twentieth-century daily newspapers. Like many other newspaper employees, his specific job did not exist until the advent of mass circulating metropolitan dailies. Beginning in the 1880s, publishers took advantage of cheap newsprint to expand their print layouts and sell more advertising space to cover their production costs. As Michael Stamm notes, "the transition to wood as the basis for making newsprint helped enabled the development of the American mass-circulation newspaper."<sup>102</sup> With the creation of newly expansive newspapers filled with graphics, advertisers replaced political parties as the main subsidy for daily print. This "commercialization of news" in the late nineteenth century facilitated a shift from viewing readers as citizens to consumers.<sup>103</sup> By the middle decades of the twentieth century, advertising constituted anywhere from 40 to 50 percent of the content featured in a daily newspaper.<sup>104</sup> Cartoon and comic art played a significant role in this transformation by fueling New York's circulation wars.<sup>105</sup> Of the two it was the comics that became the most profitable branch of cartooning.

According to a Pulitzer employee, the comics section alone increased the *New York World's* circulation from 250,000 to a half a million readers.<sup>106</sup> Ian Gordon notes that part of this popularity stemmed from cartoon and comic art reflecting "a humor-based response to the problems of representation faced by a society in transition."<sup>107</sup> Recognizing this, press barons Joseph Pulitzer and William Randolph Hearst began recruiting cartoonists from popular humour weeklies like *Puck*. Hearst, who lured Yellow Kid creator, cartoonist Richard Occault, from Pulitzer's *New York World* to his *New York Journal*, initiated a competition among publishers to sign the top cartooning talent. Meanwhile, the Yellow Kid appeared on "buttons, cracker tins, cigarette packs and lady fans" not long after it helped inspire the phrase "yellow journalism," which came to denote the sensational news coverage of the penny press.<sup>108</sup>

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<sup>102</sup> For more on these changes, see Michael Stamm, *Dead Tree Media: Manufacturing the Newspaper in Twentieth-Century North America* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2018), 9-10.

<sup>103</sup> See, for example, Gerald J. Baldstay, *The Commercialization of News in the Nineteenth Century* (Madison, WI: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1992).

<sup>104</sup> Stamm, *Dead Tree Media*, 5-6.

<sup>105</sup> For more on the history of American comic strips, see Robert C. Harvey, "How Comics Came to Be: Through the Juncture of Word and Image from Magazine Gag Cartoons to Newspaper Strips, Tools for Critical Appreciation Plus Rare Seldom Witnessed Historical Facts," in *A Comics Study Reader*, 25-45.

<sup>106</sup> Guarneri, *Newsprint Metropolis*, 28-29.

<sup>107</sup> Ian Gordon, *Comic Strips and Consumer Culture, 1890-1945* (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1998), 6.

<sup>108</sup> Becker, *Comic Art in America*, 10.

Unlike political cartoons, the comic strips were transparently commercial from the start. In the early twentieth century some famous strip cartoonists became celebrities and even “served as grand marshals of parades” while drawing “prestigious speaking assignments.”<sup>109</sup> Michael G. Rhode argues that while popular comic strips were “tied strongly to advertising and selling newspapers,” profiting off comic strips was not limited to print. The “built-in popularity, recognition, [and] familiarity” of serialized strip characters was used to sell “cigarettes, chewing gum, and yeast.” This merchandizing and licensing of comics fed an emerging mass culture organized around the visual spectacle of the reproduced image.<sup>110</sup>

Julia Guarneri argues that readers welcome the commercialization of dailies. For many readers, newspapers packed with illustrations, thrilling headlines, and the latest strip adventures provided them with “maps that could help them navigate the modern city and the modern world.”<sup>111</sup> With city dwellers reading several papers a day, cartoon and comic art visualized these mental “maps” while also providing images that attracted consumers.

Press barons, in turn, used political cartoons to smear political rivals. During the 1896 presidential election, Hearst published Homer Davenport’s devastating cartoons of Republican Party boss and industrialist Mark Hanna on the front-page of his papers every day of the campaign. Davenport’s takedowns harkened back to Nast’s caricatures of Boss Tweed. The Hearst cartoonist showed Hanna as a “bloated” fat cat “covered by dollar signs” and working the strings of “his puppet” William McKinley.<sup>112</sup> Three years later Hearst poached Opper from *Puck* then set him loose on McKinley’s re-election bid. Opper picked up where Davenport left off, drawing McKinley and his running mate, Teddy Roosevelt, as “obedient sons” following Hanna’s beck and call.<sup>113</sup> Fittingly, when Hearst ran for Mayor of New York city in 1905, the Tammany Hall-backed *Daily News* ran a cartoon featuring “the ghost of McKinley” haunting Hearst’s bid for electoral power.<sup>114</sup> Hearst, long after he had consolidated his industry position, would still send instructions to his editors for them to relay to his star cartoonists.<sup>115</sup>

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<sup>109</sup> Dewey, *Art of Ill Will*, 41.

<sup>110</sup> Michael G. Rhodes, “The Commercialization of Comics: A Broad Historical Overview,” *International Journal of Comic Art* 2, no.2 (Fall 1999): 143-170.

<sup>111</sup> Guarneri, *Newsprint Metropolis*, 7.

<sup>112</sup> Nasaw, *The Chief*, 118.

<sup>113</sup> *Ibid.*, 154.

<sup>114</sup> *Ibid.*, 197.

<sup>115</sup> *Ibid.*, 478.

Cartoonists' transition to daily print created a demanding work schedule that compelled many of them to simplify their drawing styles. In contrast to the highly detailed sceneries that appeared in weeklies, cartoons published in daily newspapers were "stripped to essentials."<sup>116</sup> The introduction of a more standardized work discipline in cartooning meant that while cartoonists' saw their audiences grow, they had less time to brainstorm ideas. Due to the pace of production, experimentation suffered. Cartoonists like Opper drew both cartoons and strips, but it was usually the latter that required more artistic energies. By the 1910s political cartoons became predominantly associated with daily print and an ideological appendage to newspapers.

Newspaper cartooning, in general, did not require advanced technical drawing ability. This was particularly evident in how political cartoons relied on setting as a form of visual metaphor. As Rolland Kirby once remarked: "[a] good idea has carried many an indifferent drawing to glory, but never has a good drawing rescued a bad idea from oblivion."<sup>117</sup> Kirby's observation neatly captured the conceptual side of the medium and the importance of using situations as a way to make events intelligible to readers who had multiple papers to choose from. The techniques of juxtaposition, exaggeration, and distortion, which were hallmarks of cartooning, also contrasted with the "modernist pursuit of authenticity" found in social realist photography.<sup>118</sup> In an editorial cartoon, a simple drawing of a building came to symbolize an entire cityscape. Eschewing visual literalism meant that cartoonists did not need to draw several buildings, or a detailed landscape, in order to convey an urban setting to readers.

In adopting a more simplified aesthetic, cartoonists became more reticent in how they chose to represent big business. In the early decades of the twentieth century newspaper chains began to embrace a corporate model of management that centered around the idea of nonpartisan news coverage. Not wanting to offend potential investors or advertisers, editors scaled back the more partisan aspects of their coverage while appointing ad censors to vet advertisements for family-friendly material.<sup>119</sup> These changes ushered in "a novel occupational ethic" in journalism.<sup>120</sup> While muckrakers like Nellie Bly had won acclaim with first-person accounts of conditions within mental asylums, in the early 1900s the professionalization of journalism

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<sup>116</sup> Dewey, *The Art of Ill Will*, 23.

<sup>117</sup> Quoted in Dewey, *The Art of Ill Will*, 9.

<sup>118</sup> Orvell, *The Real Thing*, 299.

<sup>119</sup> Guarneri, *Newsprint Metropolis*, 34.

<sup>120</sup> Kaplan, *Politics and the American Press*, 16.

positioned reporters as unbiased conveyors of facts.<sup>121</sup> As Richard Kaplan argues, “newspapers reconstructed their political role in the public arena” by presenting themselves as a “formally neutral and independent medium of public communication.”<sup>122</sup>

As reporters’ manuals and professional codes became the cornerstones of journalism schools, newspapers in the 1910s and 1920s began hiring cartoonists like Orr who had some formal art training. Before becoming an editorial cartoonist, Orr, for example, taught briefly at his alma mater where Walt Disney, among other artists, studied under him. Having a background in art education represented another shift within the cartooning field. In 1889 John Anes Mitchell, one of the founders of *Life* magazine and a cartoonist himself, wrote, “that the tendency of an artistic education is to tone down and frequently eliminate . . . that playfulness and fancy which are often the very life of a drawing.”<sup>123</sup> The kind of “playfulness” that Mitchell believed was essential for cartooning was still present, but in the early twentieth century, the expansion of newspapers’ art departments meant that cartoonists redirected play to specific job tasks.

Gradually, political cartoons became more colloquially known as editorial cartoons as they became integrated into editorial pages. As political cartoons began to migrate to the editorial and opinion pages in the early twentieth century, editorial cartoonists like Orr and Berryman still saw their work prominently featured on the front pages of their respective newspapers. But this practice became exceedingly rare by mid-century. Editors preferred to feature editorial cartoons in the space where “newspapers most directly pronounce their views.”<sup>124</sup> With the reorganization of newspaper layouts into distinct sections, editorial cartoons also reinforced the distinctiveness of a paper’s component parts in subtle ways. Having individual sections in newspapers played to a consumer mindset that granted readers control over what parts of the newspaper that appealed to them while allowing editors to counterpoise the subjective editorial sections of their newspapers with their “objective” reportage.

As a result of these wider industry changes, print diversity declined in the early decades of the twentieth century. Editorial cartoonists’ lack of critical independence likewise suffered.

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<sup>121</sup> See Dianne Bragg, “Nellie Bly: Flying in the Face of Tradition,” in *Sensationalism: Murder, Mayhem, Mudslinging, Scandals, and Disasters in 19th-Century Reporting*, eds. David B. Sachsman and David W. Bulla (New Brunswick and London: Transaction Publishers, 2013), 265-279.

<sup>122</sup> Kaplan, *Politics and the American Press*, 2.

<sup>123</sup> John Ames Mitchell, “Contemporary American Caricature,” *Scribner's Magazine*, December 1889, 734. Quoted in Hess and Kaplan, *The Ungentlemanly Art*, 19.

<sup>124</sup> Kaplan, *Politics and the American Press*, 27.

This became particularly evident during the First World War. In the lead up to US entry into the conflict, Hearst reassigned cartoonist Winsor McCay to the editorial page where he drew cartoons picturing “wistful Uncle Sams, stoic Founding Fathers, animalized Japanese warlords” alongside scenes of war and devastation.<sup>125</sup> The point of these cartoons was to sway the American public that the US had little direct interest in getting involved in the conflict. But once the US entered the war, McCay, along with the majority of his colleagues, adopted a pro-war stance that showed the malleability of cartooning’s propagandistic side.

The Wilson administration, which established the Committee on Public Information (CPI) — an agency headed by Mississippi newspaper editor George Creel — recognized the power of visuals to sell the American public on the war effort. The CPI created a Bureau of Cartoons to encourage cartoonists to advance pro-war messages in their cartooning.<sup>126</sup> In 1918 the CPI issued a *Bulletin for Cartoonists* that praised patriotic cartoonists for their “splendid service” in selling war bonds. The pamphlet also asked cartoonists to consider to “draw those arguments” that would help change public opinion.<sup>127</sup> Michael Coventry argues that Rollin Kirby drew cartoons that featured a “stylistic and idealized Columbia” that legitimized the “rhetorical roles for women in the war.”<sup>128</sup> Kirby, the profession’s first Pulitzer Prize winner in 1922, established himself in part through this pro-war imagery.<sup>129</sup>

By contrast socialist cartoonists like Art Young skewered Wilson for reversing his re-election pledge to stay out of the European conflict. Famously, Young, along with the stable of radical writers and artists on staff with Max Eastman’s socialist magazine *The Masses*, faced state persecution for their outspoken dissent. At his trial, Young turned the courtroom into a theatre. His relatively high-profile helped him evade prosecution, but eventually *The Masses* folded. But this radical tradition was kept alive by IWW papers like *Solidarity* who featured weekly unsigned cartoons drawn by union members.

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<sup>125</sup> Nasaw, *The Chief*, 244. Nasaw notes that at the start of Franklyn Roosevelt’s administration, Winsor McCay drew editorial cartoons in support of the president. Nasaw, *The Chief*, 469.

<sup>126</sup> Michael T. Coventry, “Editorials at a Glance’: Cultural Policy, Gender, and Modernity in the World War I Bureau of Cartoons,” *Review of Policy Research* 24, no. 2 (2007): 97-117.

<sup>127</sup> For the full *Bulletin for Cartoonists*, created by the Committee on Public Information pamphlet, see, <http://historymatters.gmu.edu/d/5052/> Accessed 3 June 2020.

<sup>128</sup> Coventry, “Editorials at a Glance’: Cultural Policy, Gender, and Modernity in the World War I Bureau of Cartoons,” 97.

<sup>129</sup> For more on the history of American cartoonists’ wartime cartooning, see Lucy Shelton Caswell, “Drawing Swords: War in American Editorial Cartoons” *American Journalism* 21, no.2 (2004): 13-45.

For Young, cartooning was an ideal medium for opposing the “money-making fetish.” His philosophy was “[w]e are caught and hurt by the system, and the more sensitive we are to life’s highest values the harder it is to bear the abuse.”<sup>130</sup> However much Young’s colleagues in mainstream print saw their work along similar progressive lines, their images contributed greatly to diminishing the prospects of popular radicalism by warning of the dangers of “Bolshevism.” This would have an impact on how the medium portrayed racism. Editorial cartoonists denounced the resurgence of the KKK in the 1920s at the same time they fearmongered about socialism.<sup>131</sup> Such red baiting began in the “red summer” of 1919, which saw an upsurge of violence against northern blacks. Newspapers like the *Chicago Tribune* reported on white violence in northern cities, but typically omitted who instigated these “race riots.” Outside of the brilliant Edmund Duffy, who cartooned on H.L. Mencken’s *Baltimore Sun* staff, few white cartoonists critically addressed this critical point.<sup>132</sup>

Editorial cartoonists’ reluctance to critically comment on the failings of the press was characteristic of their general reverence for print journalism’s traditions. By the 1920s mainstream print had a near monopoly on how news and information was presented to the public. Editorial cartoons were part of this narrowing of opinion in mainstream print. Since their images had little textual dialogue, editorial cartoons also helped “Americanize” immigrants who had limited knowledge of English. Appealing to the widest audience fit with the strategies of newspaper chains who by the 1920s claim roughly one-third of the daily newspaper market in America. The Hearst chain alone controlled roughly 11 percent of this market by 1935.<sup>133</sup>

While syndication became a widespread phenomenon in the 1920s, the first comic strips were syndicated as early as 1906.<sup>134</sup> In 1916 Hearst, who wanted to organize his content under one distribution chain, founded King Features. Hearst-owned strips like *Mutt and Jeff* became

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<sup>130</sup> Quoted in *Art Young: His Life and Times*, John Nicholas ed., (New York: Sheridan, 1939), 452.

<sup>131</sup> The Hearst paper chain engaged in constant red baiting during the 1930s after “the Chief” turned on the New Deal. See Nasaw, *The Chief*, 521-524. Also for a primary source collection of red scare cartoons from the 1920s online, see “Becoming Modern: America in the 1920s.” *National Humanities Center*.

<http://americainclass.org/sources/becomingmodern/divisions/text8/text8.htm> Accessed 1 June 2021.

<sup>132</sup> The Black press had, of course, more critical coverage. I discuss this more in chapter 2. For more on how the *Chicago Defender*’s coverage of “red summer” and the Chicago race riot of 1919 differed from the *Chicago Tribune*, see Juan Gonzelez and Joseph Torres, *News For All the People: The Epic Story of Race and the American Media* (New York and London: Verso, 2011), 307-311.

<sup>133</sup> Guarneri, *Newsprint Metropolis*, 219.

<sup>134</sup> See Guarneri’s chapter, “Nationalizing the News,” in her *Newsprint Metropolis*, ch. 5, 194-233. I discuss syndication more fully in chapter 3 of this study.

cultural exports while independent syndicates, unattached to any one single newspaper chain, began selling and circulating feature content to client papers across the country. Syndication had a profound effect on the industry. As Guarneri notes, it “standardized the terms in which readers thought about and understood their lives, created a sense of connection around certain common traits and passions, and highlighted affinities across ethnic and regional lines.”<sup>135</sup>

But syndication had its critics, including journalists who bemoaned the loss of local reporting due to editors’ overreliance on generic syndicated feature stories. Sam Lebovic argues that by the 1930s the idea “that the mass news media was a conservative force in [American] society” had become “an article of faith” among liberal media critics.<sup>136</sup> The media reach of newspaper moguls was staggering: in 1945 the nationwide readership of newspapers was 43,384,188.<sup>137</sup> Chains dominated this market, and much else in public life. Consequently, media critics argued that competitive print markets would lessen the grip of monopoly media ownership. Editorial cartoonists latched onto this line of reasoning.

As Scott Long argued, editorial cartooning typified a print diversity that he believed was vanishing. Long recognized the “big business” of newspaper ownership as a stumbling block to reversing these trends. But as Orr’s career arc demonstrated, it was the business of newspapers which brought editorial cartoons to millions of readers.<sup>138</sup> In Orr’s case, having this media platform was dependent on aligning with his employer’s politics. Throughout the 1930s, Orr attacked the Roosevelt administration’s government programs in ways that aligned with the *Tribune*’s anti-New Deal leanings. Nonetheless, Orr described his career “unique” insofar as he was not required to have his work vetted by editors. As he explained:

The normal procedure is for the cartoonist to submit two or three rough sketches, one of which the editor may O.K. for completion. This latter method is a great time waster, and causes the artist to depend on the judgment of others with regard to his own work.

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<sup>135</sup> Guarneri, *Newsprint Metropolis*, 233.

<sup>136</sup> Sam Lebovic, “When the ‘Mainstream Media’ Was Conservative: Media Criticism in the Age of Reform,” in *Media Nation*, 63-76, 65. Also, for more on these debates, see Sam Lebovic, *Free Speech and Unfree News: The Paradox of Press Freedom in America* (Cambridge: MA: Harvard University Press, 2016), chapter 3, 64-87.

<sup>137</sup> Davies, *Postwar Decline of American Newspapers*, 2.

<sup>138</sup> For more on McCormick, see Stamm, *Dead Tree Media*, 140-174.

Eventually the artist loses the ability to distinguish a good idea from a poor one. It is a bad habit to be dependent on others.<sup>139</sup>

Orr's reflections on his art mirrored his conservative politics insofar as both viewpoints assumed that individual self-realization flourished in the absence of social constraints. This ignored how editorial cartoonists worked in a production world that produced and distributed an ephemeral commodity that people consumed daily. Editorial cartoonists helped sell this commodity by way of illustrating abstractions and giving them concrete form. While most editorial cartoonists choose their own topics, their job required them to generate subjective content rooted in the "neutrality" of news. This reality was further enforced by the institutional print culture which awarded them.



Figure 1.9: Carey Orr, "The Kindly Tiger," *Chicago Tribune*, 8 October 1960.

Source: <https://www.cbr.com/a-month-of-pulitzer-prize-winning-cartoons-day-15/><sup>140</sup>

One key part of building a selected tradition is through garnering outside recognition. The cartoon that finally notched Orr a Pulitzer played off Nast's Tammany tiger and was refitted to signify the communist threat. The message of Orr's prize-winning cartoon comported with his

<sup>139</sup> Upon donating his personal archive to Syracuse University Library, Carey Orr sent this letter to the Special Collections Research Library. 3 June 1966. For more on the collection and a sampling of Orr's work, visit: <https://library.syr.edu/digital/exhibits/c/cartoonists/orr.htm>. Accessed 1 June 2021.

<sup>140</sup> For the backstory of this cartoon, Brian Cronin, "A Month of Prize Winning Cartoons," 15 March 2009. <https://www.cbr.com/a-month-of-pulitzer-prize-winning-cartoons-day-15/> Accessed 1 September 2021.

paper's editorial policy, and thus, typified a defining characteristic of his art form: editorial cartoonists commented on situations, but did so fleetingly, and rarely in ways that recast national symbolism against the very idea of nationhood and its concomitant clauses of citizenship.

Stuart Hall argued that abstracting “texts from the social practices which produced them and the institutional sites” where they were created is a “fetishization” that “obscure[s] how a particular ordering of culture came to be produced and sustained.” Selected traditions, he argued, are “rendered natural” by this tendency to fetishize individual artistic expression.<sup>141</sup> The “particular ordering of culture” that the canon formation of American cartooning symbolized rested on the complete absence of any women or Black cartoonists from this selected tradition. While a select few radicals, like Art Young, were inducted into this canon, their core political messages were forgotten. Thus, even in remembering, social forgetting prevailed in such a way that the politics of political cartooning were sometimes curiously absent.

### **Conclusion**

Collecting is a form of creating. For Art Wood and his colleagues in the 1960s, establishing a national museum for the history of American cartoon and comic art would take a circuitous route due to insecure funding. But cartoonists did succeed in piquing public interest. In the long run, this proved both a hindrance and a boon. From an aesthetic perspective, working within a commercial medium made it harder to experiment with the form. On the other hand, in contrast to newer mediums such as film, radio, and television, political cartooning was firmly rooted in the popular imagination, and thus, editorial cartoonists were able to remind publishers and editors, as well as the wider public, about their medium's contributions to American political culture. Yet, in crafting a selected tradition, American cartoonists glossed over differences in the production, reproduction, and circulation of broadsides, graphics and stand-alone prints in eighteenth and nineteenth century print. Moreover, cartoonists projected their own romantic ideas about authorship onto their forebearers, and thus, tended to ignore the role that print capitalism played in popularizing the medium.

The transition from weekly to daily print meant that while they retained a measure of agency in how they drew, cartoonists were severely curtailed in what and who they drew, and to

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<sup>141</sup> Stuart Hall, “Cultural Studies and the Centre: Some Problematics and Problems,” in *Culture, Media, Language: Working Papers in Cultural Studies, 1972-1979*, Stuart Hal, Dorothy Hobson, Andrew Lowe, and Paul Willis, eds. (London: Hutchinson, 1980), 15-47, 27.

what ends. While this was true of all newspaper cartoonists to a certain extent, the loss of autonomy in editorial cartooning had a reciprocal effect on the narrowing visual field of politics. As this chapter has argued, editorial cartoonists in the 1950s and 1960s remained integrated into the mainstream of American life, even as the profession was amounting its critics and facing potential job loss. The subtext in the essays written by Long, Hubenthal, and Hesse was centered on retaining this privileged media space, rather than petitioning for access. Relatedly, editorial cartoonists did not have any incentive to explore the medium's complex legacies. Gilded Age cartoonists such as Nast and Keppler influenced the development of cartoon and comic art in the context of a burgeoning visual culture enthused with racialized imagery, but they were also cultural touchstones. While some of the rough edges of late nineteenth century cartooning were softened as cartoonists transitioned to daily print, odious traces remained.

If abstract concepts such as the public and the nation needed to be imagined in concrete form in order for them to be recognizable to the people who comprised these abstractions, capital, on the other hand, thrived by mystification. While the iconography that late nineteenth-century cartoonists developed to make their readers conscious of living in local and national political communities survived well into the twentieth century, the symbolic shorthand they used to represent capital, such as octopi symbolizing monopoly capitalism's insatiable appetites, fell out of favour with their successors. Mainstream print's purging of radical cartoonists during WWI and its subsequent red scare played a role in homogenizing and ferreting out critical perspectives within the medium.

The corporate model of newspaper ownership and management, coupled with the rise of syndication in the 1910s and 1920s, opened the way for a generation of cartoonists who later came of age during the Great Depression and with midwestern syndicates. In the 1940s and 1950s cartooning's westward march continued as Los Angeles-based cartoonists such as Karl Hubenthal reached wider audiences through syndication. More than a half-century after "the editorial cartoonist compromise" had first created the profession, a booming postwar magazine market paralleled the creation of a growing suburban press that together presented cartoonists more venues to publish in than ever before. Newspapers, however, started contemplating if they needed editorial cartoons at all. And if so, many editors wondered: could newspapers publish editorial cartoons without employing or paying the artists who created these images?

The following two chapters engage this question by delving into the institutional histories of the NCS and the AAEC. Cartoonists' belated professional turn followed previous patterns established by journalists and editors earlier in the twentieth century. The difference was that their numbers remained comparatively small in terms of full-time employment. Continuing the profession's conservative drift which began during WWI, cartooning's professional societies were fiercely anti-union and anticommunist. While some notable cartoonists found subtle ways to subvert McCarthyism in the late 1940s and early 1950s, most in the profession would accept the main tenets of the Cold War. This meant that those cartoonists who continued to challenge the shibboleths of American capitalism would have no role in cartooning's professionalization. Existing at the print margins, they nonetheless grasped the inequities of mainstream American life better than those who occupied its cultural center.

## **CHAPTER TWO: Drawing Professional Lines**

“One is in exile only when one is not allowed to live in peace and dignity . . .”

— Ollie Harrington<sup>1</sup>

### **Introduction**

On Saturday, May 9, 1964, the Association of American Editorial Cartoonists (AAEC) held its Business Meeting at the International House in New Orleans, Louisiana. While an annual event for the AAEC, the meeting was notable as much for its corporate boardroom atmosphere as the issues discussed. On hand were some of the medium’s most successful names, many of whom volunteered their time to chair AAEC committees and staff administrative roles. A stenographer, present to record the discussion, transcribed the notes into an official record that absent AAEC members could later access. The topics broached at the meeting included the national museum, a book proposal of editorial cartoons on the Kennedy assassination, and a segment on the AAEC in an upcoming National Broadcasting Corporation (NBC) documentary on the slain president. In addition to these meeting items, the members nominated a new slate of candidates for officer positions. After the list of nominees was read, the official record noted that one unnamed attendee asked, “Is the Secretary also a Treasurer?” To which someone “from the floor” quipped, “His wife is!” In brackets, the stenographer noted “laughter” after this remark.

Crude humour aside, presiding AAEC president Karl Hubenthal did raise an issue that had plagued the group since its inception in the late fifties. Due to “newspapers closing,” Hubenthal intoned, some former AAEC members had been demoted to undefined roles in newspapers’ art departments or had been forced to leave the profession altogether. This made them ineligible for membership under current bylaws. Hubenthal suggested amending these rules to include an “associate membership” category for any editorial cartoonist, who, “through circumstances not of his own fault,” had lost their staff position. This proposal generated a lively discussion and led to a motion calling on the AAEC’s membership committee to revise the current eligibility requirements that previously stipulated that “all editorial cartoonists whose work appears regularly in accredited newspapers [are] eligible to membership.”<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Ollie Harrington, “Look Homeward, Baby,” in *A Freedomways Reader: Afro-America in the Seventies*, Ernest Kaiser, ed. (New York: International Publishers, 1977), 66.

<sup>2</sup> “Business Meeting of the Association of American Editorial Cartoonists,” 9 May 1964, New Orleans, Louisiana. Box AAEC Pres 3, folder 1, BICLM.

Hubenthal's proposal demonstrated the difficulty of defining the category of "professional" editorial cartoonist in a way that tracked with larger changes in print media. The AAEC was not the only cartooning society that wrestled with these questions during these years. The amorphous National Cartoonist Society (NCS), which the AAEC had evolved from, also provided a forum to debate, dissect, and discuss what it meant to turn play into a profession. Both groups approached this question from a distinct point of view that was rooted in their relative standing within print capitalism. Because editorial cartoonists viewed their craft as an integral part of American political culture, their organizing appealed to a lofty set of ideals that sought to distinguish their medium from what they saw as the crass commercialism of the strips. Yet like the NCS, the AAEC recognized that its members competed in an expansive mediascape. Recognizing this, editorial cartoonists defined their "expertise" as a set of technical skills — the ability to draw abstractions and interpret events under the print deadline — that combined with a fierce commitment to a competitive market ideal of print diversity.

This chapter retraces the institutional histories of cartooning's professionalization in the mid-1940s and 1950s. Specifically, I aim to show that while cartoonists faced pressures from editors and publishers in their working lives, in the context of their professional spaces, they were free to express their ideas among peers. Examining their extensive extracurricular pursuits reveals that cartoonists enthusiastically volunteered to play the part of the happy Cold Warrior.

I begin by outlining the divergent streams of cartooning in the early twentieth century. What distinguished editorial cartooning from other genres was mainly its topical terrain, which required its practitioners to disclose their politics. Along with entrenched sexism and racism in daily print, this dimension added additional barriers for women and minority cartoonists. By comparing Ollie Harrington's industry experiences to his mainstream peers, I also complicate the idea that cartoonists who operated at the print margins simply desired inclusion. In Harrington's case, political cartooning entailed a set of political commitments that he believed could not be meaningfully expressed in mainstream print. The second and third sections further build on this point by unpacking the assumptions that guided cartooning's belated professional turn. Because the publishing industry was rife with exploitation, I ask, why did cartoonists professionalize rather than unionize? And how did this choice reinforce a perception that cartooning was free of class conflict? I conclude by arguing that cartoonists' patriotic volunteerism and anticommunism aligned their professional projects with the Cold War project in several key respects.

### **Cartooning as Cultural Work or Professionalized Play?**

At first glance, the idea of a professional cartoonist seems contradictory. As an art form that traffics in whimsy, the medium's aesthetic conventions appear ill-suited for codified professional standards. From a historical perspective, cartoonists typically adopted specific skills that were suited to their particular medium and print context, which meant their use of technique varied according to genre. In general, cartoon and comic art broke down into several overlapping genre categories that were featured mainly in newspapers, magazines, comic books, and animation. Because they were not required to have any specific vocational training or art education prior to being hired, cartoonists moved rather fluidly between these fields. A background in one area did not necessarily bar entry into another. The larger dilemma for unestablished cartoonists was how to obtain this experience. While most cartoonists from the 1920s onward had some formal art training, having an accreditation did not translate to secure employment. Thus, having contacts, as well as good fortune, were key to amateurs breaking into the business.

For newspaper cartoonists, training often took place on the job. Whether they gravitated towards political or more entertainment-driven content, many began their careers as illustrators working in art departments where they learned to produce under the daily print deadline. Such starting positions typically did not pay well but gave a crash course apprenticeship in the fast-paced production world of print journalism. For graphic artists and illustrators working in magazine cartooning, having creative autonomy was more common. Although, in this field, cartoonists experienced both low pay and constant rejection from editors who received hundreds of unsolicited submissions in any given week. The most lucrative field by far was comic strips. The challenge for these cartoonists was less about subsisting and more about ownership. Those cartoonists with name recognition were able to negotiate favourable contracts, while those without star cache were sometimes unceremoniously dismissed by their syndicates who retained exclusive rights over the intellectual property of a strip's storyline and characters. In the 1910s, syndicated comic strips became a commercial bonanza and would grow to adopt features of comic book cartooning, which started in the 1930s. In both fields cartoonists might supervise a team that included inkers, letterers, and storyboard editors. This division of labour showed if commercially successful, cartoonists might be drafted into managing younger cartoonists.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Jules Feiffer began his career working in Will Eisner's shop producing the popular *Spirit* strip. I discuss Feiffer more in chapter 5.

Film animation provided another occupational field, and one where battles for collective bargaining had played out most intensely. In the 1930s and early 1940s animation cartoonists were involved in two high-profile strikes at the Disney and Warner Bros. studios, respectively. As many cartoonists made the switch from print to electronic media in the post-WWII era, this labour organizing was considerably muted compared to the Popular Front era.<sup>4</sup> Undoubtedly, the Cold War chill quieted possibilities for largescale collective agitation. Yet, as invasive as official anticommunism was, many cartoonists in this period did not need any urging from the state. Anticommunism was never simply imposed on them so much as it was imbibed.

Because editorial cartooning required cartoonists to declare their politics, anticommunism was most visible in this medium. Having engaged in red baiting themselves, no high-profile newspaper cartoonists were blacklisted or marshalled before Congress. Editorial cartoonists, who, on the whole, tended to lean more liberal than the wealthy comic strip artists of the day, mainly opposed McCarthyism on the grounds of its intrusive methods and corrupting influence. Even progressives like Herbert Block regularly drew anti-Soviet cartoons while publicly calling for a defense of “democratic freedom” from “all comers . . . in whatever combinations and by whatever labels.” The US State Department thought so highly of these cartoons that they packaged and circulated them into a pamphlet called, *Herblock Looks at Communism*.<sup>5</sup>

Apart from Walt Kelly, creator of the wildly popular *Pogo*, the cartoonists who took on leadership roles in their cartoon societies were more resolutely anticommunist than Block or Mauldin, both of whom were aloof from the flurry of cultural activities organized by their peers. But while cartoonists like Kelly, Block, and Mauldin mercilessly mocked Cold War conservatives at their drawing boards, they remained on friendly terms with the main players involved in the NCS and the AAEC. Both groups insisted time and again, that they were neither a guild nor a union. Moreover, they constantly joked among each other—with more than a hint of pride—that as a group, cartoonists were notoriously difficult to organize.

Valuing their sense of independence above all else, the cartoonists who initially organized the NCS and AAEC were also well established in their careers. Because they were not

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<sup>4</sup> I discuss animation unions in more detail in chapter 4. For more on the changes in postwar labour organizing among cultural workers in the early Cold War era, see Clark, *The Making of the American Creative Class*, 444-444.

<sup>5</sup> *Herblock Looks at Communism* was compiled by the State Department with permission from the Washington Post. The propaganda booklet contained roughly two-dozen Block cartoons on topics that ranged from “Communist Imperialism” to “Life Under a Communist State.” I discuss this pamphlet in chapter 3.

in need of career advancement, and were ideologically aligned with mainstream print media, what drove them to devote their energy to attending events, conventions, and business meetings while publishing newsletters, drawing cartoons for charity drives, and volunteering to promote US Savings Bonds among other patriotic acts?

In her classic study, *The Rise of Professionalism: A Sociological Analysis* (1977), Magali Sarfatti Larson argues that fields such as medicine, law, and engineering achieved “closure” by defining the requisite levels of education needed for professional entry. In the nineteenth century, Larson describes this professional project as a way monopolize “the process by which producers of special services sought to constitute *and control* a market for their expertise [italics in original].”<sup>6</sup> Seeking social mobility, professionals enumerated their areas of expertise to retain a privileged place in the changing class structures of market societies. Larson also locates a historical shift in the general strategies of professionalization that accompanied the transition from competitive to monopoly capitalism during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. It was at this point, she argues, that older professions sought social status over social mobility, while newer middle-class professions pursued strategies of legitimation to affirm their importance in managing expanding corporations, bureaucracies, and culture industries.

While she did not focus on cultural workers, Larson’s broadly Marxist synthesis is suggestive on several fronts. Cartoonists, for example, did seek to create what Larson calls “an idealized and organized image” of their occupational self in order to signal and secure social privilege.<sup>7</sup> But Larson’s Althusserian notion of ideology tended to assume a relative autonomy between the economic and cultural realms that when applied to creative work, reaffirms many of the dominant tropes associated with cultural production. This perhaps misses an obvious, yet crucial, point: the culture of overwork is most evident in cultural work. As Mike Wayne notes, the “differentiations” that sociologists of class tend to locate in and between various groups, “are not absolute.” They are instead, as he argues, “different facets within the social and economic ‘unity’ of the class that sells its labour power to survive.”<sup>8</sup> Importantly, this includes knowledge, media, and cultural work, all of which have been subject to historically competitive job markets where a reserve army of potential “stars” constantly replenishes itself.

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<sup>6</sup> For more on her historical framing of professionalization, see Magali Sarfatti Larson, *The Rise of Professionalism: A Sociological Analysis* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1977), introduction, xi-xvii.

<sup>7</sup> Larson, *The Rise of Professionalism*, 91.

<sup>8</sup> For a critique of how sociologists map class as it relates to media, see Wayne, *Marxism and Media Studies*, 9-21.

While commercially successful artists who build up their brands escape this downward pressure, unestablished cultural workers typically have worked long hours under poor working conditions. Yet, this structural reality does not account for why some cultural workers identify with the class interests of their employers, while others do not. As Benjamin trenchantly observed, “even the proletarianization of an intellectual hardly ever makes a proletarian.”<sup>9</sup>

Given the reality that artists, writers, painters, musicians, and cartoonists must hone their artistic skills prior to entering any formal pay structure, finding waged creative work merely reaffirms a pre-existing artistic identity. Professional cultural workers are not so much “hailed” by an “ideological state apparatus” as they are recognized by a community of peers for being that which they already identified with.<sup>10</sup> For artists labouring in popular cultural forms, status does not necessarily flow from this wage. Instead, peer recognition, which advances the idea that an individual’s talent and perseverance finally “paid off,” legitimizes professional identities. In other words, for cartoonists, working in an inherently unstable industry where most creators did not “make it” in the commercial sense, securing approval from peers signified a meritocracy. This is key to unlocking the paradox of professionalized play in cartooning for two reasons: for one, it asks us to consider how culturally entrenched ideals of creativity as individually inspired acts are ideologically compatible with a capitalist merit-based system of awards that stresses competition and overwork. Secondly, uncoupling the “professional” from cultural work brings into relief how the language of professionalism has often been deployed as a disciplining tool against labour. As Michael Schudson notes in his history of professionalism in print journalism, “the ideology of objectivity was a kind of industrial discipline” insofar as it allowed newspaper editors to keep reporters in check.<sup>11</sup> For media professionals, organizing strikes or refusing work could just as easily invite the charge of being “unprofessional.”

In his late unpublished work, the sociologist C. Wright Mills argued that cultural work was political work, and thus, “cultural workmen,” including intellectuals and journalists, had the potential to shape new subjectivities. While Mills acknowledged that cultural workers had little control over how their products were distributed, he argued they belonged to a “cultural

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<sup>9</sup> Walter Benjamin, “The Author as Producer,” in *Selected Writings, Volume Two, Part II, 1931-1934*, trans. Harcourt Brace Jovanovich. Michael W. Jennings, Howard Eiland, and Gary Smith, eds. (Cambridge and London: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2005), 768-782, 780.

<sup>10</sup> See Louis Althusser, “Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses: (Notes towards and Investigation),” *On Ideology* (London and New York: Verso, 2008), 8-60.

<sup>11</sup> Michael Schudson, *The Sociology of News* (New York and London: W.W. Norton & Company, 2003), 82.

apparatus” that fetishized both work and leisure.<sup>12</sup> Earlier in his career, Mills paid particular attention to the new class “that slipped into history” and now competed in “a personality market.”<sup>13</sup> What Mills overlooked was the extent to which being a consumer has historically been one of the few roles where Americans were most clearly afforded a level of deference denied to them in politics. Given the many ways that citizenship was folded into consumerism, this personality market extended to consumption and was crucial to shaping what he described as “the culture of politics. . .[and] the politics of culture.”<sup>14</sup>

These connections were not always visible in editorial cartooning, partly because print journalism defined itself as a preserve of civic ideals. As Julia Guarneri notes, since the 1890s newspapers combined news and entertainment in a deliberate strategy to present readers with “something for everyone.”<sup>15</sup> In Frankfurt School parlance the culture industry produced “something for everyone, so that no one can escape.”<sup>16</sup> Taking a more pessimistic outlook than Mill, Adorno argued that the industrial cultural commodities of radio, film and print meant that “[e]veryone is their own Charlie McCarthy.”<sup>17</sup> For Adorno, a hegemony of consumerism was reproduced vis-à-vis “a business with strict division of labour, departments and restricted entry.” To succeed in the “the competitive hierarchy” of consumer capitalism, professionals had to become “more blinkered than the most inveterate specialist.”<sup>18</sup>

While Adorno has often been dismissed as cultural elitist, in a letter to Benjamin in the mid-1930s, he wrote: “If you defend the kitsch film against the ‘quality’ film, no one can be more in agreement with you than I am; but *l’art pour l’art* is just as much in need of a defense.”<sup>19</sup> As Marina Vishmidt observes, while Adorno saw repetition in art as synonymous with “stasis and reaction,” Benjamin took a “more sanguine view” on the possibilities inherent to

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<sup>12</sup> For an excellent overview of Mills’ unpublished drafts, see Kim Sawchuck, “The Cultural Apparatus: C. Wright Mills’ Unfinished Work,” *The American Sociologist* 32, no. 1 (Spring 2001): 27-49.

<sup>13</sup> C. Wright Mills, *White Collar: The American Middle Classes, Fiftieth Anniversary Edition* (New York and London: Oxford University Press, 2002), introduction, ix.

<sup>14</sup> C. Wright Mills, *Power, Politics and People: The Collected Essays of C. Wright Mills*, ed. Irving Louis Horowitz (New York: Oxford University Press, 1963). Quoted in Sawchuck, “The Cultural Apparatus,” 27.

<sup>15</sup> Guarneri, *Newsprint Metropolises*, 66.

<sup>16</sup> Adorno and Horkheimer, “The Culture Industry,” *The Dialectics of Enlightenment*, 173.

<sup>17</sup> Charlie McCarthy was a popular ventriloquist dummy. See Theodor Adorno, *Minima Moralia: Reflections on a Damaged Life*, trans. E.F.N. Jephcott (London and New York: Verso, 2005), thesis #40, 146.

<sup>18</sup> Adorno, *Minima Moralia*, thesis #1, 16-17.

<sup>19</sup> Theodor Adorno to Walter Benjamin, 18 March 1936, in *Aesthetics and Politics: Adorno, Benjamin, Bloch, Brecht, Lukács* (New York and London: Verso, 2020), 153.

art's technical reproducibility.<sup>20</sup> But Benjamin also believed that newspapers turned information into a sensory experience. As print workers, journalists also competed in a marketplace where their professional identities emerged alongside commodification.<sup>21</sup> Significantly, Benjamin did see resistance to these commercial trends in popular graphic art. In the *Arcades Project* Benjamin analyzed the work of Daumier's contemporary, the graphic artist Grandville, a pseudonym for Jean-Ignace-Isidore Gérard. For Benjamin, "Grandville's fantasies confer a commodity character on the universe . . . In taking it to an extreme, he reveals its nature."<sup>22</sup> As Jaeho Kang notes, in one Grandville graphic, a "media machine" was depicted pumping out "a torrent of newspapers, pamphlets, and advertisements into city streets."<sup>23</sup> In contrast, American editorial cartoonists defined themselves within this "media machine" while largely eschewing the fantastical. Instead, this was left to comic strip cartoonists to explore, albeit it in limited ways. This divergence in form was due to newspapers adopting print layouts that separated comic and editorial art in the early twentieth century. The inventive imagery that Benjamin saw coursing through Grandville's critical commentary did, however, exist at the print margins.

For cartoonists in alternative media joining cartooning's professional project held little appeal. This is telling since mainstream cartoonists championed a democratic ideal, which in many ways, amounted to a historical bloc that gained consent through representation. As Michael Denning notes, "cultural forms have no necessary class allegiance."<sup>24</sup> While this is true for cartooning writ large, the institutional home of editorial cartoonists—the daily newspaper—presupposed if not a class allegiance, then certainly an ideological affinity that obscured that the "free" press was a commercial press. This was evident in editorial cartoonists' silence on the wave of newspaper strikes in the immediate postwar years.<sup>25</sup> It is not that they ignored the "common man"; rather their cultural practice was based on speaking for John Q. Public. But such symbolic figures represented a highly normative view of who comprised this public.

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<sup>20</sup> Marina Vishmidt, "Art, Technology, and Representation," in *The SAGE Handbook of Frankfurt School Critical Theory*, Beverley Best, Werner Bonefeld, and Chris O'Kane, eds. (Sage Publications, 2018), 1102-1118, 1106.

<sup>21</sup> See Jaeho Kang, "The Ur-history of Media Space: Walter Benjamin and the Information Industry in Nineteenth-Century Paris," *International Journal of Politics, Culture, and Society* 22, no. 2 (June 2009): 231-238.

<sup>22</sup> Walter Benjamin, "Grandville, or the World Exhibitions," *Arcades Project*, trans. Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1999), 6-8.

<sup>23</sup> Kang, "The Ur-history of Media Space," 239.

<sup>24</sup> Denning, *Culture in the Age of Three Worlds*, 112.

<sup>25</sup> For more on strikes from 1946 to 1948, see Davies, *The Postwar Decline of Newspapers*, 11-13.

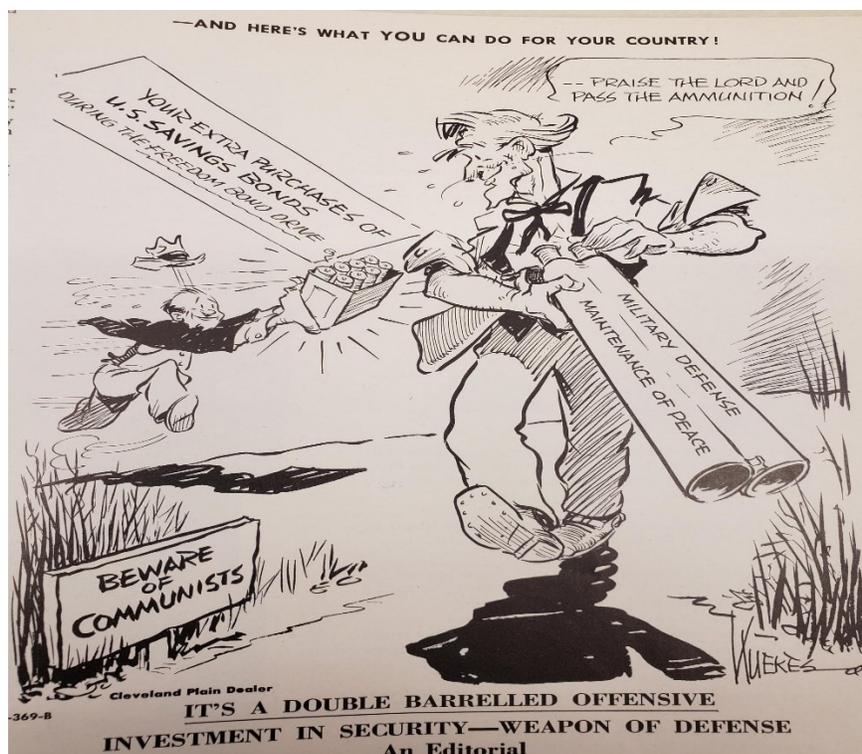


Figure 2.1: R.N. “Ding” Darling, undated cartoon promoting US Saving Bonds.

Source: Billy Ireland Cartoon Library and Museum, Ohio State University.

The postwar consumer society also reinforced a view that women were consumers, while men were producers. This was congruent with print publishing’s deep-seated sexism. In 1908 the National Press Club was formed in Washington, D.C. Other press clubs cropped up around the country, many of which barred women reporters. In these gendered spaces dues-paying male members fraternized with fellow journalists and editors while also advancing their careers. As Guarneri notes, press clubs “put journalists in regular contact with their cities’ businessmen,” which allowed them to move freely between the corporate sector and the print industry.<sup>26</sup>

Editorial cartoonists, who identified as “newspaperman,” reflected this fraternal view of their profession. When asked at the AAEC’s 1962 Chicago convention why the organization had no female members, Scott Long remarked: “Editorial cartoonists have to be a kind of a preacher . . . this requires a cohesive philosophy. It’s a very masculine business.” Carey Orr answered this same question about the profession’s gender deficit by comparing cartoonists to “boxers,” which echoed his colleagues’ views that women lacked the instinct “to do some fighting.”<sup>27</sup>

<sup>26</sup> Guarneri, *Newsprint Metropolises*, 47.

<sup>27</sup> Scott Long, “Convention Notes,” *AAEC News*, July 1962, pp. 14. Box AAEC1, folder 9. BIMCL.

From the 1890s to the 1930s, a number of women found work as artists and illustrators for weekly and monthly magazine publishing. In the early twentieth century Rose O’Neil regularly published cartoons in *Puck*. Other female cartoonists and illustrators such as Alice McKee, Lou Rogers, Emma Gordon, Edwina Dumn, Fay King, and Delia Messick found success in various cartoon and comic art formats. Sexism, however, remained an enduring feature of the publishing industry. In Messick’s case, she was only able to find a syndicate to distribute her strip, *Brenda Starr, Reporter*, after she adopted the pseudonym “Dale” and changed her lead character’s profession to journalism.<sup>28</sup> Some women, however, were able to find success. In 1925 Helen E. Hokinson published her first *New Yorker* cartoon and quickly became famous for satirizing wealthy female socialites colloquially known as “Hokinson women.”<sup>29</sup>

In the early Cold War, the institution of the “family wage” erected additional barriers for women to professionally advance as creators within the industry. Women with radical politics were even less likely to find publishing outlets beyond leftist periodicals. Editorial cartooning was considered a male preserve because men were supposedly more “aggressive” in attacking political elites. Laura Slobe, whose cutting cartoons of capitalist fat cats and anticommunists appeared weekly in the Trotskyist press from 1944 until 1957, put the lie to this cliché.<sup>30</sup> Prior to Etta Hulme becoming a full-time editorial cartoonist for the *Fort-Worth Star Telegram* in the early 1970s, only one female editorial cartoonist — the *Miami Daily News*’ Anne Mergen — occupied a staff position with a major daily from 1933 to 1956. She entered semi-retirement a year before the AAEC was founded, and despite being credited by her own paper for helping it win a Pulitzer Prize, her work appeared to be largely unknown to her male peers. Mergen’s running commentary on segregation was notable for its appeals to readers to consider the human costs of Jim Crow as opposed to focusing on the rhetoric of “state rights.”<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> For more on Messick, see Anna Diamond, “How Women Broke Into the Male-Dominated World of Cartoons and Illustrations,” *Smithsonian Magazine*, Published on 11 January 2018.

<https://www.smithsonianmag.com/history/how-women-broke-into-male-dominated-world-cartoons-illustrations-180967803/> Access 1 July 2021.

<sup>29</sup> For more on the history of women in cartooning, see Lamb, *Drawn to Extremes*, 227-231.

<sup>30</sup> For more on Laura Slobe’s career, see chapter 5, section 1 of this study.

<sup>31</sup> See Martha H. Kennedy, *Drawn to Purpose: American Women Illustrators and Cartoonists* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2018). Kennedy, along with her colleagues at the Library of Congress, have curated a number of exhibits on women cartoonists. See Barbara Orbach Natanson, “Ready for Research: Anne Mergen’s Editorial Cartoons,” Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division, 20 February 2020. Accessed 1 July 2021.

<https://blogs.loc.gov/picturethis/2020/02/ready-for-research-anne-mergens-editorial-cartoons/>

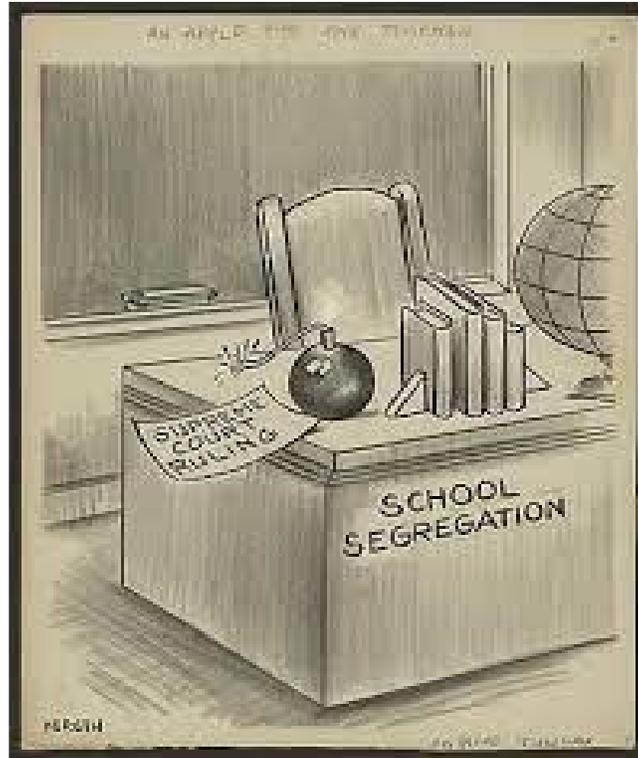


Figure 2.2: Anne Mergen. “An Apple for the Teacher,” *Miami Daily News*, 18 May 1954.

Source: Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division

For women of colour, breaking into the male, white-dominated world of American cartooning proved additionally difficult. Comic strip cartooning was no less discriminatory than editorial cartooning, but a handful of Black cartoonists found steady work in comic art, in part, because revealing one’s politics was not necessary to the genre. The trailblazer Jackie Ormes was the first woman of colour to establish herself as a Black creator in the comic strip medium. Ormes initially began as writer and editor with the African American weekly, the *Pittsburgh Courier*, during the Depression. In 1937 she debuted her strip, *Torchy Brown in Dixie to Harlem* but no syndicate picked it up and after a year it folded. After a stint as a columnist with the *Chicago Defender*, in 1950 she revived her Torchy Brown character for the *Courier*, which in the postwar years had further expanded its national reach with black-owned newspapers. Ormes also designed the first Black doll that countered the Mammy stereotype, and during the Civil Rights era, her strip became increasingly political.<sup>32</sup>

<sup>32</sup> For an excellent biography of Ormes, see Nancy Goldstein, *Jackie Ormes: The First African American Woman Cartoonist* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2008).

Comic strip and gag cartooning were more pliable than editorial cartooning when it came to broaching social themes under the cover of humour. But Black characters, even when drawn by ethnically diverse cartoonists, still drifted into regressive territory. George Herriman, the creator of the influential *Krazy Kat*, had an Afro-Cuban family lineage. His 1880 birth certificate classified him as “coloured,” but as white-passing, Herriman sometimes identified as Greek, French or Turkish. As inventive as his panel strip was, Herriman was not immune from mocking ethnic minorities.<sup>33</sup> E. Simms Campbell became the first self-identified Black cartoonist to regularly contribute to weekly and monthly magazines in mainstream print. His illustration of the “Night Club Map of Harlem” in the early 1930s catered less to white prejudices than it did to their spending power. Most readers of his *New Yorker* cartoons were unaware that he was black. Humour scholar Judith Yaross Lee notes that in the *New Yorker*, “race and dialect often served as convenient or shorthand class markers.”<sup>34</sup> Aimed at a sophisticated readership, the *New Yorker*’s visual puns were less accessible to working class readerships that gravitated towards newspaper comic strips, and beginning in the mid-1930s, comic books. To a certain extent, comic strips and books allowed Black creators to smuggle in class and race themes together, provided they could find work in these industries. Matt Baker became a successful comic book artist in the 1950s and a decade later Morris Turner became the first Black cartoonist to have his comic strip, *Wee Pals*, which featured a multiracial cast of children characters, nationally syndicated. Prior to the mid-1960s, however, few Black cartoonists were able to access the lucrative syndicate market or budding comic book field.<sup>35</sup>

One reason that these cartooning genres lent themselves to syndication and a slightly more diverse set of contributors, had to do with their decontextualized content. Most popular strips had no identifiable local city scenery in their panels because they were intended for a national audience. In contrast, prior to the widespread syndication of editorial cartoons in the 1950s, many editorial cartoonists commented on state politicians or local legislative bills, which made their political sympathies visible to readers. As Gilbert Seldes notes,

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<sup>33</sup> See M. Thomas Inge, “Was Krazy Black? The Radical Identity of George Herriman,” *Inks: Cartoons and Comic Art Studies* 3, no. 2 (1996): 2-9.

<sup>34</sup> Judith Yaross Lee, *Defining New Yorker Humor* (Jackson, MS: University Press of Mississippi, 2000), 54.

<sup>35</sup> Many fan cultures have taken a leading role in archiving and digitizing past cartoon and comic art. For an example of this invaluable research, see the series, “Profiles in Black Cartooning,” curated by the “Black Nerds Club,” as part of Black History Month, 2016. <http://cblcdf.org/profiles-in-black-cartooning/#> Accessed 1 July 2020.

[a newspaper comic strip] must avoid political and social questions because the same strip appears in papers of divergent opinions; there is no room in it for acute racial caricature, although no group is immune from its mockery. These and other restrictions have gradually made of the comic strip a changing picture of the average American life.<sup>36</sup>

This generic formula did not require its contributors to disclose political loyalties. The same was true of magazine gag or panel cartooning which were more socially satirical than pointedly political. In this genre, the interplay between caption and picture made both text and image interdependent, since understanding a gag cartoon's punchline was entirely dependent on reading both the words and the picture together. Consequently, politics did not need to visibly factor into a gag cartoon's punchline in the same way that was required in an editorial cartoon. According to R.C. Harvey, during "the heyday of magazine cartooning," between the 1930s and early 1960s, popular weekly magazines published an estimated 200 cartoons a month while the monthly magazines published closer to 500.<sup>37</sup> This growing market offered limited opportunities to non-white cartoonists who were largely excluded from mainstream dailies.

Another reason that breaking the colour line of mainstream newspaper editorial cartooning proved so daunting was because editorial cartoonists were integrated into the working structures of their paper's newsrooms in a way that syndicated artists were not. After syndication came into existence in 1906, cartoonists did not have to work for any one newspaper or chain. This change meant that syndicated cartoonists were freed from the drudgery of producing a range of tasks for their papers' art departments. As Harvey notes, "[o]nce syndicated, a cartoonist escaped this gamut of illustrative labours and could devote his whole energy to the feature that was syndicated."<sup>38</sup> Syndication also locked the cartoonist and the syndicate into a contractual arrangement whereby the latter assumed responsibilities for distributing a cartoon or comic strip feature, while the former focused on its creative development.<sup>39</sup> The downside of this arrangement was that creators had to relinquish ownership rights, including any claim to revenue generated by commercial licensing of a strip's characters.<sup>40</sup> The potential financial windfall in

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<sup>36</sup> Gilbert Seldes, "The 'Vulgar' Comic Strip," in *A Comics Study Reader*, 46-52.

<sup>37</sup> Harvey, "How Comics Came to Be," in *A Comics Study Reader*, 34.

<sup>38</sup> Harvey, "How Comics Came to Be," in *A Comics Study Reader*, 44.

<sup>39</sup> While editorial cartoonists worked for syndicates as early as the 1920s, the widespread syndication of editorial cartoons did not occur until the 1950s. See chapter 3 of this study.

<sup>40</sup> For more on syndication, see Harvey, "How Comics Came to Be," in *A Comics Study Reader*, 43-45.

comic strip cartooning far outweighed the staff salaries of editorial cartoonists. Most syndicate contracts split profits fifty-fifty, although bigger name cartoonists could claim a greater percentage share. Walt Kelly, for instance, took home 70% of profits that came from the syndication of *Pogo*, while the Hall Syndicate's share was 30%.<sup>41</sup> Throughout the twentieth century, few Black cartoonists were in a position to negotiate similar contract terms.

As a result of these wider industry trends, Black cartoonists who wanted to directly comment on politics were largely confined to the African American press, which after the Civil War, began to build its own print networks independently of mainstream newswire services.<sup>42</sup> John Mitchell Jr., the editor and publisher for the Virginia-based *Richmond Planet*, which was founded by former slaves in 1884, was representative of this shift in forging an autonomous Black print culture. A contemporary of Nast and Keppler, Johnson was also the first prominent Black cartoonist, and in 1917, he hired Ben Johnson to take over editorial cartooning duties for the *Richmond Planet*. Johnson's editorial cartoons, which only appeared between 1918 and 1920, represented a sophisticated leap in the "visual rhetorics" aimed primarily at Black audiences. Thematically, Johnson was less encumbered than Johnson's post-Civil War era stress on inclusive citizenship, and thus, explored the varied meanings of a vibrant diasporic African heritage in his cartoons from what was a transnational perspective.<sup>43</sup>

Other politically inclined and art-schooled Black cartoonists followed in Johnson's wake in the 1920s and 1930s. The founding of the Associated Negro Press in 1919 granted these graphic artists, working in strips, panels, and editorial cartoon formats, a greater national reach.<sup>44</sup> Along with Oliver "Ollie" Harrington, who Langston Hughes described as "America's greatest African American cartoonist," Wilber Holloway and Jay Jackson formed a generational cohort that commented directly on the social upheavals that accompanied the "Great Migration" to northern cities.<sup>45</sup> Black political cartooning was also diverse in perspective. On the eve of the Second World War Jackson, along with William "Bill" Chase of the *Amsterdam News*, initially

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<sup>41</sup> See Box WK4, folder 12b, BICLM, for Kelly's correspondence with Robert Hall as well as his financials.

<sup>42</sup> For more on the domination of white-owned news wire services, see Gonzalez and Torres, *News for All the People*, "Wiring the News," chapter 9, 186-219.

<sup>43</sup> See Benjamin R. Bates, Windy Y. Lawrence, and Mark Cervenka, "Redrawing Aforcentrism: Visual *Nommo* in George H. Ben Johnson's Editorial Cartoons," *The Howard Journal of Communications* 19, no. 4 (2008): 277-296.

<sup>44</sup> Guarneri, *Newsprint Metropolis*, 216-217.

<sup>45</sup> William H. Foster III, "Langston Hughes' 'Jesse B. Simple' and Ollie Harrington's 'Bootsie': Cartoons and Stories That Preserve the Voice of the African American Everyman," *International Journal of Comic Art* 11, no.1 (Spring 2009):294-306.

expressed isolationist sentiments prior to Pearl Harbor. Their cartoons reminded readers that lynching and Jim Crow posed the more immediate threats to Black America than European fascism. Michelle Chen argues that as the war proceeded their cartoons “took on an anti-colonial dimension,” and suggested racial solidarity with Japanese. But in general, the Black press embraced the war effort and Holloway’s “Double V” emblem, which he designed for the *Courier*, became a rallying cry for ending racism at home and abroad. As Chen notes, political cartoons were another venue where “the trauma of modern warfare generated a new race consciousness, and new visions, that redefined blackness on the world stage.”<sup>46</sup>

Yet, the war did not bring Black cartoonists opportunities in the mainstream. In the case of Chester Commodore, outright discrimination had robbed him of a chance to break in with mainstream dailies. In 1938 he secured a job with the *Minnesota Star*. The offer was then rescinded after the paper’s staff discovered their new colleague was not white. A decade later, during the wave of postwar newspaper strikes, Commodore was hired as a printer for the *Chicago Defender* where he contributed strips and cartoons until replacing Jackson in 1954. In the Black press, the labour of division between cartoon and comic art was not as stark as in mainstream dailies. For instance, between the 1930s and 1960s Sam Milai drew editorial cartoons and illustrated artwork for Joel A. Rogers’ serialized “Facts About the Negro,” which the *Courier* distributed to other Black weeklies around the country.

In the climate of the Cold War, Milai drew broadly liberal cartoons that were supportive of the Kennedy and Johnson administrations’ civil rights policies. Harrington, however, adopted a more critical lens. At the tail end of the Harlem Renaissance, Harrington created his popular Dark Laughter panel for the *Amsterdam News*. From the mid-1930s onward, he became widely known in Black circles, but it was not until the early 1940s, when he worked as an art director for the *People’s Voice*, a communist weekly based in Harlem, that Harrington found steady work. In the 1940s he socialized with the Marxist playwright Bertolt Brecht and other German emigres during the war. The *Pittsburgh Courier* also sent him to Europe as a war correspondent. This elevated public profile would eventually make Harrington a target of the state.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> See Michelle Chen’s essay, “Editorial Cartoons in the Black Press during World War II,” published in *Sociological Images*, 2 July 2012. <https://thesocietypages.org/socimages/2012/07/02/editorial-cartoons-in-the-black-press-during-world-war-ii/> Accessed 1 July 2021.

<sup>47</sup> For more on the history of Black cartoon and comic art, see Sheena C. Howard, *Encyclopedia of Black Comics* (New York: Fulcrum Publishers, 2017). Howard offers the most comprehensive historical accounting of Black cartoonists in comic strips, political cartooning, comic books, graphic novels.

Many scholars of American cartooning have acknowledged Harrington's civil rights organizing, but in general, he is remembered more for creating the everyman character, Bootsie, than he is for his radical politics.<sup>48</sup> Both are key, however, to grasping the confluence of social forces that shaped his creative development and political outlook.<sup>49</sup> As Brian Dolinar notes in *The Black Cultural Front: Black Writers and Artists of the Depression Generation* (2012): "the primary reason why Harrington left America was to escape the Communist witch hunt."<sup>50</sup> Harrington, who was as talented a wordsmith as he was a visual artist, referred to this red-baiting directed towards Black radicals as "the old moldy anticommunism."<sup>51</sup>

After witnessing the appalling treatment of Black veterans, Harrington secured a position with the National Association of the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP). He continued to cartoon throughout the late 1940s, while he became increasingly known as a fierce public intellectual. But he eventually grew frustrated with the NAACP's moderation and resigned. Years later, he described his decision as being motivated by the need to shield the organization from a smear campaign because of his affiliation with Black radicals such as Paul Robeson and Community party leader Benjamin Davis Jr. Yet as Dolinar notes, by 1947 Harrington's relationship with a NAACP leader Walter White had become frayed.<sup>52</sup> In 1948 he worked on Henry Wallace's presidential campaign and in 1950 he chaired the Citizens Non-Partisan Committee to Elect Dr. Du Bois to the US Senate on the American Labor Party ticket. In 1951, a notice published in the *Daily Worker* announcing that Harrington was teaching at the Jefferson School of Social Sciences, which the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) considered a communist front, appeared to have sparked an in-depth investigation. The lengthy dossier that the FBI compiled of Harrington would also include his years living abroad.<sup>53</sup>

Harrington gave varying accounts about why he left America. But clearly anticommunism combined with racism were motivating factors. After an acquaintance warned

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<sup>48</sup> See, for example, Lordon, *Politics, Ink*, 93-94.

<sup>49</sup> For a biographical sketch of Harrington's political and creative life, see M. Thomas Inge, "Introduction," *Dark Laughter: The Satirical Art of Oliver W. Harrington* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2009).

<sup>50</sup> Brian Dolinar, *The Black Cultural Front: Black Writers and Artists of the Depression Generation* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2012), 218.

<sup>51</sup> Harrington, *Why I Left America*, 23.

<sup>52</sup> Dolinar, *The Black Cultural Front*, 211.

<sup>53</sup> Harrington's extensive FBI file is now held at Ohio State University. A digitalized version of the file can be located online at: <http://omeka.wustl.edu/omeka/exhibits/show/fbeyes/harrington>. This digital collection consists of Freedom of Information Requests and William J. Maxwell's research for his *F.B. Eyes: How J. Edgar Hoover's Ghostreaders Framed African American Literature* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2015).

him that anticommunists were investigating him, Harrington decided to leave the US for a while. Harrington would later memorably describe how after receiving this tip from his acquaintance the man “held his hand out next to mine. Both hands were black. So that was that. Three weeks later I was on a boat.”<sup>54</sup> William J. Maxwell notes that the FBI tried to “confiscate Ollie Harrington’s travel papers” and contacted the American embassy in France. But these attempts proved unsuccessful.<sup>55</sup> Harrington arrived in Paris in 1952 and quickly integrated into ex-pat Black community in Paris, which included the writer, Richard Wright, with whom he would become close friends. From France, Harrington published his first collection of Bootsie cartoons in 1958.<sup>56</sup> After relocating to East Berlin in the early 1960s, Harrington lived behind the Iron Curtain for three decades. Throughout the 1950s and 1960s his cartoons appeared in the *Courier* and in 1968 he began publishing with the *Daily World*, the print successor to the *Daily Worker*.<sup>57</sup>

In his memoirs Harrington expressed his desire to upend stereotypical and demeaning depictions of Black life. Harrington came to cartooning by way of caricaturing a white grade schoolteacher who had taunted him and the other black pupil in his class. Throughout his career, he would recall the pleasure he experienced in making and sharing those drawings. As he came of age, the countless images of black stereotypes in popular media further motivated him to press his talents into the service of deconstructing American racism and revealing its class dynamics. A perceptive critic, Harrington also elaborated on the structural constraints that prevented Black cartoonists from breaking into the “BIG business” of comic strips.<sup>58</sup> Harrington was well aware that strip cartoonists worked “under contract to a small number of monopolies called syndicates.” This monopolistic control, he argued, was one reason why the visual stereotypes he encountered while growing up in the Bronx were so ubiquitous in print culture. As he wrote, Black characters “were always represented as a circle, black with two hotdogs in the middle of the mouth.” Most of these images were drawn by white cartoonists who were trying to establish a foothold in the profession. He described his own work as “a conscious effort on my part to change that at least in my drawing. The black had to disappear. The rubber lips had to disappear.”<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> Harrington, *Why I Left America*, 104.

<sup>55</sup> Maxwell, *F.B. Eyes*, 203.

<sup>56</sup> For an overview of Harrington’s political activities in the late 1940s and early 1950s, see Dolinar, *The Black Cultural Front*, “Battling Fascism for Years with the Might of His Pen,” chapter 4, 171-223.

<sup>57</sup> I discuss Harrington’s 1960s and early 1970s cartoons in chapter 5.

<sup>58</sup> Harrington, *Why I Left America*, 86.

<sup>59</sup> Quoted in Inge, *Dark Laughter*, xi.

In the mid-1940s Harrington's political activism crept into his Bootsie cartoons. Increasingly, the everyman character who bumbled through life was becoming aware of the larger social forces arrayed against Black Americans. As Harrington described:

. . . [the] U.S. is racist and class oriented. So what's that got to do with comic strips? Well like we've already seen, the MAN owns them all (remember those syndicates) and like we all know, every decent American kid will fight his parents like a tiger to get at the Sunday comics before they do. If he loses the battle he'll rush into his room where he's got so many HORROR COMICS stashed under his bed that the bedsprings can't spring. And what the whole family gets out of all this is a sense of "them" and "us." Us being the nice decent folks in places like Grand Rapids and Plains, Georgia. I won't waste any typewriter ribbon explaining who "them" is.<sup>60</sup>

In one passage Harrington mapped the complexities of authorship, readership, and ownership of American cartooning, while pausing to consider the interplay between the socially sanctioned Sunday "funnies" and the more illicit comic book horror genre that prompted industry self-censorship in the mid-1950s. For Harrington, race and class reproduced their analytical frames and social relations through cultural production. By focusing on an imagined household in the Midwest, Harrington constructed an "us" that was overwhelmingly white, increasing middle-class, and consuming cultural products aimed specifically for white sensibilities. Meanwhile, by "them" Harrington's passage gestured toward both the demeaning representations of Black life in mainstream cartoon and comic art and the stratified class structure that hemmed in the creativity of critical graphic artists. This had a decidedly racialized cast. As Harrington described, "syndicate doors were firmly barred against Black cartoonists" during his day.

Harrington's reflections on the power of visual media to shape public perceptions were rooted in a material analysis of American publishing's two-tier system. For him the psychic costs of racism were perpetuated by a lucrative comic art market that prevented Black creators from expressing themselves freely outside of the print channels of Black-owned newspapers. In Harrington's view, exercising political autonomy in editorial cartooning was even more difficult. In a profile published in the *Daily World* on his 60<sup>th</sup> birthday, Harrington said: "I have always insisted on determining the content of my work . . . That is why I always refused to work for any

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<sup>60</sup> Harrington, *Why I Left America and Other Essays*, 86.

publication that would not allow that luxury.” This was not a self-aggrandizing comment on artistic independence, but rather an astute observation of the politics of cultural work. In 1940 the *New York Daily News* offered Harrington a staff position, to which he declined. Inclusion, for him, meant more than having opportunity; it also meant the freedom to critique. It was fitting, then, that self-exile provided him a measure of autonomy denied to him in America. Harrington later described how his experiences with anti-fascists like Brecht during the war had a profound impact on his worldview. Based on these encounters, Harrington drew the conclusion “that racism in the U.S. and Nazism in Germany stemmed from the same roots.”<sup>61</sup>

Barbara Fields insightfully argues that “when virtually the whole of society . . . commits itself to belief in propositions that collapse into absurdity upon the slightest examination, the reason is not hallucination or delusion or even simple hypocrisy; rather it is ideology.”<sup>62</sup> The community-based print networks created by African Americans newspapers in the early twentieth century countered this hegemonic hold. As William H. Foster notes, alongside Black poetry, art, and music, the cartoon and comic art of Harrington and others provided “a sense of dignity and a sense of humor despite the forces of oppression, racism, and bigotry.”<sup>63</sup> Bootsie spoke to many Black Americans who saw in the character’s experiences something of their own. Political cartoons had the ability to condense a multitude of experiences into a visually arresting form that stuck with readers. Outside of a few noteworthy examples, such as the *Baltimore Sun*’s Edmund Duffy, few white editorial cartoonists would harness this visual potential to critical ends prior to the 1960s. Harrington and other Black cartoonists, meanwhile, did not appeal to a professional identity rooted in artificial categories of cartooning. For them the division of labour in mainstream dailies was not as pronounced in the Black press. Instead, they did the work that was needed, all the while being aware of Du Bois’ lament: “I have been in the world, but not of it.”<sup>64</sup> In the early Cold War, however, because Jim Crow undermined America’s global designs, Cold Warriors recognized that America needed to do more than sell a consumer lifestyle. It would also have to promote the democratic underpinnings of the “American way of life” to secure global allies. White cartoonists in mainstream print would do just this.

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<sup>61</sup> Bill Andrews, “In Praise of Ollie Harrington, Part I,” *Daily World*, 25 February 1976. Unprocessed collection, BICLM.

<sup>62</sup> Fields, “Slavery, Race, and Ideology in the United States of America,” in *Racecraft*, 118-119.

<sup>63</sup> Foster III, “Langston Hughes’ ‘Jesse B. Simple’ and Ollie Harrington’s ‘Bootsie,’” 294.

<sup>64</sup> W.E.B. Du Bois, *Darkwater: Voices from Within the Veil* (New York and London: Verso, 2016), “Postscript,” 13.

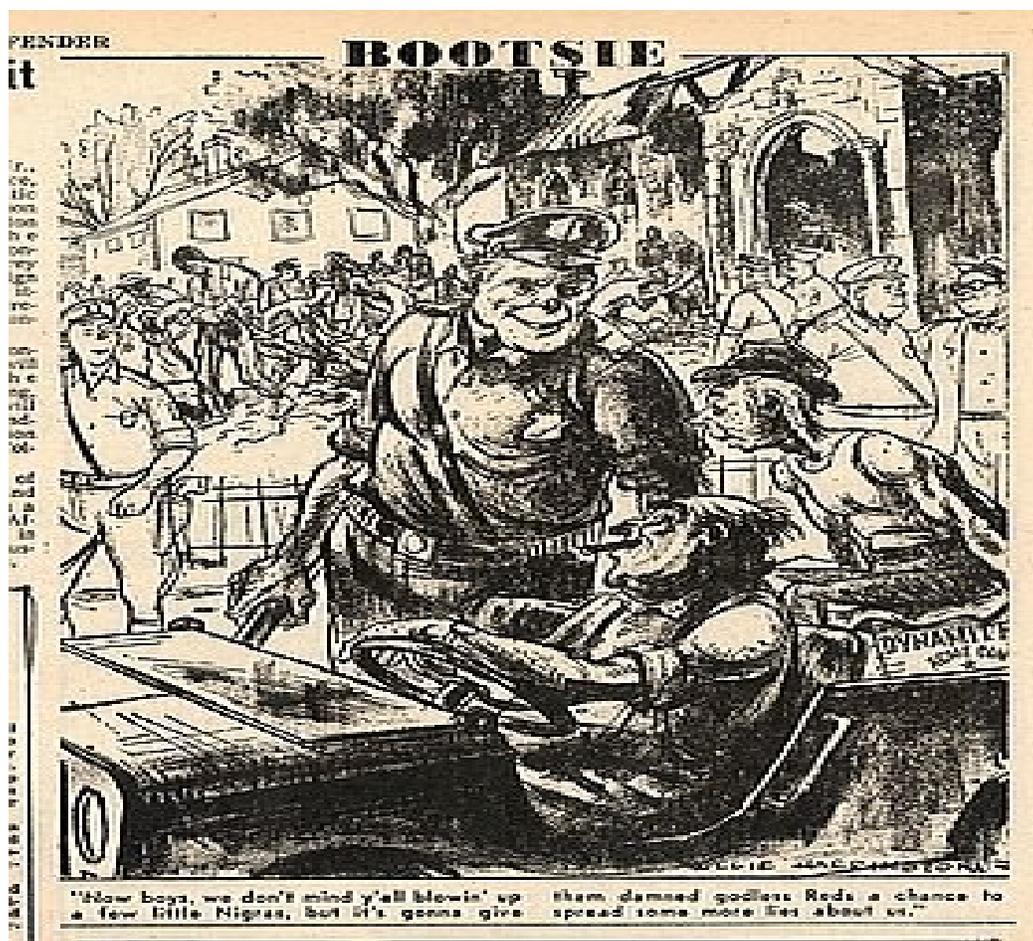


Figure 2.3: Ollie Harrington, Untitled Bootsie cartoon, *Northwest Defender*, 15 October 1964.

Source: Walter O. Evans Collection of African American Art<sup>65</sup>

### Visualizing The “Rounded Completion of an American Type”<sup>66</sup>

In 1954 the nation’s most well-known cartoonists met the president for breakfast as a token of appreciation for the NCS’s involvement in promoting the United States Savings Bonds program. An amateur painter, President Dwight D. Eisenhower regaled his guests with his favorite comic strips while praising them for teaching the nation’s youth “truth, honor and, above all, dedication.” The cartoonists reciprocated with sketches of him playing golf and coyly painting

<sup>65</sup> The *Oregon History Project*, curated by the Oregon Historical Society, has an excellent write-up of this image, which can be accessed online: <https://www.oregonhistoryproject.org/articles/historical-records/bootsie-cartoon/#.YVXleppE1ts>. Accessed 15 August 2021.

<sup>66</sup> Constance Rourke, *American Humor: A Study of the National Character* (New York: New York Review Books, 2004). Quoted in Joseph Boskin, *Rebellious Laughter: People’s Humor in American Culture* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1997), 2.

cartoon portraits of his own. Two years later these presidential caricatures were repackaged into a collection titled, *President Eisenhower's Cartoon Book*, which featured forwards written by the president and his secretary of the treasury, George M. Humphrey, each of whom were named honorary NCS members.<sup>67</sup> By imagining the president excelling in various recreational activities, the cartoon collection visualized ideals of middle-class leisure and postwar masculinity. The cartoons, which portrayed the president in a cheerful repose and smiling with a toothy grin, also echoed the animated “I like Ike” campaign television spots that propelled the former general to victory in the 1952 presidential campaign.<sup>68</sup>

Collectively, the NCS's visual paeans to Eisenhower valorized humour as a desirable trait that even the commander-in-chief himself embodied. Unwriting the reciprocity between presidents and the cartoonists who caricatured them was a self-deprecating form of humour that made the caricatured appear down to earth. As Constance Rourke noted in her classic study, *American Humor: A Study of the National Character* (1931): “Humor has been a fashioning instrument in America, cleaving its way through national life, holding tenaciously to the spread elements of that life.”<sup>69</sup> In the context of the Cold War, cartoonists deployed this “fashioning instrument” to promote cartooning as an “American type” that was bipartisan, good natured, and patriotic. The NCS was first invited to the White House after completing a seventeen-city tour promoting the Savings Bonds program in 1948. During this first White House visit, President Harry S. Truman praised the group for its spirit of public service, a sentiment that would be echoed by his successors.

The NCS's proximity to power in the 1950s was noteworthy for several reasons. For one, cartoonists' disarming drawings, combined with self-deprecating wit, made their patriotic volunteerism seem less as a solemn duty, and more a joyful commitment to civic participation. Secondly, the reciprocity between presidents and cartoonists during White House visits humanized the imperial presidency by showing that the men who occupied the Oval Office were not unlike most Americans. Finally, from the perspective of the cartoonists, the NCS's raising profile in the 1950s positioned the Society as a mouthpiece for the larger field of cartooning. By the time the NCS breakfasted with Eisenhower in the mid-1950s, the group had grown from a

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<sup>67</sup> *President Eisenhower's Cartoon Book* (New York: Fredrick Fell, Inc., Publishers, 1956).

<sup>68</sup> Files for the Eisenhower White House visit are located in Box NCS 4, folder 25, BICLM.

<sup>69</sup> Rourke, *American Humor*, quoted in Joseph Boskin, *Rebellious Laughter*, 2.

small social club based in New York to a national organization with regional chapters. By the 1960s its membership reached over 400 cartoonists. Part of this growth owed to the NCS's willingness to enthusiastically participate in a number of state-endorsed projects. In a letter to the Treasury Department from 1960, then NCS president Bill Crawford wrote that "if the Society can aid Uncle Sam in any way, yours is to whistle Yankee Doodle in this direction."<sup>70</sup>

Among the NCS's charter members were some of the medium's most famous names: Rube Goldberg, who served as the Society's first president and who was described by his NCS peers as "the father confessor" of American cartoonists;<sup>71</sup> C.D. Russell, creator of the popular *Pete the Tramp* comic strip; Russell Patterson, the famous magazine illustrator who popularized the "flapper" in the 1920s; and Otto Soglow, creator of the *New Yorker* strip *Little King* who was poached by the Hearst paper chain in the 1930s. The idea for a professional society for cartoonists originated in the hospital visits that Tony Mendez arranged as part of the American Theatre Wing. Mendez, who would later become a prominent cartoonist's agent herself, helped organize what cartoonists would come to refer to as "chalktalks," which were essentially performances that involved cartoonists spontaneously illustrating for crowds and mixing banter and jokes in between. Following one such event, Russell pitched the idea that the participating cartoonists should remain in contact after the tour by founding a "club of our own." His one stipulation was that "no girls [be] allowed!"<sup>72</sup>

In March 1946 the Society was officially founded at a dinner in New York. Within two weeks, 32 cartoonists joined and by the end of the year the Society had 112 dues-paying members.<sup>73</sup> Milton Caniff, who recently left his popular *Terry and the Pirates* strip over a contractual dispute, became the NCS's first treasury. Caniff became one of the NCS's most prominent figures and helped direct the Society's early efforts from the King Features' New York offices. After signing with the Hearst-owned King Features syndicate, Caniff's new strip, *Steve Canyon*, won immediate acclaim throughout the industry. His favourable contract terms

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<sup>70</sup> Bill Crawford to Jake Mogelevor of the Treasury Department, 6 July 1960, NCS Box 1, folder 35, BICLM.

<sup>71</sup> "Newspaper Comics Council (Bulletin)," 1 September 1959, Box NCS 1, folder 46, BICLM.

<sup>72</sup> See R.C. Harvey, "Tales of the Founding of the National Cartoonists Society," *Comics Journal*, 7 June 2010. For more on the NCS's founding, a snippet of Harvey's article is posted on the NCS's webpage: <https://www.nationalcartoonists.com/about/>. Accessed 1 October 2020.

<sup>73</sup> Rube Goldberg, Russel Peterson, C.D. Russell, and Otto Soglow are often credited among the NCS's founding members. Milton Caniff, the NCS's first treasurer, joined shortly after the group was founded. See Lucy Shelton Caswell, "The Birth of the National Cartoonists Society," in *King of the Comics: 100 Years of King Features*, Dean Mullaney, Bruce Canwell, and Brain Walker, eds. (New York: IDW Publishing, 2015), 229.

provided a contractual model for his colleagues. The initial core leadership of the Society was almost exclusively talent signed by King Features. But other industry players, such as the United Features Syndicate, which was originally part of the E.W. Scripps newspaper chain, and who distributed popular strips like Charles Schultz' *Peanuts* and Al Capp's *Li'l Abner*, partnered with the Society as it grew in prominence. But in its early years the group was known more for "purposes of fraternization" than a serious forum for cartoonists.<sup>74</sup>



Figure 2.4: National Cartoonists Society circa 1949.

Source: <https://www.nationalcartoonists.com/about/>

During the Society's early years, the group was led by cartoonists who had accrued enormous financial success in the industry. First NCS president Rube Goldberg became a syndicated editorial cartoonist after making his millions in the strips. His professional climb occurred during the boom times of print publishing. After starting off in the art department of the *San Francisco Chronicle* in the early 1900s, Goldberg left for its rival, the *San Francisco Bulletin*, where he became the city's best-known sports cartoonist. In 1907 he made his way to New York where he gained a national following. During WWI Hearst poached Goldberg from the *New York Mail* by offering the cartoonist a yearly salary of \$150,000. With his strips distributed through King Features, Goldberg characters like "Boob McNutt," a bumbling everyman, as well as his famous "Rube Goldberg machines," which were new-fangled inventions performing tasks in a needlessly complex fashion, became cultural idioms.

<sup>74</sup> Walt Kelly to Al Capp, 5 April 1954. Box WK 4, folder 16, BICLM.

In a 1951 profile for the magazine, *Pageant*, Goldberg elaborated on his views of his profession. For Goldberg, cartooning was “pure entertainment.” The celebrated cartoonist also believed that “all humorists are rebels.” Yet his editorial cartooning, which was pitched in a different register than his brilliant lampooning of America’s obsession with gadgetry, was not rebellious so much as it was staunchly protective of defending the status quo. Harry Henderson, the writer of the *Pageant* profile, described Goldberg’s editorial cartoons for the Hearst chain, as “violently anti-Truman, anti-New Deal, anti-Russian.” Henderson also noted that “except for military expenditures,” Goldberg’s political message was hostile to government spending and openly opposed “nearly all Democratic-sponsored legislation as either ‘communistic’ or belaboring the perplexed little man who represents the public in Rube’s cartoons.” Goldberg’s disdain for the New Deal visualized a class politics that mirrored the rightward drift of his publisher, Hearst. But the Society that Goldberg helped shepherd in was largely non-partisan. During the NCS’s first White House visit, for instance, Truman ribbed Goldberg for supporting the Republican candidate, Thomas Dewey, in the 1948 election. Truman also proudly displayed the Goldberg cartoon that appeared the day following the election. The cartoon simply featured a blank space with the words “Rube Goldberg regrets.” While both Truman and the NCS evinced an air of bipartisanship during their first meeting, after leaving the White House Goldberg described Truman as “a charming monster.”<sup>75</sup>

Goldberg was able to make the transition to editorial cartooning because his success as a comic strip cartoonist gave him carte blanche. His editorial cartoons did not reach the readership levels of a strip like Chic Young’s *Blondie*, which had 1,2000 subscribers in the early 1950s. Goldberg’s editorial cartoons, by contrast, appeared in 80 newspapers. And while Goldberg saw his cartoon inventions as a “rebellion against the useless gadgetry of the machine age,” his editorial cartooning fiercely defended the very capitalism whose products he satirized.<sup>76</sup>

Goldberg presided over the NCS in its early years as adopted a more corporate structure, replete with a board and treasury. Officers took on various roles, including staffing committees to settle disputes among members and investigate industry practices harmful to cartoonists. Marge Duffy Devine, a secretary at King Features, quickly became a central figure behind the scenes. Her home address served as the main NCS mailing address. As the Society’s first

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<sup>75</sup> Harry Henderson, “Rube’s No Boob,” *Pageant*, 8 December 1951, 74-81. Box NCS 1, folder 23, BICLM.

<sup>76</sup> Henderson, “Rube’s No Boob,” *Pageant*, 79.

salaried employee—originally paid \$50 a month, by the 1960s her monthly salary rose to \$300—the NCS’s monthly newsletter listed her official position as “Scribe.”<sup>77</sup> To gain NCS membership, a cartoonist had to have the sponsorship of an existing member, which was then seconded by two additional sponsors. Over the years, a number of cartoonists let their memberships lapse.<sup>78</sup> The Treasurer often granted a reprieve, sometimes up to three years before removing a cartoonist from the membership list. Treasury Reports indicated that the NCS stayed in the black in most quarters, but rarely carried over a significant surplus. Disbursements included Devine’s modest salary, monthly dinners at the Lamb’s Club, and donations to the Milt Gross Fund, which was an emergency relief account reserved for cartoonists in need.<sup>79</sup> In the early 1950s the Society embarked on a membership drive and reached out to editorial cartoonists who were “full time professionals.”<sup>80</sup> By 1952 the Society, which had adopted “National” in its name at the outset of the Korean War, claimed nearly 300 members from a variety of graphic arts fields. The NCS also expanded its membership base into Canada and Britain. In a monthly newsletter, Treasurer John Peirotti exclaimed, “We’re major Leaguers now!”<sup>81</sup>

At the start of the new decade a series of internal controversies embroiled the NCS. In 1950 Alex Raymond, whose *Flash Gordon* comic strip influenced a number of high-profile artists such as comic book creator Jack Kirby and filmmaker George Lucas, became NCS president. At a monthly meeting Raymond, who had first proposed a “code of ethics” for the NCS, announce his support for the admission of women cartoonists. Not all members were enthusiastic about losing the NCS’s boys club feel, however.<sup>82</sup> Al Capp, among others, appeared to oppose Raymond’s bid to change the Society’s gender makeup. A year later the *Lil’ Abner* creator resigned his membership.<sup>83</sup> Newsletter editor Al Andriola, who wanted the Society to leave behind its “social cream-puff” days of fraternizing, described the meeting’s debate over the

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<sup>77</sup> Estimating her month-to-month salary is difficult because Treasury Reports often collapsed Devine’s salary and expenses into one outlay. Her estimated salary translates to roughly \$30,000 a year in today’s US dollars.

<sup>78</sup> Al Smith in a letter to Stan Mott, 13 September 1962. Box NCS 1, folder 9, BICLM.

<sup>79</sup> The NCS conducted annual audits and kept track of its receipts and disbursements. The Treasurer was also bonded. For more on the NCS’s finances, see Box NCS 1, folder 9, BICLM.

<sup>80</sup> “Meeting Minutes of the NCS,” 12 April 1950, Box NCS 1, folder 21, BICLM.

<sup>81</sup> John Pierotti, “National Cartoonists Society Newsletter,” 5 January 1952. Box NCS 1, folder 9, BICLM.

<sup>82</sup> Bob Dunn to Al Capp, 20 February 1950, Box NCS 1, folder 20, BICLM.

<sup>83</sup> Capp was later accused of sexual harassment while visiting the University of Alabama in the late 1960s to promote his college radio program. The *New York Post* reported on the series of incidents several years later. “Capp on Campus,” 22 April 1971, *New York Post*. The NCS never publicly commented on these charges. For more on this incident, see Box NCS 1, folder 20, BICLM.

issue of admitting women cartoonists as a show of “little deliriums.”<sup>84</sup> Soon after, a few women illustrators joined the NCS, but their involvement would remain limited.

The NCS’s internal correspondence indicates how important it was for the group to project a professional image to the public. After charter member C.D. Russell publicly called on former president Harry Truman to resign his honoree membership in the Society, the NCS’s Board of Governors admonished the cartoonist for his outspoken partisanship.<sup>85</sup> In addition to promoting a professional, non-partisan, corporate outlook, the NCS also appealed to a national mythos. In 1955 *Editor & Publisher* reported that the group was planning a “junket” to visit Colonial Williamsburg to help “sell the greatness of the United States to newspaper readers.”<sup>86</sup>

During the Korean War, the NCS became involved in USO-sponsored tours known as “camp shows.” The NCS arranged these tours with Pentagon and Armed Services personnel. Each touring unit had a supervising cartoonist and typically was assigned to geographic areas where US troops were stationed, including France, Germany, and Japan. In a memorandum to membership, the NCS noted that “In lending its name to these Tours, the National Cartoonists Society expects all members to do nothing to impair the prestige or dignity of our Society.”<sup>87</sup> The cartoonists were given the equivalent of VIP status and played shows at officers’ clubs as well as army and naval bases. While the tours were generally well received, the participating cartoonists were not always happy with their experiences. In 1958, a NCS junket to France was cut short by the cartoonists due to a lack of promotion and poor accommodations. Chuck Werner, an editorial cartoonist of the *Indianapolis Star*, noted in a letter to Bill Crawford that “My time to my publisher is of some value but apparently to the armed services it doesn’t amount to much. . . someone somewhere in charge of plans for our show in France goofed.”<sup>88</sup> But in general, the military recognized how cartoonists could help communicate Cold War aims. In 1958 the Public Relations Director of the USO wrote to Bill Mauldin asking him to contribute “graphic illustrations” for the launch of its publication, *USO News*. The PR Director noted:

many [Americans] feel [the USO] operates only in time of a shooting war; many are not cognizant of its need in a so-called cold war, warm around the edges. This feeling, which

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<sup>84</sup> Al Andriola, “NCS Newsletter,” 21 February 1950, Box NCS 1, folder 20, BICLM.

<sup>85</sup> For more on this incident from December 1953, see Box NCS 1, folder 21, BICLM.

<sup>86</sup> James L. Collings, “NCS Plans Pilgrimage to Historic Site,” *Editor & Publisher*, 12 March 1955, pp. 68.

<sup>87</sup> Memorandum from the Board of Governors to NCS Members, August 1958. Box NCS 1, folder 19, BICLM.

<sup>88</sup> Chuck Werner to Bill Crawford, 7 October 1958, Box NCS 1, folder 19, BICLM.

may be an expression of apathy or indifference or ignorance, none the less exists in the face of Lebanon, Quemoy and unknown Korea's [sic] that lie ahead.<sup>89</sup>

In 1957 the Department of Labor requested editorial cartoons from NCS members for a child labour education program. Editorial cartoonist Cliff Rogerson responded to the request by calling on his fellow "Public Opinion Swayer[s]" to promote the campaign. Rogerson added that since the campaign was "non-political," editors would have no objections to members of the "noble profession" volunteering their service.<sup>90</sup> The NCS also further burnished its patriotic bonafides by contributing to campaigns organized by the Red Cross and Boy Scouts of America. At other points the NCS lent its name to industry events. In 1957 the NCS promoted National Newspaper Day, which was a salute to newspaper carriers, who Rogerson referred to as "the little merchant princes."<sup>91</sup> In 1964, echoing *Puck's* coverage of the 1893 Chicago World fair, the NCS co-sponsored the New York World's Fair. These and other events further raised the public profile of American cartoonists.

In addition to its monthly meetings in New York, the NCS hosted an annual awards gala at the Plaza. This black-tie banquet featured awards given to cartoonists in various categories. An Outstanding Cartoonist of the Year award was the main event. Originally named the Billy DeBeck Memorial Award, in 1954 the award was renamed after Rube Goldberg, and thereafter, became colloquially known as "the Reuben." The top prize was voted on by members in a secret ballot and in most years a famous comic strip cartoonist was its recipient. In 1956 Herbert Block became the first editorial cartoonist to win the Reuben. In posters publicizing these events, the NCS drew from its greatest strength: cartooning. These publicity materials featured vivacious, buxom women that undercut the professional tone that the NCS strove to cultivate elsewhere. The sexual imagery contrasted with the family-friendly image that the AAEC would later project. Both groups, however, clung to a masculinized ideal of their professions in ways that meshed with postwar culture's seamier side. Hugh Hefner, whose *Playboy* magazine introduced a number of cartoonists in alternative print media to a national audience, invited the NCS to his Playboy Mansion in the early 1960s. Such invitations cashed in on cartoonists' cultural capital, even as the NCS struggled to raise real capital to further fund its organizational ambitions.

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<sup>89</sup> Public Relations Director of the USO to Bill Mauldin, 16 October 1958. Box NCS 1, folder 19, BICLM.

<sup>90</sup> Cliff Rogerson, "NSC Newsletter," 12 August 1957. Box NCS 1, folder 41, BICLM.

<sup>91</sup> Cliff Rogerson, "NSC Newsletter," 18 September 1957. Box NCS 1, folder 41, BICLM.

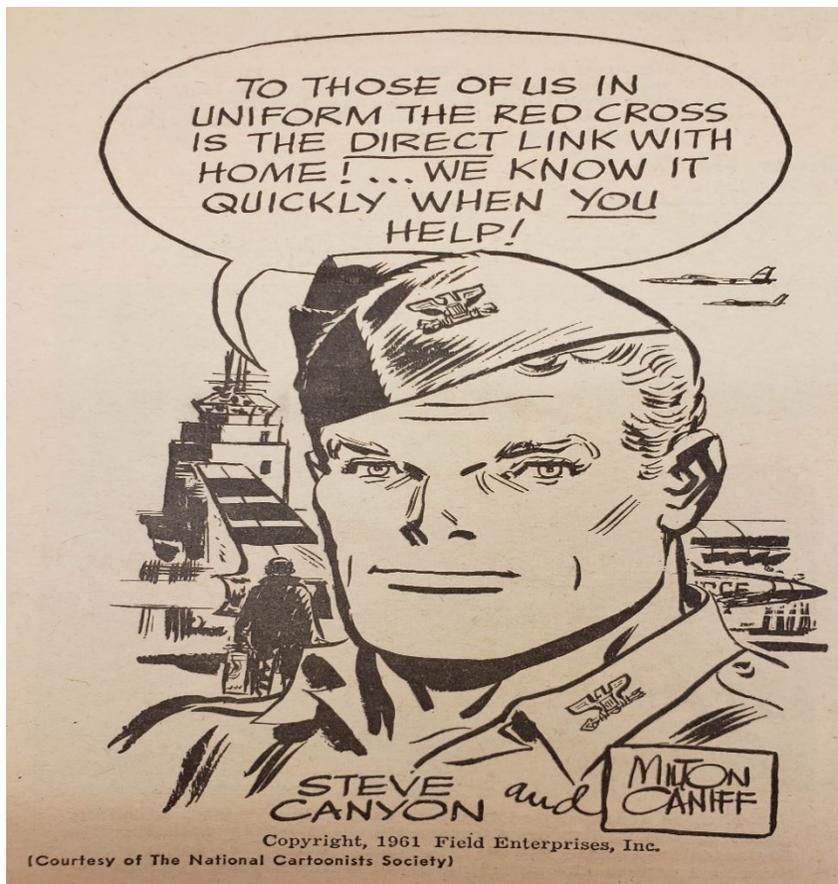


Figure 2.5: Milton Caniff, Steve Canyon cartoon promoting the Red Cross, circa 1961.

Source: Billy Ireland Cartoon Library and Museum, Ohio State University.

Other outlays for the group included printing costs and postage for its monthly NCS Newsletter as well as its sporadically produced magazine, the *Cartoonist*. Both publishing ventures were considered by NCS leadership as “the links that bind us together.”<sup>92</sup> In the mid to late fifties, printing an issue of the magazine ranged from \$300 to \$400. While the newsletter kept members apprised of organizational news, as the *Cartoonist* evolved over the years it aimed for a wider public consumption. In the 1960s Treasurer Al Smith proposed selling ad space in the magazine to art suppliers and newspaper syndicates. Smith, an unsung veteran of the organization, also suggested that the magazine’s popular “talent pool” section, which spotlighted up and coming cartoonists, be used to recoup costs for publishing the magazine. As Smith put it, “When a member profits through this service it seems to me that he should make some sort of a percentage donation to N.C.S. for his good fortune.”<sup>93</sup>

<sup>92</sup> Johnny Pierotti, “What We Do and What We Stand For,” *Cartoonist* (Winter, 1954): 6-7.

<sup>93</sup> Al Smith Treasurer to NCS President Jerry Robinson 25 October 1967, Box NCS 1, folder 11. BICLM.

The NCS's mix of highly successful cartoonists and lesser-known graphic artists made it an imperfect vehicle for bridging the industry's stratified class structure. Another potential fissure in the group was comic books. According to the Society's membership lists, roughly two-dozen cartoonists worked in the comic book industry. This came to the fore during the more panic over horror and crime comic in the mid-1950s. During the 1954 Senate Committee hearings into the putative links between comic book reading and juvenile delinquency both the NCS rank and file and leadership worried that about possible censorship legislation impacting newspaper comics strips. Anticipating that its members might be enlisted into the cultural battle, the NCS sent a newsletter instructing its membership to collect "anything you have done to promote War Bonds, Recruitment, Public Service, Army, Navy, National Safety, Public Health, State Department, Mental Health, etc." The idea was to "display our examples of Public Service as evidence that we represent an intelligent and responsible majority who think with determination and contribute to the American way of life."<sup>94</sup> Prior to his joint appearance before Congress with Milton Caniff, NCS president Walt Kelly also received assurances that "Senator Kefauver and his staff" would not target "popular newspaper comics strips."<sup>95</sup>

Despite the NCS's deft maneuvering of the comics controversy, frictions within the organization remained. In 1960 cartoonist Lou Schwartz penned "An Open Letter to the New NCS Administration" in which he argued that "each member belongs to NCS for some personal reason." Elaborating on what members hoped to gain from the NCS, Schwartz wrote:

He may just like to drink, chew the fat, get a night out, or he may have had some illusions to a society of professionals aiding and abetting his ability to earn a better living at his chosen field. He may have hoped to gain knowledge and connections in this chosen field. He further may have looked for work, compassion, encouragement, yes, even protection from this society he has joined.<sup>96</sup>

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<sup>94</sup> Joe Musial, Chairman of the Educational Committee, "NCS Newsletter," 6 April 1954, Box NCS 1, folder 26, BICLM.

<sup>95</sup> Edward C. Lapping to Ward Greene, General Manager of King Features Syndicate, 5 July 1950, Box NCS 1, folder 26, BICLM. I discuss this episode more fully in chapter 5.

<sup>96</sup> Lew Schwartz, "An Open Letter to the New NCS Administration," 1 June 1960. In the letter's margins, Schwartz scribbled this note for Marge Devine: "Hi Love, Just to cause a little trouble . . . mebee (sic) we can get a little controversy back into the group." NCS Box 1, folder 2, BICLM.

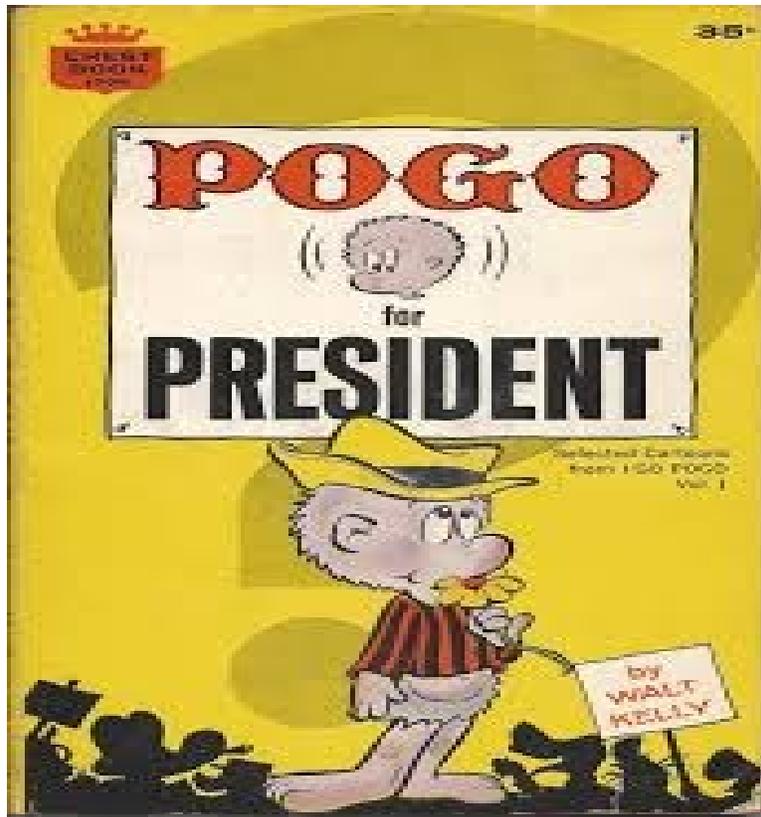


Figure 2.6: “Pogo for President” campaign, 1956.

Source: Billy Ireland Cartoon Library and Museum, Ohio State University.

Schwartz was moved to pen this letter after reading Tom Doerer’s rant published in *The Cartoonist*. In 1960 the syndicated sports cartoonist chastened cartoonists who made “conformity a sort of religion.” Surveying the current landscape of editorial cartooning, Doerer lamented that “controversy, the sharp sword of the political cartoonist, has been dulled by the conformists, the ‘togetherness’ boys, the mass thinkers and the peace-at-any-price clique.”<sup>97</sup> Schwartz took umbrage with Doerer’s framing, describing it as “another stronghold of individuality mashed into mediocre pie.” Schwartz added that the NCS “must be aware of the needs and desires of all its members rather than a part of the group.” This goal, however, was compromised by “the newspaper and syndicate men.” The larger problem, as Schwartz saw it, was that in addition to print media cartoonists were increasingly “looking to television and to industry for security and a place to show their stuff.” Even though he drew attention to cartoonists working in electronic media, Schwartz remained aware of his audience when he rhetorically posed the question:

<sup>97</sup> Tom Doerer, “The Newspaper Business—What Goes on Anyhow?” *The Cartoonist*, Spring 1960, unpaginated.

“Where are the new Herblocks, Debecks, Caniffs, etc. going to come from?” Schwartz did not venture an answer to this question, but he did note that “the syndicate cries ‘It’s the editor’ out there who doesn’t understand. The editor ‘out there’ blames the readers, and I lay the blame smack where it belongs . . . with you!”<sup>98</sup>

The questions raised by Schwartz had plagued the NCS since its inception. In 1954 the *Cartoonist* published a piece featuring cartoonists who vented their frustrations at the Society’s organizational structure. John Cullen Murphy wrote that he “joined the Society primarily to talk to other cartoonists about cartooning.” Another cartoonist, Fred Rhoads, asked why the NCS was not providing any “market information” to its members. Tony DiPreta suggested that the Society should provide its members with the same benefits as “workers in offices and factories.”<sup>99</sup>

After serving as NCS president from 1960-1961, Bill Crawford issued a report on his term, asking, “Are we to become a Professional Society in a real sense of the word or, a delightful New York drinking club?” Like past NCS presidents before him, Crawford had to confront the challenge of forging a national organization with members who were scattered throughout the country, and whose monetary compensation differed wildly. Alongside these class and regional discrepancies, a generational divide cleaved the old guard from upstart members. Crawford was not alone in believing these divisions harmed the Society’s unity. After visiting with NCS chapters in Los Angeles and Cleveland, Crawford became convinced that “the society is drifting to no particular goal at all” and was in need of “shot in the arm.” In order to mend these regional, generational, and class divides, Crawford believed that the NCS needed to become “a more vital, productive organization” that would help cartoonists “achieve a loftier spot in the community and a few more bucks in the bank.”<sup>100</sup>

Among Crawford’s proposed reforms included a quarterly magazine, a revamped membership newsletter, improved regional promotion, and a “new business consultant service.” Crawford also proposed monetizing the NCS’s overseas shows and expanding the Society’s fundraising capabilities. Heavily reliant on volunteers, Crawford suggested expanding the NCS’s touring cartoon exhibits as well as selling cartoon originals, which he believed would “make an attractive money maker.” For Crawford, these proposed reforms were aimed at building a more

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<sup>98</sup> Schwartz, “An Open Letter to the New NCS Administration,” 1 June 1960. NCS Box 1, folder 2, BICLM.

<sup>99</sup> “The Nosey Reporter,” *Cartoonist* (Winter 1954): 2-3.

<sup>100</sup> Bill Crawford, “President’s Report,” September 1961. NCS Box 1, folder 2, BIMCCA.

cohesive organization that extended beyond a social club centered in New York.<sup>101</sup> Other cartoonists agreed. Dick Ericson, who chaired the NCS's Public Relations Committee, argued that the group need to move on from playing the part of "the jester" and embrace the role of "the king." While cartoonists could be playful in their work, Ericson believed the NCS needed to project "a dignified, professional image." Canvassing the era's mediascape, Ericson continued, "Any area of business, industry or professionalism must be organized and big to withstand the tremendous pressure of competition."<sup>102</sup>

In sharp contrast to the jovial spirit of earlier years, Ericson was blunt about his mission: "My prime objective was to enhance the prestige of our society and our profession in the eyes of those who buy our work, distribute it, and those who are in a position to exercise governmental control over our marketplace." Ericson also listed his committee's accomplishments, including getting the NCS's activities published in *Editor & Publisher's* "calendar of events," and inserting an NCS member in key speaking slots at conventions held by the powerful industry group, the American Newspaper Publishers Association (ANPA). Ericson's committee convinced syndicates to publicize NCS award winners through ads and direct mail. Television and radio likewise began covering NCS news, which Ericson noted granted the Society free publicity. Obtaining this industry legitimacy was hard fought, Ericson claimed, and represented a "breakthrough" which "signified our acceptance into the publishing world as a truly professional society." Perhaps Ericson's biggest accomplishment was partnering with the Advertising Council, which he described as "one of the most highly respected organizations in the country." The Ad Council, which collaborated with government officials on national campaigns, had considerable media reach. For Ericson, this partnership would "open up new market areas for our people" and help the NCS "gain tremendous prestige." Ericson boasted that, "Through these and other measures we covered the newspaper business like a blanket."<sup>103</sup>

Ericson's efforts helped strengthen the NCS contacts with the United States Information Agency (USIA) which had in the past broadcasted NCS events abroad through its Voice of America radio program. In order to capitalize on these media contacts, Ericson noted, NCS members needed to sustain their sense of public service. To do so would require enthusiastic

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<sup>101</sup> Crawford, "President's Report," September 1961.

<sup>102</sup> Dick Ericson, "Report of Public Relations Chairman," 26 April 1963, NCS Box 1, folder 39, BICLM.

<sup>103</sup> Ericson, "Report of Public Relations Chairman," 26 April 1963.

volunteering and “a forceful, dynamic” leadership to navigate a competitive media marketplace. With Americans’ options for entertainment expanding by the day, the NCS, and by extension, its members, could not afford to rest on their laurels. As Ericson observed, “This is the climate of our time – and we must live in it or be killed by it.”<sup>104</sup>

### **Cheerful Citizens at “the Vanguard” of Print Diversity**

In a letter to Walt Kelly, recently retired editorial cartoonist R.N. “Ding” Darling recalled that in the 1910s and 1920s newspaper chains employed “a galaxy of editorial cartoonists.”<sup>105</sup> But by mid-century editorial cartooning was not a growing profession compared to comic books and strips as well as film animation. In this changing mediascape instead of forming unions, many cultural workers opted for professionalism and industry status over collective workplace organizing. Because cartoonists had no hiring authority and did not appeal to the state for recognition of their services, professional advancement, rather than entry, governed their organizing strategies. Although, by elaborating a set of professional norms and ideals that defined cartooning’s various occupational categories, both the conservative politics of the NCS and the AAEC narrowly conceptualized what it meant to be a “professional” cartoonist.

Darling’s letter to Kelly praised the NCS for creating a “cohesive organization of the craftsmen who with their manual and mental dexterity have captured the attention of the Press.”<sup>106</sup> Darling’s twin emphasis on “manual and mental dexterity” aptly described the dual skills at the heart of cartooning. His effusive praise for the NCS was also noteworthy for its timing. Coming a few months after the AAEC had been founded in the nation’s capital, Darling, a hero to many of the men who had led that effort, was notably absent from the group.

For over a decade, the NCS was the only professional society to represent cartoonists. Similar groups, like the Society of Illustrators, with which the NCS shared a clubhouse, had been more selective in accepting members. However, as late joiners, many editorial cartoonists felt like the NCS was more geared towards promoting comic strips and did not speak to their specific concerns. The founding of the AAEC grew from editorial cartoonists’ discontent with its parent organization, but the spark for this break was mounting media criticism of the profession.

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<sup>104</sup> Ericson, “Report of Public Relations Chairman,” 26 April 1963.

<sup>105</sup> R.N. “Ding” Darling to Walt Kelly, 9 November 1957, WK Box 4, folder 17, BICLM.

<sup>106</sup> Ding Darling to Walt Kelly, 9 November 1957, Box WK 4, folder 17, BICLM.

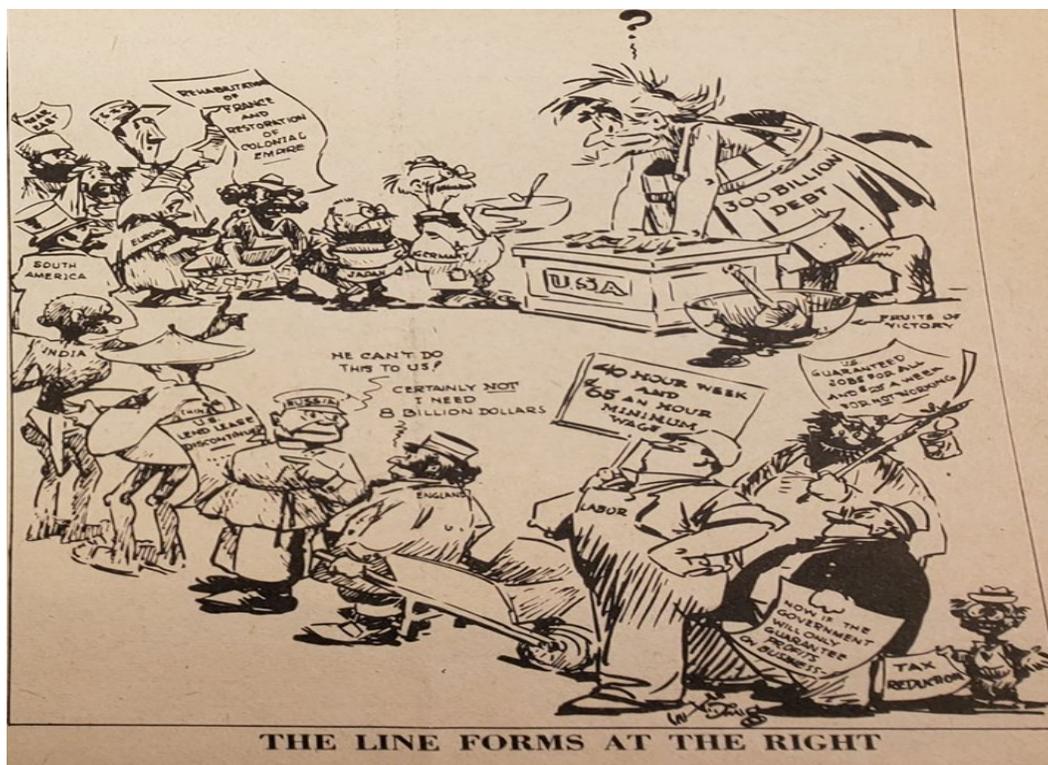


Figure 2.7: J.N. Darling, “The Line Forms at the Right,” in *AAEC News*, “Tribute to ‘Ding.’”

Source: Billy Ireland Cartoon Library and Museum, Ohio State University.

By the 1950s editorial cartooning began amassing critics who believed the medium had become creatively stagnant and politically ineffective. In 1954 Henry Ladd Smith, a University of Wisconsin professor of journalism, argued that contemporary cartoonists needed to reclaim “the offensive weapon” of political satire. Until they did so, Smith suggested that editors stop “wasting” editorial space by allotting it to ineffectual and harmless cartoons.<sup>107</sup> Three years later, *Saturday Review* published a similar critique from Jerome Beatty Jr. who blasted “the domesticated wit” of *New Yorker*-style satire as well as other magazine cartooning. He added that “an elaborate system of institutional taboos . . . have destroyed the gag cartoon’s power to make any kind of realistic comment and/or funny comment on our society.”<sup>108</sup>

John Stampone, editorial cartoonist for the *Army Times Publishing Co.*, took this as a generalized attack on editorial cartooning. In early 1957 the *Army Times* cartoonist reached out to a group of Washington, D.C. based editorial cartoonists, including the *Washington Star*’s Jim

<sup>107</sup> Henry Ladd Smith, “The Rise and Fall of the Political Cartoon,” *Saturday Review of Literature* 37 (May 29, 1954): 7-9, 28-29. For more on this contemporary criticism, see Kercher, *Revel With a Cause*, 30-32.

<sup>108</sup> Jerome Beatty Jr., “Humor vs. Taboo,” *Saturday Review of Literature* 40 (November 23, 1957): 11-13.

Berryman, about forming their own specialized trade group. Stampone, whose work, his publisher boasted, appeared throughout “the Free World,” wanted to “restore some prestige to the profession.” After asking his editor to help cover some initial costs, Stampone mailed out over a hundred three by five index cards around the country to gauge his colleagues’ level of interest.<sup>109</sup> The response was overwhelmingly enthusiastic. Many returned their cards with notes of suggestions in the space that Stampone provided for feedback. Hugh Haynie, editorial cartoonist for the *Greensboro Daily News*, returned his card with the note, “this is the only society which would be worth two hoots in hades to me.” John Hudson, of the *Cleveland News* added, “that other organization is getting to be big business.”<sup>110</sup> In a letter to Stampone, Elmer R. Mesaner, the *Rochester Times-Union* editorial cartoonist and NCS member, praised Stampone’s “Washington group” for exploring the idea. Mesaner added that he tried to attend monthly NCS meetings but “noted the [group’s] trend toward comic book artists, advertising cartoonists, etc. and others who hardly qualify . . . as members of a cartoonists’ organization.”<sup>111</sup>

On 6 March 1957 the Association of American Editorial Cartoonists (AAEC) was officially incorporated at a law office in Washington, D.C.<sup>112</sup> At the time of his mass mailout Stampone was well respected by his professional peers. Cartoonist Art Wood, an early champion of the AAEC, would later describe Stampone as having “the fountain of youth etched on his face.”<sup>113</sup> More copy boy than a hardened, veteran “newspaperman,” Stampone recognized that for the new association to thrive, the AAEC would also have to overcome similar regional and generational divides as the NCS. As well regarded as Stampone and other charter members were in their profession, the core of the early AAEC leadership did not consist of the medium’s biggest names, however. Star editorial cartoonists such as the *Washington Post*’s Herbert Block and Bill Mauldin, who in 1958 would replace the retiring Daniel Fitzpatrick at the *St. Louis Post Dispatch*, had limited involvement in the Association over the years. Like Darling, Fitzpatrick gave his blessings to the group. Initially, this deprived the AAEC of a ready-made promotional tool as well as the medium’s most prominent liberal voices. Lacking the star power of the NCS’s stable of famous comic strip creators, the AAEC instead had to overcome this prestige deficit.

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<sup>109</sup> John Stampone letter on AAEC’s origins. Undated. Box AAEC Sec 3, folder 7, BICLM.

<sup>110</sup> For the original cards, see “General Correspondence and Papers, 1957,” Box AAEC Pres 1, folder 7, BICLM.

<sup>111</sup> Elmer R. Mesaner to John Stampone, 16 February 1957. Box AAEC Pres 1, folder 5, BICLM.

<sup>112</sup> For the original Certificate of Incorporation, see Box AAEC Sec 3, folder 7, BICLM.

<sup>113</sup> Art Wood, *Great Cartoonists and Their Art* (New York: Gretna Books, 2000), 22.

These problems were compounded by an organizational mandate that limited the Association's membership base to practicing full-time editorial cartoonists. While the NCS could count on industry growth in other media besides print, AAEC membership contained a built-in ceiling. While the NCS had a cluster of cartoonists in media centers like New York and Los Angeles, the AAEC had no strong regional roots. This reality created a logistical problem that made monthly in-person meetings an impossibility. Furthermore, the geographical spread of its membership base, along with its relatively low numbers, meant the Association relied heavily on its newsletters and conventions to keep its members in the loop. The AAEC's annual convention rotated host cities and often featured local politicians as invited guests. The AAEC also continued the non-partisan tradition of the NCS by reaching out to leading Republicans and Democrats. The group named Vice-President Richard Nixon an early honorary member. At its 1961 Los Angeles Convention, the AAEC also dined at Walt Disney's home and reciprocated by naming the notoriously union-busting studio boss an honorary member.

Not long after its founding, the AAEC established a group charter. While the NCS did not get around to formalizing a constitution until the early sixties, the AAEC wasted no time outlining its principles. The Association laid out its mission in Article II of its constitution:

The purpose of this Association is to promote and stimulate among the public more interest in the editorial page cartoon and to create close contact among the Editorial Cartoonists through mutual interest.<sup>114</sup>

Other articles outlined voting procedures for meetings and officer duties. Adding to the seriousness with which the AAEC approached its task, the editorial cartoonists hired a lawyer to ensure everything was in order. Notably, the group edited out female pronouns of "her" and "she" in a clause describing its membership criteria. Unlike the NCS, the AAEC did not clash over the potential admittance of women since there no full-time women editorial cartoonists. The AAEC also had to decide whether some members still counted as editorial cartoonists. Bob Meagher, an editorial cartoonist for the *Democrat & Chronicle*, wrote to Stampone about this issue, explaining, "At the present time my production of daily editorial cartoons is rather at a stand still except for local subjects." Unsure if he was still "considered an editorial cartoonist on the staff" Meager expressed hope that he would return to "a more regular schedule in the very

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<sup>114</sup> See "By-Laws of the Association of American Editorial Cartoonists," Box AAEC Sec 3, folder 7, BICLM.

near future.” Meagher added that the NCS in had been dominated by “the ‘gag’ and ‘strip’ boys” in recent years.<sup>115</sup> Meagher was not alone in voicing this sentiment or wondering about the status of syndicated editorial cartoonists who were not employed by a single paper. The *Sacramento Bee*’s editorial cartoonist, Newt Pratt, inquired if the new organization would have “safeguards” to prevent “syndicate bosses” from setting the AAEC’s agenda. Pratt echoed Meagher’s disillusionment with the NCS, writing that the Society had “turned the whole damn outfit over to the strip boys and their syndicate bosses.”<sup>116</sup>

Not long after the AAEC was founded, rumors of an acrimonious split between editorial cartoonists and comic strip cartoonists within the NCS began circulating. *Editor & Publisher* published a piece dispelling these rumors, but the whispers grew louder as the two trade groups independently explored ways of commemorating the history of American cartooning. After his term as NCS president, Walt Kelly headed up a committee to explore the establishment of a cartoonists’ hall of fame. NCS members excitedly chimed in. Comic strip and comic book cartoonist Morris Weiss wrote to Kelly about the project and proposed that “certain greats,” Nast and Opper among them, merited “immediate approval” for induction.<sup>117</sup> Burton W. Marvin, who was the Director for the William Allen White Foundation, wrote to Kelly expressing concerns about the project. Marvin asked Kelly if the newly founded AAEC was “an outgrowth of ill feeling” between editorial cartoonists and the NCS. Not wanting to risk involving his Foundation in a potential professional quarrel, Marvin wanted to know if the two groups would be able to collaborate on the project. Marvin added that in order to avoid comparing “apples with oranges,” the criterion for hall of selection should consist of two categories: one for comic strip and panel cartoonists, and a separate one for editorial cartoonists.<sup>118</sup> Kelly followed up Marvin’s query about a potential conflict brewing between the two groups with Russell Patterson, who replied: “I’ve never been conscious of any conflict between our Society and the editorial groups so I don’t think we’ll have any difficulties there.”<sup>119</sup>

AAEC members complained about the NCS in private. Publicly, they went to work crafting a distinct professional identity. The indefatigable Scott Long quickly became the group’s

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<sup>115</sup> Bob Meagher to John Stampone, undated letter from 1957. Box AAEC Pres 1, folder 5, BICLM.

<sup>116</sup> Newt Pratt to John Stampone, 18 March 1957. Box AAEC Pres 1, folder 5, BICLM.

<sup>117</sup> Morris Weiss to Walt Kelly, 22 April 1957, WK Box 4, folder 17, BICLM.

<sup>118</sup> Burton W. Marvin to Walt Kelly, 6 August 1957, WK Box 4, folder 17, BIMCCA. Burton also suggested that newspapers and syndicate executives be included in the selection committee.

<sup>119</sup> Russell Patterson to Walt Kelly, 20 November 1957, WK Box 4, folder 17, BICLM.

biggest booster. A Harvard graduate who also wrote a play about a local newspaper in the late 1960s, Long occupied a number of key administrative posts in the AAEC's early years. Photography For Long, photographs were "dandy alternatives" to editorial cartoons because the former could more easily be cropped to fit into a paper's print layout. Whereas an editorial cartoon was created with definite specs in mind, a photograph, Long reasoned, "can be lifted from the morgue and manhandled without a mutter of protest" from the original photographer.<sup>120</sup> Along with parsing the differences between the two visual art forms, Long stressed the social benefits that newspapers accrued by publishing editorial cartoons. The medium's civic traditions were, for Long, a key selling point. Selling this intangible, however, was another matter. Long suggested that no less than the survival of democracy was at stake in debates about editorial cartooning's future:

Outspoken, courageous and independent editorial pages are essential to the survival of democracy. Editorial cartoonists are at the vanguard of the fight to make them so. If the fight is lost, then all of us . . . editorial cartoonists, editorial writers, editors, publishers, newspapers and eventually democracy itself . . . will go down the drain anyway. All that will remain is a makeup man with a pot of paste, a scissors, a pile of stolen clippings and a batch of photographs.<sup>121</sup>

Long's linking of the medium's future with a healthy democratic print culture echoed media critics who at the time fretted over the growing corporate influence in print journalism. Concerned about what a newspaper industry dominated by corporate owners would mean for the public's access to information, media critics stressed a belief in competitive markets. Long deftly tied his appeals to these print diversity debates, and thus raised the question of how the public service performed by a commercial press was compromised by the search for profits. Bucking these trends, Long painted editorial cartoonists as iconoclasts who did not follow popular whims, despite what the medium's recent critics had claimed. Although he admitted that "the overall quality of our cartooning" may have slipped in recent years, he speculated that the reason for this decline was that the "strong and controversial" cartoons needed "courageous" publishers and editors. Long's inclusion of "publishers" confused the issue at hand, however. Publishers were

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<sup>120</sup> Long, "The Cartoon is a Weapon." For much information on the publication history of this essay, see chapter 1.

<sup>121</sup> *Ibid.*

not, as he suggested, under any kind of pressure to temper their critical coverage. Nonetheless, Long struck up an anti-monopoly position on media ownership while enumerating the different roles and tasks assigned to newspaper editorial cartoonists:

A political cartoon is a signed, graphic editorial. It is an expression of opinion about the problems of our planet and our people, and, like a written editorial, it attempts to sift the facts that have been printed elsewhere in the newspaper and to interpret them. It seeks to distinguish good from bad, right from wrong. A cartoon tries to make a point quickly and with wit. It is a subjective judgment of people and events and, if the reader cannot find an opinion in it, the cartoonist has obviously failed.<sup>122</sup>

This principle of “signed, graphic editorial” was a crucial for editorial cartoonists. While AAEC members recognized the rights of editors to not publish material, editorial cartoonists took pride in developing their own topics and authoring their own opinions. This was in stark contrast to the earlier years which saw publishers like Hearst instructing editors, columnists, and cartoonists how to approach certain topics. This autonomy was always circumscribed, however, and more aspirational. Even if cartoonists like Carey Orr had no interference from publishers, they still imbibed many of the dominant values of their era. Even the liberal Long noted, “the American century looks suspiciously, in blacker moods, like the Communist Millennium.”<sup>123</sup>

Communism remained a regular theme in AAEC meetings. In one AAEC meeting Orr suggested the organization’s chief purposes was to figure out “how to sell editors on the idea they must have a political cartoonist.” “The thing to do,” Orr argued, was “to sell editors on the American cartoonist” by showing the medium’s roots in American political culture.<sup>124</sup> Famous for creating “the Braintrust” idea in his editorial cartoons, Orr’s involvement in the AAEC’s braintrust bore mixed results. Citing an unnamed study, Orr claimed that “80% of readers don’t read editorials.” Given these low numbers, Orr reminded his colleagues that their “duty is to highlight the news” and help readers become “conscious of what’s going on.” In other unguarded moments Orr expressed his disapproval with some of the group’s projects. Commenting on Long’s effort to work out an exchange between American and Russian cartoonists, Orr said that

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<sup>122</sup> Ibid.

<sup>123</sup> Scott Long, “Writing Editorials With A Brush: The Theory and Practice of Political Cartoons,” *Harvard Alumni Bulletin* 2 April 1960: 508-511. AAEC 1, folder 6, BICLM.

<sup>124</sup> “Minutes of the 5<sup>th</sup> Annual Meeting of Association of American Editorial Cartoonists,” 11 May 1961. Box AAEC Sec 3, folder 7, BICLM.

he would have his “six-shooter ready” in the event that the exchange took place. Believing war between the two rivals was imminent, the distinguished cartoonist joked that if Russians visited America, he “volunteered to be executioner.”<sup>125</sup>

While the AAEC’s leadership structure was dominated by cartoonists with conservative views, not all of its members were Cold War hawks. Liberals such as Bill Sanders were more interested in civil rights and took a less idealized perspective on the industry’s business practices. In a 1962 article for the AAEC News, Sanders responded to an article penned by *Miami Herald*’s editor Don Shoemaker, which had been published in the *American Society of Newspaper Editors*. Shoemaker argued that “the average editorial cartoonist is a slave to outworn symbolism” and urged editors to consider publishing “picture editorials” in lieu of a daily editorial cartoon. Sanders conceded that editorial cartoonists needed to rethink their use of symbolism. To achieve this, he proposed that the AAEC’s upcoming convention host “critique seminars” whereby his colleagues could deconstruct and analyze each other’s work. But Sanders countered that Shoemaker was being somewhat hypocritical since his own paper carried no less than three editorial cartoons in its Sunday edition. This was only possible because newspapers like the *Miami Herald* could purchase editorial cartoons from national syndicates, or simply reprint them without paying them a corresponding reprint fee. Both these options meant that Shoemaker and other editors did not need to keep an inhouse editorial cartoonist on staff. The problem with this arrangement is that editors would lose out on cartoons that commented on local concerns.<sup>126</sup>

The local and the national were always unsettled categories in postwar discourse. At a moment when middle-class professionals were being recruited into the Cold War project, cartoonists volunteered for a range of state-endorsed and industry-driven initiatives that broadly imagined the contours of Cold War citizenship. Cartoonists rearticulated the constant calls for anti-communist vigilance by turning a solemn duty into a joyful commitment to upholding the American way of life. In contrast to cinema, cartoonists could rely on readers to fill in the gaps in their images, and thus, were relieved of the burden of having to humorlessly explain the putative dangers of communism. Whereas filmmakers had to incorporate anti-communist themes into a narrative structure in films such as the pedantic *I Married A Communist* (1949), and *I Was A*

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<sup>125</sup> Ibid.

<sup>126</sup> Bill Sanders, “Sanders Sounds Off,” *AAEC News*, vol.3, no.4 (November 1962).

*Communist for the FBI* (1951), cartoonists had the advantage of communicating vis-à-vis free-floating signifiers denuded of explanatory content.

Cartoonists would shape their patriotic, corporate professional identities in ways that allowed them to link their professional project with the Cold War project. The organizational form of cartooning's professional societies, which bore more resemblance to journalist and editors' professional associations, had a built-in disadvantage. For instance, the Writers Guild of America (WGA), the American Federation of Musicians (AFM), as well as the notoriously anticommunist Screen Actors Guild (SAG), which was led by Ronald Reagan in the 1950s, all secured for its members better compensation.<sup>127</sup> Because cartoonists did not aim to control the supply side of who entered the profession, they aimed to stoke demand by stimulating public interest.

For editorial cartoonists, this meant appealing to a print diversity that they believed was served by competitive markets. This view was congruent with anticommunism, which on one hand, through magazines like *Red Channels*, rested on copious background research on those deemed suspicious, while on the other, was highly speculative. All told, anti-communists had little to no direct knowledge of life behind the Iron Curtain and relied on former communists-cum-confessors like Whitaker Chambers for knowledge. Within this speculative void, visual images of the "red menace" were suitable propaganda that did not need a fact check and could instead project Cold War fantasies.

The corollary to this paranoid atmosphere was a reimagining of nationhood. Here, again, editorial cartoonists were well positioned for refastening nationalist ideals to Cold War themes since the medium took its cues from current events and reformulated them as subjective comment. In this way, an anti-communist cartoon appeared to readers as "one man's opinion" that expressed a common-sense reading of that day's news rather than a constellation of ideas that were actively being constructed and disseminated to the wider public. The disarming qualities of cartooning further camouflaged these dynamics as the mere musings of cheerful, but vigilant, citizens who just happened to have media platforms.

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<sup>127</sup> For more on how these guilds represented "above-the-line" media workers such as actors, artists, and writers, see Stahl, "Privilege and Distinction in Production Worlds," in *Production Studies*, 58-61.



Figure 2.7: John Collins of the *Montreal Gazette*, featured in the *AAEC News*, 1967.

Source: Billy Ireland Cartoon Library and Museum, Ohio State University.

### Conclusion

During a 1959 NCS event, Rube Goldberg remarked that, “[c]artooning is a form of entertainment which is the most durable in the world. Songs last a few months—they might be revived in 20 years—but cartoons go on and on and on.”<sup>128</sup> But the cartoonist forgot to add that unlike songs, which paid residuals to copyright holders, cartoonists saw no clear financial benefit from the reprinting of their images. This became a major sticking point between editorial and comic strip cartoonists in the late 1950s and early 1960s that was partly the result of their varying industry experiences. These discrepancies were also rooted in ideology. Newspaper editorial cartoonists were much more likely to emphasize the non-commercial character of their work, and thus, largely ignored bread-and-butter issues in their profession.

Professional projects are inherently exclusionary enterprises. On the one hand, professionalism allowed cartoonists to reclaim a measure of autonomy in peer-dominated spaces. On the other hand, who counted as a “professional” in a particular field was heavily gendered and racialized. Adding to this class stratification was the widening gulf between editorial

<sup>128</sup> James L. Collings, “Switch: Editors Hear Cartoonists’ Views,” *Editor & Publisher* 14 March 1959.

cartoonists and comic strip cartoonists. While each group aligned itself with the ideological prerogatives of the Cold War project, editorial cartoonists were keener to define their medium as a media space devoted to the public good. Both the NCS and the AAEC, however, projected middle-class values through a masculinized lens. They also projected an image of the cheerful citizen — still dutiful, vigilant, and loyal — that accepted the commitments of the Cold War with good cheer and humour. In posters, publications, and promotional material for charity campaigns and US Savings Bonds drives, cartoonists' professional societies visualized values and norms firmly in the mainstream of American public life. In doing so, they helped reimagine a national sense of self in an era that cojoined consumer capitalism with anticommunism.

The following chapter will delve deeper into syndication and the national markets for editorial cartoons to show why the medium occupied a liminal space between art and commerce, information and entertainment, satire and journalism. Holding these opposing poles together was editorial cartoonists' adherence to a liberal ideal of the public sphere shorn of commercial concerns. Yet, when it came to confronting the industry on newspaper practices that undermined their bottom-line, editorial cartoonists would find this ideological faith tested.

### **CHAPTER 3: National Syndication and Print Consumption as Citizenship**

“Amplification can be, and indeed almost everywhere is, highly selective;  
only some voices are amplified.”

— Raymond Williams<sup>1</sup>

#### **Introduction**

Following World War II, the widespread syndication of newspaper “features” such as cartoons, comics, and columns created national print networks for newspaper content that connected mainstream dailies situated across North America. In industry parlance, editors who purchased features directly from syndicates were referred to as “subscribers,” a term historically reserved for readers, but whose use by syndicate managers in these years underscored an embrace of corporate print culture in the newspaper industry. Subscribing to a syndicate’s service was an attractive option for editors since they were under no contractual obligation to publish this content and could cancel their subscription at any point. In some ways, this built-in flexibility contrasted with press barons who formed syndicates for the purposes of distributing inhouse content within their publishing empires. However, while syndicates operated independently of any one chain by the mid-1940s, print diversity continued to suffer.

As much as syndication grew markets for cartoonists, it also further homogenized the content being distributed. Advancements in communication technologies in the post-WWII years meant that editorial cartoons could be more widely distributed. In general, syndicate managers coordinated how to deliver features to newspapers with greater speed and from greater distances than before. Metropolitan dailies, based in New York and Chicago, had previously been the main source for supplying content to small circulating dailies. With the growing reach of Los Angeles-based newspapers, by the late 1950s these distribution pathways were now flowing in both directions. As a result, a syndicate office in New York could arrange the delivery of an editorial cartoon made in California to a small town daily in the Midwest on the same day this content was produced. This shrinking of space and time aided the spread of print capitalism while incentivizing editorial cartoonists to aim for the broadest possible readership.

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<sup>1</sup> Raymond Williams, “Means of Communication as Means of Production,” in *Culture and Materialism*, 73-89, 85.

This chapter delves into the complex set of industry practices that reshaped how editorial cartoons were produced, distributed, and consumed in the postwar era. With television threatening to siphon off advertisers, newspapers embraced what Sarah Igo describes as “the movement of social data into everyday life” to track readership trends and streamline the distribution of features.<sup>2</sup> Recognizing these changing dynamics, cartoonists’ professional societies adopted many of these same research methods. But while comic strip cartoonists commissioned audience studies in order to understand what type of strips readers preferred, editorial cartoonists displayed a keener interest in knowing what editors valued in their work. Using both correspondence between cartoonists and syndicates, as well as the AAEC’s surveys of newspaper editors in the early 1960s, I show how editorial cartoonists walked a fine line between controversy and professionalism as they aimed for a national audience.

The other critical thrust of this chapter centers on the growing rift between the NCS and the AAEC during the late 1950s and early 1960s. While the industry moved towards a standardized distribution system, a patchwork of older publishing practices continued to persist. The NCS and the AAEC clashed over the reprints issue because the latter did not want to risk depriving its members of an important showcase for their work. In sketching this broad industry overview, this chapter also looks at how the pressure to produce for a national audience induced subtle changes in content. At a time when the rise of suburban press oriented much newspaper coverage towards the local, editorial cartooning saw an opposite trend. Because local cartoons could not be widely distributed, syndicates encouraged creators to think nationally. While the Beltway had always provided grist for cartooning’s mills, syndication incentivized editorial cartoonists to also focus on the Cold War to entice newspaper subscribers around the country.

Surveying these broader trends, I argue that editorial cartooning was uniquely positioned to visualize the mutually reinforcing links between postwar prosperity and Cold War ideology. Producing “one-day best sellers” meant newspapers played up their civic ideals.<sup>3</sup> Editorial cartoonists did too, while also supporting a model of print diversity based on competitive markets as a counterweight to media monopoly ownership. But they refrained from exploring a glaring contradiction in American print culture: a “free” press was still a commercial press.

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<sup>2</sup> Sarah Igo, *The Averaged American: Surveys, Citizens, and the Making of a Mass Public* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007), 13.

<sup>3</sup> Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 35.

### Mapping a National Market

If newspapers had one distinct advantage over television, it was the industry's experience with attracting readerships and advertisers in tandem. Since the inception of mass circulating dailies at the tail end of the nineteenth century, newspapers' endless search for readers and advertisers went hand in hand. As the industry competed with new media, newspapers billed themselves as a trusted medium with civic responsibilities. This folding of citizenship into print consumption was greatly aided by newspapers' ability to blend news and entertainment into one media space. By the mid-twentieth century, the popularity of features like editorial cartoons blurred these content lines while providing a new arena for marketing and advertising to take root.

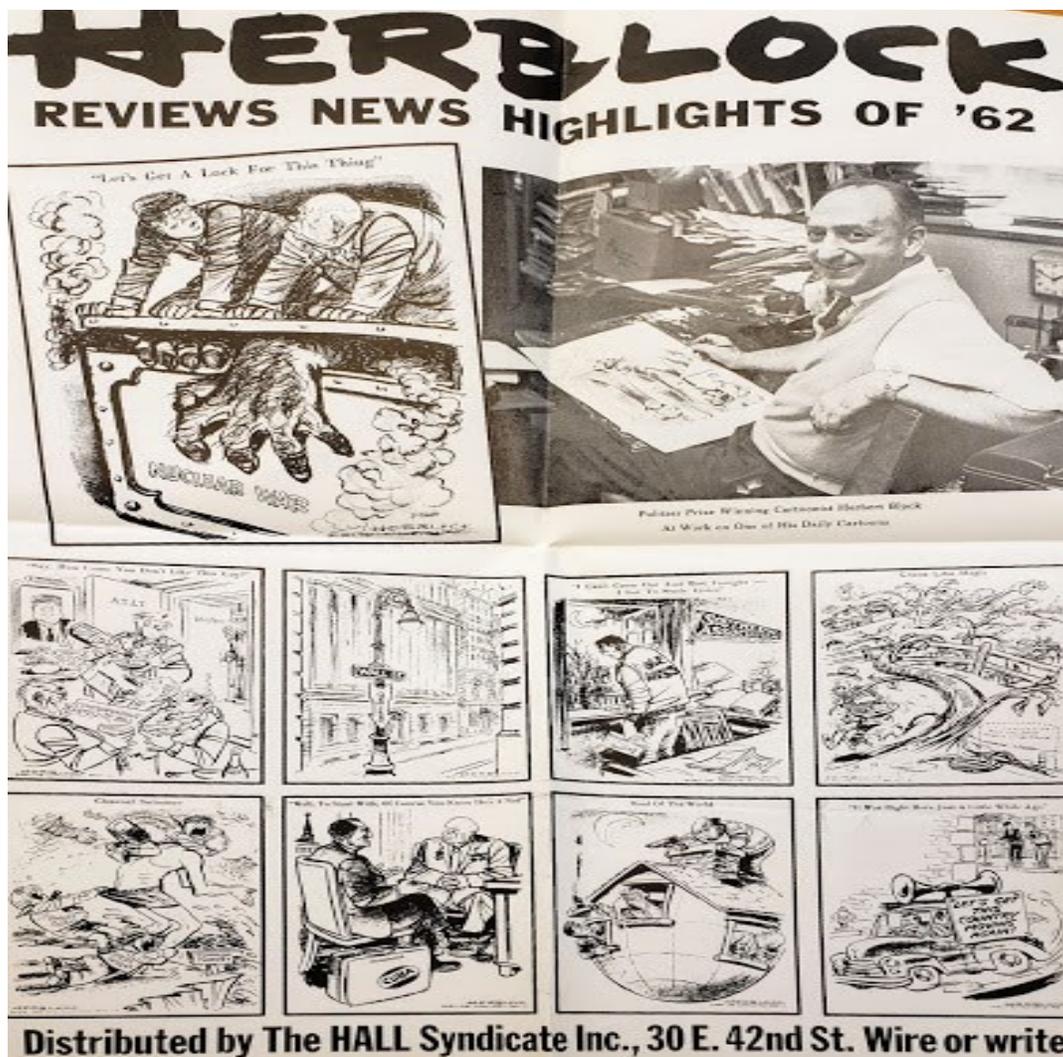


Figure 3.1: Syndicate press kit for Herblock. Undated.

Source: Billy Ireland Cartoon Library and Museum, Ohio State University.

A 1952 advertisement for the Post-Hall Syndicate, published in *Editor & Publisher*, showed how features were being categorized and marketed. In its pitch to potential subscribers, the syndicate publicized its talent roster by genre. In addition to popular strips like *Pogo* and *Dennis the Menace*, the Post-Hall Syndicate distributed Dr. Norman Vincent Peale's weekly column, "Confident Living." In the category of "Editorial Cartoons," only one name appeared: Herblock.<sup>4</sup> A decade later, syndicates' marketing strategies had become more sophisticated. In the early 1960s Block's syndicate bundled a collection of his representative cartoons into a glossy one-page foldout that included a photograph of the affable cartoonist seated at his draft board. The marketing package, or press kit, featured a number of vintage Herblock cartoons, including commentary on civil rights, regulation of media monopolies as well as the Cuban Missile Crisis. This sample catalogue appealed to a broad market of potential subscribers.

The ubiquity of advertising and marketing gave new meaning to the word "image." As the distribution of features developed into a mass market, syndicates and creators embraced various marketing strategies to distinguish themselves in a crowded cultural marketplace. Through targeted advertising in the industry's trade press, as well as press kits mailed to editors, syndicate managers pitched editorial cartoons as a way for newspapers to stimulate interest in their editorial pages. For editorial cartoonists, building a national brand mostly centered on concealing commercial concerns in favor of a narrow civic ideal.

In his landmark study *The Lonely Crowd* (1950) the popular sociologist David Reisman described the growth of consumer capitalism as a transition "from invisible hand to glad hand."<sup>5</sup> Other contemporary critics of postwar consumerism drew a correlation between the rise of consumer capitalism and a decline in democratic debate. Several years later, economist John Kenneth Galbraith's *The Affluent Society* (1958) attempted to show consumerism's corrosive impact on democracy. As Galbraith argued, "in an atmosphere of private opulence and public squalor, the private goods have fully sway."<sup>6</sup> At a most basic level, the newspaper business muddled these distinctions. As a material product, newspapers were a disposable, rather than, durable commodity whose consumption was renewed daily.

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<sup>4</sup> Advert in *Editor & Publisher*, 26 July 1952, p. 5.

<sup>5</sup> See David Reisman, "The Other-directed Round of Life: From Invisible Hand to Glad Hand," *The Lonely Crowd: A Study of the Changing America Character, Abridged and Revised Version* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2020), 110-122.

<sup>6</sup> John Kenneth Galbraith, *The Affluent Society, Fortieth Anniversary Edition* (Boston and New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1998), 191.

Editorial cartoonists absorbed many features of the postwar consumer society at the same time they disassociated themselves from its crasser commercialism. Yet, their self-image as public crusaders who stood above the commercial fray was itself a marketing pitch aimed at presenting their profession as a vehicle for civic ideals. To the extent that newspapers represented civic engagement was limited by the fact that their readers doubled as a customer base. But because editorial cartoonists tended towards a romanticized ideal of the free press, few dwelt on the possibility of publishing in non-commodified print media. Such a media space – representing a publicly-owned “commons” — was not on their radar.<sup>7</sup> While many liberal media critics were well aware that the newspaper industry’s commercial prerogatives threatened both print diversity and public access to information, making this argument in the context of the Cold War proved tricky, since it required acknowledging, however tacitly, that if left unregulated, markets trended towards monopoly ownership.

Syndication deepened these contradictions along several lines. In the 1940s and 1950s countless syndicate ads in *Editor & Publisher* testified to the growing importance of features as newspaper circulation builders. In addition to providing ad space for syndicates, the trade press published an annual syndicate directory as well as weekly columns spotlighting comic strips, panels, and editorial cartoons that editors could purchase. Within this industry forum, newspapers also advertised their own ad space to advertisers, thus underlining the importance of advertising to the industry. In a 1953 ad for the *Chicago Tribune* in *Editor & Publisher*, the daily posed the question that many industry stakeholders were then asking: “What is the best way to sell your brand?” The ad urged potential advertisers “to tell your story” to women consumers as they prepared to get “down to the business of planning her purchases.” Using readers’ relationship with dailies as a selling point, the *Tribune* ad claimed, “the newspaper is the medium which is an integral part of a woman’s life.”<sup>8</sup> While such gendered marketing was commonplace in the postwar mediascape, the normative prescriptions generated by print media were particularly pronounced in features.

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<sup>7</sup> For more on the commons, see David Harvey, “The Future of the Commons,” *Radical History Review* no. 109 (Winter 2011): 101-107. Also, for more on how the enclosure of the commons relates to knowledge and cultural work, see Harvey, *Marx and the Madness of Economic Reason*, 96-103.

<sup>8</sup> Front-page advertisement in *Editor & Publisher*, 27 June 1953.

According to Julia Guarneri, newspapers in the 1920s had “dropped much of their class-specific advice and outlined new parameters of behavior for metropolitan men and women.”<sup>9</sup> Popular advice columns instructed readers on how to achieve middle class success by posing solutions to readers’ letters asking for marriage advice or tips on how to appear employable. Historically themed articles on the American Revolution and the Civil War wove a national mythology into the budding features market. With the popularity of features came “a more nationally uniform culture” that downplayed social divisions while offering “something of a corrective to pop culture fantasy” found in film and escapist literature.<sup>10</sup> Billing itself as a civic medium, early twentieth-century newspapers set the stage for a post-WWII print culture that became increasingly adept at selling the news commodity. As *Editor & Publisher* reported in the early 1950s, when readers renewed their subscriptions, it was an expression of public trust that was “a tribute to the vitality of newspapers in the eyes of the buying public.”<sup>11</sup>

Unlike radio or film, the convenience of print also allowed dailies to publish coupons that shoppers could easily cut out and bring directly to vendors. As postwar suburbanization facilitated white flight from urban cores, a more open alliance between local business and local newspapers converged on sites of consumption. As David Davies notes, in the 1950s newspapers banded together with “downtown merchants to attract shoppers” from the suburbs into cities’ shopping centers.<sup>12</sup> Conscious of their role in shaping consumer habits, newspapers helped sell the consumer society by finding new ways to sell its own consumption.

It was no surprise, then, that features content figured so heavily into the industry’s market research. To better understand its customer base, newspapers began commissioning readership studies in the 1940s, breaking down reader habits by morning, afternoon, and Sunday editions. Cultivating mass publics, Igo argues, required reorienting quantitative analysis of social habits away from its progressive roots in social reform and towards a more market orientated outlook. As marketers, pollsters, and surveyors devoted more attention to understanding the public, these findings documented “a culture coming to know itself through social science.”<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Guarneri, *Newsprint Metropolis*, 80.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid. 95.

<sup>11</sup> George A. Brandenburg, “Dailies, Sunday Papers Maintain Circulation,” *Editor & Publisher*, 4 July 1953.

<sup>12</sup> Davies, *The Postwar Decline of American Newspapers, 1945-1965*, 92.

<sup>13</sup> Igo, *The Averaged American*, 67.

. In 1953 Clarence Harding, the promotion manager for the *South Bend Tribune*, developed an ingenious method whereby the paper equipped its “carrierboys” with surveys that could be delivered directly to a reader’s home. Hoping to compile reader statistics on the papers’ features material, Harding devised a two-page ballot that listed cartoons and comics published in daily editions on one page, and Sunday edition content on the other. Next to each feature, readers could check off what cartoon or comic they preferred reading. After readers completed the survey, carriers collected the ballots for the paper to tabulate, breaking down the results by age and gender. The *Tribune* recognized the importance of its news carriers in making these contacts with readers and even recruited them during its “Industry-Education Day.” Besides informing the teenage boys about how much money they could make from home deliveries, the paper “stressed the value of route training” in order to better serve customers.<sup>14</sup>

The *South Bend Tribune*’s experiments in surveying readers’ preferences in features reflected a growing trend. In a roundup of features trends in 1952, *Editor & Publisher*’s business reporter Erwin Knoll interviewed several syndicates who “unanimously report[ed] an increase in the use of syndicated material.” Knoll noted that television was “an aid, rather than a hindrance” to newspapers.<sup>15</sup> In Knoll’s year-end summary, S. George Little, the executive editor of the General Features Corp., expressed his belief that while “no particular type of feature [was] in greater demand than another,” the experience of his sales staff indicated that editors were willing to “pay fair prices for features because they know that heavy costs go into the creating, producing and servicing” this content. Little added that survey data indicated that “features have a much higher reader following” than straight news items. Little’s optimistic forecasts concluded by arguing that “editors more aware of the importance of features in holding circulation against this new competition.”<sup>16</sup> Joseph B. Agnelii, who headed the North American Newspaper Alliance, echoed Little’s optimism by recounting readers’ attachment to comic strips over news items. Agnelii recalled a recent incident in British Columbia that saw the *Vancouver Sun* accidentally run the same Korean War story for three consecutive days. According to Agnelii, “the editors admitted that if they had duplicated publication of a comic” then in all likelihood “their switchboard and mail clerks would have been overwhelmed by reader complaints.”<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> George A. Brandenburg, “Paper Uses Carriers for Survey on Comics,” *Editor & Publisher*, 17 January 1953.

<sup>15</sup> Erwin Knoll, “Syndicate Heads Report Greater Use of Features,” *Editor & Publisher*, 3 January 1953.

<sup>16</sup> S. George Little, quoted in Knoll, “Syndicate Heads Report Greater Use of Features.”

<sup>17</sup> Joseph B. Agnelii, quoted in Knoll, “Syndicate Heads Report Greater Use of Features.”

According to the Mirror Enterprises Syndicate chief executive, Rex Barley, one downside of syndication was that editors tended to favour known content and did not appreciate “the creative processes which produced the great features of the past.”<sup>18</sup> Boyd Lewis of the Newspaper Enterprise Association, Block’s former employer, added that “fashion articles, crossword puzzle [sic], editorial cartoons, illustrated women’s features and Peter Edson’s Washington column all rank in ‘the over 85 per cent’ category of usage.”<sup>19</sup> Willet Weeks, manager of the New York Herald Tribune Syndicate, argued that “[t]he most noticeable trend among the purchasers of newspaper features in 1952 was ever-increasing selectivity.” Weeks believed that “the demand is for features that have across-the-board readership, appealing to a high percentage of the population.” Weeks added that “specialized features directed to a limited audience” were only popular when the content displayed a “unusual degree of excellence.”<sup>20</sup>

While industry experience varied, what Weeks described as “ever-increasing selectivity” provided anecdotal evidence that editors were displaying a more discerning attitude towards what features they purchased. Their selectivity, however, was not a sign that creators’ originality was being prized. As Barley lamented, the frantic search for winning content overlooked how “the great features of the past” were borne of creative restlessness.<sup>21</sup>

In many ways, editorial cartoons proved an awkward fit for this commercial driven print climate. While popular comic strip characters could be enlisted into mass advertising campaigns, editorial cartoons had little cross-media appeal. A caricature of LBJ could hardly be used to hawk consumer wares the same way that a comic strip could. A similar dilemma existed for syndicate managers who represented editorial cartoonists. This made the trade press crucial for promoting new editorial cartoon features. In Ray Erwin’s weekly “syndicate news” column for *Editor & Publisher*, the category of editorial cartoon feature often had an elastic meaning. In a 1965 profile of Robert York’s “York At Large” panel, Erwin’s column focused on how it was designed “as news commentary and satire based upon national and international events.” This dry description lent the panel a certain distinction, since York’s use of sequential panels did not conform to the usual single-frame format preferred by editorial cartoonists.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>18</sup> Rex Barley, quoted in Knoll, “Syndicate Heads Report Greater Use of Features.”

<sup>19</sup> Boyd Lewis, quoted in Knoll, “Syndicate Heads Report Greater Use of Features.”

<sup>20</sup> Willet Weeks, quoted in Knoll, “Syndicate Heads Report Greater Use of Features.”

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> Ray Erwin, “York Lampoons News In New Gag Panel,” *Editor & Publisher*, 29 May 1965.



In addition to plugging their features in the trade press, syndicate managers packaged editorial cartoonists' bios and sample cartoons into press kits aimed at editors and publishers. Frequently, press kits used descriptive language such as "fearless" and "independent" to pitch their cartoonists. This selling point could sometimes be strained as, for example, when Art Wood's work was described as being both "conservative" and "(yet) progressive."<sup>24</sup> More often, syndicate managers marketing emphasized flexibility and experience. An Editor's Choice press kit packaged editorial cartoonists Scott Long and Roy Justus together in order to offer editors a choice between a liberal slant on the news or a more conservative take. The syndicate claimed this service was "like having two top-notch cartoonists working right at your elbow." Depending on the individual newspaper's editorial policy, subscribers could choose which of the two daily cartoons they preferred to publish. This flexibility appealed to both editors' layout needs while catering to belief that the press presented "both sides." As the press kit explained:

Scott Long and Roy Justus, working separately, each with his own dramatic interpretation of modern national and world situations, come together in one package to provide the most unusual and useful editorial cartoon service being offered to newspapers.<sup>25</sup>

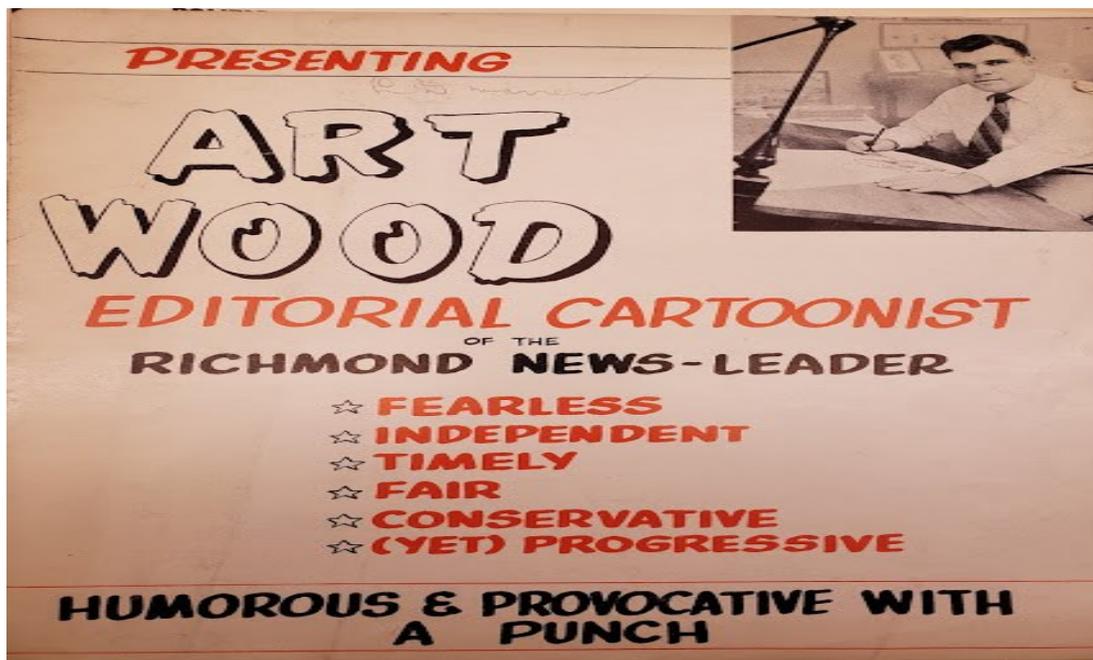


Figure 3.3: General Features' press kit for Art Wood. Undated.

Source: Billy Ireland Cartoon Library and Museum, Ohio State University.

<sup>24</sup> General Features Corp. press kit for Art Wood. Undated. Box AAEC 1, folder 6, BICLM.

<sup>25</sup> Editor's Choice press kit for Scott Long and Roy Justus. Undated. Box AAEC 1, folder 6, BICLM.

A Times-Mirror Syndicate press kit from this era recapped the career highlights of the *Oakland Tribune*'s Lou Grant with several full-page sample cartoons. One of the sample cartoons depicted Secretary of State Dean Rusk trapped in a maze with the caption: "And now Mr. Rusk will explain our Southeast Asia position . . ." <sup>26</sup> A syndicate press kit for the staunchly conservative cartoonist Bruce Russell of the *Los Angeles Times* noted that he combined "26 years of experience with superb craftsmanship and hard-hitting opinions." Notably, the press kit offered a guarantee that whenever Russell focused on a local topic he would also "supply syndicated clients with a national interest substitute." Recognizing that prospective subscribers located in geographically remote areas may be hesitant to subscribe to a service in the L.A., the syndicate boasted that air mail would deliver his material "WITHIN TWO HOURS of the cartoon leaving the drawing board," and urged editors to act fast to "reserve their territory." <sup>27</sup>

Occasionally, syndicates left out potentially controversial biographical details about the cartoonists whose work they were shopping around. For example, in its press kit the Chicago Sun-Times Syndicate made no mention of the fact that, at the height of McCarthyism, anti-communist investigators had probed into the background of their editorial cartoonist, Jacob Burck. Although Burck began his cartooning career for the *Daily Worker* in the 1930s and barely avoided deportation, he had rehabilitated his public image by becoming a vocal anti-communist. Indeed, it was that part of his work that the syndicate chose to emphasize by noting that his anti-Soviet cartoons were used by the State Department. Consistent with other syndicate marketing tactics, the press kit also played up the journalistic side of his craft, stressing his uncanny knack for delivering "incisive commentary on our times." As a final selling point, the press kit noted that Burck's reputation and success would be an asset to any newspaper looking to spruce up "the appeal of their editorial pages." <sup>28</sup>

In a telling sign that editorial cartoonists needed to have an established local or regional presence before reaching a national audience, the Associated Newspapers' promoted *Detroit News* cartoonist Arthur Poinier by emphasizing his strong roots with Michigan area readers. Already syndicated in over fifty newspapers, the syndicate packaged Poinier's impact by focusing on cartoons about national and global affairs. But the press kit also included a pro-civil

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<sup>26</sup> Times-Mirror Syndicate press kit for Lou Grant. Undated. Box AAEC 1, folder 13, BICLM.

<sup>27</sup> Times-Mirror Syndicate press kit for Bruce Russell. Undated. Box AAEC Sec 3, folder 7, BICLM.

<sup>28</sup> Chicago Sun-Times Syndicate press kit for Jacob Burck. Undated. Box AAEC 1, folder 10, BICLM.

rights cartoon about the 1960 Louisiana School Boycott, which his syndicate branded as “Liberal . . . on-the-news . . . editorial comment in pictures.”<sup>29</sup> In contrast to the common tendency in syndicate press kits to insist that their editorial cartoonists “capture[d] the interest of all groups of readers,” the Associated Newspaper syndicate aimed for a more limited engagement.<sup>30</sup> The syndicate’s inclusion of a pro-civil rights cartoon set a possible cap on Poinier’s national audience. The press kit tried to offset this by including Poinier’s anti-Soviet cartoons to affirm his Cold War credentials.



Figure 3.4: Associated Newspapers’ press kit for Arthur Poinier. Undated.

Source: Billy Ireland Cartoon Library and Museum, Ohio State University.

The tone of syndicates’ press kits matched the tenor of the newspaper industry’s strategies for advertising, namely trumpeting their civic reputation. Moreover, because editors were under no contractual obligation stipulating they had to publish the content they purchased, they were free to adjust features to their paper’s own specifications. Syndicates further played up this flexibility by offering editors choice in the size of column dimensions for features.

<sup>29</sup> Associated Newspapers’ press kit for Arthur Poinier. Undated. Box AAEC 1, folder 6, BICLM.

<sup>30</sup> General Features Corp. press kit for Art Wood. Undated. Box AAEC 1, folder 6, BICLM.

For editorial cartoonists, this meant accommodating themselves to the realities of a market that required them to be advertised as experienced and seasoned media hands. In many ways, this development mirrored cartooning's growing public profile. But whereas their professional societies performed a similar function by promoting cartooning to the public at large, syndicates' marketing was aimed at the newspaper industry. The end result of syndicates' growing market power was that suburban newspapers could have the same access to content as large metropolitan dailies but without, in any way, appearing to compromise their independence or autonomy. Because syndicated content was typically only flagged through a small accreditation line attributing the origin of the feature, national syndication did not announce itself to readers. Ironically, this would be one of the few media and marketing trends that did not attempt to advertise itself to the broader public. Instead, it remained largely invisible to readers, even as its importance to creators became more visible.

### **The Daily Ritual of Creating and Reading**

The new breed of syndicate managers who rose to prominence in the 1940s and 1950s played a key role in maintaining the industry's expanding print networks. Corporate-savvy executives like Robert Hall, who had begun his career as a sales manager for United Feature Syndicate in the mid-1930s before founding the Post-Hall Syndicate in 1944, differed from the press barons of previous generations. For one, Hall did not need to exercise a heavy hand in dictating content. Instead, he harnessed information culled from his contacts with editors dispersed around the country in order to relay to creators how their syndicated content was being received. This information proved useful to more daring cartoonists such as Walt Kelly and Herbert Block, both of whom had their work distributed by Hall. Both cartoonists also corresponded with the upstart syndicate manager in ways that might not have been possible if they had signed with a larger syndicate with a more extensive talent roster.<sup>31</sup>

Hall took an active part in communicating and negotiating his cartoonists' work schedules with publishers. For instance, in 1948 the *Washington Post's* publisher Phillip Graham corresponded with Hall on organizing a vacation for Block. Since moving to the *Post* in 1946, Block had been producing the six cartoons per week. For syndicated cartoonists, this workload

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<sup>31</sup> The Post-Hall Syndicate had a modest stable of star content producers compared to more established syndicates. Hall's former employer, United Feature Syndicate, was considered by *Fortune* magazine as one of the "big four" syndicates, which also included King Features, the Chicago Tribune Syndicate, and Bell Syndicate.

represented a standard schedule. In addition to helping build the *Post*'s circulation in these years, Block's output attracted a growing list of subscribers to Hall's "Herblock service." Both Graham and Hall, though, recognized that the *Post* cartoonist was due for a break. In June Hall had written to Block proposing some possible solutions, including sending subscribers a retrospective of Herblock cartoons to publish in lieu of new material. Other suggestions included Block hiring a cartoonist assistant to help shoulder the workload, or simply get "two or three days ahead" in his working schedule in order to produce "cartoons which would be of a timeless character." Hall admitted that none of these scenarios were ideal, yet nonetheless stressed the importance of delivering content to subscribers to keep rivals from "having an open heyday at our expense. . . with the competitive spirit running so high." Hall reminded Block that he had lost "two or three" subscribers during a previous absence and wanted to avoid repeating "this procedure."<sup>32</sup>

A month later, Graham proposed that Block produce six additional cartoons in advance of his vacation for the first week of his absence. The *Post* would then print Herblock highlights from the previous three years to cover the remaining time that Block would be away.<sup>33</sup> Hall agreed and quickly drew up a template letter for subscribers outlining this plan. Somewhat misleadingly, given Graham's involvement, Hall's letter added that he had consulted with "a good many" editors who were "perfectly content" with this working arrangement.<sup>34</sup>

This episode highlighted the industry's "competitive spirit" in the post-WWII years as much as it showed that national exposure meant more work. Additionally, Hall kept Block apprised of how editors responded to his work.<sup>35</sup> For a cartoonist like Block, who avidly followed news coverage and solicited feedback from multiple sources, having access to this information helped him gauge regional reception. By 1958 an estimated 266 newspapers in North America subscribed to the Herblock service, but this number fluctuated over the years.<sup>36</sup> Catering to each readership was impossible. Yet knowing how some editors reacted to his cartoons was useful as he ramped up his attacks on anti-communist zealots in the late 1940s.

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<sup>32</sup> Robert Hall to Herbert Block, 29 June 1948. Herbert Block Papers, Box 63, folder 10, Library of Congress, Manuscripts Division.

<sup>33</sup> Phillip L. Graham to Robert Hall, 23 July 1948. Herbert Block Papers, Box 63, folder 10, Library of Congress, Manuscripts Division.

<sup>34</sup> Robert Hall letter to subscribers, undated. Herbert Block Papers, Box 63, folder 10, Library of Congress, Manuscripts Division.

<sup>35</sup> Robert Hall to Herbert Block, 20 September 1950. Herbert Block Papers, Box 63, folder 10, Library of Congress, Manuscripts Division.

<sup>36</sup> Kercher, *Revel With a Cause*, 37.



Figure 3.5: Herbert Block, “Fire!” 17 June 1949, *Washington Post*.

Source: Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division.

Block had first begun to satirize rabid anti-communists during the late forties following the House on Un-American Activities’ (HUAC) 1947 hearings on subversion in Hollywood. Famously, in 1950 the *Post* cartoonist turned his well-trained sights on Republican Senator Joseph McCarthy. Weeks after McCarthy came to national prominence for claiming he had a list of communists who had infiltrated the State Department, Block portrayed Republican senators trying to maneuver a reluctant GOP elephant to stand on a shaky platform labeled “McCarthyism.”<sup>37</sup> Henceforth, a catchall term to denote a corrosive brand of politics was borne. Block followed up this cartoon with other jabs. However, by September of that year Hall began receiving word that some subscribers were not thrilled with his recent criticism of McCarthy. According to Hall, newspapers in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania as well as Cedar Rapids, Iowa, and New Castle, Indiana cancelled their subscriptions to the Herblock service specifically due to Block’s anti-McCarthy cartoons.

Hall wrote to Block admitting that he was “somewhat disturbed over this flurry of cancelations.” Hall informed Block that he had contacted Gene Farrell, the editor for the *Patriot and Evening News* in Harrisburg, to find out more information. Hall, who was on friendly terms with the editor, learned that Farrell, “in no uncertain terms,” told him that the recent drift in

<sup>37</sup> Herblock, “You mean I’m suppose to stand on that?” *Washington Post*, 29 March 1950.

Block's commentary was worrisome. As Farrell bluntly put it, Block's recent cartoons had become "quite pinko." Hall assured Block that he "disagreed vehemently" with the editor's opinion but asked the cartoonist "if there is any feeling on your part that maybe you are playing up the liberal slant too strongly." Hall suggested that Block "give a little consideration to why, at least, the cancellation was prompted in Harrisburg."

While the loss of three subscribers was not a cause for panic, Hall explained that Farrell had published only one of Block's cartoons in the previous three weeks and was now subscribing to a competitor's syndicate service for daily editorial cartoons. Although the recent cancellations "might give us some pause for consideration," Hall left Block to decide on the best course of action. But the syndicate manager concluded his letter by acknowledging that he was relaying this news to the *Post* cartoonist "because I know *you want to know at all times* what editorial reaction there is, if any [emphasis added]" to his syndicated cartoons.<sup>38</sup>

While there is no evidence that Block altered his images based on Hall's reports, his fondness for running preliminary sketches by colleagues is well documented.<sup>39</sup> Although Block was not required to attend editorial meetings, he still sought out opinions from *Post* staff writers and regularly tested out preliminary sketches with colleagues before settling on an idea. Furthermore, Block received a steady stream of letters from readers over the years and exhibited a genuine interest in reader reactions. What impact all this feedback had on Block as an artist is impossible to say. But given how adept he was at brushing up against lines of controversy, having some gauge on the reception of his work likely helped him navigate potential controversy. Along with his avid attentiveness to news coverage, Block also displayed a keen awareness of how issues were discussed, processed, and presented throughout news media. Whether in print, broadcasting or within his own newsroom, Block sussed out discursive limits that allowed him to occasionally push beyond them.

At the height of anticommunism Block showed a knack for lampooning political authority while toeing a delicate line that insulated him from charges of being "un-American." Part of his success derived from his own faith that American institutions, even in the darkest of times, would eventually reign in demagoguery.

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<sup>38</sup> Robert Hall to Herbert Block, 20 September 1950. Herbert Block Papers, Box 63, folder 10, Library of Congress, Manuscripts Division.

<sup>39</sup> For more on how colleagues viewed Block, see Navasky, *The Art of Controversy*, 189-193.

In 1954, after McCarthy was caught submitting falsified documents during the well publicized Army-McCarthy hearings, Block depicted the disgraced senator holding up two pieces of paper tinged with flames. One read, “Doctored Photo” while the other was labeled “Faked letter.”<sup>40</sup> The cartoon’s imagery, stripped to its essentials, anticipated McCarthy’s senate censure later that year. Moreover, its minimalism demonstrated Block’s approach to cartooning. As a topic became more familiar to readers, Block tried to simplify its details in the hopes that its political message would dominate the reader’s reaction.<sup>41</sup>

A similar direct, unadorned style characterized Block’s relentless skewering of Vice-President Richard Nixon in the 1950s. In one memorable cartoon during the 1954 congressional campaigns, Block showed Nixon crawling out of a sewer.<sup>42</sup> Giving him a similar sinister looking five o’clock shadow that he had drawn for McCarthy, Block’s deep stencil shading of Nixon’s facial features projected a villainous hue. Block’s caricatures of the GOP’s notorious anti-communist politicians did not need elaborate labelling or wordy captions since these politicians were already well known to readers through visual media such as photography and television. Thus, Block astutely recognized that the stripped-down aesthetic in editorial cartooning had a built-in advantage since it did not require elaborately detailed scenery or extensive text. Cartooning in a media saturated era also allowed Block to riff off politicians’ pre-established media personas rather than create these personalities from scratch.<sup>43</sup>

Block was sensitive to the fact that his position as a nationally syndicated cartoonist prevented him from commenting on local affairs beyond the Beltway. At a shop talk during the AAEC’s 1965 convention in Washington, Block lamented his inability to cover local topics in far away locales. With a front row seat to the theatre of Washington, Block’s local commentary automatically defaulted to national commentary.<sup>44</sup> When young, unestablished cartoonists reached out to him asking for career advice, Block suggested they start by offering to “to do some local cartoons. . . [which] are something the syndicates can not supply.”<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>40</sup> Herblock, “I have here in my hand . . .” *Washington Post*, 7 May 1954,

<sup>41</sup> Quoted in Friedman, “American Editorial Cartoonists Told To Modernize Their Styles.” *AAEC News*.

<sup>42</sup> Herblock, “Here he comes now . . .” *Washington Post*, 29 October 1954.

<sup>43</sup> These and other anti-communist cartoons by Block can be viewed in the Library of Congress’ online collection: <https://www.loc.gov/exhibits/herblocks-history/fire.html>

<sup>44</sup> “Cartoonists Need to Modernize Their Styles,” *AAEC News*.

<sup>45</sup> Herbert Block to Geoffrey Nielson, 1 May 1985, Herbert Papers. Box 58, folder 11, Manuscripts Division, Library of Congress.



Figure 3.6: Herbert Block, “Here He Comes Now” 29 October 1954, *Washington Post*.

Source: Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division.

While Block’s career was in many respects unique, the problems he faced in reaching a mass audience were generalizable. For Block, a cartoon proved successful when its message resonated with ten percent of his readership.<sup>46</sup> Judging this impact, however, was difficult, which made readers’ letters another valuable source. These letters also showed how syndication remade the cartooning landscape. As early as the late 1940s, readers’ letters addressed to Block began referencing publications that subscribed to the Post-Hall Syndicate’s Herblock service. In 1961 a reader wrote to Block requesting a reproduction of his “wonderful ‘Low Blow’ cartoon” spoofing Senator Barry Goldwater that appeared in a recent issue of *Time*.<sup>47</sup> Such letters indicated that the complexity of the features market operated far away from public view. This was significant insofar as readers of a weekly magazine or suburban daily were increasingly consuming the same content that readers in New York, Chicago or Los Angeles did. Moreover, syndication allowed readers to connect with cartoonists in new ways. Readers mailed Block clippings of articles published in their local newspapers, occasionally asking if he was aware or interested in a regional or news item that was not receiving national attention. Block typically responded to these letters with gratitude, but rarely followed up on readers’ suggestions.

<sup>46</sup> Hubenthal, “Reflections of an Editorial Cartoonist,” *The Quill*, 23.

<sup>47</sup> Robert C. DeFriese letter to Herbert Block, 2 January 1962. Herbert Papers. Box 96, folder 1, Manuscripts Division, Library of Congress.

By and large, though, readers writing to Block did so to praise or condemn his take on a national news story. Some readers even suggested possible cartoon ideas with an accompanying mock-up drawing. A Maryland woman, writing on behalf of her husband who was a civil servant, suggested that Block draw a cartoon of a mushroom cloud with the slogan “Go With Goldwater” emblazoned in the middle of its nuclear cloud. Included in the letter was a crude drawing of her husband’s cartoon idea, which he was willing to grant to Block free of charge. The couple even suggested a caption that appeared below the mushroom cloud: “...that is, if you’re sure you want to go that way.”<sup>48</sup> Other readers, less enthused by Block ridiculing extremist views, wrote to the *Post* cartoonist denouncing his putative radicalism, often in response to a recent cartoon that had mocked a sacred cow of American conservatism.<sup>49</sup>

Whether a local or national issue prompted their letters, the regularity with which Block received correspondence testified to his growing national influence. Such reader engagement would not have been possible without the distribution channels created by national syndication. Nor would it have been likely for Block to elicit strong reactions from readers if his cartoons addressed unfamiliar issues and obscure topics. As such, the response that Block and other cartoonists generated from readers across the country indicated that the medium remained a vehicle for expressing the fears, and confusions, of postwar America.

### **“We are not union, but professional men”**<sup>50</sup>

The mounting data on consumer spending, political polling, and opinion surveys provided a way for syndicates and editors to understand what features content played to the largest market. Importantly, this market research was also a way of creating public opinion. When informal market research, by way of syndicates, was relayed to cartoonists, it helped them situate their commentary within acceptable limits. While a cartoonist of Block’s stature could tap into a pipeline of information, while also counting on a steady supply of reader feedback to gauge the reception of his work, less high-profile cartoonists looked to industry studies conducted by their professional societies to plum the depths of a sprawling national market for features content.

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<sup>48</sup> Eugene Keith letter to Herbert Block, 9 September 1964. Herbert Papers. Box 96, folder 6, Manuscripts Division, Library of Congress.

<sup>49</sup> Within Block’s correspondence, the letters that generated the greatest volume of reader response was the cartoonist’s late 1960s running commentary on gun rights. See Herbert Block Correspondence, Box 96, folder 6. Library of Congress, Manuscripts Division.

<sup>50</sup> “NCS Final Report,” Box NCS 1, folder 41, BICLM.

For its 1960 convention in Atlanta, the AAEC invited anti-segregationist journalist and publisher of the *Atlanta Constitution*, Ralph McGill, as its keynote speaker. In his address, the civil rights defender told his audience that they belonged to “the most exclusive club in the world.” While McGill urged cooperation between editors and editorial cartoonists, he also strongly endorsed the latter’s autonomy. Believing “both strengthen one another,” McGill reminded his audience that “both cartoons and editorials come out of the news of the day.”<sup>51</sup> But as the medium’s critics pointed out, American cartoonists’ reliance on worn-out symbols and labelling techniques to identify caricatured political figures to their readers had become a form of “debased currency” that constrained creative experimentalism within the field.<sup>52</sup>

At the same that cartooning’s professional societies were soliciting and sharing industry information perspectives, they also began conducting market research. The Newspaper Comics Council, which was founded by cartoonist-agent Toni Mendez and Milton Caniff as a forum to connect publishers with high-profile cartoonists, was one example of how creators began harnessing market research to creative ends. The Council commissioned in-depth reports on reader habits and preferences as well as the “functions and character” of strips.<sup>53</sup>

As the NCS became more attuned to the importance of collaborating with what the group referred to as the “the publisher-purchaser,” the Society published profiles of syndicate managers as well as articles detailing entrepreneurial cartoonists who organized syndicates of their own. After its formation in the late 1950s, the AAEC followed suit. In 1963 the AAEC’s newsletter reported on “three artists [who] have pooled their talents to form a syndicate.” The brief blurb explained that the unsigned cartoonists were pitching “drawings using farm gags, social and home gags, shopping, business, and teen-age gags” to weekly publications.<sup>54</sup>

The AAEC likewise mobilized its resources and industry contacts to learn more about how editorial cartoons were received, particularly by soliciting feedback from editors. However much they idealized their role in the public sphere, editorial cartoonists were aware that they competed for readers’ attention in an entertainment saturated mediascape. Moreover, with the threat of redundancy hanging over the profession, editorial cartoonists had additional motivations

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<sup>51</sup> Scott Long, “Ralph McGill Urges More Cooperation Between Editors and Editorial Cartoonists,” *AAEC News*, vol. 2, no.1 (June 1960): 3. Box AAEC 1, folder 7, BICLM.

<sup>52</sup> *AAEC News*, vol. 2, no.1 (June 1960): 3. Box AAEC 1, folder 7, BICLM.

<sup>53</sup> “The Sunday Comics: A Socio-Psychological Study of Their Functions and Character,” undated. Box WK 5, folder 18, BICLM.

<sup>54</sup> “Weekly Service Will Buy Editorial Cartoons,” *AAEC News*, March 1962, 2. Box AAEC 1, folder 8, BICLM.

for inviting editors, publishers, and syndicate representatives to AAEC conventions while publishing interviews from syndicate managers and editors. The *AAEC News* reported on *Los Angeles Times* editor Nick B. Williams' address to the Association's 1962 convention in Chicago. Williams' message was welcomed by his hosts as the respected editor told his audience that editorial cartoons were "probably the strongest of all newspaper habits." Warren Woolard, editor for the then *Los Angeles Examiner*, followed up his fellow L.A.-based editor by praising editorial cartoonists for their ability to think in "picto-graphic language" while remaining informed on the nuances and angles of a plethora of issues.<sup>55</sup>

The AAEC's interest in industry perspectives in these years occupied much of the group's energies. In the early 1960s the AAEC sent out a questionnaire to over a hundred newspaper editors around the country inquiring about their use of editorial cartoons. The answers were revealing. In response to the question of whether editors would compel their cartoonists to draw cartoons in support of a newspaper's editorial line, 76 respondents responded "no," while a mere 7 replied "yes." In a question asking about contractual terms, 78 editors reported that they did not have a contract with their editorial cartoonist against 11 who reported they did. A majority of the respondents also reported that they published editorial cartoons on their editorial pages. When asked why, most checked off the answer, "By tradition." When asked to rank in order of importance what they valued most in an editorial cartoon, a slim majority reported "Clarity of presentation of issues" followed by "Originality of ideas." Most editors reported their preference for editorial cartoonists to develop a more "modern" style of American cartooning while still keeping the material "light in tone."<sup>56</sup>

The frequent calls for cartoonists to "modernize their style" suggested the use of well-worn national symbols had become a visual crutch. Unlike their European counterparts in this period, American cartoonists had become reliant on labelling techniques in their drawings. Editors recognized as much yet failed to draw a logical connection for why this might be the case. Labelling allowed cartoonists to range beyond the familiar topical domain, which in a time of global Cold War, was important. By labelling a foreign leader who was unfamiliar to American readers, cartoonists were then free to exaggerate their facial and bodily characteristics without risking that the reader would be unable to identify who they were.

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<sup>55</sup> "Editor Views Cartoons as Strong Reader Habit," *AAEC News* 3, no. 1, March 1962. Box AAEC 1, folder 9, BICLM.

<sup>56</sup> "Confidential Questionnaire for Association of American Editorial Cartoonists," Box AAEC 1, folder 9, BICLM.

By ranking “Clarity of presentation of issues” above “Originality of ideas,” the surveyed editors indicated that they were nominally aware of these thematic trends. Their primary interest was in using editorial cartoons to draw reader interest in editorial pages. Other questions in the AAEC survey recorded a more mixed response from editors. No clear majority emerged among the surveyed editors about requiring their staff cartoonists to attend daily editorial meetings. But enough editors affirmed that they did require this of their staff cartoonists to throw cold water on cartoonists’ frequent boasts that they remained independent. The editors were equally split when asked if they sent their staff cartoonists to political conventions or if they paid their expenses for such junkets. Showing the continual existence of ad hoc methods of compensating cartoonists within the industry, the editors reported no clear consensus on the question of whether editorial cartoonists should be paid for reprints of their work. Asked whether they assigned staff cartoonists additional illustrating tasks in a paper’s art department, 33 editors reported they did, while 54 said they did not. Perhaps most telling, given that more and more syndicated cartoonists worked remotely from newspaper newsrooms, 78 editors responded that they expected their staff cartoonists “to work in the newspaper’s office” during the paper’s “normal business hours” while only 14 said they had a more lax policy. On the issue of local content, the questionnaire asked:

Some newspaper chains have one cartoonist supplying all member papers with the same cartoon. If the size of the paper warrants, do you feel its editorial influence would be added to by having a local cartoonist on local subjects?

In a sign that the AAEC’s effort to promote staff cartoonist positions was gaining traction, a whopping 72 editors reported that they did believe their paper’s coverage would be enhanced with local cartoons. Despite this interest, when asked about the future employability of the medium, 26 editors reported they envisioned “More job opportunities” for staff cartoonists against 21 who believed the profession would see “Less job opportunities.” Reflecting this uncertain future, 28 editors confessed they believed the job market would remain unchanged. This split indicated no clear consensus on what the future of the medium held, but it did provide evidence that earlier fears that national syndication threatened to cut a vast swath through professional ranks had been dramatic, if not unrealistic. As the editors indicated, supplementing syndicated cartoons with a local cartoon was becoming an industry norm.<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> Ibid.

While the AAEC questionnaire revealed that many editors continued to employ salaried staff cartoonists, on many important questions they appeared divided. This lack of consensus on crucial issues for editorial cartoonists such as receiving compensation for their reprinted work indicated that the medium still operated as a mismatch of standardized and ad hoc practices. Nonetheless, the AAEC's surveying of editors had an impact on the profession in more ways than one. As circulation of features content increased, editorial cartoons entered a process of slowly becoming dislodged from their roots as an ideological appendage of a single newspaper, or chain, perspective. Knowing what editors were looking for in this content helped cartoonists to tailor their content to this national market. It also provided more evidence that syndicate managers' strategies for growth were effective. While many editors reported to the AAEC that they continued to demand their salaried staff cartoonists to work in the newsroom, technological improvements like air mail and telecopiers laid the foundation for off-site production. In theory, the ability for editors to purchase content and have it delivered would make the staff cartoonist redundant. However much this development presaged editorial cartoonists' eventual displacement, in practice the traditional model of employing a staff cartoonist continued.

While the AAEC publicly distanced editorial cartooning from adjacent graphic arts fields throughout the 1950s and 1960s, the Association displayed an elitist attitude towards what it considered the commercial world of comic strips. Syndicates, underscoring the journalistic aspects of editorial cartooning in their pitches to potential subscribers, also fed into this self-perception. Editorial cartoonists' desire to be taken seriously as media commentators presented a serious challenge to their professional identity as they navigated the hodgepodge of publishing practices that overlapped within the industry.

Nowhere was this tension more apparent than when editorial cartoonists confronted the issue of compensation for cartoon reprints in the late 1950s and early 1960s. As the issue played out, an emerging rift between cartooning's two main professional societies widened. Despite an industry consensus that features were an indispensable way for newspapers to retain readers, the cartoonists who produced this content did not always receive remuneration for cartoon reprints. In fact, many newspapers continued to reprint previously published cartoons without paying either the original cartoonist or the newspaper in which the image first appeared. This made for a confusing market for editorial cartoons.

The *New York Times*, for instance, viewed editorial cartoons as a form of editorial comment, which in effect, meant that the nation's paper of record used its industry clout to republish what they considered newsworthy without corresponding compensation. The *Times*' longstanding policy was a carryover from an earlier era which saw the corporate consolidation of print journalism entrench a set of editorial practices that placed public information over other considerations, including the labour that produced this content. Since in most cases, the newspapers that employed staff cartoonists owned the copyright to their work, editorial cartoonists belonged to a category of cultural producers known as "work for hire." Matt Stahl notes that "[t]he US Copyright Act of 1909 codified work for hire and obliterated the rights that creator employers had previously enjoyed to the products of their labor." Employment status had little effect on these legal distinctions. As Stahl notes, American courts "lumped freelancers together with employees and simply alienated them all."<sup>58</sup>

For editorial cartoonists, being alienated from the ownership of their images, as well as their wider distribution, meant that syndication was a way to gain control over how their images were presented to the public. Confusion, however, remained, since the market for reprints was far from uniform and newspaper practices varied. While the syndicates' marketing of editorial cartoonists to prospective subscribers was pitched to editors throughout the country, many newspapers continued to assert territorial rights over competitors that capped the circulation of content. Editorial cartoonist Warren King, who would head up the NCS's investigation into cartoon reprints, explained these discrepancies when referring to his own relationship to the *New York Times*. King wrote, "'the Times,' as an NYC publication, naturally doesn't pick up my New York News cartoons. If they did, they would have to pay!" In King's case this would mean he would receive remuneration from a reprint because he owned the rights to his own work. This scenario was unlikely, however, since as King noted, his cartoons appeared in the editorial pages of one of the *Times*' New York-based competitors. Even though King believed he was not directly affected by the *Times*' reprint policy, he recognized that, by allowing reprints to be published without compensation, "professionally we have suffered from an outdated, unjust practice" that needed remedying.<sup>59</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> Stahl, "Privilege and Distinction in Production Worlds," in *Production Studies*, 56. Also, for more on the history of copyright law and authorship, see Catherine Fisk, "Authors at Work: The Origins of the Work-For-Hire Doctrine," *Yale Journal of Law and the Humanities* 15, no. 1 (2003): 32-70.

<sup>59</sup> Warren King, NCS Report, Box NCS 1, folder 41, BICLM.

The *Times*' reprint policy had been an open secret within the industry for years, but it was not until the late 1950s, when the NCS surveyed its editorial cartoonist members on the issue, that the Society learned how widespread this practice was among large circulating dailies. Based on the response from its membership, the NCS leadership believed it had a mandate to confront publishers who skirted fee payment. The Society had some experience in these matters. In 1957 the NCS's ethics committee investigated Charles Preston on accusations that his Cartoon Features Syndicate was skimming profits from cartoonists. Preston, who billed himself as a cartoon agent, had direct contacts with *Sports Illustrated*, *American Weekly* and the *Wall Street Journal* and ran a cartoon editing service on the side. Preston claimed that cartoonists needed to go through him to publish their work in these venues. The NCS wrote directly to *Sports Illustrated* to clarify if publishing in their magazine required an intermediary as Preston had claimed. When the NCS learned that cartoonists were free to bypass Preston and submit their work directly to *Sports Illustrated* editors, it relayed this information to its members, thus undercutting Preston's business. Out of this process the NCS began looking more closely at other predatory practices within the industry that diminished cartoonists' bottom line.<sup>60</sup>

In 1958 *Editor & Publisher* ran a story on the cartoon reprints issue in which current NCS president John Pierotti explained the stakes. While weekly publications like *Time* and *Newsweek* remunerated cartoonists like King for the images they reprinted, Peirotti said many newspapers "just pick us up for free." This was an especially harmful practice for precarious cartoonists whose livelihoods depended exclusively on syndication. Pierotti also noted that of the 80 editorial cartoonists who were then Society members, 75% had responded positively to the NCS's initial survey about addressing the reprints issue. Pierotti added that "the fellows are honored when they're reprinted . . . [but] would like a little money to go along with the honor too." When pressed for solutions, Pierotti reiterated that the NCS was not a union or guild but would "keep punching away" if publishers proved unresponsive.<sup>61</sup>

A few weeks later *Editor & Publisher* published a follow-up piece that quoted AAEC president Roy Justus at length. Like Pierotti, Justus gave the perfunctory declaration that the Association "was in no sense a guild or a union." But he also distanced the AAEC from the NCS

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<sup>60</sup> The NCS also began developing a model contract for inexperienced freelancers to consult. See the file, "Ethics Committee, 1956-1960," NCS Box 1, folder 45, BICLM.

<sup>61</sup> James L. Collings, "Cartoonists to Seek Payment for Reprints," *Editor & Publisher*, 18 October 1958.

by disputing that the Society's initial polling of editorial cartoonists represented the views of the entire profession. Further undercutting the NCS's claims, Justus intoned, "[s]ince the matter of pay for reprints concerns is a drastic departure from the long newspaper tradition of quoting editorial comment either in the form of a cartoon or editorial, the subject requires a most thorough and deliberate examination."<sup>62</sup>

This line of argument would later be used by publishers to justify not paying fees for reprints. A few days prior to the AAEC's response which appeared in *Editor & Publisher*, Pierotti had written to *Times* publisher Arthur Sulsberger requesting a meeting on the issue.<sup>63</sup> On November 10 Daniel Schwartz, the *Times* assistant Sunday editor, replied to Pierotti and quoted Justus's interview with *Editor & Publisher* verbatim to defend the *Times*' reprints policy. Schwartz added that since newspapers owned the copyright to the original cartoons reprinted by the *Times*, "the legal question" of this practice remained murky. Schwartz reminded Pierotti that "it was established practice in the Untied States" for papers to republish cartoons along with "articles, maps, charts" without paying fees when such material was newsworthy. Schwartz argued that the *Times*' set the tone for the wider industry.<sup>64</sup> In a follow-up letter, Pierotti countered that copyright ownership was immaterial to the question of remuneration. Nor did it matter that the two main cartooning groups seemed to be diverging on this question of reprints. To back up his claim, Pierotti asserted that the majority of the AAEC's membership, including Justus, remained NCS members. Pierotti claimed that most of the dual members "are in sympathy with the idea of payment for reprinting their cartoons" and expressed concern that if the *Times*' current policy was not corralled, "a very historic and important segment of cartooning" would suffer as salaried cartoonists would be replaced with "a free reprint."<sup>65</sup>

Despite his impassioned plea, the NCS's leverage over the industry was undermined by the AAEC's intervention as publishers interpreted Justus' remarks as a sign that editorial cartoonists were not aggrieved by the practice. George A. Cornish, the executive editor of the *New York Herald Tribune*, introduced a new wrinkle in a letter to Pierotti. Cornish wrote that the AAEC had "given careful consideration" to the NCS's plan to remedy the situation but had

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<sup>62</sup> "Cartoonists' Head Denies Talk of Fees," *Editor & Publisher*, 1 November 1958.

<sup>63</sup> John Peirotti to Arthur Sulsberger, 28 October 1958. Box NCS 1, folder 41, BICLM.

<sup>64</sup> Daniel Schwarz to John Pierotti, 10 November 1958, Box NCS 1, folder 41, BICLM.

<sup>65</sup> John Pierotti to Daniel Schwartz, 12 November 1958. Box NCS 1, folder 41, BICLM.

decided “it would not be practical” to implement.<sup>66</sup> Although Cornish did not specify what plan he was referencing, the editor seemed to have been referring to a previous NCS proposal that would have required large circulating dailies to deposit reprint fees in a special fund for editorial cartoonists that would then be managed by the NCS.

A few months prior to this episode being covered in the industry press, the NCS Board of Governors held a special session on the reprints issue. After the meeting Russell Patterson recalled that the NCS had devised a plan to disperse reprint fees but had abandoned it due to a lack of membership interest. Patterson notified Pierotti that this proposal came from a lawyer that the Society had consulted with some years earlier. According to Patterson, the lawyer advised the NCS to write to the *New York Times* asking them “to contribute three or four thousand dollars yearly in quarterly payments to this Society to pay for reprint rights.” This tactic was meant to compel other newspapers to follow the *Times*’ lead. Since “individual payment on reprint rights to individual cartoonists would involve a lot of bookkeeping,” Patterson wrote, the NCS’s lawyer believed that a plan for a special fund was the most feasible course of action. Patterson added that if the plan was resurrected, editorial cartoonists would be able to withdraw fees from the fund while any remaining monies could be allocated towards Pierotti’s proposal to create “an unincorporated tax’ fund or . . . ‘insurance fund’” for NCS members.<sup>67</sup>

Whether knowledge of the Society plan for a special fund motivated the AAEC to publicly challenge the NCS’s authority to speak for editorial cartoonists is unclear. But there is little doubt that after *Editor & Publisher* printed Justus’ response to the initial NCS poll, momentum to address the issue appeared to have stalled. Despite this setback, the NCS remained undeterred and over the next couple of years compiled more data to better understand the ins and outs of the reprints market. Along with King’s investigation, the NCS also commissioned a study into the foreign market for magazine gag cartoons. Just as editorial cartoonists saw their work reprinted without fee payment in domestic publications, many American gag cartoonists experienced foreign publications reprinting their images without purchase or remuneration.

Occasionally, the NCS followed up these studies with action. In 1961 King wrote to the Society’s scribe Marge Devine asking her to compile all previous NCS correspondence on the reprints issue as he finished up his final report. Devine revealed that former NCS treasurer Ben

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<sup>66</sup> George A. Cornish to John Pierotti, 14 November 1958, Box NCS 1, folder 41, BICLM.

<sup>67</sup> Russell Patterson to John Pierotti, 17 July 1958, Box NCS 1, folder 41, BICLM.

Roth had convinced the *Times* to agree to paying a nominal fee for cartoon reprints shortly before his untimely death in January 1960. Lamenting the AAEC's earlier intervention, Devine confessed, "I honestly think the NCS would have done better on this project if the AAEC had kept their big mouths out of it."<sup>68</sup>

King's investigation surveyed 110 practising editorial cartoonists included responses from non-Society members. The final report revealed how little control editorial cartoonists exercised over their work. In an introductory note from King, who chaired the Society's professional committee, the editorial cartoonist confidently claimed that "[a]fter all these years the strength to resolve this injustice now exists." Gesturing at possible legal action, King reported that with membership consent the NCS would "enthusiastically put its weight behind" pursuing the issue further.<sup>69</sup> The NCS report included a breakdown of what the Society considered acceptable and unacceptable types of "traditional" practices: the first included large dailies releasing editorial comment to a "low circulation paper as a helpful courtesy," which was deemed acceptable; the second involved major publications "freely reprinting artist's [sic] work," which the report called unacceptable. On this second point, the NCS report took aim at the *Times*' initial defense of their newspaper's reprint policy. The report claimed that the editorial cartoonists overwhelmingly supported "resolv[ing] reprint injustices" and indicated that most agreed that \$25 represented a reasonable nominal fee for a reprint. However, the legal remedies were muddled by cartoonists' ongoing confusion over ownership rights. The report confirmed that neither most practicing editorial cartoonists nor their syndicates owned the rights to their cartoons. Just as Schwartz had pointed out in his original defense of the *Times*' reprint policy, newspapers that employed staff cartoonists held the copyright to the original images.

Some editorial cartoonists, however, remained unclear on what ownership rights entailed. Others believed that newspapers had a rightful claim to their work. The NCS report indicated this uncertainty was "our area of legal weakness." As a result, the NCS planned to follow up with a more in-depth questionnaire. Tellingly, the NCS made a careful distinction by stressing the professional makeup of the men involved. Echoing both the self-image they had created, as well as the widespread anti-unionism that pervaded mainstream American cartooning in these years, the NCS report concluded:

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<sup>68</sup> Marge Devine to Warren King, 7 November 1961, Box NCS 1, folder 41, BICLM.

<sup>69</sup> Warren King, "NCS Newsletter," 26 May 1962. Box NCS 1, folder 41, BICLM.

We are not union, but professional men. We are not making a demand for money, but for the adherence to principle. Simply . . . we are asking a nominal fee for the privilege of reprinting our creative work.<sup>70</sup>

While the NCS pressed ahead, the AAEC appeared to demur. The continual presence of AAEC members like L.D. Warren at NCS meetings seemed to suggest a working relationship between the two groups.<sup>71</sup> The NCS asked its editorial cartoonist members to bring the questionnaire it devised to their publishers so they could get in writing an unequivocal response to the following question: “Do you agree, that as the creator of the cartoon, I have the right to expect a nominal fee for the reprinting of my editorial cartoons?”<sup>72</sup> After sending out this second questionnaire, Devine wrote to King, “Holy mackerel . . . we ought to get crowns in Editorial Heaven!”<sup>73</sup> Once these questionnaires were returned, the plan was for King to present these results to the AAEC at its June convention in Chicago. King, however, would find the AAEC a less receptive audience than the NCS had hoped.



Figure 3.7: Photo of Warren King in *AAEC News*. Vol. 2, no. 5, May 1961.

Source: Billy Ireland Cartoon Library and Museum, Ohio State University.

<sup>70</sup> “NCS Final Report,” Box NCS 1, folder 41, BICLM.

<sup>71</sup> The 1962 report indicated that Warren had attended the NCS Board of Governors meeting which vetted the report before its release to members.

<sup>72</sup> “Questionnaire II – NCS Final Report,” 26 May 1962. Box NCS 1, folder 41, BICLM.

<sup>73</sup> Marge Devine to Warren King, 12 June 1962, Box NCS 1, folder 41, BICLM.

When the AAEC leadership held its annual business meeting in June, the NCS report dominated the discussion. Ever since Justus' comments were first reported in *Editor & Publisher* in the fall of 1958, the AAEC adopted a far less confrontational tone on reprint fees than the NCS had voiced in public. Furthermore, after publicly challenging the NCS's authority to speak on the behalf of the profession, the AAEC had put the reprints issue to a membership vote on two separate occasions. Both times the AAEC membership unanimously "voted it down."<sup>74</sup> Recognizing that national syndication provided a professional lifeline, the AAEC did not appear eager to push the issue further. From a practical perspective, not owning the rights to their work deprived editorial cartoonists of any leverage they might have needed in a protracted struggle.

In the immediate years following the reprints episode, the relationship between the two groups worsened. In 1961 incoming NCS president Bill Crawford had reportedly reached out to the AAEC about the prospect of a merger. At its 1961 convention in Atlanta, the AAEC put the merger idea to members who summarily dismissed the proposal with a unanimous vote.<sup>75</sup>



Figure 3.8: 1961 AAEC Atlanta Convention, *AAEC News*, vol. 2, no. 1 (June 1960)

Source: Billy Ireland Cartoon Library and Museum, Ohio State University.

<sup>74</sup> "Business Meeting of the AAEC," 21 June 1962, Box AAEC Sec 3, folder 7, BICLM.

<sup>75</sup> "Minutes of the Fourth Annual Meeting of the Association of American Editorial Cartoonists," 1961, Box AAEC Sec 3, folder 7, BICLM.

With this recently fraught history framing the 1962 AAEC convention, the discussion quickly turned hostile. AAEC member Chuck Warner voiced his annoyance with the NCS's continual research into the matter. Believing the issue resolved, Warner said he was "disturbed" that the AAEC's business meeting, which took place once a year, was being dominated by what he viewed as a NCS agenda item. Warner added that "[o]ur work belongs to our newspapers," which meant editorial cartoonists had little say in the matter. King, who was present for the AAEC discussion, defended the Society's actions by countering that he "never thought of this as a NCS operation" and considered his advocacy as benefitting the wider cartoon profession.<sup>76</sup>

Other discussants who were long-time AAEC members pivoted to the topic of how editors were altering reprinted cartoons. Bruce Russell chimed in that newspapers sometimes excised a cartoonist's signature. Russell added that he had heard of papers "in the New England states" printing syndicated cartoons and passing them off as their own. Justus called this practice "editorial arrogance." Others, however, recounted their positive experiences with editors. John Chase said that his editor deserved the AAEC's "Thomas Nast Award." While AAEC members appeared more animated by the question of how their work was being viewed by the public, Hy Rosen framed the reprints issue succinctly:

The *New York Times* practice is old hat – and an old problem. They even change captions. But they are a good showcase. I suggest that a letter be sent out by the Association protesting with dignity the mutilation of cartoons. The editor is not editorial-cartoonist minded.<sup>77</sup>

Rosen added that the *Times* had recently agreed to pay \$30 per for each reprint— \$5 more than what the NCS report suggested as a fair price — and thus concluded that no further action was required. For the AAEC, the attraction of being published in "a good showcase" outweighed other factors. Being reprinted in a prestigious publication like the *New York Times* was not only a mark of professional distinction for editorial cartoonists; it was also a means to build national exposure for their brand. Given the *Times*' publishing reach, reprints amounted to free publicity. Yet on the question of presentation, the AAEC remained adamant that cartoons should appear in print as their creators originally intended. Accreditation, along with the retention of the cartoon's original captions, were, for the AAEC, the main points of concern.

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<sup>76</sup> "Business Meeting of the AAEC," 21 June 1962, Box AAEC Sec 3, folder 7, BICLM.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid.

After failing to garner support from the AAEC for a concerted strategy to confront publishers, the NCS appeared to drop the reprints issue. Winning concessions from the *Times* signaled a victory of sorts, even though no uniform set of industry practices followed. The episode also created a rift in cartooning's professional ranks which had been festering since the mid-1950s. Even as the NCS had begun devoting its larger resources to investigating harmful practices to cartoonists in a variety of fields, the AAEC's smaller, more cohesive membership, had positioned the Association as the industry's mouthpiece for editorial cartooning. While the AAEC preferred a non-confrontational approach with publishers, it began keeping tabs on how frequently the *Times* reprinted editorial cartoons. In 1965, the *AAEC News* reported that the paper had "reduced the number of reprints considerably" and published a list of editorial cartoonists whose work was republished by the *Times* over a six-month period prior to its "cut-back" in overall reprints. According to the AAEC's running tally, the total amount of editorial cartoons reprinted by the *Times* over this span had added up to 577. Out of this total, 452 were domestic reprints, while the remaining 125 were picked up from foreign publications. Sixty-two editorial cartoonists in total saw their work reprinted in the *Times* in this period, with many prominent AAEC members such as Long, Crawford and Jim Berryman among the cartoonist most frequently republished.<sup>78</sup>

At first glance, the AAEC's reluctance to forge a united front with the NCS seems puzzling, especially given editorial cartoonists' fears that syndication placed their jobs at risk. Although the AAEC's position was consistent with its traditional understanding of the public role of newspapers. The reluctance to press the reprints issue further was also a tacit acknowledgement that its members lacked leverage. Short of withdrawing their labour as a form of collective pressure, editorial cartoonists had few recourses to pressure their industry.

When Karl Hubenthal assumed the AAEC presidency, the *Los Angeles Examiner* cartoonist opined that the AAEC had "grown to become a solid, mature professional organization, commanding the respect of both Publisher and Politician . . . the two important groups we deal with." At the same time, Hubenthal suggested that the AAEC might be reaching the limits of its growth. Hubenthal wrote that with a "127-man roster" that included nearly "every legitimate editorial cartoonist in the country," roughly about a half-dozen "non-joiners . . .

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<sup>78</sup> Guernsey Le Pelley led all cartoonists with 30 reprints followed by Long with 21. Block also ranked high with 17 reprints over this span. See "Reprint Rundown," *AAEC News* 6, no. 1 (April 1965), Box AAEC 1, folder 16, BICLM.

who have been approached repeatedly” had refused to join. While the new president warned that “the cantankerous nature” of cartoonists might lead to more attrition within its membership, he ensured his readers that he was prepared to start “listening to the malcontents.” That said, Hubenthal recognized that in the organization’s first seven years of existence, established cartoonists had mostly run AAEC operations. This had effectively sidelined a younger generation of editorial cartoonists who were still trying to make a name for themselves.

Hubenthal’s piece also addressed the gnawing tensions between the AAEC and the NCS. According to the NCS’s 1963 membership roster, 57 editorial cartoonists, most of whom doubled as members of the AAEC, remained as dues-paying Society members. But as the cartoon reprints episode showed, relations between the two trade groups remained fraught. Hubenthal wrote that “the air has always been pretty frigid between our group and the National Cartoonists Society” and stressed that “the NCS breach” needed to be healed as “joint effort could prove beneficial to both sides.” Despite his reconciliatory tone, the veteran cartoonist reiterated his belief that AAEC meetings should remain “a sounding board of membership opinion” and avoid devolving into a “sophomoric recounting of who got stiff with who at the Lambs Club.” On a more ominous note, Hubenthal invoked the common refrain in these years that there was “little danger of the AAEC becoming a cartoonist’s Union League Club.” The AAEC president made clear he would “deplore even a tendency in that direction.”<sup>79</sup> Such a forceful warning was hardly needed, since most AAEC members shared in this opinion. This rhetoric was more than a strategic calculation meant to appease anticommunists; as countless internal newsletters and correspondence from the trade groups revealed, anti-unionism was a position openly expressed in American cartooning’s professional world.<sup>80</sup>

While Hubenthal’s stewardship of the AAEC demonstrated his passion for the medium, the ideological horizon in which he and other cartoonists operated did not stretch beyond the imaginative and political limits of postwar consumerism and Cold War anticommunism. While editorial cartoonists took their cues from headlines and broadcast news, they were firmly rooted in a visual culture that included comic strips, magazine cartooning, advertising, photography, and

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<sup>79</sup> Karl Hubenthal, “What’s Bugging the Prez . . .” *AAEC News* vol. 4, no. 4 (November 1963), Box AAEC 1, folder 16, BICLM.

<sup>80</sup> The profession’s hostility to unions may have been one reason why the few “non-joiners” in the profession remained reluctant to join the AAEC. Despite having many friends in the AAEC, Block, for example, was a longtime member of the Newspaper Guild, whose New York chapter in the 1930s was involved in organizing white collar print workers. Block remained a Guild member throughout his career and was honored by them in the 1950s.

increasingly, television. To readers who consumed editorial cartoons, these other media provided a visual frame of reference for interpretation. Thus, in a commercial print culture saturated with print and televisual images, editorial cartoons appeared to readers as part of a visual landscape that promoted consumerism through mass advertising, mass marketing, and mass media. However much editorial cartoonists believed they were separate from this commercial culture, their images were clearly consumed within it.

The makings of a geographically diverse readership came to fruition at a moment when the everyday became a site where consumerism and anticommunism were cultivated in tandem. As Lizabeth Cohen argues, after WWII anti-New Dealers redirected the grassroots energies of Depression-era consumer activism towards a more business-friendly consumerism. The making of this “consumer-citizen” combined with anticommunism in the late forties to displace radical currents within consumer activism. As a result, activist support for labour strikes and consumer boycotts declined as a new era of ebullient consumer spending took hold.<sup>81</sup> With consumption and citizenship merged into a unity of opposites in the early Cold War, ideas about the traditional public sphere also underwent a transformation. As Lawrence Glickman notes, “the concept of the American *free enterprise system* emerged in no small measure as a result of the consumer movement [*italics in the original*].”<sup>82</sup> The promotion of consumerism dovetailed with the ideological imperatives of the superpower rivalry insofar as both projects pointed to postwar prosperity as evidence for the superiority of American capitalism.

These links were reinforced by film, radio, television, and print media, all of which helped sell the consumer lifestyle through the advertising and marketing of products and brands. It was no accident that one of the Cold War’s most memorable moments consisted of a debate centered on which economic system produced the best kitchen appliances. The kitchen symbolized domestic comforts, gendered familial roles, as well as the space where consumerism comingled with citizenship in subtle ways. Moreover, the kitchen provided the most likely site where Americans read their morning newspapers. Whether readers glossed the opinion and editorial pages, scanned that day’s headlines, or went directly to the funny pages, editorial cartoons promoted a brand of cheerful citizenship that fit within this mediascape.

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<sup>81</sup> For more on consumer citizenship during the Depression, see Cohen, *The Consumer Republic*, 18-61.

<sup>82</sup> Lawrence Glickman, *Buying Power: A History of Consumer Activism in America* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 2007), 264.

Benedict Anderson argued that because members of a national community could never hope to meet or interact with most of their fellow citizens, print capitalism provided a crucial link through which shared values, histories, and traditions could be transmitted.<sup>83</sup> But the ritual of newspaper reading was never static, and nor was its content. Not only did the Cold War offer a readymade adversary, but the conflict supplied cartoonists with a revolving cast of political figures in the communist bloc who could be spoofed without receiving reader complaints. Just as British cartoonist David Low had, a generation earlier, won international acclaim for upbraiding fascists, American cartoonists believed they were carrying on this tradition by lampooning Stalin, Khrushchev, Mao, Castro, and Ho Chi Minh. What they failed to realize was that America's Cold War rivals had already been caricatured in the American press long before they became caricatures in the nation's editorial cartoons.

The domestic Cold War needed enemies both within and outside its borders. Liberal cartoonists like Block blasted anti-communist overreach on the domestic front. The global front was another matter. As the *Post* cartoonist wrote in the preface to the State Department's *Herblock Looks at Communism*, the "kind of personal liberty" that allowed him to mock anti-communists was a crucial "part of American democracy." The cartoonist continued, "[i]f such liberty existed in communist lands there probably would have been no occasion to draw the cartoons in this pamphlet — and we would all be living in a happier world." Block also placed the blame on Cold War hostilities on Soviet leaders while echoing what had become a standard line in American postwar discourse. He concluded that another world war "can be prevented if communism, like fascism, is opposed by all who want to live as free men."<sup>84</sup>

For American cartoonists, expressing such anti-Soviet sentiments was commonplace. Editorial cartoonists, who borrowed imagery from multiple media sources, combined the disarming powers of cartooning with the persuasion techniques of advertising to visualize an enemy that appeared everywhere. By combining elements from adjacent media, they signalled civic engagement by routinely picturing its obverse: public corruption, venal politicians, and totalitarian governments. This played well to a national audience. Consequently, their ideals of nationhood were not as divorced from commercial strategies as they often boasted.

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<sup>83</sup> For the North American roots of nationalism, see Anderson's chapter four, *Imagined Communities*,

<sup>84</sup> Quoted in *Herblock Looks at Communism*. The pamphlet can be located in both Herbert Block's correspondence at the Library of Congress, Manuscripts Division, as well as the AAEC's correspondence at BICLM

Raymond Williams once argued that the means of communication doubled as a means of production. At bottom, what Williams meant by this was that “cultural democracy,” as he sometimes called it, could not be realized within the spaces of profit-driven mass media.<sup>85</sup> From the perspectives of syndicates, democracy, however, was expressed through the exigencies of market forces. The abstraction that occupied them had less to do with the putative threat of communism, and more about to do with mapping a national market for features. Editors helped concretize this abstraction by providing valuable information to syndicate managers who then relayed this information to cartoonists. For editorial cartoonists, syndication, meanwhile, represented a means of gaining some control over the circulation of their images. Being “professional men,” they pursued this goal non-confrontationally.

### **Conclusion**

Reflecting on the ubiquity of images in postwar visual culture, Guy Debord memorably wrote: “the spectacle is not a collection of images . . . rather, it is a social relation among people, mediated by images.”<sup>86</sup> For editorial cartoonists, syndication mediated this social relation on several levels. On the one hand, syndication granted greater visibility to editorial cartoonists with less high-profile newspapers vis-à-vis a national market. While cartoonists, in general, tended to play up their popular image as cultural outsiders, behind the scenes syndicates marketed editorial cartoonists as media insiders. The pressures of creating for a national audience also hastened the decline in local cartoons as topics like the Cold War played to a larger audience of subscribers. On the other hand, as the industry transitioned to more standardized distribution methods, older publishing methods persisted. These overlapping practices had a contradictory impact on editorial cartoonists that challenged their idealized professional self-image.

As this chapter has argued, editorial cartoonists were not aloof spectators in this consolidation of national syndication, but rather actively worked to figure out their place within its expanding print networks. Whether their cartoons were reprinted in a “good showcase” or a small suburban daily, the speed at which this content could be delivered reinforced a burgeoning national visual culture organized around images in advertising, film, television, and newspapers.

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<sup>85</sup> For more on Williams’ idea of “cultural democracy” and media cooperatives, see Fuchs, “Raymond Williams’ Communicative Materialism,” 746-748.

<sup>86</sup> Guy Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (New York: Zone Books, 1994), thesis # 4.

Technological advances that allowed features content to be delivered by air mail within hours of its creation made this distribution system appear as an efficient outgrowth of American mass production. At a time when Cold Warriors were enlisting consumerism into their ideological armory, newspapers figured less prominently into the exporting of the “American way of life” abroad. Instead, daily print shored up a domestic Cold War audience that, until the advent of television news broadcasts in the 1960s, largely relied on newspapers and radio for their news. Nonetheless, the “competitive spirit” that syndicates and cartooning’s professional societies frequently referenced in their communiqués showed that cartoonists were keenly aware that their readerships had an extensive range of entertainment options. In this mediascape, cartoonists of all stripes had little choice but to embrace market research tools to understand their audiences. Tellingly, though, editorial cartoonists largely aimed their efforts at learning more what editors desired to see in editorial cartoons, rather than reading publics.

This broad sketch of the political economy of print shows that even cartoonists as civically driven as Block had to contend with market forces. In Block’s case, his celebrated attacks on McCarthy and Nixon were aided by his syndicate manager, Robert Hall, who relayed how editors around the country were receiving his cartoons. Block’s principled stance against right-wing conspiratorial fantasies won much deserved acclaim from journalists and his peers. Yet his “traditional civic idealism” tended to reinforce a liberal belief that McCarthyism was a passing phase in American life, an anomaly that would be eventually restrained by a political system that had first given form to it.<sup>87</sup> Thus, the amplification of his work in these years set the pace for others. As Block himself recognized, local cartoons were discouraged by syndicates, which in practice, meant Beltway politics were crowding out local perspectives in print. Editorial cartooning was one venue among many where this local-national dynamic played out.

As the following chapter will detail, national markets had an indirect impact on how labour was represented in editorial cartooning. While many cartoonists openly supported the anti-union provisions of Taft-Hartley, syndication dissuaded them from covering local labour issues and work stoppages that may have garnered their sympathy. Therefore, as syndication grew in importance, the thematic field of editorial cartooning continued to narrow, while the ideal of print diversity remained squarely within the horizon of print capitalism.

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<sup>87</sup> Kercher, *Revel With a Cause*, 38.

## **CHAPTER 4: The Production and Social Worlds of Editorial Cartoonists**

“My drawing hand became my Rock of Gibraltar. With it, I was convinced the world might be mine. Without it, I felt like an insignificant jerk.”

— Bill Mauldin<sup>1</sup>

### **Introduction**

In the 1950s and 1960s the rising popularity of weekly magazines presented an expanding market for freelance cartoonists. While television had eaten into newspapers’ ad revenue, popular weeklies had increased their circulation with suburban readers, creating both a primary market for freelance cartoonists and a growing secondary market for cartoon reprints. Despite having ample venues to publish their work, most freelancers experienced insecure employment and dismal working conditions. At a Society of Illustrators meeting in 1965, the cartoon editor for the *Saturday Evening Post* relayed that his magazine “receive[d] over 4,000 cartoons per week. . . only 500 have real merit. Out of that 500, we choose – six.”<sup>2</sup> Within this competitive print climate, freelance cartoonists had little recourse to challenge their industry’s exploitative practices. In a 1958 article for *The Cartoonist*, former magazine cartoonists Mort Walker and Dick Cavilli spotlighted “hazy reprints rights” and “low pay rates” as issues endemic to the profession. Painting a stark picture, they concluded:

The average cartoonist who is *not* a top man is lucky if he makes as much as the boy who runs the magazine’s mimeograph machine. . . The great majority of cartoonists today must supplement their incomes by doing additional work outside the field, whether it is doing advertising work or carrying out the trash cans in their apartment building.

In addition to navigating the pressures of insecure work, Walker and Cavilli pointed out that freelancers had to contend with constant rejection, much of which came from “unqualified editors” who returned original drawings “mutilated” with comments or changed captions. In principle, cartooning’s professional societies had the power to ameliorate this situation. But their aversion to labour organizing foreclosed any collective action. Nonetheless, Walker and Cavilli

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<sup>1</sup> Quoted in DePastino, *Bill Mauldin: A Life Upfront*, 94.

<sup>2</sup> “Society of Illustrators, Report by Jerry Dumas,” *National Cartoonists Society Newsletter*, December 1965, unpaginated. See Herbert Block Papers, Box 55, folder 10, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress.

proposed that freelancers receive higher pay and be made magazine employees.<sup>3</sup> Their industry exposé also overlapped with editorial cartooning where editors routinely reprinted, resized or recaptioned cartoons without permission or consultation. This lack of control over how their “mutilated” images appeared in print, meant cartoonists saw their labour of love transformed into “something hostile and alien” that took on a life of its own.<sup>4</sup>

The public rarely glimpsed this side of the industry. Instead, readers saw cartoonists as they saw themselves: humorous, independent, content. This image comported with an ascendant idea that work could be self-actualizing, even when performed under duress. Cartoonists, who embodied the cheerful Cold Warrior trope that relieved Cold War anxieties also trivialized apprehensions about modern work with their own “happy model” of the creative worker.<sup>5</sup> While cartoonists managed this perception by playing up the artisan and handicraft traditions of graphic art, in the post-WWII era this nostalgia became mixed with professionalism in ways that blended creative time with labour time. By combining conceptual image-making with the physical skill of drawing, cartoonists also straddled the technical division between mental and manual labour. These ambiguities partly explain why cartoonists have been frequently depicted as “rebellious” non-conformists who escape the tedium of modern life. Yet work itself is rarely mentioned in popular and scholarly accounts of the medium. This focus on the playfulness of the profession disembodies cartoonists from their work settings, typecasting them as perennially free artists who escape routine, supervision, and boredom.

This chapter tacks a different tack. By delving deeper into the profession’s production and social worlds, I root cartooning’s visual aesthetics in the labour process itself. In doing so, I take up the question of a labour theory of culture by trying to think through “the relations between commodity forms and class formations” in cultural production.<sup>6</sup> Taking this as a starting point, I ask how did cartoonists adapt their techniques to the space and pace of daily print? As alienated media workers who were nonetheless passionate about the art of cartooning, how did they choose to represent other workers? And what invisible labours were behind the images that readers saw?

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<sup>3</sup> Mort Walker and Dick Cavilli, “A Wonderful Profession But a Terrible Business,” *The Cartoonist*, Spring Issue, 1958, unpaginated. See Herbert Block Papers, Box 55, folder 8, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress.

<sup>4</sup> Marx, “Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844,” in *The Marx-Engels Reader*, 72.

<sup>5</sup> Stahl, *Unfree Masters*, 22.

<sup>6</sup> Denning, *Culture in the Age of Three Worlds*, 104.

To help answer these questions, I resituate cartoonists within a wider set of social relations that included their newsrooms, workspaces, and conventions. As John Roberts points out, artistic creativity is “the outcome of a set of shared iterative skills, temporal forms and collective relations.”<sup>7</sup> Yet artists are more often viewed as expressive subjects who operate within the domain of an embattled individualism that is thought to be constrained by the social. As such, the dominant image of artists as being spontaneous, unencumbered, and typically male producers is often counterpoised in a gendered fashion with the monotonous tasks associated with domestic labour and clerical work. By reading editorial cartoons’ labour practices against this grain, I instead show how a creative work-discipline, forged in the material firmament of daily print, subjected their practice to routinization and repetition.

The other critical thrust of this chapter focuses on how humour contains a hegemonic impulse built around shared laughter and lines of exclusion. To further complicate the default notion that editorial cartoonists’ political humor carried inherently oppositional traits, this chapter concludes by analyzing their gendered professional spaces in relation to industry precarity. Newspapers were far from the only publishing venue available to aspiring cartoonists. Throughout the twentieth century, print networks in alternative media continued to exist. In many ways, these parallel circuits provided alternative print outlets where creators and writers could reimagine a non-commodified print commons that was radically different than the commercial press. Of course, many of these alternative print contributors had no choice but to work in the culture industries, which for cartoonists, typically meant advertising, graphic design or the highly exploitative magazine publishing market. Whether in mainstream or alternative print, working conditions for most cartoonists remained dismal, and employment security was rare. Drawing on both critical theory and recent scholarship on cultural labour, I put precarity and professionalism in dialogue to show why “culture is immanent in work itself.”<sup>8</sup> In doing so, I argue that while alternative print media opened a potential space for social critique, mainstream print continued to be shaped by definitive imaginative and political limits.

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<sup>7</sup> Roberts, *The Intangibles of Form*, 27.

<sup>8</sup> Christian Fuchs, *Critical Theory of Communication: New Reading of Lukács, Adorno, Marcuse, Honneth and Habermas in the Age of the Internet* (London: University of Westminster Press, 2016), 56.

### **Scrap, Morgues, and the Everyday**

In both magazine profiles and during “chalk talks” delivered in person or on television, cartoonists modeled an ideal of work that was above all fun. For editorial cartoonists, this portrait was tinged with a serious strain that emphasized their status as public communicators. But like other cartoonists, they framed work as desirable, self-fulfilling, even as the job itself was changing. Editorial cartooning, of course, was never a static profession. In the late nineteenth century few cartoonists could claim it as a profession at all. This changed in the early twentieth century as a print boom created new opportunities for employment in the graphic arts. Initially, large metropolitan dailies grouped their artists together in a “cartoonists bullpen” where they worked alongside one another performing an array of tasks in art departments. By the 1920s a professional structure emerged based on promotion and set roles. Cartoonists who were promoted to staff editorial cartoonist would, typically, find themselves interacting more with editors and journalists rather than other cartoonists. As staff cartoonists swapped the shared workspace of the “cartoonists bullpen” for a corner office, they also began attending editorial conferences. With these job alterations came an entirely different set of professional norms that placed them within print journalism’s corporate newsroom structure.<sup>9</sup>

These changes had taken place long before the profession entered an apparent state of crisis in the mid-1950s. Yet as the AAEC kickstarted its public relations campaign, cartoonists’ vocational memory drew from stories of print’s “golden age,” as well as a selective tradition that was being fastened in an emerging literature on the origins of political cartooning. This useable past helped contemporary cartoonists conjoin work and play in novel ways. For instance, as part of their media blitz in the early 1960s, editorial cartoonists drew cartoons that pictured themselves in isolated work settings. In these drawings, cartoonists were shown working alone at their draft boards, pressing to meet the daily print deadline. In one AAEC convention poster, a group of cartoonists were shown huddling over a colleagues’ desk, curiously watching as he busily pressed ink to paper. In these self-referential illustrations, cartoonists imagined themselves sometimes contented, other times flustered, but always engaged in the task at hand. This visualization presented the creative process as an inspired act born of spontaneous inspiration and solitude. It is no surprise, then, that syndicates used adjectives such as “fearless” and “independent” when pitching editorial cartoonists to prospective newspaper subscribers.

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<sup>9</sup> For more on this promotion structure, see chapter 1, section 3 of this study.

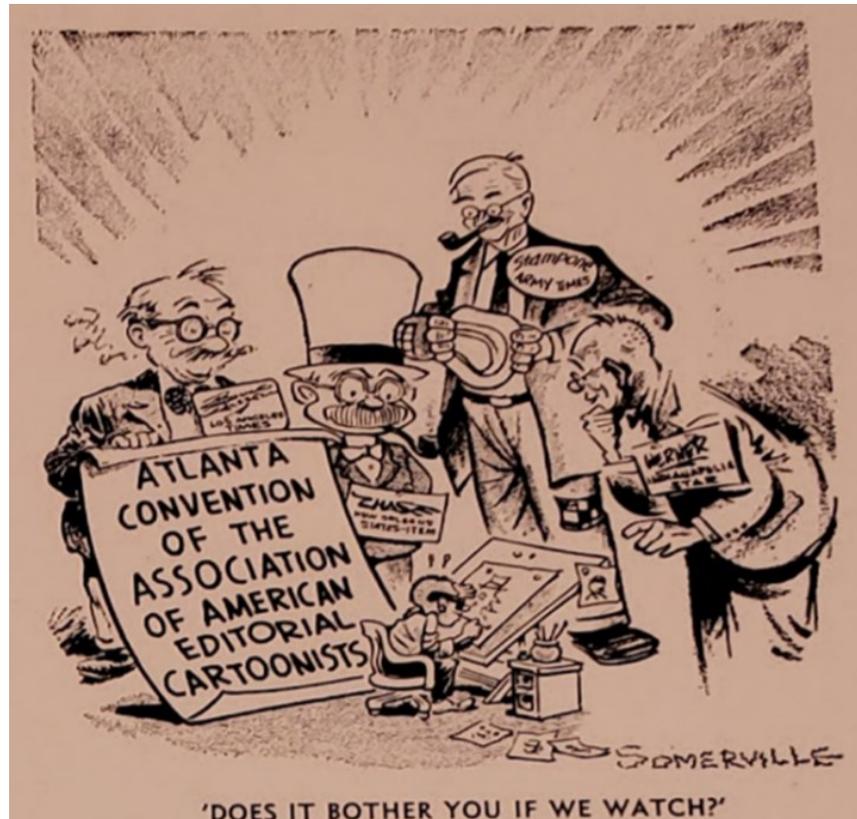


Figure 4.1: Poster for the AAEC 1962 Atlanta Convention.

Source: Billy Ireland Cartoon Library and Museum, Ohio State University.

By abstracting themselves from their interactive workplaces, cartoonists embodied what Mark Banks calls “the bourgeois myth of aesthetic creation” that was premised on seeing “the autonomous subject [as] the wellspring of creativity.”<sup>10</sup> On a more immediate level, cartoonists’ self-image gave a partial view of their daily routines. Absent from these images was any reference to below-the-line workers such as the printers who translated their images into newsprint, the secretaries that compiled their reader mail, or the staff who arranged their cartoon mats for distribution. To readers these labours remained out of sight. Also missing in cartoonists’ idealization of their working selves were the print journalists, editorial writers and other newsroom colleagues who influenced their ideas. As Denning observes, cultural commodities “appear to us as a vast store of accumulated mental labor.”<sup>11</sup> Editorial cartoons were no different insofar as they represented the finished result of a long chain of revisions, rough drafts, and refinement that took place within the course of producing newspaper content.

<sup>10</sup> Banks, *The Politics of Cultural Work*, 81.

<sup>11</sup> Denning, *Culture in the Age of Three World*, 93.

Cartoonists have been far from the only cultural workers who have imagined their creativity along such modernist, asocial lines. In their edited volume, *Joy Forever*, Michael Kozłowski and Kuba Szreder argue that the fetishization of creativity follows the logic of the commodity form. Echoing Marx, they define creativity as “not merely a thing, an action, a feature or a quality, but . . . above all, a social relation.”<sup>12</sup> Similarly, Sarah Brouillette argues that the “mainstreaming of the figure of the artist as valorized mental laborer” hinges on an ahistorical archetype that ignores how “self-exploration, self-expression, and self-realization” are also social processes subject to historical change.<sup>13</sup> While scholars of cultural labour have demythologized and recontextualized creative work to show its embeddedness within social relations, the links between autonomy and aesthetics, workspace and practice, have proven more difficult to establish, varying as they do, from medium to medium, industry to industry. To establish how these connections were forged in editorial cartooning, I follow Brouillette’s approach to reading cultural texts in conjunction with larger public discourses on creativity. To begin, I start by recreating the typical working day of the newspaper editorial cartoonist.

Occasionally, the medium’s social relations were glimpsed in media profiles of cartoonists. In a 1960 *Georgia Magazine* profile of Cliff Baldowski, the editorial cartoonist for the *Atlanta Constitution*, writer Charles F. Bailey described his interviewee’s workspace and daily routine. After attending his newspaper’s morning editorial meeting, Baldowski would “retire to his rabbit warren” to brainstorm ideas. Following this creative reflection, Baldowski would emerge with rough sketches that he would then run by his editors for approval. Bailey also catalogued the cultural resources that Baldowski drew from, which included “old sayings, songs, and proverbs” as well as promotional material of “worthy causes” that was sent to him by mail. Among the “nest of newspapers, books, old drawings, inkpots, mail, memos, and mementos” scattered across Baldowski’s cluttered desk were discarded “advertising layouts.”

Baldowski, whose own newspaper experience came from his father who worked as the advertising manager for the *Augusta Herald*, drew inspiration from advertising on occasion. He won the Distinguished Service in Journalism award from the Sigma Delta Chi based on a cartoon

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<sup>12</sup> Michał Kozłowski and Kuba Szreder, “Introduction: What Makes People Creative? Creativity as a Social Construct,” in *Joy Forever: The Political Economy of Social Creativity*, Michał Kozłowski, Agnieszka Kurant, Jan Sowa, Krystian Szadkowski and Jakub Szreder, eds. (London and Warsaw: MayFlyBooks 2014), 1.

<sup>13</sup> Sarah Brouillette, “Creative Labor,” *Mediations: Journal of the Marxist Literary Group*, 24, no. 2 (Spring 2009): 140-149. <https://mediationsjournal.org/articles/creative-labor>

that he modeled after an abandoned advertisement campaign. The mock-up ad showed a dilapidated factory with the caption: “First we stopped advertising, then one thing led to another.” Baldy, as he was known, transposed the ad’s conceptual idea to a cartoon commenting on school integration in the South. In his prize-winning photo the Georgia native depicted a deserted town with shuttered buildings with a similarly worded caption found in the original ad idea: “First we closed our schools, then one thing led to another.”<sup>14</sup>

In addition to shedding light on the creative process, Bailey’s profile of Baldowski engaged questions of reception. According to Bailey, local politicians in Atlanta initially reacted in an “indigent” way to Baldowski’s caricatures. But with time, they became “less inclined to take umbrage” at being spoofed. Allegedly, some even hanged Baldowski’s caricatures “in their home and offices,” which suggested that the sting of being parodied in print faded with time, but also that it was increasingly a kind of badge of honour to be targeted by editorial cartoonists.<sup>15</sup>

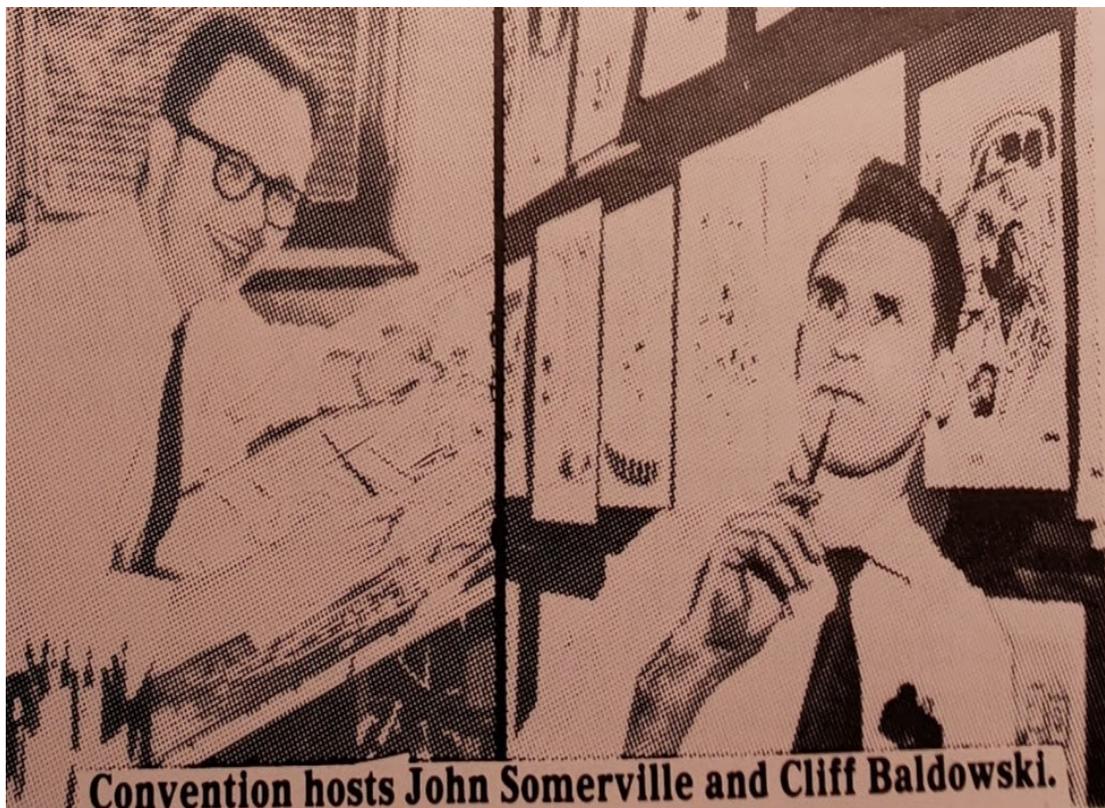


Figure 4.2: Picture of John Somerville and Cliff Baldowski. *AAEC News*, 1962.

Source: Billy Ireland Cartoon Library and Museum, Ohio State University.

<sup>14</sup> Charles F. Bailey, “Baldy of the Constitution,” *Georgia Magazine* (April-May 1960). Box AAEC 1, folder 6, BIMCL.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*

Profiles of cartoonists appeared in various media at the same time as the AAEC's nascent public relations campaign in the early 1960s. Collectively, these efforts communicated an emergent idea that work could be a task to be enjoyed rather than dreaded, provided that this play was productive. The melding of these two spheres required a hands-off approach to managing cartoonists that allowed space for autonomy. As E.P. Thompson noted, industrial capitalism ushered in a "time-discipline" whereby "task orientation" labour was eclipsed by labour-time performed under the supervision of the clock. The former marked a temporal zone where "social intercourse" and the labour process were "intermingled" and fluctuated according to tasks and by season. Counterpoising the two, Thompson suggested that artistic production resisted being incorporated into capitalism's logics. In his words, "the growth of a poet's mind, can never, in the last analysis, be planned."<sup>16</sup>

However, the development of culture industries over the course of the twentieth century had blurred these lines: creative work-discipline calibrated the working day while extending labour time beyond its typical bounds. In his late writings Adorno detected this shift by describing how the discrete temporal zones that had once separated "free time" from labour-time had become increasingly muddled. As the leisure industries developed, work-discipline was "smuggled into the realm of free time."<sup>17</sup> This blurring of temporalities had implications for how both work and play were organized. The latter, Marcuse argued, marked a "sphere outside labor" that resisted regiment and routine.<sup>18</sup> With creative work-discipline, these boundaries blurred. Regimenting play proved possible because for artists like editorial cartoonists, who did not have to increase their output by the unit, this situation was desirable, even welcomed. This apparent contradiction added a new wrinkle into debates on artists' autonomy under capitalism.

In his posthumously published *Aesthetic Theory* (1984) Adorno identified the tensions between what he described as art's autonomy and dependency. For Adorno autonomous art "discard[s] the illusion of being-for-society, an illusion tenaciously retained by all other commodities." In this way, an autonomous artwork seeks to "rid itself of the ideology inherent in the commodity form" that dependent artworks retain.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> E.P. Thompson, "Time, Work-Discipline and Industrial Capitalism," *Past & Present* no. 38 (December 1967):56-97.

<sup>17</sup> Theodor W. Adorno, "Free Time," *The Culture Industry: Selected Essays on Mass Culture*, ed. J.M. Bernstein (London and New York: Routledge Classics, 1991), ch. 8, 162-170.

<sup>18</sup> Herbert Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1966), 156.

<sup>19</sup> Theodor Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, trans. C. Lenhardt (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1984), 336

As many critics of Adorno have pointed out, this distinction appeared to rest on an implicit hierarchy of tastes. But this reading largely ignores Adorno's critique of the commodification of both "high" and "low" culture. As media scholar Christian Fuchs notes, "Adorno profoundly opposed the commodity form" in whatever guise, regardless of its content.<sup>20</sup> An autonomous artwork, then, was a potential working out of these conflicts. For Adorno, "it is precisely as artefacts, as products of social labor, that [artworks] also communicate with the empirical experiences that they reject and from which they draw their content."<sup>21</sup> Thus, for Adorno, the autonomous artwork achieves a critical relationship to its own traditions, institutional settings, and conditions of realizability by virtue of sussing out potential fault lines. As Marina Vishmidt argues, art's exceptionality, insofar as it exists, is an "exception that allows us to understand the rule" of capitalist accumulation.<sup>22</sup>

While Adorno's dialectical approach to art's autonomy and dependency dislodged aesthetics from a contemplative viewpoint, the possibility for dependent or popular art to break free from its constraints was left under theorized in his account. Despite this lacuna, his awareness of the possible shifts or reversals in art's vexed relationship to material production called attention to the constellation of social forces under which art is made. Somewhat counterintuitively, Adorno's gestures towards a post-visual artistic landscape are also useful for parsing how editorial cartoonists gravitated more to the conceptual side of their image-making over the course of the twentieth century.

In editorial cartooning, producing to a daily print schedule meant that visual tropes, topical themes, and shared techniques would inevitably become habitual. The medium's iterative tasks such as lettering, captioning and to a certain extent, caricature, were an example of what Roberts calls "the skilling-deskilling-reskilling dialectic." The shift from weekly to daily cartooning in the early twentieth century deskilled aspects of cartooning by prompting cartoonists to purge their drawings of unnecessary details. Syndication accelerated these trends as simplified, legible drawings could be more readily mass produced. This in turn prompted a "reskilling" that saw cartoonists place greater emphasis on the conceptual side of their craft.<sup>23</sup> In the *AAEC News* and trade conventions, cartoonists openly talked about how their proficiency in

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<sup>20</sup> Fuchs, *Critical Theory of Communication*, 79.

<sup>21</sup> Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, 5.

<sup>22</sup> Vishmidt, "Anomaly and Autonomy," 588.

<sup>23</sup> For more on his account of deskilling-reskilling in art, see Roberts, *Intangibles of Form*, ch.3, 81-100.

technical drawing skills was secondary to their use of irony, juxtaposition, and conceptual framing. As editorial cartoonist Don Hesse observed: “One of the biggest changes in editorial cartooning in the past fifty years has been in the direction of more simplicity in the drawings and more economy in the words.”<sup>24</sup>

Alarmed by editors’ cavalier handling of their images, cartoonists, in a variety of genres, reduced the risk of poor-quality reprints by simplifying their formal skillset. As Hesse explained, cartoonists needed to possess “acceptable dexterity but must be an editor, editorial writer and political sage” all at once.<sup>25</sup> As an ephemeral art form designed for reproducibility, clarity in what editorial cartoonists referred to as “the cleanness of their line” had always been crucial. While variations in these practices continued to fluctuate at the individual level, collectively, mainstream cartooning in the 1950s and 1960s displayed a remarkable consistency in styles, themes, and ideas, as well as a similar modification of technique aimed at translating their visual shorthand to mass print. The turnover time of daily production further tempered their experiments with form, as did the political culture in which they worked. Hence, a Russian bear or an American eagle needed to be rendered legibly lest it risked being misinterpreted.

In his widely circulated 1966 essay, Karl Hubenthal expounded on many of these trends. For Hubenthal the newspaper editorial cartoonist’s job was a “hard one” because it entailed “long hours and considerable mental anguish.” Labouring under the pressure of a daily deadline meant that newspaper cartoonists had to calibrate their creativity to the rhythms of a production schedule, which typically involved what cartoonists referred to as four hours of brainstorming and four hours of drawing.<sup>26</sup> As Vincent DiGirolamo argues, in the newspaper business, where “speed was as much a commodity of the press as its stories and pictures,” the ability to produce quickly was a skill sharpened by experience.<sup>27</sup> Editorial cartoonists, the majority of whom began their careers in newspapers’ art departments, honed these skills through habit and practice. As Hubenthal explained:

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<sup>24</sup> Hesse, “The Ungentlemanly Art,” 7.

<sup>25</sup> Hesse, “The Ungentlemanly Art,” 17.

<sup>26</sup> Hubenthal, “Reflections of an Editorial Cartoonist” I quote from *The Quill* version, published in January 1966. Also for a version excerpted in *The Cartoonist*, see Herbert Block papers, Box 55, folder 10, Library of Congress, Manuscripts Division.

<sup>27</sup> DiGirolamo, *Crying the News*, 175.

I learned long ago to reject the first idea that crops up as my work day starts each morning. I force myself to dig for that second, third or fourth angle on a given subject. As the daily deadline draws closer and closer, the panic compounds itself but that one better idea is always there if one digs hard enough for it.<sup>28</sup>

Hubenthal did not expand on the derivative features built into the medium, but he did note the importance of having broad ideological agreement with publishers. As a cartoonist for the Hearst chain, Hubenthal imbibed his employer's "staunchly anti-Communist and anti-New Deal" perspective.<sup>29</sup> As such, he dispensed with the trope that conflict between editors and cartoonists drove the creative process and instead suggested that this tension originated in the labour process itself. Equally revealing was Hubenthal's glimpse into reader feedback. The cartoonist described how a vast mediascape had trained readers to detect when a cartoonist flubbed a minor visual detail in their drawings. This form of reader criticism now represented an "occupational hazard" that came with producing opiated content. Despite these drawbacks, the former AAEC president acknowledged his professional privilege as relative to the vast reserve army of underemployed and exploited graphic artists:

The chance to speak your mind each day before several million people is an opportunity not given to every man. It takes more than just cleverness to hold those people's attention. You must have something of substance to say. And say it with conviction.<sup>30</sup>

Hubenthal's standing in the profession ensured an audience for his occupational reflections. Additionally, his professional knowledge was transmitted by way of mentorship. Cartoonist Bob Staake recalls "Hubie," as his friends called him, giving him a tour of the *Los Angeles Herald-Examiner's* newsroom in 1974 where the younger cartoonist was introduced to trade secrets, including the storing of "scrap." For editorial cartoonists "scrap" consisted of rough drawings and abandoned ideas. A veteran cartoonist like Hubenthal organized his "scrap" by subject matter and filed it away in cabinets for easy access when needed. Hubenthal also showed Staake his folders of reference photographs which were kept in what cartoonists referred to as the "morgue." These techniques contained a temporal logic to them, as they allowed

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<sup>28</sup> Hubenthal, "Reflections of an Editorial Cartoonist," *The Quill*, 24.

<sup>29</sup> Davies, *The Postwar Decline of American Newspapers*, 40.

<sup>30</sup> Hubenthal, "Reflections of an Editorial Cartoonist," *The Quill*, 24.

cartoonists to quickly access visual references of public figures, physical objects as well as their own rough ideas when needed. Thus, the importance of keeping “scrap” and having a “morgue” in their workspace freed cartoonists up to spend more time reading newspapers, attending editorial meetings, and brainstorming ideas.<sup>31</sup>

By relaying these and other related techniques to Staake, Hubenthal introduced established practices to a younger generation of cartoonists. Such cross-generational linkages ensured a measure of continuity that strengthened prevailing professional norms. Yet these links threatened to curtail originality. Hubenthal’s own career, which began under the tutelage of sport cartoonist Willard Mullin, demonstrated the difficulties in transposing the aesthetic conventions from one cartooning genre to the another. As Staake notes, Hubenthal’s drawing techniques were “built on a graphic foundation of [Willard] Mullin aesthetics.”<sup>32</sup> Mullin’s ability to dramatize a sporting contest without the aid of sequential panels to relay a game’s action, made him a standout among his professional peers.<sup>33</sup> But whereas Mullin’s drawings conveyed human bodies in motion, Hubenthal’s transposing of sport cartooning’s aesthetics to political cartooning bordered on static. This was distressing when the subject matter was war.

In a cartoon accompanying his *Quill* essay, Hubenthal commented on the escalating war in Vietnam. The former sports cartoonist framed his comment with a baseball theme. Hubenthal cast the US in the role of the powerful pitcher and the Viet Cong as a diminutive batter. The pitcher, ostensibly controlling the pace of play, stares down an implausibly short batter. This contrast played to American stereotypes of Southeast Asians while suggesting that the shrunken strike zone—identified with “guerilla tactics”—could be solved by approaching the war as an intellectual problem. Hubenthal’s cartoon heavily implied that North Vietnam’s anti-imperialist methods skirted established military rules and international norms that the US, presumably, abided by. In invoking a sporting motif that readers would recognize, the cartoon glibly suggested that “U.S. POWER” operated in a ruled-bound system that communists were subverting through deceit and deception. As a cartoonist for a conservative publication, this salutary take on Cold War-era US foreign policy conformed to his paper’s editorial line. Yet this

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<sup>31</sup> Bob Staake, “Truly A Master,” published on a website administered by Staake. The website contains Hubenthal’s 1966 *Quill* essay along with short essays from Staake describing Hubenthal’s aesthetics and cartooning style. [https://bobstaake.com/karl/hubenthal\\_importance.html](https://bobstaake.com/karl/hubenthal_importance.html) Accessed 15 November 2020.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

<sup>33</sup> Mullin was awarded the NCS’s “Sport Cartoonist of the Year” on multiple occasions in the 1950 and 1960s.

political alignment did not find its form through a clear-cut, top-down management style. By and large editorial cartoonists chose their own topics but from a circumscribed slate of subjects whose priority of importance was established in the newsroom.

In the early to mid-1960s the medium was rife with pro-war messages. Given editorial cartoonists' embeddedness within newsrooms, this was hardly surprising. Like reporters, columnists, and editorial writers, editorial cartoonists were situated in a media environment where the principle of objectivity had been the dominant paradigm for decades. By the late 1960s this ideal came under fire as American print journalism experienced a crisis in legitimacy.



### REDUCED STRIKE ZONE

Figure 4.3: An editorial cartoon accompanying Karl Hubenthal's essay in *The Quill*.

Source: Billy Ireland Cartoon Library and Museum, Ohio State University.

In an address to the Massachusetts Historical Society in 1971, *New York Times*' reporter Tom Wickers suggested that the press could mollify its critics from the left and the right with a return to muckraking traditions. He urged reporters to abandon the pretense of neutrality that positioned them as "professional recorders of accumulated facts and authorized views."<sup>34</sup> Editorial cartoonists who published regularly in mainstream dailies rarely questioned these "authorized views" and instead were integrated into a "routinized pattern of news production."<sup>35</sup> This paradigm continued to influence how events were covered throughout the postwar mediascape, as both radio and television relied on newspapers for news sources. Increasingly, it was from these information streams that editorial cartoonists found the news content for their images. The key difference was that while editorial writing staffs on large dailies had a division of labour according to areas of expertise, "the cartoonist," Hesse explained, had "to know something about everything."<sup>36</sup>

While both Hubenthal and Hesse wanted to puncture holes in the profession's mythology, they failed to stock of how editorial cartoonists arrived at the opinions they did. By their own admission, their job required them to be knowledgeable about a range of issues. This made them dependent on editorial writers, columnists, and foreign correspondents, most of whom formed their views on an interventionist US foreign policy during WWII and which hardened at the onset of the Cold War. Kathryn McGarr notes the Washington press corps accepted that the Cold War "necessitated certain wartime-like concessions." Even reporters who held misgivings about foreign policy justifications occasionally withheld public information in the name of national security. Open dissent was all but impossible since reporters had to file stories that were vetted "by layers of editors, publishers, producers, and executives, who . . . filtered out disagreement."<sup>37</sup> Editorial cartoonists bought into the prevailing mindset and were subject to the same layers of vetting as their print colleagues.

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<sup>34</sup> Quoted in Nicole Hammer, "From 'Faith in Facts' to 'Fair and Balanced,'" in *Media Nation: The Political History of News in America* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2017), 136.

<sup>35</sup> Keven G. Bamburst and John Nerone, *The Form of News: A History* (New York and London, The Guildford Press, 2001), 113.

<sup>36</sup> Hesse, "The Ungentlemanly Art," 17.

<sup>37</sup> Kathryn McGarr, "'We're All in This Thing Together,'" in *Media Nation*, 85.

Labouring on a daily print schedule also reduced their scope for nuance and context by forcing them to “render history on the run.”<sup>38</sup> These temporal and spatial dynamics made for reactive, rather than reflective, reporting. Like Hubenthal, many cartoonists cycled through several ideas before settling on a conceptual framing for a cartoon. To gauge how an idea might be received, they relied on feedback from colleagues. The whole point of their medium, as they saw it, was to create indelible images that communicated a message quickly and clearly. Nuance, they believed, was something columnists could indulge. But for editorial cartoonists, readers needed to understand their cultural references and symbolism. Hesse went so far to suggest that “dream[ing] up some new characters . . . would be like changing the basic design of the American flag.”<sup>39</sup> In effect, this meant the medium’s mainstream currents recapitulated a well-worn patriotism in ways that dovetailed with a Cold War ethic. In Hesse’s bifurcated worldview:

Every era of history has its bad guys and good guys. Tom Nast had his Tammany Hall . . . Rollin Kirby had Prohibition . . . Today we have gangsterism and hoodlumism in labor Unions. The Communist menace is real and threatens our very survival.<sup>40</sup>

Among the few notable progressive cartoonists in the postwar era who earned a reputation for dissent, liberal anticommunism remained a powerful pull. Bill Mauldin, for example, who championed progressive causes like civil rights at home, was more circumspect when it came to critiquing US policy abroad. Despite having developed an antiwar sensibility based on his personal experience of World War, the celebrated cartoonist sent mixed messages when it came to the Vietnam War. Mauldin, who had replaced the New Deal liberal Daniel Fitzpatrick at the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* in 1958 before moving to the *Chicago Sun-Times* in the 1960s, occasionally hinted in 1962 at his opposition to US involvement in South Vietnam. But as he admitted some years later, the inconsistency of his position on the war was his “biggest and longest goof.” Likewise, Mauldin also believed that other more liberal-leaning colleagues similarly pulled their punches, particularly when it came to criticizing the Democratic Party.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> Richard Kluger, *The Paper: The Life and Death of the New York Herald Tribune* (New York: Vintage Books, 1986), 119.

<sup>39</sup> Hesse, “The Ungentlemanly Art,” 7.

<sup>40</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>41</sup> Reflecting on his experience seeing John F. Kennedy’s Berlin speech, Mauldin told an interviewer: “Herblock blew it there. He was a huge Kennedy man. I went to Berlin with Kennedy in 1963 . . . [and] puked” after hearing the President’s famous address. Donald R. Katz, “Bill Mauldin: Drawing Fire,” *Rolling Stone* 4 November 1976.

In a 1977 article intended for the World Book Encyclopedia, Mauldin elaborated on how the medium's methods restrained social critique. In this revealing essay he described how earlier in his career, when he was still required to work at newspapers' offices, he usually ran "a rough sketch" past "a few reporters and editorial writers, a secretary, and a copy boy." The final concept typically only emerged following a range of newsroom interactions that made the final cartoon a product of many minds, whether credited or not.<sup>42</sup> Mauldin's elaboration on how this process worked is revealing however for its defence of the cartoonist's independence:

Based on all this input, the cartoonist is ready to speak his piece. I'm assuming, of course, that he wants to be an independent, not a hack at the service of his publisher or editor. . . [while] the editorial writer is presenting the viewpoint of the paper and its management. The cartoonist is producing signed work, and it should be his own.<sup>43</sup>

Mauldin's reflections brought into frame the social relations in which cartoonists operated, namely the interactive newsrooms where their ideas and drawings were first tested and materialized. Mauldin also echoed the widely held professional view that to avoid being "a hack," an editorial cartoonist needed to resist coercion. Producing "signed work" was an important professional principle that was interpreted by editorial cartoonists as meaning that opinions expressed in their images should articulate their personal viewpoint. But as Hubenthal observed, the opinions they generated were not unmediated. Importantly, editorial cartoonists worked dialogically, in conversation with news media rather than the public as such. In this piece Mauldin noted the importance of his own media consumption in helping spark his creative ideas. While watching the evening news or listening to a radio broadcast, Mauldin would often jot down ideas for the next day's cartoon. Other cartoonists in this era described how their conceptual ideas developed from their reading of news coverage. Notable for his candor, Mauldin, nonetheless occasionally succumbed to a romanticized ideal of the profession by arguing that "political cartoonists proliferate in times of upheaval, suffering, and tyranny." But he qualified this claim by suggesting that an editorial cartoonist on staff with a newspaper was "not so much that of a destroyer as of a gadfly."<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> Bill Mauldin, "Cartoons with a Conscience," *AAEC News*, vol 18, no. 4 (1977). The article was later reprinted in the 1978 World Book Encyclopedia.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*

Mauldin was acutely aware of how consumerism and media advertising had influenced readers over the years. “Gone are the innocent, gullible readers of Nast’s day,” Mauldin lamented. In their stead were “customers” whose “intelligence and sense of humor” were harder to satiate than audiences in the late nineteenth century. While Mauldin restated the oft-repeated claim that humor offered “the best way to cope with grim situations,” earlier in his career he expressed doubts about the potential for satire in American cartooning. At the peak of his fame in the early 1960s, the two-time Pulitzer winner described his job “to jar, shake, needle people out of their fat headedness” but he also wondered how effectively irony roused Americans.<sup>45</sup>

Hubenthal quoted this Mauldin line in his 1966 essay. Just as Mauldin would a decade later, Hubenthal wanted to “puncture” a few holes in the “popular conception” of the profession. Countering the image of cartoonists as “zany talents,” the former AAEC president argued that this image persisted alongside similar archetypes of “the drunken reporter and the tyrannical city editor.” As the veteran cartoonist explained, “the pressures of daily print deadlines inhibit any flamboyant behavior.” To drive home his point, Hubenthal declared that “the mere mechanics of the job leaves little time for screwball antics.”<sup>46</sup>

Hubenthal’s descriptions still fit within the parameters of the newsroom. In principle, cartoonists could work anywhere, however, just as Mauldin discovered. Writing a decade later, Mauldin shed light on how telecommunications technology had altered his work habits in the mid-1970s. As he explained:

For the past few years, I have carried with me a telecopier machine about the size of a portable typewriter, which transmits and receives written copy and drawings over the telephone. Usually, I prefer to mail drawings to my office at the *Chicago Sun-Times* because they lose some quality when transmitted by machine. But the telecopier saves my day when events are moving too fast or the mail is too slow. . . through this device, the office can send me details of news stories when I need them and, in an emergency, can even transmit photographs of individuals whose faces I can’t remember.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> John Kuenster, “The Responsible Editorial Cartoonist,” March 1961, pp. 9-13 and 48. Box AAEC 1, folder 10, BICLM.

<sup>46</sup> Hubenthal, “Reflections of an Editorial Cartoonist,” *The Quill*, 20.

<sup>47</sup> Mauldin, “Cartoons with a Conscience,” *AAEC News*.

Mauldin's work habits were far from standard. As the AAEC's survey of editors in the early 1960s indicated, most staff cartoonists were required to work onsite.<sup>48</sup> This remained the dominant model even after syndication had opened a portal to the possibility of alternative working arrangements. The same improvements in telecommunications that permitted syndicates to promise same-day delivery did, however, slowly detach cartoonists from traditional work settings. But the industry's adherence to tradition ensured old models overlapped with new ones, which recalls Fredric Jameson's insight that "no mode of production exists in any pure state."<sup>49</sup>

Nonetheless, in the late 1960s and 1970s work was changing. Like other American workers, the long transition to a post-Fordist economy would eventually dislocate editorial cartoonists from stable employment structures altogether. But like other media commentators, American postwar prosperity appeared as "something boundless" within the temporal logics of homogenous, empty time.<sup>50</sup> As Benjamin recognized, newspapers contributed to this sense of progress by conveying "information by sensation."<sup>51</sup> Editorial cartoons added to this sensory appeal by drawing from the same sources of opinion that they were ostensibly supposed to critique. Working in a dependent art form discouraged critical perspectives. Mainstream cartoonists by and large accepted this arrangement. As Jameson observed, "future models of production are also at work in the present and can be detected most visibly in the various local forms of class struggle."<sup>52</sup> But detection would have required looking, which would have meant observing events, and how they were processed, from a different vantage point altogether.

### **Where Are the Workers?**

Through their single-minded emphasis on what made "the ungentlemanly art" unique, editorial cartoonists completely missed the point that what they had in common with American labour was that they, too, were workers. Likewise, their relative silence about adjacent class struggles in American mass media signified both a division that cleaved above-the-line from below-the-line media workers. As Jim McGuigan describes, the privileging of the creative artist above other cultural workers obscures how "even the lonely poet . . . is dependent on the labour of others."<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> "Confidential Questionnaire for Association of American Editorial Cartoonists," Box AAEC 1, folder 9, BICLM.

<sup>49</sup> Fredric Jameson, "Marxism and Historicism," *New Literary History* 2, no. 1 (1979): 41-73.

<sup>50</sup> Walter Benjamin, "Theses on the Philosophy of History," in *Illuminations*, thesis #8, 205.

<sup>51</sup> Walter Benjamin, "On Some Motifs in Baudelaire," in *Illuminations*, 107.

<sup>52</sup> Jameson, "Marxism and Historicism," 68.

<sup>53</sup> Jim McGuigan, "Creative Labour, Cultural Work, and Individualisation," *International Journal of Cultural Policies* 16, no. 3 (2010): 323-335.

Scholars of cartoon art have described labour issues as being a muted topic in the period's political cartoons.<sup>54</sup> Compared to foreign policy, domestic labour issues did indeed figure less frequently than in previous eras, but they were by no means absent. When workers were represented, the results suggested a class consciousness at odds with other cultural workers whose workplace struggles had been formative. Much of this had to do with a mindset that considered labour agitation as “unprofessional.” No doubt this view was reinforced by a general belief that being a “public opinion swayer” meant not being tainted by labour agitation.<sup>55</sup>

Despite many cartoonists working at unionized newspapers, the profession as a whole remained aloof from this labour organizing in the late 1930s and 1940s. As Shannan Clark has recently described, the domestic Cold War atmosphere tempered drives to organize cultural workers. Unions like the Newspaper Guild purged their leadership ranks of radicals and “fellow travelers,” many of whom were the most experienced organizers. By the early 1950s, Clark notes, most white-collar unions “had adjusted to the political imperatives of the Cold War.”<sup>56</sup> The AAEC exemplified this labour compromise. The Association also took form at a point when many commentators were rethinking work in an era of mass planning and mass production. For these observers, white-collar workers experienced various degrees of alienation.

Strikingly, when describing their working selves in the 1950s and 1960s, editorial cartoonists registered aspects of a larger discussion that sought to reconcile the antimonies between work and play. Critics ranging from North American sociologists and management theorists to the Frankfurt School, shared a belief that modern work had become alienating. As Brouillette argues, beginning in the mid-1940s, management theorists such as Abraham Maslow, looked to artists as “models of contentedly flexible and self-managed workers.”<sup>57</sup> Maslow, who designed the hierarchy of human needs in his best-selling *Motivation and Personality* (1954), viewed “self-actualization” as an innate humanistic desire for finding creative expression through work. Whereas critical theorists viewed aesthetics as a potential site for collective transformation, management theorists, saw artists as “straightforward evidence that the social is a form of constraint to be transcended by the effective working self.”<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> See the introduction to this study for a full discussion of how scholars have framed the “lack” of labor cartoons.

<sup>55</sup> Cliff Rogerson, NCS Newsletter, 12 August 1957, Box NCS 1, folder 41, BICLM.

<sup>56</sup> For more on anticommunism, see Clark, “The Cold War in New York’s Culture Industries,” *The Making of the American Creative Class*, chapter six, 244-292.

<sup>57</sup> Sarah Brouillette, *Literature and the Creative Economy* (CA: Stanford University Press, 2014), 2.

<sup>58</sup> Brouillette, *Literature and the Creative Economy*, 56.

Management theory's focus on individual self-fulfillment aligned with many precepts of North American sociology. Concurrent to this discourse on creativity, the term "alienation" entered popular usage. Marcello Musto has traced the concept's genealogy from Marx's early writings in the mid-1840s to the mid-twentieth century when it underwent a "veritable distortion" across academic disciplines, including psychology, psychoanalysis, existential philosophy, and sociology.<sup>59</sup> By 1957 the *American Sociological Review* was featuring peer-reviewed studies purportedly measuring degrees of alienation in various sectors of society. Several years later American sociologist Robert Blaumer located alienation "in the large-scale organizations and impersonal bureaucracies that pervade all industrial societies."<sup>60</sup> Yet American sociology studies stressed the subjective qualities of alienation, and thus "reduced [the concept] to a phenomenon of individual maladjustment to social norms."<sup>61</sup>

Writers on the anti-Stalinist left took a different approach to alienation. In his classic 1941 work, *Escape from Freedom*, Fromm celebrated artistic production but acknowledged that "only the successful artist whose individuality or spontaneity is respected" can hope to achieve an un-alienated life. Fromm built on these themes in *The Sane Society* (1955) where he further developed the idea that a pervasive "marketing personality" had fostered a "pathology of normalcy" that had penetrated to the core of social and psychic life. Several years later he would conclude that the proletariat was no longer the most alienated class: "the clerk, the salesman, the executive, are even more alienated today than the skilled manual laborer."<sup>62</sup>

These ideas were not confined to the literati or cloistered academic circles. Like Fromm, Fritz Pappenheim, another German émigré and American transplant, gave frequent public talks. Pappenheim saw his work as an attempt to identify and overcome the sources of modern alienation. After escaping fascists in Nazi Germany, then later Spain, in the 1930s, Pappenheim eventually emigrated to the US where he became a victim of an anti-communist witch hunt while teaching in the American South. Like many critical theorists of his generation, Pappenheim's encounters with fascism and Cold War America proved formative, but they did not lead to him to a hopelessly pessimistic conclusion about the possibilities for radical social transformation.

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<sup>59</sup> For more on how the concept of alienation was received and interpreted in mid-twentieth century thought, see Marcello Musto, "Revisiting Marx's Concept of Alienation," *Socialism and Democracy* 24, no. 3 (2010): 79-101.

<sup>60</sup> Robert Blauner, *Alienation and Freedom* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1964), 15.

<sup>61</sup> Musto, "Revisiting Marx's Concept of Alienation," 94.

<sup>62</sup> Erich Fromm, *Marx's Concept of Man* (New York: Frederick Ungar, 1961), 56-57.

In his study of postwar pathologies Pappenheim began with an anecdote of a recent magazine contest that called for amateur photographers to submit photos of “freshest on-the-spot news.”<sup>63</sup> One of the prize-winning photos showed a car crash victim in her final moments before death. For Pappenheim, the amateur photographer who captured this scene responded in a way that was symptomatic of a wider social malaise. While addressing a group of university students at a conference promoting socialism in 1964, he elaborated on his narrative choice:

the photographer symbolized for me the attitude of the alienated man who, possessed by a need to turn every experience into an object, a tool for attaining his ends can ask only one question when he comes face to face with an event or a human being: “What’s in it for me?” And this spirit of calculation remains even in the very face of death.<sup>64</sup>

For critical theorists the promotion of consumerism and a middle-class lifestyle in mass media encouraged aspiring professionals to disassociate themselves from their wider social context as they pursued career advancement. Reaching for a suitable analogy, Pappenheim compared the magazine photo contest with a Goya etching which depicted a woman trying to filch the teeth of a hanged man because she believed they possessed magical powers. While their motives differed — Goya’s fictional character was driven by superstition while the amateur photographer was motivated by a desire for success — Pappenheim noted disturbing parallels. This analogy sat uneasily with the realities of what drew artists to contemporary cultural work: many creative workers, for one, enjoyed it. Bereft of any patronage networks to materially sustain them, most artists had to become entrepreneurs if they wanted to secure a greater measure of artistic autonomy. But whether they worked in the culture industry or were self-employed, market dependency remained a common reality. This dilemma raised the question if alienated cultural labourers could attain a de-alienated creative life through work. Whereas Marx had “rooted [alienation] historically in a certain structure of production and social relations,” the concept, by the mid-twentieth century, had become more diffuse, signaling a generalized state of suspension experienced subjectively.<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>63</sup> Fritz Pappenheim, *The Alienation of Modern Man: An Interpretation Based on Marx and Tönnies* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1959), 11-12.

<sup>64</sup> Fritz Pappenheim, “Alienation in American Society,” republished in *Monthly Review* 52, no. 2 (June 2000). This paper originally presented at the Yale student conference “Socialism in America” in 1964.

<sup>65</sup> Marcello Musto, *Another Marx: Early Manuscripts to the International*, trans. Patrick Camiller (London, UK: Bloomsbury, 2018), 37-38.

In creative work alienation and de-alienation exist in tension with other. Cultural workers operate in what Stahl describes as a state of “doubleness” whereby they model forms of subjectivity that hold mass appeal while simultaneously being subject to strictures that limit their autonomy. In contractual terms, they are often “free to generate new material and unfree when it comes to the labor and intellectual property covered by the contract.” Celebrating authenticity, autonomy, and agency in the absence of structural analysis, Stahl argues, misses how the “legal arrangements” that determine ownership in the culture industry cultivate “stable structures of authority and subordination.”<sup>66</sup>

This state of “doubleness” described many cartoonists’ situation. Like most workers, editorial cartoonists did not control their labour time. During business hours, they produced by the clock. After hours, they produced more, and in this, they were different. Many, no doubt, were more than content to devote time to their passion. But because the vast majority of them did not own the rights to their cartoons, they had little recourse to prevent editors from “mutilating” their images other than collective pushback. Within the ambit of postwar capital-labour relations, this appeared an unlikely prospect, especially for middle-class professionals like themselves who comfortably embraced the era’s palpable anti-union attitudes.

These contradictions reflected the tensions of postwar liberalism as much as it did a crisis in the inability of cartoonists to organize *en masse*. In the newspaper industry, militant strands of labour organizing thrived among below-the-line workers such as printers. The 114-day New York printers strike that unfolded over 1962-63 represented one of the most high-profile postwar newspaper strikes. After resuming publication, a *New York Times* editorial described the far-reaching effects of the strike beyond the metropolitan New York area by noting its impact on radio, television, and newspapers which still depended on the New York press for syndicated content. Because of the lengthy strike, the *Times* claimed, American citizens were “forced to live in a fog” which was “dangerous” for “a democratic, free-labor, free-enterprise society.”<sup>67</sup>

The strike was sparked by fears that automation in newspaper production would replace printers and result in a dramatic reshuffling of the metropolitan area’s newspaper market. For above-the-line workers such as cartoonists, automation posed less a threat. When the strike was

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<sup>66</sup> Stahl, *Unfree Masters*, 3.

<sup>67</sup> Editorial, “The Strike Is Over,” *New York Times*, 1 April 1963. Nearly 20,000 print workers were directly impacted by the strike as well as 7 million readers in the metropolitan New York region. The *Times* editorial also claimed the “one twelfth of the population” of the US was “deprived” of “its daily newspaper fare.”

over, a number of prominent strips announced their return to the Sunday “funny” pages after a three-month absence. Yet despite having a media platform to make a statement on the strike, cartooning’s professional societies remained deafeningly silent.<sup>68</sup>

Some prominent editorial cartoonists like John Stampone were supportive of moderate craft unionism. During WWII Clifford Berryman also expressed his preference for a form of labour organizing that would not interfere with defense production. In a cartoon that appeared before the United States entered the conflict, Berryman showed the Greek god of war, Hermes, fused into the body of Uncle Sam. With the label “national defense” pasted on the Uncle Sam-Hermes hybrid, Berryman pictured the two conjoined figures being restrained by a ball and chain labeled “strikes.” The other figure in this cartoon, representing Congress, was shown holding the tools that would allow the Uncle Sam-Hermes hybrid to break free.<sup>69</sup>

Conservative cartoonists like Bruce Russell adopted a more outwardly reactionary perspective. One of the AAEC’s most active participants, Russell won the 1946 Pulitzer Prize for a cartoon that showed a stoic eagle, feathered with the stars and stripes, facing off against a bear emblazoned with the hammer and sickle. The animals were shown perched on opposite sides of a cliff. In between loose pieces of paper labelled “irresponsible statements” and “deepening suspicion” drifted ominously. The caption read: “Time to Bridge the Gulch.”<sup>70</sup>

That same month, Russell commented on the legendary “Battle of Burbank” strike at Warner Brothers Studios. During the strike studio boss Jack Warner, whose reputation as one of Hollywood’s leading liberals, personally oversaw the strikebreaking operations. As the strike escalated, the studio lot hoses were turned against members of the Conference of Studio Unions (CSU). Animation cartoonists and some Hollywood stars countered with vocal support for the striking CSU members. According to cartoonist and labour activist Tom Sito, the Screen Cartoonists Guild Local 852 was “a proud pillar” of CSU. After Warner Bros called on the support of local police, public opinion shifted in support of the striking workers. As Sito

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<sup>68</sup> Within the AAEC’s internal correspondence, newspapers strikes are rarely referenced. For a discussion of newspaper strikes in general. For more on how the New York printers strike impacted journalists, see Scott Sherman, “The Long Goodbye,” *Vanity Fair*, 30 November 2012 <https://www.vanityfair.com/culture/2012/11/1963-newspaper-strike-bertram-powers> Accessed 1 January 2021

<sup>69</sup> Clifford K. Berryman, “Something Seems to be Holding Me Back,” *Washington Star*, 31 January 1941.

<sup>70</sup> Bruce Russell, “Time to Bridge the Gulch,” *Los Angeles Times* 30 November 1945.

recounts, most local newspapers “openly favored” the CSU. The staunchly conservative *Los Angeles Times* was an exception<sup>71</sup>

Russell echoed this editorial line in a cartoon showing Uncle Sam confronting a brutish figure labelled “Big Labor.” The cartoon’s caption – “Which Union?”— appeared at a time when many Americans were anxious about converting the wartime economy to peacetime production. Russell gave vent to these anxieties, and as a former sports cartoonist, juxtaposed two seemingly equal choices, which suggested to readers that they needed to pick a side. But his Warner Bros. strike cartoon made no visual attempt to nuance the issue. In essence, the cartoon pitted worker solidarity against patriotism, anticipating the red-baiting climate to follow.

Russell’s anti-unionism was in stark contrast to animation cartoonists who supported the CSU during the “Battle of Burbank.” For animation cartoonists their negative experiences with studio bosses informed their class perspective. In 1941 Walt Disney had accused communists of infiltrating his staff of cartoonists. Disney erroneously claimed that “Communitic agitation, leadership, and activities” were responsible for sowing discord among his workers.<sup>72</sup> One explanation for cartoonists’ varying responses to labour questions may have stemmed from their contrasting work settings. While animation cartoonists laboured in teams, editorial cartoonists worked mainly with journalists, editors, and secretarial staff. Many editorial cartoonists reported feeling isolated by this newsroom culture. Others, though, refused to take on additional work apart from their daily cartoon. Hesse recalled a colleague who quit his newspaper after being asked to help in the art department. This aggrieved response indicated that for some editorial cartoonists, the position entailed specialized responsibilities.<sup>73</sup>

Outside the field of animation, American cartoonists alternated between indifference to labour organizing or outright hostility. The latter was vividly displayed in the twenty-eight-page booklet called *The Cartoonist and Your Right to Work*. While not officially endorsed by the AAEC, its high-profile members were contributors. The booklet was commissioned by the arch-conservative National Right to Work Committee. Established in 1955 as a “nonprofit and nonpartisan,” national organization committed to fighting “compulsory unionism,” the Committee’s modus operandi was built on a fierce defence of the Taft-Hartley Act (1947).

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<sup>71</sup> Tom Sito, *Drawing the Line: The Untold Story of the American Unions from Bosko to Bart Simpson* (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 2006), 166.

<sup>72</sup> For more on the strike, see Sito, “The Great Disney Studio Strike,” in *Drawing the Line*, 101-152.

<sup>73</sup> Hesse, “The Ungentlemanly Art,” 18.

In the mid-1960s the Committee mobilized to counter congressional efforts to repeal Taft-Hartley's notorious Section 14 (b) "right-to-work" clause. In June of that year Democratic Senator Pat McNamara of Michigan had introduced legislation to repeal the clause. McNamara's proposed legislation passed in the House but died in the Senate during the fall session. In 1966 the Committee, anticipating a renewed repeal effort from Democrats in an election year, ramped up its public campaign by enlisting editorial cartoonists.<sup>74</sup> The resulting booklet featured many of the familiar symbols, figures, and motifs of an iconography that was first in the late nineteenth century when anti-monopoly sentiments were high. In *The Cartoonist and Your Right to Work* these symbols were put to opposite effect. As Nick Durenfurth and Marian Quarly have shown in their study of Australia's labour press, Australian cartoonists borrowed heavily from both British and American sources. In all three print cultures the "Mr. Fat Man" character, which personify capitalists, circulated as early as the 1880s. But the character fell out of favor in the US.<sup>75</sup>

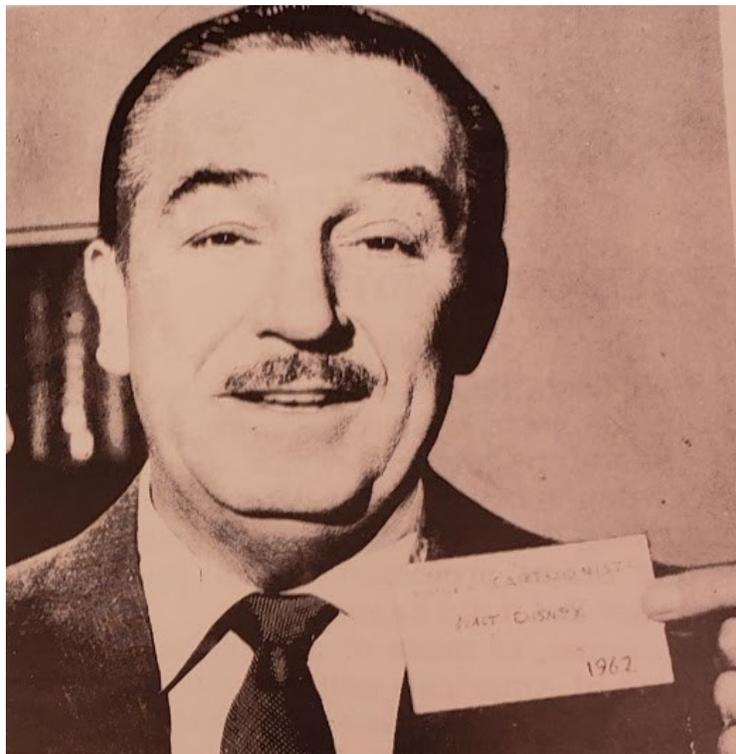


Figure 4.4: Walt Disney holding his AAEC membership card. Photo in *AAEC News*, May 1962.

Source: Billy Ireland Cartoon Library and Museum, Ohio State University.

<sup>74</sup> *The Cartoonist and Your Right to Work* booklet can be found in the correspondence related to the AAEC's 1965 convention in Washington, D.C. See Box AAEC 1, folder 16, BICLM.

<sup>75</sup> Nick Durenfurth and Marian Quartly, "All the World Over": The Transnational World of Australian Radical and Labour Cartoonists, 1880s to 1920," in *Drawing the Line*, Richard Scully ed. (Monash University Press, 2009), ch.6.

The 1966 propaganda pamphlet displayed this anti-labour legacy, while advancing an attenuated notion of individual liberties threatened by collective rights. Notably, many vocal civil rights supporters, such as Bill Saunders and Art Poinier, were contributors. The general libertarian sway of editorial cartoonists also included well-known conservatives. The *Chicago Tribune*'s cartoonist Ed Holland pictured a cigar-chomping "labor boss" sitting astride a decapitated Statue of Liberty labeled "right to work" as he jackhammers through Lady Liberty's headless, marbled body.<sup>76</sup> Other cartoons echoed the pamphlet's propagandistic refrain by conveying what appeared to them as a horrifying idea, namely the eventual unionization of all workers. The public was likewise represented by way of the "average Joe." The *Nashville Banner*'s Jack Knox depicted this everyman being accosted by an angry mob holding placards that screamed "Liberals for Rights!" while the frightened worker clutches a "right to work" scrap of paper and cowers from the rabid protesters.<sup>77</sup>

Other images played on a fear of "big labor" by rendering union officials and their congressional allies as grotesque, conniving figures. In a section titled, "The Union Boss Demands Compulsion," a cartoon from Len Borozinski of the *Oregon Standard-Examiner* showed a slothful figure representing "labor leaders" sitting on a throne watching LBJ and his vice-president Hubert Humphrey dance before him. Borozinski's image recalled the righteous anger bursting forth from Nast's Boss Tweed cartoons that portrayed the Tammany Boss as an indolent, corrupt figure. But in Borozinski's rendering the power dynamics were reversed as union representatives were the ones portrayed as part of the corrupt elite.<sup>78</sup>

Vaughn Shoemaker, who in the 1930s famously refined the John Q. Public character, equated efforts to repeal Taft-Hartley's section 14 (b) with unaccountable federal authority. In his cartoon, captioned "Down to His Shorts," Shoemaker played to the prejudices of states' rights advocates. Choosing a rigged poker game for his visual metaphor, he showed a character representing the federal government fleecing a near-naked "right to work" advocate and a "states' rights" player who is presumably naked, having lost the clothing on his back.<sup>79</sup>

The Committee sprinkled its anti-union message with quotes from newspaper editorials. Next to Temple's cartoon of an embattled "average Joe" appeared a quote from the *Chicago*

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<sup>76</sup> Ed Holland, "I Got My Rights!" *The Cartoonist and Your Right to Work*, 3.

<sup>77</sup> Jack Knox, "The Heal of a Tyrant," *The Cartoonist and Your Right to Work*, 6.

<sup>78</sup> Len Borozinski, "Command Performance: Dancing Away Freedoms," *The Cartoonist and Your Right to Work*, 13.

<sup>79</sup> Vaughn Shoemaker, "Down To His Shorts," in *The Cartoonist and Your Right to Work*, 11.

*Daily News*: “Few things in life are more basic than the right of an individual to choose the method by which he earns his livelihood.” Elsewhere in the pamphlet the *Daily News* proclaimed that “the American system of individual freedom” was under attack. In a lengthy section, the Committee heralded editorial cartoonists’ ability to shape public opinion:

The nation’s political cartoonists are makers of, as well as reflectors of, public opinion. The editorial page cartoon is an institution of American newspapers. With a few strokes of the pen the cartoonist can sketch an eye-opening description of any currently popular issue. On the issue of voluntary versus compulsory unionism the editorial cartoonists are virtually unanimous in their support of the individual’s freedom of choice. Their cartoons serve as another measure of public opinion that has overwhelmingly shown that Americans want 14 (b) preserved.<sup>80</sup>

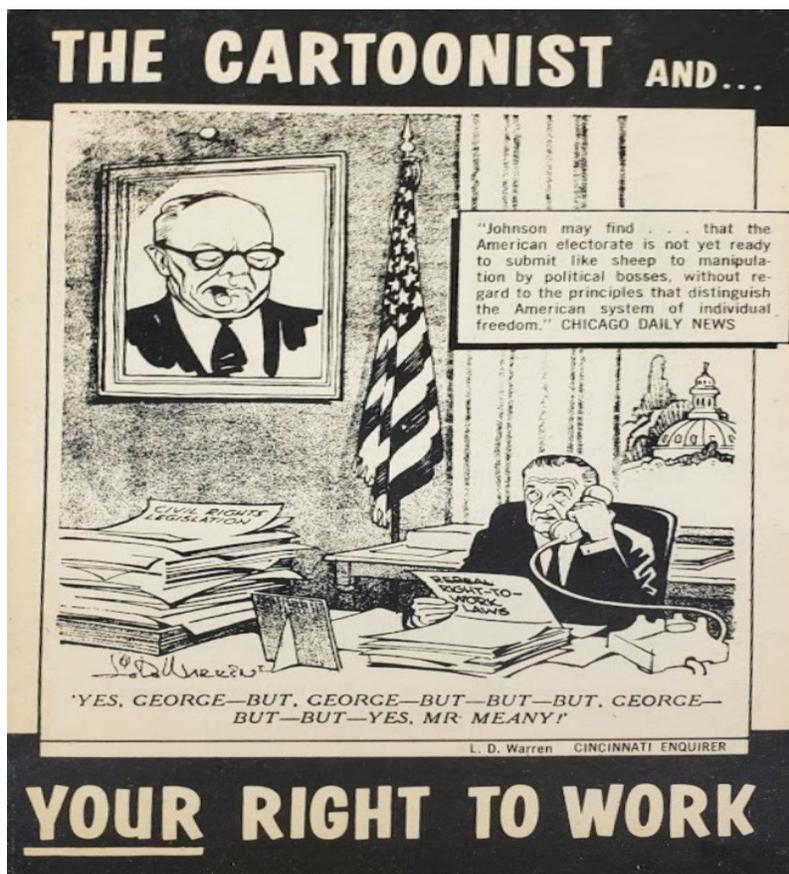


Figure 4.5: Cover of *The Cartoonist and the Right to Work* booklet, 1966.

Source: Billy Ireland Cartoon Library and Museum, Ohio State University.

<sup>80</sup> Quoted in *The Cartoonist and the Right to Work*, 2.

The Committee's campaign recognized that building a public consensus required communication. Its savvy enlistment of cartoons camouflaged its message in humorous, patriotic hues. The juxtaposition of "big labor" with the "little guy" attacked liberal politicians who supported the repeal effort. This evinced a deeper, more troubling, trend in American politics that represented a growing conservative backlash against the welfare state. Later that year Ronald Reagan would win election as California Governor. What Stuart Hall would later call "the great moving right show" at the dawn of the Thatcher and Reagan era, had been building since the mid-1960.<sup>81</sup> As Kim Phillips-Fein has shown, American business groups such as the National Manufacturing Association (NMA) had undertaken a political project to turn back the gains of the New Deal long before the culture wars of the 1970s and 1980s flared.<sup>82</sup>

Whether or not editorial cartoonists were immediately prescient to the rise of the New Right, many of their images played into the growing distrust of government that became a feature of the emerging neoliberalism. Moreover, their appropriation of visual signifiers used to denote corrupt public figures revealed the form's malleability. Anticommunism's long cultural reach also played its part. In a cartoon by L.D. Warren workers were shown chained to each other. This image did not express a critique of capitalism; in the minds of readers, it likely signaled a connection between "big labor" and totalitarianism.<sup>83</sup> These visual tropes were deployed to pit "compulsory unionism" in opposition to the "American way of life." Despite the Committee's clear conservative agenda, Mike Davis points out that postwar liberals saw collective bargaining as being "[a]dministrated by a priestly order of arbitrators, mediators and conciliators."<sup>84</sup> This made efforts to repeal Taft-Hartley vulnerable to conservatives who seized on the contradictory perception that unions were either controlled by "gangsterism" or aloof managerial elites. Either way, this labour perspective was dated as much it was distorted.

As the printers recognized in the lead-up to the 1962-63 strike, automation and mobile capital posed far greater threats to American labour in these years. On this point the booklet betrayed a general confusion about what had made the postwar Keynesian economy so robust. The long postwar boom was built on high taxation, high defense spending, and a favorable trade

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<sup>81</sup> Stuart Hall, "The Great Moving Right Show," *Marxism Today*, January 1979.

<sup>82</sup> See, for example, Kim Phillips Fein, *Invisible Hands: The Making of the Conservative Movement From the New Deal to Reagan* (New York and London: W.W. & Norton Company, 2011).

<sup>83</sup> L.D. Warren, "We Love a Parade," *The Cartoonist and Your Right to Work*, 4.

<sup>84</sup> Mike Davis, *Prisoners of the American Dream: Politics and Economy in the History of the U.S. Working Class*, (New York and London: Verso, 2018), 131.

climate for American manufacturers that was backed by US military might. The emergence of the rebuilt economies in Japan and Germany, along with de-industrialization and the Vietnam War, would upend American economic life. Signs of this transformation were already visible, if one cared to look beyond a national framing that for the moment remained deeply anti-worker.

Most cartoonists did not register democratization of the workplace as part of their democratic ideal. For the economically secure among them, professionalism conceived class struggle as “unprofessional.” What this perspective failed to register was that “time freed from the realm of necessity,” as Werner Bonefeld describes, “is the very content of life.”<sup>85</sup> Not all cartoonists were fortunate to create outside the realm of necessity. For those precariously employed, the passageway to de-alienation was both present and absent at the same time.

### **Debased Currency and Humour as Hegemony**

As a daily print format, editorial cartooning was a venue well suited to renewing and renegotiating the shifts in postwar hegemony. Political humour, as opposed to critical satire, supplemented the Cold War consensus on two levels: for one, in America’s Cold War cultural imaginary Russian characters were often portrayed as joyless automatons driven by ideology and blind to human happiness. This one-dimensional characterization marked a sharp contrast from the variegated ways that Germans were portrayed in American mass culture during WWII.<sup>86</sup> Secondly, in a highly developed mediascape, the visual shock of caricature had become muted, which is one reason why Scott Long believed editorial cartoonists should focus on saying “something significant and serious about the world.”<sup>87</sup> But not all his colleagues agreed with this view. “We have discovered,” Hesse had earlier explained, “that when you boot a culprit in the seat of his pants it is often more effective if you laugh while you do it.”<sup>88</sup> More often than not, this approach involved accentuating a subject’s physical appearance for humorous effect. This visual technique did not pack the same punch as it had during Nast’s day, since public figures had become widely known through intense media exposure. Cartooning’s critics tended to neglect this historical change, and instead chided American cartoonists for being timid.

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<sup>85</sup> Werner Bonefeld, “Abstract Labour: Against its Nature and on its Time,” *Capital & Class* 34, no.2 (May 2010): 257-276.

<sup>86</sup> For more on how the Nazis were portrayed in film comedies, see Brandon Webb, “‘Hitler Must Be Laughed At!’: The PCA, Propaganda, and the Perils of Parody during Wartime,” *Historical Journal of Film, Radio, and Television* 39, no. 4 (2019): 749-767.

<sup>87</sup> Long, “Writing Editorials With a Brush,” 508-511.

<sup>88</sup> Hesse, “The Ungentlemanly Art,” 17.

At the AAEC's 1960 convention in Atlanta, invited guest speaker, British journalist, Ian Ratiu, expressed a similar sentiment by way of comparison. Describing trends in Europe, Ratiu touched on the staidness of the classic editorial cartoon form as practiced in America:

There is a trend in European cartoons towards more simplicity, fewer words and titles, a more direct visual approach, and more humor. Dramatic cartoons are on the way out because they simply state a fact. The cartoonists must be critical rather than applaud, and the cartoon must spring from inner conviction. Humor sharpens a point so that it is retained better by the reader, and humor comes from paradox and from absurdity, not just a funny situation. Cartoons must invent new symbols and avoid old clichés because they are “debased currency” in the modern world.<sup>89</sup>

At the AAEC's 1965 convention in Washington, Boyd Lewis, then president of the NEA syndicate, addressed these concerns as part of a panel that included Herbert Block as well as a communications scholar teaching editorial cartooning. *Editor & Publisher* reported that Lewis told his audience that the medium “hasn't changed much in 40 years” and needed reinvention. In reference to a cartoon exhibit that the AAEC displayed in the hotel's foyer, Lewis lamented the lack of originality in the drawings and went so far as to proclaim: “It's time to retire a lot of clichés we've been using . . . If editorial cartoons stay in a rut, they are going to fade, to be replaced by such things as photographs.” The syndicate executive implored cartoonists to search for “the subtle idea” in order to reach readers looking for more “sophisticated humor.”<sup>90</sup>

Gene Graham, a lecturer in the Communications Department at the University of Illinois, joined Lewis in criticizing the profession's existing practices. Graham urged his audience to “quit trying so hard to get reproduced in national journals” and reconsider topics that focused more on the state and local levels. Graham, who was preparing to teach a course on editorial cartooning, said that after completion of the course he would “try to find a place for these young men.” As a former cartoonist and cartoon editor, Graham ended by noting his belief that editorial cartoonists “must be editorialists first, cartoonists second.”<sup>91</sup>

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<sup>89</sup> Quoted in Scott Long, “Convention is Challenge to New Ideas, Achievement,” *AAEC News*, vol. 2, no. 1 (June 1960), pp. 3. Box AAEC 1, folder 7, BICLM.

<sup>90</sup> Rick Friedman, “American Editorial Cartoonists Told to Modernize Their Styles,” *Editor & Publisher* 22 May 1965, pp. 13-14. Box AAEC 1, folder 15, BICLM.

<sup>91</sup> Friedman, “American Editorial Cartoonists Told to Modernize Their Styles,” 13.

As the third speaker on this panel, Block echoed his co-panelists' views on the importance of local commentary. All three panelists agreed that newspapers were now seeking local content to publish alongside syndicated cartoons that were geared towards national and international topics. Most newspapers, the panelists reported, were looking to strike a balance between local and national themes. Block also noted that cartoonists on small circulating dailies had an opportunity to fill a content gap. *The Post* cartoonist told the AAEC audience: "Local cartoons are something that I can't do . . . And it's something every newspaper wants."<sup>92</sup>

Conventions, which were typically sponsored by corporations or newspapers, provided a space for less experienced cartoonists to find out about industry trends. It was telling, that among the speakers that addressed annual AAEC gatherings, no satirists were invited as guest speakers. Instead, politicians, journalists, and editors filled the main speaking slots. These invitations reflected a desire to reclaim some agency denied to them elsewhere in their working lives.

The AAEC's desire to be seen as a serious forum in print media led them at times to filter out ethical concerns from their convention organizing. This resulted in some questionable choices for invited speakers over the years. At the AAEC's convention in New Orleans in 1964, Alabama Governor George Wallace addressed the group. The *Birmingham News* reported that the segregationist was amiable with his hosts, who reciprocated by drawing light-hearted caricatures of the governor.<sup>93</sup> Inviting speakers like Wallace did not necessarily signal broad ideological agreement; rather, it reflected AAEC members' willingness to hear "both sides" of an issue. This ideological perspective ran deep in American culture and found its most fulsome expression in elegies about the civic traditions of print journalism. Sometimes this ideal could yield absurd ideas. Carey Orr once suggested at an AAEC business meeting that the Association would be well served by hearing Wallace debate with Martin Luther King Jr. Orr's extreme and naïve faith in "the marketplace of ideas" was shared by many of his colleagues. In the 1980s, when an entirely different AAEC leadership ran the organization, the Association reached out to the ambassador of South Africa, inviting him to speak at an upcoming convention to give his perspective on apartheid.<sup>94</sup>

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<sup>92</sup>Friedman, "American Editorial Cartoonists Told to Modernize Their Styles," 14.

<sup>93</sup> For more on this convention, see Box AAEC 1, folder 11, BICLM.

<sup>94</sup> Andy Donato in letter to Herbert Gilschrist, South African Ambassador, 21 January 1986. AAEC Pres 2, BICLM.

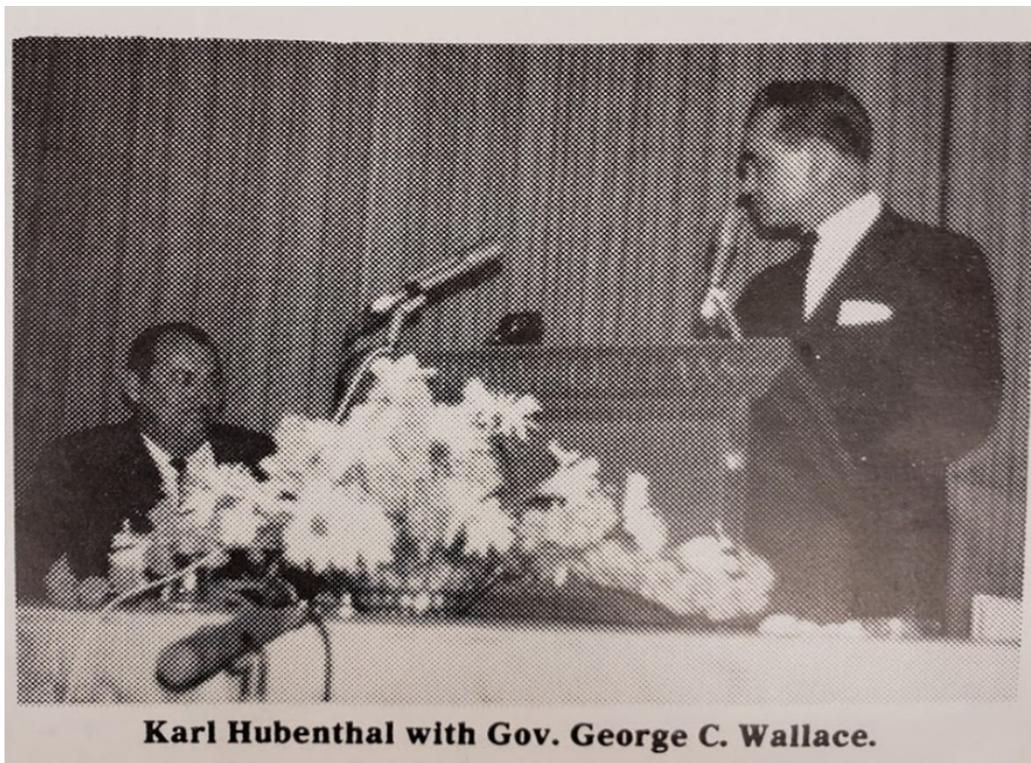


Figure 4.6: George Wallace Addressing the AAEC in New Orleans, 1964.

Source: Billy Ireland Cartoon Library and Museum, Ohio State University.

By focusing on the political arena as the site for public debate, conventions reinforced a professional norm that viewed the practice of politics from above. This thematic focus suggested to readers that social change was initiated and carried out by their elected public figures alone. The art of caricature was central to this messaging. For cartoonists, caricature was a technique honed through practice and study. When public figures started receiving national coverage, cartoonists opened their “morgue” to study photographs in the hopes of finding physical features that they could embellish. Blending the likeness of portraiture with a comic sensibility was refined over countless drawings, something that did not escape the notice of those caricatured. During their separate White House visits in the 1950s and 1960s both the NCS and the AAEC presented Eisenhower, Kennedy, and Johnson with collections of caricatures to each president. When the AAEC visited the Kennedy White House in 1962, the president quipped that they had spent an excessive amount of time drawing his hair. In a letter prefacing the collection given to Kennedy, Scott Long repeated the AAEC’s mission statement that the organization “has no political bias” and claimed that “collectively . . . [we] represent all points of view.” In a conciliatory tone, Long wrote:

The men who have drawn these caricatures of you are influential, for better or worse, in modern America. If they please those whom they draw, they are happy. If they offend, it is only in the line of what they conceive to be their duty.<sup>95</sup>

The AAEC's visit to the Kennedy White House, Hubenthal described, was "one more feather in the cap" and a sign of the AAEC's "growing stature and prestige."<sup>96</sup> Three years later, their momentous meeting with LBJ cemented the Association's ascendance. Socializing with politicians took place in a bipartisan fashion. Even those politicians who had a reputation for not "taking a joke" frequently met with cartoonists in these years. The famously thin-skinned Nixon, who reportedly bristled at Block's caricatures in the 1950s, had an altogether different reaction when socializing with AAEC members. During its 1959 Washington convention, Nixon attended an AAEC sponsored event with Democratic Senator Hubert Humphry. In the first issue of the *AAEC News*, then Association president Roy Justus commended the vice-president for "graciously attending as our special guest."<sup>97</sup>

In addition to meeting serving presidents and vice-presidents, the AAEC also met with presidential contenders including Arizona Republican Senator Barry Goldwater. The mutual camaraderie during these occasions demonstrated underlining changes in American humour. In the postwar era mainstream comedy in television and film shed many of its slapstick qualities and penchant for absurdity. This was part of a broader trend in the culture production that saw vaudeville acts slowly be divested of their ethnic origins as performers and writers aimed their comedy for mass appeal. But whereas radio acts could transition to television, outside animation, cartooning remained the preserve of print. Attempts to present editorial cartoons on television fizzled or failed to capture an audience beyond local television.<sup>98</sup> Given these changes in the nation's mediascape, editorial cartoons represented an earlier mode of communication that in many ways, appeared dated. The constellation of social, political, and cultural forces which had made political cartooning so popular with readers in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century were no longer aligned in ways that would facilitate a sustained contemporary revival. Yet the popularity of comic strips demonstrated that narrative and characterization in cartooning

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<sup>95</sup> Scott Long's February 8, 1962 letter addressed to John F. Kennedy. Pres AAEC 2, folder BICLM.

<sup>96</sup> See Karl Hubenthal, "Do You Find that I am Harder to Draw than Ike?" April 1962. Box AAEC1, folder 10, BICLM.

<sup>97</sup> Roy Justus, "Convention Notes," *AAEC News*, vol. 1, no. 1 (1959). See Box AAEC 1, folder 5, BICLM.

<sup>98</sup> One notable exception to cartooning's cross-media formatting was the NCS's "Living Library" series, which involved Bill Crawford interviewing cartoonists for radio broadcasts. See Box NCS 2, folder 45, BICLM.

were hits with readers. Editorial cartoonists, by contrast, stuck to a single-image framing instead of branching out into sequential panels. This adherence to tradition circumscribed their appeal by making their conceptual image-making reliant on caricature as one of its main technical traits. Even so, in a media saturated culture, editorial cartoonists courted a curious mix of prestige and praise that signaled a nostalgia for a print culture that no longer existed in the same way that it had before. For these reasons, editorial cartoonists retained a semblance of media influence that allowed them access to power.



Figure 4.7: Richard Nixon meeting members of the AAEC in Washington, D.C., 1959.

Source: Billy Ireland Cartoon Library and Museum, Ohio State University.

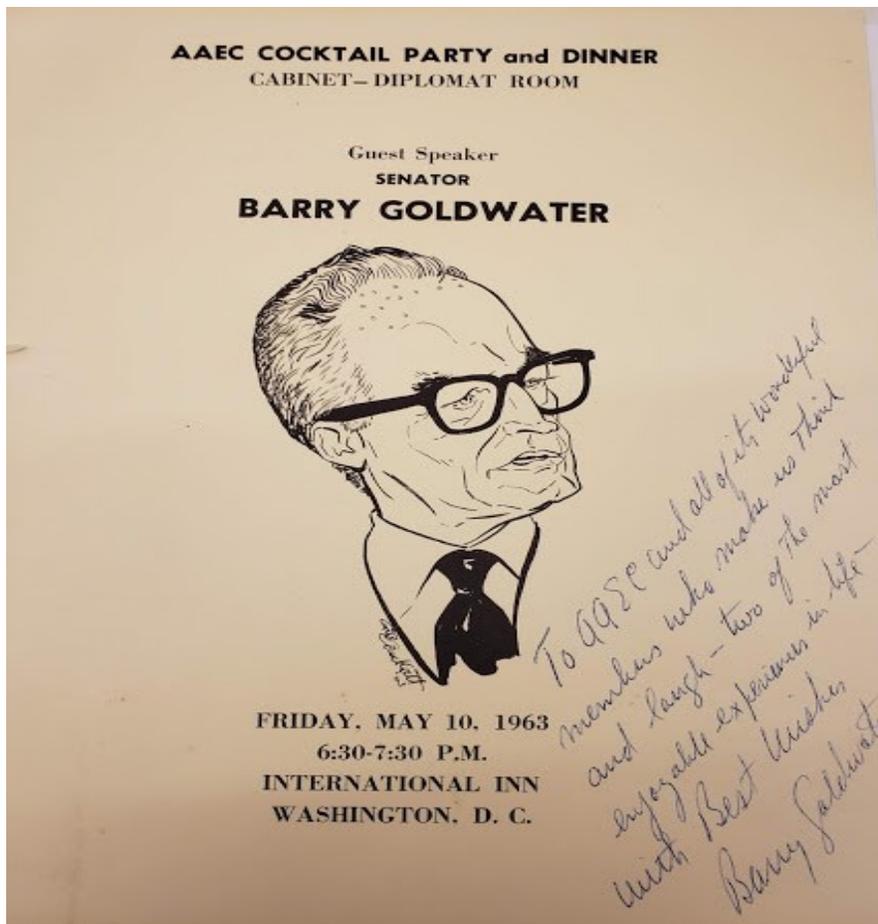


Figure 4.8: Personal note from Barry Goldwater at 1963 convention in Washington, D.C.

Source: Billy Ireland Cartoon Library and Museum, Ohio State University.

When cartoonists publicly gifted caricatures to politicians they were effectively communicating a shared moral universe of values. In a twist of cultural diplomacy, gifting performed a measure of ideological work by showing that political differences could be breached through humour. At these events both the powerful and those who ridiculed them joined in affirming democratic norms by showing they could transcend partisan politics despite trafficking in them daily. These subtleties were not remarked upon by cartoonists or in the trade press. But no doubt politicians, living an era of television and public relations, were aware that by showing that they could take a joke, they made themselves appear more relatable to voters.

The nation's capital provided a logical choice for AAEC conventions but the trade group, rotated host cities to achieve a broad geographical coverage. Editorial cartoonists often cited the annual gatherings as a professional highlight of their working year. Bruce Russell, in a cartoon announcing his temporary absence to his readers and editors, called conventions "pen and ink

summit meetings.” The annual gatherings mixed business and socializing with the stress on the former. As the Association grew its public relations capabilities, conventions were covered by the trade press and publicized by cartoonists in posters and through their publications. Cartoonists who worked for a daily newspaper based in the convention’s host city typically took on the bulk of organizing responsibilities. But carrying out the event planning and logistics required a larger and strikingly gendered cast which enlisted both members’ wives and their secretaries. As Justus noted about the first of many Washington trips:

The convention in Washington last April was the product of many men. But I an [sic] sure it would have been much less a success had it not been for three women: my wife, Ruth, who had many a lost weekend while I struggled with the agenda; my secretary, Sandra Fincham, who pounded her fingers to the wrists typing letters, forms, by-laws, membership rosters and doing many other chores for the brush and pen wielders; and Margaret Moore, of course, who brought order out of chaos and gave us convention.<sup>99</sup>



Figure 4.9: Undated photo of AAEC Ladies Auxiliary Group.

Source: Billy Ireland Cartoon Library and Museum, Ohio State University.

<sup>99</sup> Roy Justus, “Convention Notes,” *AAEC News*, vol. 1, no. 1 (1959), republished in *AAEC Notebook*. See Box AAEC 1, folder 5, BICLM.

In the AAEC's early years conventions were hastily arranged. This began to change in the 1960s as the format expanded to include more social events. The AAEC's Ladies Auxiliary, which was a working group consisting of members' wives, played a key role in this transformation.<sup>100</sup> As the list of activities grew, the Ladies Auxiliary began organizing outings of their own. During one Washington trip Elsie Hubenthal arranged for the Ladies Auxiliary to meet with Senator Margaret Chase Smith.<sup>101</sup> Julianne Warren, who was a professional news photographer, documented conventions gatherings and later became the AAEC's official historian. In the 1970s and 1980s Warren wrote for the *AAEC Notebook* while also leading the Association's campaign to amend the 1969 tax code law that had barred cartoonists from claiming their work at market value for tax purposes.

As conventions grew to incorporate more recreational fare, the Ladies Auxiliary both strengthened and pushed back against the normative ties that stitched this disparate creative community together. Within this social space, the postwar familial ideal, however, reigned. The importance of women helping organize conventions and other AAEC events sometimes went uncredited, even as these activities received due praise. By and large AAEC members fondly recalled the Association's extracurricular activities. Introverted cartoonists, who initially dreaded "hand-pumping" with strangers, came to appreciate the importance of the AAEC's annual meetings in building networks among a professional peer group known more for its independence than its sociability.<sup>102</sup> Cartoonists' conventions also mimicked the chubby male-dominated press clubs of American journalism. This fraternal camaraderie produced a social use-value that comingled with the transactional nature of networking in print journalism where social contacts often doubled as professional contacts. This blending of work with the social received little comment from cartoonists in their public writings, however. Far more common was the tendency to present themselves as embattled artists who worked in a poorly understood medium.

The conventions' gendered norms bore traces of what Elaine Taylor May memorably dubbed "domestic containment."<sup>103</sup> Conventions provided networking opportunities and brand-building. Attendees could also adjust their practice by learning about industry trends at star-

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<sup>100</sup> The AAEC's Ladies Auxiliary was originally founded at the Indianapolis convention in 1958. See "Mrs. John Chase Heads AAEC Women's Group," *AAEC News*, vol. 2, no. 1 (June 1960), Box AAEC 1, folder 7, BICLM.

<sup>101</sup> See "Washington Convention, 1963," Box AAEC 1, folder 11, BICLM.

<sup>102</sup> Lou Erickson, "A One-Time Loner Capitulates," *Atlanta Journal*, 5 July 1963, Box AAEC 1, folder 11, BICLM.

<sup>103</sup> See May, *Homeward Bound*, "Containment At Home: Cold War, Warm Hearth," 19-38.

studded panels. In these ways, the unwaged work that the Ladies Auxiliary performed represented a form of social reproduction, whether acknowledged or not. As Nancy Fraser notes, the separation of private and public spheres conceptualizes the latter as a space where citizenship, political debate, and communications are exercised. This bifurcation rests on a division between symbolic and material forms that in reality are mutually reinforcing.<sup>104</sup>

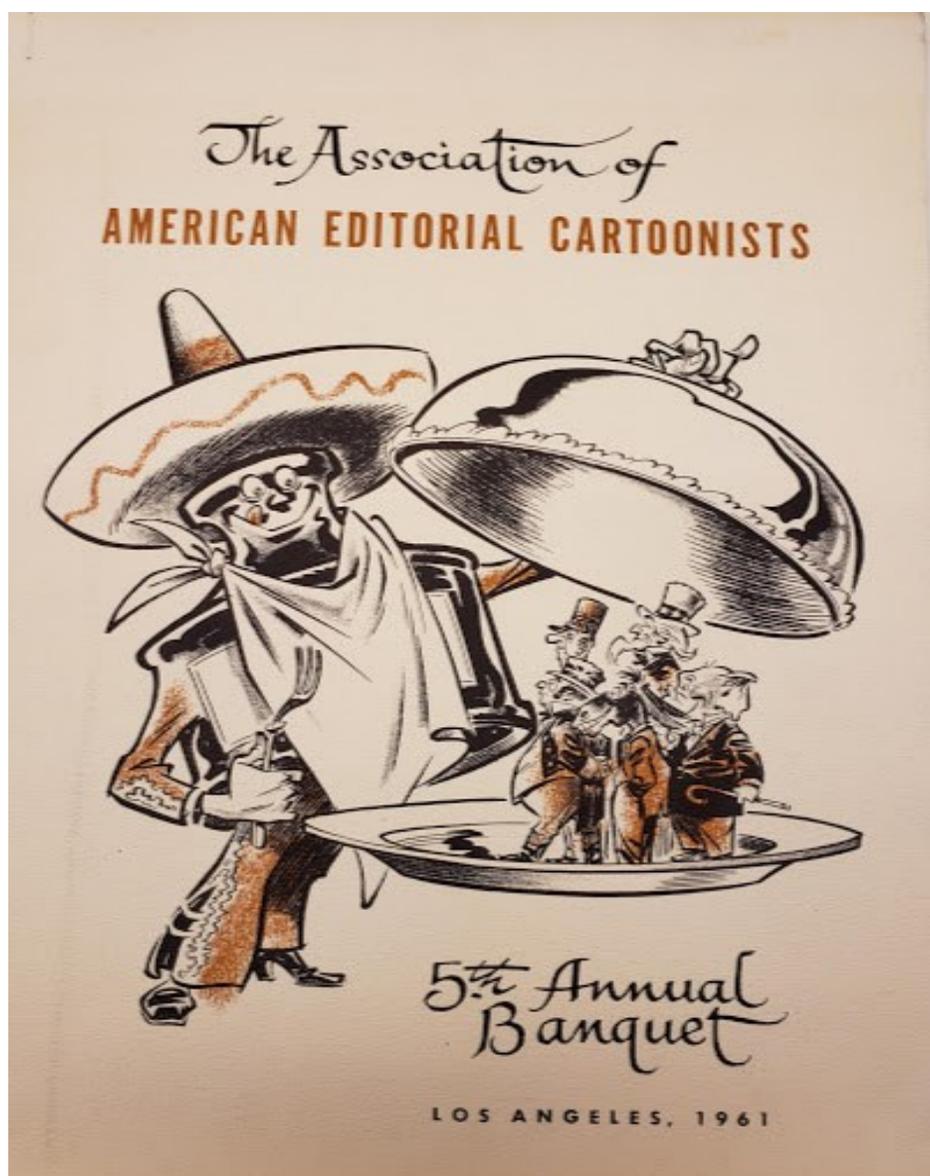


Figure 4.10: Poster designed by Karl Hubenthal for the 1961 Los Angeles Convention.  
Source: Billy Ireland Cartoon Library and Museum, Ohio State University.

<sup>104</sup> See Fraser, *Fortunes of Feminism*, "What's Critical About Critical Theory?" chapter 1, 33-83.

Early AAEC conventions reified the separation between the social and the economic through the lens of middle-class respectability, masculine identity, and the ideal of the family wage. This matrix of meaning obscured the planning and legwork that women undertook to help make the events possible, which, in turn, allowed social capital to be accrued. Real capital, was also at stake, since the separation of “women’s work” from “men’s work” was anchored in Cold War familial ideals. While conventions were billed as a way of strengthening sociability, their gendered division of labour reinforced a worldview where women were social beings who consumed, while men were producers who worked alone. Similarly, because AAEC conventions were initially only open to members who fit the Association’s narrow professional criteria, precarity did not figure in panel discussions or keynote addresses. Undoubtedly, the creative pull that drew graphic artists into cartooning stemmed from a desire to make a living from what they loved. The instability of their industry made this difficult. Passion for one’s art could also provide a pathway to accepting exploitive working circumstances. Gaining membership in cartooning’s professional societies did not, however, provide immediate economic relief.

In 1957 the NCS’s monthly newsletter included a small note announcing that cartoonist Bob Pierce had requested that his membership status be changed from “editorial cartoonist” to “advertising and illustration.”<sup>105</sup> In an industry where work was plentiful, but security was not, Pierce’s request was not unusual. In this print climate, commercial and magazine art, along with a burgeoning field of animation, offered cartoonists the most clear, visible pathways for steady employment.<sup>106</sup> But as Walker and Calvilli observed in their deep dive into the “terrible business” of magazine cartooning, precarity was the norm, rather than the exception.

In addition to lacking job security, most cartoonists had little in the way of savings or benefits. The NCS was sympathetic to these material realities but were not organized to deal with them in any comprehensive way. As Johnny Pierotti noted in the NCS’s *The Cartoonist*: “We [cartoonists] do not have the advantage of group insurance, sick leave, and retirement in our profession.”<sup>107</sup> While both the NCS and AAEC advertised potential job openings to members, neither group had no “plan[s] to become an employment agency.”<sup>108</sup>

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<sup>105</sup> *National Cartoonists Society Newsletter*, 18 November 1957. Box WK4, folder 22, part 2, BICLM.

<sup>106</sup> See chapter two of this study of how animation cartoonists were neglected by the NCS.

<sup>107</sup> Johnny Pierotti, “What We Do and What We Stand For,” *The Cartoonist* (Winter 1954), 7.

<sup>108</sup> Charles Brooks in letter to AAEC members, 23 June 1966. Box AAEC Pres 3, folder 3, BICLM.

In the late 1950s some editorial cartoonists wondered if their reduced workload made them ineligible to join the new organization. Some potential members wrote to Stampone asking for clarification on their eligibility status. These concerns reflected the industry's fluid employment structures as well as a commonplace view that the professional editorial cartoonist was one who had regular, full-time work.<sup>109</sup> It is no surprise, then, that the AAEC was never able to grow its membership beyond the roughly 150 staff cartoonists who were employed by American dailies. In the 1970s more Canadian members joined, as well as cartoonists from Mexico and Central America. But the AAEC missed a chance to organize freelance cartoonists whose alienating experiences within the industry took on multiple registers.

For women cartoonists, breaking into this male-dominated profession proved daunting. Etta Hulme's interrupted career trajectory provides an illustrative example of how balancing family and work commitments were altogether harder for women. Before she became one of the few female staff cartoonists on a major daily in the early seventies, Hulme had worked a range of freelance cartooning gigs in the late 1940s and 1950s. Her career arc included short stints in advertising, as well as illustrating *Red Rabbit*, a comic book parody of Red Ryder, a gig which she described as paying "next to nothing."<sup>110</sup>

Hulme's background in visual parody later resurfaced when she turned to editorial cartooning. After moving to Texas to raise a family in the 1950s, Hulme briefly left the precarious world of cartooning behind before re-entering the field in the late 1960s. She submitted freelance cartoons to the *Texas Observer* before convincing editors at the conservative *Fort Worth Star-Telegram* to take her on as a part-time cartoonist. As she recalled,

After serving time as a Girl Scout leader, Den Mother in Cub Scouts, and Potato Lady for the Rotary Club lunch . . . I got back to cartooning . . . and looked up the advertising agencies. . . The *Fort Worth Star-Telegram* was on my hit list. They were using syndicated editorial cartoons in the afternoon paper. Harold Maples was doing editorial cartoons for the morning edition. I made a nuisance of myself until they agreed to print a few on a freelance basis. In 1972, this evolved into a regular job and the five a week I do now.<sup>111</sup>

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<sup>109</sup> Bob Meagher to John Stampone, undated letter from 1957. Box AAEC Pres 1, folder 5, BICLM.

<sup>110</sup> R.C. Harvey, "Trailblazing with Ettatorial Cartoons," *The Comics Journal*, 4 August 2014. <http://www.tcj.com/etta-hulme-trailblazing-with-ettatorial-cartoons/> Accessed 1 December 2020.

<sup>111</sup> *Ibid.*

Hulme's early career experiences were indicative of an industry where outside of the biggest names, talent was viewed as expendable. In theory, a constantly replenishing reserve army of cartooning talent would appear to grant opportunities for cartoonists who did not fit traditional profiles. In editorial cartooning, however, class mobility was limited to those cartoonists who were in a position to advance through newspapers' art departments. In some cases, career advancement was also restricted to those who were able to afford the wait, since accepting low pay was not an option for many.

Similarly, the newspaper industry's raced and gendered class hiring practices erected symbolic and material barriers. As Ollie Harrington's career demonstrated, politics had an equally determining effect on professional entry. It was notable that the *Pittsburgh Courier*, which published his cartoons into the 1970s, considered Harrington a freelancer. Ironically, his employment status was confirmed by an FBI informant who, in 1954, explained to the Bureau that the reason the *Courier* had "no personnel file" on Harrington was because he was "not actually an employee of the newspaper."<sup>112</sup> While Harrington had little interest in working for a mainstream newspaper daily, having access to the burgeoning syndicate market may have offset his own precarity.

Professional societies, in principle, had the means to draw attention to such inequities. Although, the categories they had developed proved restrictive, as neither Hulme nor Harrington initially met the criteria of a "professional" editorial cartoonist. The work that went into justifying, articulating, and in some cases, creating professional boundaries left, in an Adornoian sense, a "remainder" that refused to be assimilated. In American cartooning, sedimented within the thousands of images that appeared in magazine and newspapers was this "remainder," which in its opposition, evinced the kind of critical attitude that editorial cartoonists claimed for themselves. Alternative cartooning developed alongside its mainstream iteration. Indeed, both mainstream and alternative cartooning temporally co-existed with one another, even if, the former was unaware of the latter. What united these streams was not a narrowly defined professionalism, but the precarity that was common to both. As Hulme put it: "We always said we'd draw for next to nothing, and they let us."<sup>113</sup>

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<sup>112</sup> Unprocessed collection. Oliver Harrington Correspondence. FBI File. BICLM. See chapter 5 of this study.

<sup>113</sup> Often referred to as the AAEC's "den mother," Hulme would later serve as the Association's president in 1986-1987. The NCS also named her "Editorial Cartoonist of the Year Award" in both 1982 and 1998.

## Conclusion

In the eyes of many editorial cartoonists, their art form represented “one of the remaining crafts” that was “an exclusive product of the newspaper.”<sup>114</sup> This was partially true, insofar as this definition excluded politically themed cartoons in the magazine and alternative weeklies market. Such a perspective limited editorial cartooning’s topical, creative, and political horizons to the daily newspaper. For those cartoonists working in adjacent media and whose use of dialogue, panels, and allegory all fell outside the traditional ambit of editorial cartooning, political cartooning had a broader meaning than this restrictive classification allowed. Like all genres, these distinctions were artificial, but they were not without a material grounding. Syndicated cartoonists had access to wide print networks. This meant the social relations involved in circulating their images multiplied, influencing both what they drew and how they drew it.

This chapter has argued that editorial cartooning’s professional horizons were limiting and that the work itself was calibrated to a creative work-discipline. Through practice and repetition, cartoonists simplified their drawings for mass production, which in turn, placed greater stress on ideas. Given their media platforms and audience reach, where their ideas came from mattered. Cold War ideology was one half of the equation. In this, they were hardly unique. What made them distinct was the cultural associations that were attached to their medium. As a subjective medium supposedly commenting on “objective” news, editorial cartooning appeared to be a separate branch of opinion from journalism, when in fact, it shared the same roots.

It was also telling that many editorial cartoonists had first honed their skills on the sports page. Politics for them was sport. Cartoonists like Hubenthal passed down a shared set of iterative skills to younger cartoonists while transmitting a vocational memory that relayed a contradictory set of ideas: their work was fun and hard, somehow both professional and transgressive, serious but light. Each of these attributes staked a claim to expressive individualism that, when combined with civic idealism, erased the production and social worlds to which cartoonists belonged. The physical and mental expenditures of their concrete labours have likewise been curiously absent in popular and scholarly accounts of the medium. This is partly because the work has been treated as a vocation, or calling, rather than a form of value-producing abstract labour for their publishers. What this leaves is a picture of the individual male artist, heroically doing battle with the powerful, rather than rubbing shoulders with them.

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<sup>114</sup> Hesse, “The Ungentlemanly Art,” 18.

What all this amounted to was a reinforcement of the “special status” of cultural work. In editorial cartooning, this claim dovetailed with key aspects of American exceptionalism while missing the obvious: editorial cartoonists were workers, whether they saw themselves this way or not. Theirs was a job that was highly normative, even when unintended. One alternative way of reading editorial cartooning’s thematic focus is that it gave the impression to readers that power only resided within the halls of Congress, the judiciary, the White House, and not, with themselves. Caricature fed into this impression, as did a narrowly defined idea of the “political.” Through shared laughter, these norms were communicated in ways that renewed a hegemony that viewed critique and dissent with rapt suspicion. More “gadflies” than “destroyers,” editorial cartoonists used their media platforms to help build consensus rather than oppose it.

The closing chapter of this study concludes with an exploration of radical cartoonists in the socialist and trade union presses who embodied a different set of ideals and practices. For these mostly precariously employed graphic artists, forging a counter-hegemonic perspective meant viewing the work of culture as the goal of transforming work itself. Battling entrenched racism and sexism, along with anticommunism, these additional barriers made it difficult for them to reach a mass audience. Yet a broad anti-Stalinist left maintained its own print networks. It was through these channels, rather than capital’s circuits, that radical cartoonists reclaimed the medium’s capacity for satirical critique. By escaping the Cold War’s reductive binary logic, they eschewed a singular professional identity. Nor did they believe in competitive media markets as a solution to print diversity. Rather, they published in venues which had some semblance of a non-commodified print commons where new forms of subjectivity might take hold. While they made little money, they rooted themselves in a different tradition of cultural work whereby one may “hunt in the morning, fish in the afternoon, rear cattle in the evening and criticize after dinner . . . without ever becoming hunter, fisherman, shepherd or critic.”<sup>115</sup>

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<sup>115</sup> Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *The German Ideology*, in *Marx-Engels Reader*, 160.

## **CHAPTER 5: Radical Cartooning and A World to Be Won**

“To laugh that we may not weep.”<sup>1</sup>

— Art Young

### **Introduction**

In 1962 the NCS appeared before the United States Senate Committee on Post Office and Civil Service to register its opposition to bill HR 7927. The bill, which proposed a one cent surcharge on second- and third-class mail, threatened the cartooning profession “in a very material way.”<sup>2</sup> The Associated Press reported that if the bill became law small publishers might be forced “out of business” or compelled to “curtail their budgets for art.”<sup>3</sup> Alert to this possibility, the NCS mobilized its membership and enlisted their beloved comic characters as part of their campaign.

Many of its high-profile members drew cartoons protesting the bill. One Rube Goldberg cartoon showed Congress setting into motion a series of contraptions that end with a publisher mechanically kicking a cartoonist into a wastebasket. During his testimony, Goldberg also made an impassioned case with his words, telling the committee that “newspapers consolidating and folding due to economic pressures” already created a tough market for unestablished cartoonists. A postage increase, he argued, would mean “these young aspirants [would] be deprived of their real heritage.” While the AAEC did not testify at the hearings, Goldberg spoke for many in the editorial cartooning profession when he stressed that “the editorial cartoon will [also] suffer” if the bill passed. In a scenario that resembled one of his patented Goldberg devices, he described how higher postage rates would force editors to rely more on syndication, which in turn, would drain the medium of its “spontaneity and impact.” The nominally conservative Goldberg ended with a plea that the Post Office prioritize its “cultural service” over its “economic needs.”<sup>4</sup>

Goldberg’s patriotic appeals to cartooning’s “heritage” were echoed by NCS president Bill Holman, who had led many of the NCS’ overseas tours to entertain American troops. For Holman, American cartoonists visualized the affective bonds of nationalism. He reminded the committee of cartoonists’ patriotism volunteerism, as well as their cultural influence:

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<sup>1</sup> Glen Bray and Frank M. Young, eds. *To Laugh That We May Not Weep: The Lives and Times of Art Young* (Seattle, WA: Fantagraphics Books, 2017).

<sup>2</sup> NCS Newsletter, 19 September 1962, Box NCS 2, folder 9, BICLM.

<sup>3</sup> “Cartoonists See Market Shrink By Postal Hike,” *New York Journal-American*, 17 July 1962.

<sup>4</sup> Rube Goldberg, “Statement on HR 7927,” 17 July 1962, Box NCS 2, folder 9, BICLM.

We have done shows on sides of hills at the front lines of Korea, 350 miles in the desert of Morocco, at the top of the most inaccessible mountain in The Pyrenees. We have performed for as few as three men in a hospital room in Germany, for as many as 2,000 men in a theatre in Northern Japan.<sup>5</sup>

In a similar vein, NCS secretary Jerry Robinson claimed that cartoons and comics helped “tell the American story” by showing the world “how we live, work and play.” Invoking Benjamin Franklin, whom he described as “the first American cartoonist,” Robinson tied cartooning’s civic traditions with the founder’s support for a national mail system. Looking ahead, Robinson told the committee that higher postage rates would hurt “the unborn publications of the future,” including “the voices of dissent” that print “the non-conformist idea.” He closed by arguing that “a reading America will be a thinking America.”<sup>6</sup>

The NCS’s defense of print diversity at the hearings went beyond the group’s usual invocation of platitudes. But it remained rooted in commercial interests. HR 7979’s proposed one-cent surcharge on second- and third-class mail would have affected all cartoonists in the industry, whether they published in mainstream publications, leftist periodicals or both. According to the Magazine Publishers Association (MPA), which provided the NCS with research for its senate appearance, in 1960 magazines generated over \$600 million in circulation revenue and an additional \$900 million in ad revenue. When combined, the magazine industry outstripped television’s estimated \$1.2 billion in total revenue.<sup>7</sup> As part of this booming market, “specialty magazines” like Hugh Hefner’s *Playboy* provided outlets for cartoonists with links to alternative print media, including the *Village Voice*’s Jules Feiffer, former *Mad* editor Harvey Kurtzman, and the cartoonist-songwriter-children book author, Shell Silverstein.

While the NCS led a successful effort in 1962, the victory was short-lived as postal rates saw modest increases throughout the 1960s and 1970s. The NCS’s warnings about a collapsing print market, however, did not come to pass. As John McMillian notes, the development of offset printing technology in the early 1960s led to a counterculture print explosion which increased the print options available to cartoonists who did not fit the traditional profile. “Many New Leftists

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<sup>5</sup> Bill Holman, “Statement on HR 7927,” 17 July 1962, Box NCS 2, folder 9, BICLM.

<sup>6</sup> Jerry Robinson, “Statement on HR 7927,” 17 July 1962, Box NCS 2, folder 9, BICLM.

<sup>7</sup> This figure comes from James B. Kobak, a partner of the public accounting firm, J.K. Lasser & Company, in a statement on HR 7927 during the 1962 hearings on proposed postal hikes. See Box NCS 2, folder 9, BICLM.

never bothered to read daily newspapers,” McMillian writes, and instead sought out local underground papers to find out “what was going on in their own milieu.”<sup>8</sup> Cartoonists played a significant part in making these papers appealing. Ron Cobb, along with underground “comix” artists like Robert Crumb and Art Spiegelman, bypassed traditional publishing channels and, as they became more popular, the lines separating mainstream and alternative cartooning became more permeable. In this changing print climate, the underground press’ inventive graphic art appealed to a New Left generation reared on comic books and the stinging satire of *Mad*.

The chapter pivots away from the production worlds of editorial cartoonists, and in so doing, centers the problem of genre in defining “the political” in cartooning. As previous chapters have demonstrated, editorial cartoonists thought of themselves as a distinct branch of the graphic arts as well as responsible media professionals. By contrast, many alternative cartoonists experimented with genre while simultaneously adopting a critical perspective on the commercial press. Consequently, they were unlikely to ever see their work reprinted in the *New York Times*’ editorial cartoon section. However, while these print streams developed in parallel to each other, they also shared commonalities that muddle any strict delineation between mainstream and alternative cartooning, which raises the question: how did alternative cartoonists redirect familiar tropes and techniques to critical ends?

In order to answer this question, this final chapter considers how counterhegemonic cultural formations run the risk of being absorbed into the structures that they set out to critique. These dynamics recall what Luc Boltanski and Ève Chiapello termed the “artistic critique.” As a “new spirit of capitalism” followed in the wake of the social upheavals of the 1960s and 1970s, this critique popularized counterculture watchwords such as self-exploration and authenticity in ways that ultimately proved compatible with capitalist accumulation. As Boltanski and Chiapello argue, “there is no ideology, however radical its principles and formulations, that has not eventually proved open to assimilation.”<sup>9</sup> This framing provides a good starting point to think through how the vast infrastructure of American mass media assimilated much of what had made alternative cartooning unique. Yet, for newspaper dailies, some taboos remained.

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<sup>8</sup> John McMillian, *Smoking Typewriters: The Sixties Underground Press and the Rise of Alternative Media in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 4.

<sup>9</sup> For more on the “the artistic critique” and “the social critique,” see Boltanski and Chiapello, “1968: Crisis and Revival of Capitalism,” *The New Spirit of Capitalism*, ch.3, 167-215.

I begin by recounting the early history of twentieth-century American socialist cartooning before turning to the model of collective authorship that characterized Laura Slobe's cartoons in the 1940s and 1950s. Publishing in *The Militant*, the mouthpiece for the Socialist Workers Party (SWP), Slobe was known to her readers as Laura Gray. The anonymity that protected her during her life has persisted, as few scholars of cartoon and comic art have written on her collaborative creative practice. From here I turn to a vast underground of alternative cartooning. Unlike radical cartoonists who contributed to the party presses, graphic artists in the expanding counterculture did not always operate with a clear political agenda. While many alternative cartoonists in the 1960s articulated anti-establishment beliefs, others revelled in an expressive individualism that comported with changing mainstream trends. To show this contrast, I begin this section by comparing the trade unionist Fred Wright's pro-labour cartoons with those of his contemporaries in counterculture print. The final section concludes with a discussion of why some alternative cartoonists have been integrated into the canon of American cartooning while others have not. To bring this story full circle, I conclude with Ollie Harrington's career after he left the US. Commenting on events from afar, he glimpsed the contradictions of postwar America more clearly than many of those who lived through the upheavals of the sixties.

Alan Wald notes that "the force fields" of twentieth-century left-wing publishing created "networks of cultural activists."<sup>10</sup> This puts print diversity into a different light. Ameliorating the social and ideological divisions within cartooning, I argue, was never a straightforward matter of inclusivity. Many radical contributors, for one, had no interest in publishing in a commercial press, and did so, mainly to pay the bills. Moreover, while mainstream cartooning was curtailed by both structural and formal limits, alternative cartooning did not entirely escape these restrictions. Nonetheless, alternative cartoonists revelled in defamiliarizing the familiar. As Benjamin observed, "there is no better starting point for thought than laughter."<sup>11</sup> At its critical best, satire triggers such reflection by disrupting established modes of expression and perception. But whereas mainstream cartoonists thought of political humour as a vehicle for explaining events to an imagined public, their peers in alternative print media were integrated into the counterpublics that they addressed.

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<sup>10</sup> Alan M. Wald, *Exiles from a Future Time: The Forging of the Mid-Twentieth-Century Literary Left* (Chapel Hill and London: The University of North Carolina Press, 2002), 17-18, e-book.

<sup>11</sup> Benjamin, "The Author as Producer," in *Understanding Brecht*, 163.

## **Permanent Revolution and Ephemeral Laughter**

In *The Making of the English Working Class* E.P. Thompson wrote that “every weaving district,” in the late eighteenth century, “had its weaver-poets.”<sup>12</sup> The same could be said of twentieth century leftist publications whose counterpart to the weaver-poet became the proletarian cartoonist. The co-founders of historical materialism recognized the potential for visual polemics. Noted amateur cartoonist Friedrich Engels occasionally included caricatures of the Young Hegelians and Prussian bourgeoisie in his early letters to Marx.<sup>13</sup> For his part, Marx thought highly enough of his collaborator’s doodles that in 1849 he tried to get an Engels cartoon of Frederick Wilhelm IV published in the German paper, *Brüsseler-Zeitung*.<sup>14</sup>

In Marx’s and Engels’ time cartooning had not yet reached the point of being a mass medium, but it had a place in Europe’s revolutionary culture. For the Bolsheviks caricature was read more as a sign of affection, for a time, anyway. The party’s chief economist Nikolai Bukharin drew caricatures of various Bolshevik leaders that were circulated in party circles. Among his cartoon subjects were Lenin, Trotsky, and Stalin. The first two were fans of the form but the latter proved a trickier subject. Caricatures in the Stalinist era would begin to “lose much of their light” as the Great Terror was set into motion. Bukharin, among others, fell prey to Stalin’s purges just as the practice of caricature fell off.<sup>15</sup>

American cartoonists’ Cold War imaginary largely thought of the Soviet Union as an unhumorous place, despite encountering evidence to the contrary. At its Indianapolis convention in 1958, the AAEC hosted two leading Russian cartoonists, Ivan Semyonov of *Krokodil* magazine, and Lev Petrov, of *USSR News*. The AAEC’s convention theme – “People meeting people”— was an early salvo in the new era of cultural exchanges between the two rivals. The State Department initially rebuffed the request to sponsor the Soviet cartoonists, but eventually relented when American newspaper editors and publishers expressed interest in the visit. The *Indianapolis Star* sponsored that year’s AAEC conference which sought to break “the barriers

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<sup>12</sup> E.P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (New York: Pantheon, 1963), 291.

<sup>13</sup> For a sample of Engels’ cartoons, see <https://thecharnelhouse.org/tag/friedrich-engels/>. Accessed 1 February 2021.

<sup>14</sup> Jeet Heer, “Cartoonists That Never Were,” *Comics, Comics*, 15 February 2011. <https://comicscomicsmag.com/?p=8735>. Accessed 1 February 2021.

<sup>15</sup> Swati Pandey, “Cartoonists’ Manifesto,” *Los Angeles Times*, 15 October 2006. Over 200 hundred of these cartoons were reprinted in the collection, *Piggy Foxy and the Sword of Revolution: Bolshevik Self-Portraits*, ed. Alexander Vatlin and Larisa Malashenko (New Haven, CN: Yale University Press, 2006).

between freedom and communism.”<sup>16</sup> When describing what they imagined cultural life to be like behind the Iron Curtain, American cartoonists, lapsed into familiar Cold War tropes. Yet it was not until the late 1970s before Karl Hubenthal led a small contingent to the Soviet Union in 1977. Old stereotypes die hard, however, especially for cartoonists. Hubenthal described the trip as shedding light on “the kinds of pressures these poor guys have to work with.”<sup>17</sup>

The AAEC was even more incurious about the socialist cartoonists in its own backyard. Notably, the canon of American cartooning that was being sketched out in the postwar years included few radicals outside of Art Young. This absence was all the more glaring considering that socialist cartoonists created memorable images in the early 1900s. As Michael Cohen notes,

. . . the simply drawn, politically pointed, and cheaply reproduced black line cartoons . . . gave the movements for industrial unionism, socialism, populism, progressivism, anarchism, black radicalism, feminism, and anti-militarism a kind of visual exuberance and common set of anti-capitalist values that artistically blended an angry if playful outrage with a sense of collective idealism.<sup>18</sup>

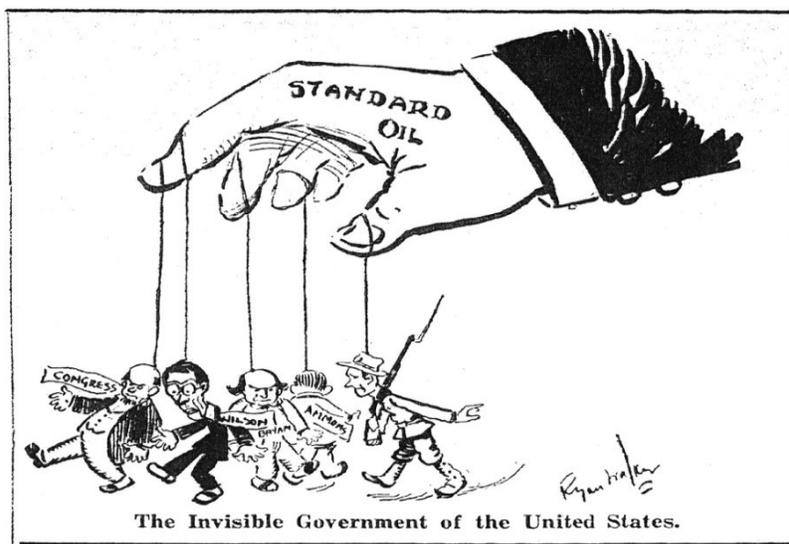


Figure 5.1: Ryan Walker, “The Invisible Government of the United States,” *Appeal to Reason*, 16 May 1914. Source: <http://www.cartooningcapitalism.com/cartoons-for-socialism>

<sup>16</sup> Julianne Warren, “Our AAEC Roots,” *AAEC Notebook*, December 1980, Box AAEC 1, folder 2, BICLM. Also, see, Dan Dowling, “Convention Notes,” *AAEC News*, 1958. Box AAEC 1, folder 2, BICLM.

<sup>17</sup> Etta Hulme and L.D. and Julianne Warren accompanied the Hubenthals. See Karl Hubenthal, “USSR Janut,” *AAEC Notebook*, vol 18, no. 2 (April 1977).

<sup>18</sup> Michael Cohen, “‘Cartooning Capitalism’: Radical Cartooning and the Making of American Popular Radicalism in the Early Twentieth Century,” *International Review of Social History* 52, no. 15 (2007): 35-58.

Along with Young, cartoonists such as Robert Minor, Boardman Robinson, and Ryan Walker visualized “playful outrage” on a regular basis. Walker’s popular comic panel, the *New Adventures of Henry Dubb*, turned the adventurous spirit of the Sunday funnies into a pedagogical tool. A versatile artist, Walker also drew political cartoons for *Appeal to Reason*, the most widely read American socialist periodical of its time. No less a figure than Eugene Debs, who was an editor for *Appeal to Reason*, recognized cartoons’ potential to frame class struggle. In an introduction to a collection of Walker’s work Debs wrote that, “cartooning capitalism is far more inspiring than capitalistic cartooning.” For the leader of the Socialist Party, radical cartoons countered “the weak, insipid, vulgar pictorial attacks upon Socialism in capitalist papers” with wit and whimsey. But they also delivered “terrific onslaughts upon the capitalist system and its regime of riches and squalor, money and misery, crime and corruption.”<sup>19</sup>

Early twentieth century socialist cartoonists were popular with urban based readers in part because they mixed the muckraking traditions of the progressive era with pathos and comedy. Dressing down the bosses also helped make capitalism appear more vulnerable, and thus, something that they and their readers could confront. However, the repression they faced during World War I halted this print incursion. Prior to the war, the *Masses*’ stable of cartoonists “donated their work” to Max Eastman’s New York weekly, knowing that they get paid for their cartoons elsewhere.<sup>20</sup> Young once remarked that he only wished to be associated with periodicals that “point[ed] the way out of a sordid materialistic world,” yet the first red scare left him and his cohort with fewer options.<sup>21</sup> While Young continued his career, others such as Minor, who joined the American Communist Party (CPUSA), left cartooning altogether.

In Minor’s case, though, he continued to have a public role. In the early 1920s the CPUSA named him head of the Negro Committee. Minor, having grown up in Texas, was intimately aware of how deep American racism ran. He befriended the Black radical and socialist Lovett Fort-Whiteman, a fellow Texan and began reading Frederick Douglass and W.E.B. Du Bois. In 1924 the *Liberator* published a series of articles from Minor that detailed the history of

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<sup>19</sup> Eugene V. Debs, “The Cartoonist and the Socialist Revolution,” introduction to *Red Portfolio*. For more examples of early twentieth-century socialist cartoons, visit the site curated by Michael Cohen: <http://www.cartooningcapitalism.com/cartoons-for-socialism>. Accessed 1 February 2021.

<sup>20</sup> Lamb, *Drawn to Extremes*, 79.

<sup>21</sup> Quoted in Dewey, *Art of Ill Will*, 48.

slave revolts. As Paul Heideman notes, “Minor made clear that the history of Black Americans was not only a history of oppression, but of resistance as well.”<sup>22</sup>

In the interwar years, a few noteworthy communist cartoonists emerged. In the English-speaking world, one of the most well-known was the Scottish cartoonist, James Friell. Appearing under the name “Gabriel,” Friell heralded the upcoming revolution in the British *Daily Worker*. From the late 1930s to the mid-1950s, his amusing takes on capitalism, and later, Stalinism, became a fixture of the British socialist left. Like E.P. Thompson, Friell resigned his membership following the British Communist Party’s disastrous response to the Soviet invasion of Hungary in 1956. A year later he landed a coveted staff position with the conservative *Evening Standard*, which had previously employed David Low as their resident gadfly.<sup>23</sup>

In America, only reformed communists typically were afforded such second acts. Before becoming the *Daily Worker*’s cartoonist Fred Ellis saw his cartoons featured in *The Liberator* and the *Labor Herald* in the early 1920s. At the start of the Depression, he briefly relocated to Europe where he published in *Pravda* and the English-language *Moscow Daily News*. In the 1930s the Polish-born Jacob Burck succeeded Ellis at the *Daily Worker* and integrated into New York radical circles that included former *Masses*’ cartoonist Boardman Robinson and future anti-communist zealot, Whitaker Chambers. Burck’s career trajectory resembled the latter’s path more than the former. After visiting the Soviet Union in 1936, Burck left the party and transitioned to mainstream print. In 1942 he won a Pulitzer Prize but during the McCarthy years, he faced deportation. His publisher at the *Chicago Daily Times*, Marshall Field III, funded his defense and in 1957 Congress granted him leave to stay.<sup>24</sup> His career, however, remained on shaky ground. In a bio Burck’s syndicate excised his years with the *Daily Worker*, mentioning instead how the State Department featured his work “in overseas propaganda in the cold war against communism.”<sup>25</sup> Ellis, meanwhile, remained a CPUSA member until his retirement in the mid-1950s, and was largely unknown outside of the *Daily Worker*’s dwindling readership.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Paul Heideman, “Socialism and Black Oppression,” *Jacobin Magazine*, 30 April 2018. The article is adapted from Paul Heideman’s edited volume, *Class Struggle and the Color Line: American Socialism and the Race Question, 1900-1930* (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2018), which contains Minor’s *Liberator* essay, “The Black Ten Millions.”

<sup>23</sup> Alison Macleod, *The Death of Uncle Joe* (London, UK: Merlin Press, 1997), 60.

<sup>24</sup> Luther A. Huston, “Cartoonist Wins Deportation Bar; Congress Suspends Order Against Jacob Burck and 130 Others,” *New York Times*, 17 April 1957.

<sup>25</sup> See Box AAEC Sec 3, folder 7, BICLM.

<sup>26</sup> For a sample of Ellis’ cartoons from the 1920s, see <https://www.marxists.org/history/usa/pubs/red-cartoons/index.htm>. Accessed 1 February 2021.

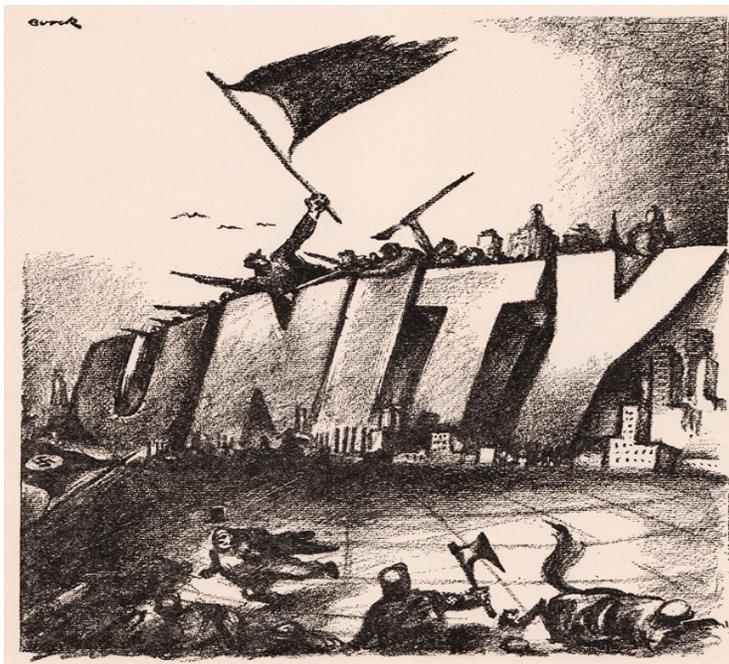


Figure 5.2: Jacob Burck, “Working Class Bulwark,” *Daily Worker* circa 1934.

Source: Daily Worker Online Archives.

[https://www.marxists.org/subject/art/visual\\_arts/satire/burck/index.htm](https://www.marxists.org/subject/art/visual_arts/satire/burck/index.htm).

Before Laura Slobe made a name for herself in Trotskyist circles, Jesse Cohen flew the flag of the Fourth International. Because mainline Trotskyists considered Stalinist Russia a degenerated workers’ state that had betrayed the legacies of Leninism, the *Daily Worker* held limited appeal to Trotskyists. Except for a brief interlude in the early 1950s when the SWP called for left unity in the face of official anticommunism, the most established Trotskyist organization in America maintained a hard line against the Soviet regime.<sup>27</sup> American Trotskyism was riven with its own internal rifts, however. The Workers Party, which split from the orthodox SWP in the 1940s then later renamed itself the Independent Socialist League (ISL), took a more heterodox perspective on “permanent revolution.” Its party paper, *Labor Action*, published Cohen’s cartoons under the signature, “Carlo.” Additionally, Cohen published in the *Socialist Appeal*, *Northwest Organizer* and *New International*, all of which helped him procure fans such as Diego Riveria and Trotsky himself. While exiled in Mexico the dissident leader praised Cohen

<sup>27</sup> “Editorial—Conviction of 11 Stalinists Emphasizes Need for United Front Against Witch-Hunters,” *Militant*, 24 October 1949.

as “a precious contributor to our common fight.”<sup>28</sup> Cohen’s cartoons occasionally commented on the communist movement’s schisms, but his commitment to party politics petered out, and in the late 1940s he left cartooning and returned to painting. The ISL, bereft of a suitable successor, “recycled some of his graphics,” giving his topical cartoons a strange afterlife.<sup>29</sup>

Although no contemporary syndicate or mainstream daily risked distributing or reprinting their cartoons, both Cohen and Slobe maintained a wide, yet narrow, network of readers that extended well beyond national boundaries. Ironically, because much as their work existed at the margins of American print culture, the force field of Trotskyist papers gave them an audience more global than many of their more famous contemporaries enjoyed.<sup>30</sup> Likewise, because leftist print channels operated more informally, neither cartoonist had to contend with the complex editorial layers that mainstream cartoonists had to pass through in order to reach beyond their home newspapers.



Figure 5.3: Carlo, *Socialist Appeal*, 12 March 1938, vol 11, no. 11.

Source: <https://www.marxists.org/history/etol/newspape/themilitant/socialist-appeal-1938/index.htm>

<sup>28</sup> Quoted in Kurt Worcester and Ethan Young, “Laura Slobe, Jesse Cohen, and the Hidden History of Political Cartooning,” *International Journal of Comic Art* (Fall 2013): 36-54.

<sup>29</sup> For more on Cohen and the similarities he shared with Slobe, see Worcester and Young, “Laura Slobe, Jesse Cohen, and the Hidden History of Political Cartooning,” 44-52.

<sup>30</sup> Art Preis claimed the Laura Gray cartoons were republished in over twenty countries. See Art Preis, “A Tribute to Laura Gray,” *The Militant*, 13 January 1964, 5.

The downside of this creative freedom was that both Trotskyist cartoonists experienced precarious employment. The perils of adhering to a shifting party line presented an additional set of challenges. Yet these print obstacles did not appear to damper the genuine joy they conveyed in drawings that expressed a moral outrage with a gleeful gloss. However, this limited their publishing reach to likeminded readers, and thus, softened the potential for their images to shock. Nonetheless, their work recalled the socialist traditions of the *Masses*. As Kurt Worcester and Ethan Young argue, by contributing a “visual panache to a dissenting left press” during a time of crisis, Slobe and Cohen reminded their readers that they were not alone.<sup>31</sup>

In Slobe the SWP had a top-notch political communicator whose images encapsulated what reams of columns could not. For a paper with a limited subscriber list, Slobe cartoons were more likely to draw in the uninitiated than heavy-handed editorials. *The Militant* recognized the value of Slobe’s agitprop and in March 1954 celebrated her tenth anniversary as staff cartoonist with a special print tribute. Two weeks earlier, Slobe had been feted by the party at its Militant Hall. During the banquet, telegrams from various SWP branches were read, expressing admiration for the cartoonist’s contributions. The normally reserved Slobe gave “one of her rare talks,” in which she thanked “friends and comrades” for their support. The labour journalist Art Preis, who first suggested Slobe take up cartooning, recounted encountering Slobe for the first time at a Chicago SWP branch meeting in 1942. Slobe, he said, looked “pale, delicate-featured, somewhat fragile-looking,” but during a typically animated meeting with its share of crosstalk, she had “listened intently, missing nothing.” After the meeting, she was the first to volunteer. For Preis and other *Militant* staffers, Slobe’s commitment, as much as her artistic talents, were what made her “a supreme political artist and cartoonist for this supremely political age.”<sup>32</sup>

The *Militant*’s print tribute included a retrospective of Laura Gray highlights. The issue’s front page reprinted a 1952 cartoon that depicted McCarthy as a Frankenstein monster, Slobe pictured the Republican elephant and Democratic donkey looking up in terror at the bipartisan monster they had jointly created. Phrases such as “Taft-Hartley” and “Smith Act Trials” were inscribed on the monster’s torso to remind her readers that the second red scare, much like the first, curtailed both labour rights and civil liberties.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Worcester and Young, “Laura Slobe, Jesse Cohen, and the Hidden History of Political Cartooning,” 38.

<sup>32</sup> “Hail Ten Years of Laura Gray’s Cartoons,” *The Militant*, 8 March 1954.

<sup>33</sup> Laura Gray, “Their Frankenstein Monster,” *The Militant*, 22 September 1952.

In his weekly column, “Notes of an Agitator,” SWP leader James Cannon penned a paean to Slobe that reversed the usual Cold War tropes associating communism with the absence of individual expression. Cannon wrote that Slobe’s counterparts in the commercial press held back when commenting on social inequalities due to their “allegiance” to the ruling class. This self-censorship struck “at their reason for being,” while Slobe, he argued, was free to explore the ugly realities of a class riven society. The SWP leader’s dismissal of newspaper cartoons was hardly surprising. More telling was his suggestion that one reason why readers connected with Slobe’s work was because she invited them to actively imagine a realm of freedom where everyone could pursue unalienated creative life to the extent that they wished. As Cannon elaborated,

The readers of the *Militant* everywhere, immersed in the prosaic details of everyday life and the routine tasks of the struggle for a better world, have greeted her weekly drawings with the same gratitude and enthusiasm, and have derived from them the same inspiration, the same anticipatory glimpse of a better world, wherein all people will express themselves better, more completely, in more effective communion with others; that is to say, more artistical.<sup>34</sup>



Figure 5.4: Laura Gray’s “Their Frankenstein Monster,” *The Militant*, 8 March 1954.

Source: <https://www.marxists.org/history/etol/newspape/themilitant/1954/index.htm>

<sup>34</sup> James Cannon, “Notebook of an Agitator: In Honor of Laura Gray,” *The Militant*, 8 March 1954.

Cannon's tribute to Slobe echoed a longstanding debate within Marxism about the nature of political art. Communist organizations had inherited from the Second International a view of culture as a social mirror that when held up revealed the whole of class reality rather than its fractured state. This assumed a one-to-one correspondence between audience and artist, which both the SWP's and the CPUSA's apparatchiks understood as a straightforward transmission. The difference between the two groups was that Earl Browder's "Communism is Twentieth-Century Americanism" showed a greater attentiveness to the type of media that workers consumed. The *Daily Worker*, for one, included an arts and entertainment section as well as Lester Rodney's popular sports reportage. As Paul Buhle notes, "mechanized leisure," sport and mass culture had "deep roots in working class life."<sup>35</sup> Aligning itself with progressive elements in American culture and an emergent "democratic modernism," the CPUSA's attempts to fuse mass politics with mass culture gave it an advantage over its Trotskyist rivals.<sup>36</sup> However, the social forces propelling this cultural front were short-lived, dissipating in the war before growing fainter still with the onset of anti-communist witch hunts and blacklists in the postwar era. Some leftist aesthetes refocused their "critical energy" by turning inwards.<sup>37</sup> In the *Partisan Review*'s austere pages, the New York intellectuals, a loose group of ex-Trotskyists, abandoned "their former program of social action" for a literary modernism far removed from mainstream American culture.<sup>38</sup> Outside of some progressive motifs in early television, the universalism of the Popular Front faded into the din of a universalized anticommunism.

Slobe's cartoons kept the populist traditions of the cultural front alive for a Trotskyist sect that had not always acknowledged their importance. She achieved this despite not considering her cartoons as "serious art."<sup>39</sup> Unpretentious about her work, Slobe embraced her role as party visual artist, drawing graphics for party literature on top of her weekly cartoons. Unlike many radicals who had been drawn to what Vivian Gornick described as "the romance of American communism," Slobe's fidelity to the SWP seemed of a surer sort. Coming at a time

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<sup>35</sup> Paul Buhle, *Marxism in the United States: A History of the American Left*, third edition (London and New York: Verso, 2013), 178.

<sup>36</sup> See Savario Giovacchini, "Modernism, Intellectual Immigrants, and the Rebirth of Hollywood," in his *Hollywood Modernism: Film and Politics in the Age of New Deal* (Philadelphia, PA: Temple University Press, 2001), ch 1, 13-39.

<sup>37</sup> Buhle, *Marxism in the United States*, 291.

<sup>38</sup> Alan M. Wald, *The New York Intellectuals: The Rise and Decline of the Anti-Stalinist Left from the 1930s to the 1980s* Thirtieth Anniversary Edition (Raleigh, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2017), 226-227.

<sup>39</sup> Alan Wald, "Cannonite Bohemians After World War II," *Against the Current* (July/August 2012): 25-35. <https://againsththecurrent.org/atc159/p3651/#R67> Accessed 1 February 2021.

when the party's most insightful theorists such as C.L.R. James, Raya Dunayevskaya, and Harry Braverman had either left Trotskyism or forged a rival tendency that challenged the dominant Cannonite one, Slobe remained a party stalwart, volunteering her time to both the artistic and the mundane. As one former CPUSA member recalled, party organizing required "hard, disciplined, repetitive work" that was often "boring and necessary."<sup>40</sup> Slobe's willingness to volunteer for this "boring and necessary work" extended her cultural labour to the quotidian aspects of movement-building while demonstrating that creative artists were not above such tasks.

Apart from a few very broad biographical reference points, little is known about Slobe's personal life. Born to a wealthy Jewish family in Pittsburgh in 1909, she was raised in Chicago and was a precocious artistic talent who entered the Art Institute of Chicago at the tender age of sixteen. Her artistic influences included the painter, Paul Klee, and generally leaned avant-garde, which put her at odds with the whimsical world of cartooning.<sup>41</sup> Initially trained as a painter, Slobe moved into sculpture in the 1930s and won some local acclaim, but commercial success proved elusive. Like many left-leaning artists, the deprivations of the Depression radicalized her. In the late 1930s she was hired by the Works Progress Administration (WPA) which paid her to create public art, most of which was later destroyed. After being introduced to Trotskyism in the early 1940s, she turned to cartooning. Art Preis later recalled that "Slobe's great gift for political cartooning was revealed almost by chance."<sup>42</sup> While putting together a shop paper for local automotive workers, Preis asked Slobe to contribute graphics. Slobe came back the next day with a mock-up of a political cartoon that the auto workers later pasted all over the plant.<sup>43</sup>

Preis encouraged the neophyte cartoonist to submit her work to *The Militant* and in 1944 she relocated to New York with her then husband, the radical music critic, George Perle. Alan Wald notes that the pair belonged to a group of "cultural dissidents and sexual non-conformists" whose lifestyles, politics, and artistic tastes marked them as a "minority within a minority."<sup>44</sup> As part of this revolutionary subculture, they rejected Cold War domesticity and Soviet-style social realism in equal measure. After the couple divorced in the late 1940s, Slobe pursued relationships with both men and women, while supporting herself with odd jobs, including

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<sup>40</sup> Vivian Gornick, *The Romance of American Communism* (London and New York: Verso, 2020), ebook, 63.

<sup>41</sup> The Art Institute of Chicago still has a prize named the Laura Slobe Memorial Prize in Sculpture.

<sup>42</sup> Preis, "A Tribute to Laura Gray," *The Militant*.

<sup>43</sup> See Worcester and Young, "Laura Slobe, Jesse Cohen, and the Hidden History of Political Cartooning," 39-41.

<sup>44</sup> Wald, "Cannonite Bohemians After World War II," 33-34.

painting mannequins and arranging window displays for Manhattan department stores. As an independent woman with a distinctive style, Slobe stood out in party circles. Fellow SWP member and *Militant* writer, Susan LaMont, described Slobe as a “gentle Bolshevik” who gave “no quarter to others’ needs for a proletarian style and disguises.”<sup>45</sup>

Joining the SWP offered no professional advancement to Slobe, but *The Militant* did provide her with a media platform that her career as an abstract painter and sculptor did not. While her passion for abstract art remained constant throughout her life, from the mid-1940s onwards, she redirected her artistic skills to the more immediate art of political cartooning.<sup>46</sup> The first Laura Gray cartoon to appear in the socialist weekly was published on March 4, 1944. Slobe’s inaugural outing pictured a slovenly rotund figure labelled “Big Business” awaiting a full-course meal while two gaunt soldiers looked on in hunger.<sup>47</sup> The paper quickly “adopted the policy of building the front-page layout around her weekly cartoon,” which helped spruce up its otherwise staid format.<sup>48</sup> LaMont succinctly described Slobe’s style as follows:

The workers were drawn as strong men in work clothes. The capitalists were fat, cigar-chomping men in bankers’ suits, and their wives, diamond-studded and overfed. The Democratic and Republican parties and politicians were depicted as human-like donkeys and elephants – often chewing on cigars themselves – eagerly doing the capitalists’ bidding.<sup>49</sup>

For the next thirteen years these themes and motifs appeared frequently throughout Slobe’s oeuvre.<sup>50</sup> Appearing on the front-page recalled the partisan use of cartoons at the turn of the century that created the impression that the cartoonist was inserting themselves into events. Naturally, cartooning for a weekly meant that Slobe laboured without the pressure of a daily deadline. One former SWP writer recalled that “the cartoon’s subject matter was on the agenda

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<sup>45</sup> Susan Lamont, “*Militant* Artist Gray’s Work at New York Exhibit,” *Militant* 30 December 1988, 6. Quoted in Worcester and Young, “Laura Slobe, Jesse Cohen, and the Hidden History of Political Cartooning,” 38.

<sup>46</sup> Fellow SWP member, Jeanne Morgan. According to Morgan, Slobe was “the most sophisticated woman” in the party on account of “her look, manner, and style.” See Wald, “Cannonite Bohemians After World War II,” 33.

<sup>47</sup> Laura Gray, “Serving the Greedy,” *The Militant*, 4 March 1944.

<sup>48</sup> Preis, “A Tribute to Laura Gray,” *The Militant*.

<sup>49</sup> Quoted in Kurt Worcester, “Sculptor, Painter, and Cartoonist: Laura Gray,” *New Politics* 14, no. 3 (Summer 2013) [https://newpol.org/issue\\_post/sculptor-painter-and-cartoonist-laura-gray/](https://newpol.org/issue_post/sculptor-painter-and-cartoonist-laura-gray/) Accessed 1 December 2020.

<sup>50</sup> Worcester and Young estimated an approximate 500 Laura Gray cartoons were published by the *Militant*. See Worcester and Young, “Laura Slobe, Jesse Cohen, and the Hidden History of Political Cartooning,” 38.

of the *Militant*'s staff meetings. After the staff discussed and decided what the topic would be, Gray would go home and start to draw."<sup>51</sup> Editorial cartoonists would have likely bristled at this workshop setting, but for Slobe, this collaborative environment meant having a *Militant* staff that doubled as a proxy for her readership.

Beyond embracing a model of collective authorship, Slobe's membership in a revolutionary organization exposed her to a potentially hostile public. Newspaper editorial cartoonists received their share of angry letters from crank readers, but Slobe risked public rebuke in person. Along with contributing content, she helped distribute *The Militant*. The SWP's antagonism towards the CPUSA did not provide Trotskyists cover from anti-communists whose knowledge of socialist schisms was likely as extensive as their grasp of Marxist theory. To the extent Americans were aware of these ideological fissures, they likely registered as one of degree rather than kind. Such political participation invited the gaze of the national security state. Along with Cannon, Trotskyist labour leaders were jailed under the Smith Act in the early 1940s. In McCarthyite America these fears did not abate.<sup>52</sup>

Other than Burck, no cartoonist experienced high-profile scrutiny from anti-communists. Cartooning for a party press, though, likely placed Slobe in the state's crosshairs. Slobe's contemporaries in the NCS, and later, the AAEC, defended an abstract freedom of expression that did not account for surveillance. Moreover, they likely were unaware of Slobe, even though she was likely familiar with them. Due to the publishing reach of mainstream print, Slobe could follow trends in cartooning without subscribing to their professional codes.

Being a women artist in a male-dominated field further set Slobe apart from her peers. Within the SWP, though, her gender was less conspicuous. Slobe was one of many prominent women in the party. Yet female characters rarely appeared in her images. Slobe's conceptual focus on industrial labour ignored care work and white-collar clerical professions where women predominated. Earlier radical twentieth-century cartoonists likewise visualized working-class labour as mainly men's work. While Slobe's politics skirted domesticated social conventions, overcoming this gendered perception of work proved difficult.

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<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

<sup>52</sup> For more on the political fortunes of the SWP, see Brian D. Palmer, "Before Braverman: Harry Frankel and the American Workers' Movement," *Monthly Review* 50, no. 8 (January 1999): 33-46.



Figure 5.5: An original Laura Gray cartoon circa 1952.

Source: Tamiment Library, Robert Wagner Labor Archives. Laura Gray Collection, NYU.

Despite not having any formal training as a cartoonist or experience apprenticing in a newspaper's art department, Slobe proved a quick study. Her use of stock cartooning techniques, such as labelling, caricature, and irony, as well as uncluttered backgrounds with minimal text, evinced a technical formalism that would have satisfied cartoonist Don Hesse's injunction to "eliminate profuse labeling and [speech] balloons" in political cartoons.<sup>53</sup> Slobe demonstrated that she was not above lifting familiar symbols as well as new ones, such as Herblock's Mr. Atom. But in her hands these signifiers were often given a new twist. For example, Slobe adopted the visual outline of Block's popular character yet redirected the anthropomorphic bomb's symbolism towards a critique of the military industrial complex. Outside of her use of charcoal and pencil, though, there was little in her technical skillset as a cartoonist that would indicate her background as a modernist artist steeped in the avant-garde. The dark shading in her images was offset by humorous jabs at political elites in caricatures that made no attempt to humanize their foibles. For Slobe, the point of ridicule was to reveal US leaders' complicity. She conveyed this notion by inserting hooded clansmen, militarists, the press, and capitalists into cartoons commenting on national politics.

<sup>53</sup> Hesse, "The Ungentlemanly Art," 17.

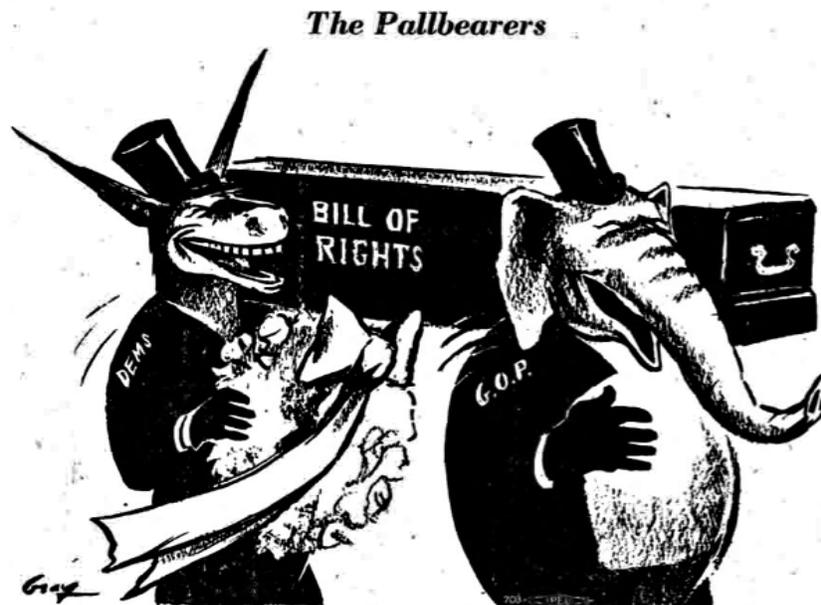


Figure 5.6: Laura Gray, “The Pallbearers” *The Militant*, 2 October 1950.

Source: <https://www.marxists.org/history/etol/newspape/themilitant/1950/index.htm>

Editorial cartoonists’ frequent appeals to a neutral public sphere betrayed a naïve liberalism that ignored how Cold War hegemony sought to exclude those publics that it could not absorb. While the AAEC claimed to represent all sides of the political spectrum, Slobe’s cartoons revealed the hollowness of this claim. In attacking Republicans and Democrats alike, she ironically hewed closer to the professional ideal elaborated by her mainstream peers who prided themselves on lampooning both sides of the political aisle. As LaMont observed, *The Militant* cartoonist used anthropomorphized political symbols to have them interact with humans. This visual strategy turned both party avatars into fully formed characters who were shown actively conspiring against American democracy.

Slobe routinely showed how workers were separated from what Braverman later described as a “unity of thought and action, conception and execution, hand and mind.”<sup>54</sup> Working collaboratively with other *Militant* staff, Slobe did not adhere to the same working methods that characterized most newsrooms. This in part made her sensitive to workers’ struggles against automation.<sup>55</sup> In the fall of 1949, *The Militant* reported on a wave of wildcat miners’ strikes in the northeast. Before leaving the SWP, Dunayevskaya, writing under the name

<sup>54</sup> Braverman, *Labor and Monopoly Capital*, 118.

<sup>55</sup> For more on automation and postwar strikes, see Gavin Mueller, *Breaking Things at Work: The Luddites Were Right About Why You Hate Your Job* (London and New York: Verso, 2021), ch.3, 77-99.

“F. Forrest,” composed a series of articles commenting on the significance of these strikes. Expanding on these themes in *Marxism and Freedom*, Trotsky’s former secretary wrote that:

the miners raised altogether new questions dealing with their conditions of work, and questions of the work itself. What they asked was: “What kind of labor should man do?” “Why should there be such a gulf between thinking and doing?”<sup>56</sup>

The limits of the medium prevented Slobe from fully exploring what Dunayevskaya and Braverman captured in prose. Working within these constraints, Slobe did, however, find inventive ways to gesture towards pertinent debates within the movement. One advantage of not working for a daily was that Slobe and her collaborators did not have to comment on charismatic union leaders such as John Lewis who dominated labour headlines. By centering workers in her cartoons, Slobe critiqued labour organizations like the AFL-CIO for their anticommunism and bureaucratic proceduralism without succumbing to a kneejerk anti-unionism.



Figure 5.7: Laura Gray, *The Militant*, 13 March 1950.

Source: <https://www.marxists.org/history/etol/newspape/themilitant/1950/index.htm>

<sup>56</sup> Dunayevskaya, *Marxism and Freedom*, 3.

Along with visualizing workers' self-activity, Slobe portrayed Black Americans in similarly active ways. At the time, this was unique among white cartoonists. In a series of cartoons commenting on the 1956 Montgomery transit strike, Slobe showed her representative labour figure lending a hand to civil rights activists. Such images conveyed a sense of solidarity that at times was more aspirational than reality. Yet by picturing white and black workers united, Slobe corrected the party's earlier blind spot on race issues by suggesting that the civil rights movement had become a flashpoint for working-class insurgency.



Figure 5.8: Laura Gray, "Car Pool," *The Militant*, 9 April 1956.

Source: <https://www.marxists.org/history/etol/newspape/themilitant/1956/index.htm>

In another civil rights themed cartoon from 1956, Slobe used Jonathan Swift's *Gulliver's Travels* as a setting to represent southern blacks emancipating themselves from Jim Crow. Casting the KKK and her capitalist figure in the roles of the Lilliputians, Slobe pictured the giant in the process of freeing himself from the forces of segregation. Conveying such a sense of motion was a difficult task for graphic artists to communicate through a single-panel image. Comic strip cartoonists had the advantage of multiple panels to elaborate their characters' changing states. Political cartoonists, on the other hand, typically had to resort to subtle visual cues when illustrating a dynamic, fluid situation. Critics of cartooning believed that this was one reason why political cartoons were no longer capable of capturing the complexity of modern life. Yet, Slobe knew some issues needed to be rendered with stark moral clarity.

### ***Freedom is Rising in the South***



Figure 5.9: Laura Gray, "Freedom Is Rising in the South," *The Militant*, 26 March 1956.

Source: <https://www.marxists.org/history/etol/newspape/themilitant/1956/index.htm>

When not caricaturing political elites, Slobe depicted everyday people fighting injustice. At times, these portrayals bordered on the romantic. Her brawny male workers with chiseled physiques and looks of defiance would not have been out of place in the poster art or cartoons published by the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW). Because political cartoonists relied on readily identifiable symbols, such stereotypes were inevitable. In political cartooning, the use of stock characters was also meant to be reductive by design as it purposively narrowed the range of possible interpretation. This technique proved successful when trying to personify capitalism or systematic racism with a stand-in character. Yet this method presented a dilemma when it came to representing workers. As Jacques Rancière argued, “an emancipated proletarian is a dis-identified worker.”<sup>57</sup> Cartoonists, even those with radical commitments, had few ways to “disidentify” a worker in a drawing. Their typical way of representing labour in a single-frame image ran the risk of reducing workers’ identity to labouring alone. To avoid such reductions, radical cartoonists like Slobe had to rely on their audiences to read beyond the image itself.

Political cartoons, of course, do not strive for the final word on any one event or person; instead, they are meant to jolt readers into reflecting on social phenomena while occasionally providing a momentary emotional release, whether humorous or otherwise. In their less idealist moments, newspaper editorial cartoonists recognized this utilitarian aspect of their work. But like any cultural worker in a mass medium, they had to contend with entrenched cultural expectations and structured markets that categorized their labour. Slobe was unrestrained by the latter, but still subject to the former. Outside of Trotskyist readers few Americans would be exposed to Slobe’s take on current events. Anticommunism’s fearful fantasies aside, print capitalism, especially at this point in the Cold War, would not allow an artist like Slobe access to mass print. Unlike other mediums like film, radio or television, political cartooning did not have the benefit of allegory or narrative devices to confound the era’s censorious tendencies. This limited Slobe’s cultural imprint, but it did not necessarily erase her influence. Hers was not an art autonomous in the strict sense posed by Adorno since Slobe’s cartoons were instrumentalized from the outset. But in Gramscian terms she was an organic intellectual who aimed to “accelerate the historical process . . . by rendering practice more homogenous, more coherent, more efficient.”<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> Jacques Rancière, *The Emancipated Spectator*, trans. Gregory Elliott (New York and London: Verso, 2009), 73.

<sup>58</sup> Antonio Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, Quintin Hoare and Geoffrey Nowell Smith eds. (New York and London: International Publishers, 1971), 365.

**The Labor Movement  
And Unemployment**  
(See Page 4)

# THE MILITANT

PUBLISHED WEEKLY IN THE INTERESTS OF THE WORKING PEOPLE

NEW YORK, N. Y., MONDAY, JANUARY 20, 1958  
PRICE 10c

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**Laura Gray—Socialist  
And Militant Artist**  
By Art Preis

NEW YORK, Jan. 12 — One of the most heroic and beloved socialists of our time is no more. Laura Gray, greatest political and social cartoonist of our generation and Militant staff artist for almost 14 years, died Saturday at St. Luke's Hospital here after a two-day illness.

She was hospitalized on Friday with pneumonia, and died at 2:30 a. m. Saturday. She was 49 years old. Her physical frailty was in direct contrast to the strength of her noble spirit. For the last ten years she struggled with the struggle of her working class — she had breast and lung and fought with very little success. At 2:30 a. m. Saturday she failed her last. She was buried yesterday afternoon after a traffic blow she endured as simple economy insisted by her

husband, Ernest and Laura was born on Nov. 17, 1909, in Pittsburgh, Pa. She was brought up in a fairly well-to-do middle-class family. Her family name was Gray. They moved to Chicago during Laura's early years and here she received her education. She was a high school and graduated high school at the age of 16.

Her activity dominated her life from childhood on — she was a born artist, with intense natural gifts. She entered the famous Chicago Art Institute at the age of 15. She was still a student but administrative positions in more than 20 organizations were prominent. She was a member of several.

She was only 19 and scheduled for her first one-man show in a leading Chicago art gallery, then she was hospitalized. She had to park her paintings for shipment to the art gallery, but some were burned down. Every work of art she had worked on hard and long and lovingly was destroyed.

**SHOWED HER STEEL.**  
Then she risked showed her steel spirit down, she did not yield the opening to her feet. She painted new works and finally held her one-man show in the same gallery. She showed the Chicago Art Institute and other art organizations and official activities. It appeared that all roads were open to her.

At the age of 23, a brilliant, recognized artist, a sound great law firm. She was arrested with her husband in 1934. There was only one treatment for this case — therefore, her husband was always fragile.

During the middle and latter part of her life she had a national reputation in the field. She had a one-man show in 1935 at the Katherine Clark gallery. She taught for periods

## Reuther Seeks to Knife UAW Shorter-Week Bid

*Capitalism in War and Peace*

This is one of Laura Gray's most famous cartoons. It was first published in the Militant of Sept. 9, 1941. It has been reprinted in labor and socialist publications in more than a score of countries.

**Ford 600  
Leader Hits  
Phony Move**

DETROIT, Jan. 15—The growing army of unemployed can take no comfort from the fact that United Auto Workers president Walter Reuther has decided to see Roman's Spindle as an excuse for dropping the shorter work-week as a demand for the 1948 auto negotiations. The union, led by the auto workers generally and finally selected by new UAW convention, as an effective method of raising unemployment. Now, Jan. when unemployment is rapidly rising on pre-War level, the demand, substituting instead a vague proposal for a complicated "profit sharing plan."

Reuther is even less likely to be satisfied. He and the board together with a small, specially selected group from Reuther's right-wing circle, in effect voted the members of the April 1952 UAW convention.

**STRAITS FOREBODEN**  
Immediately after the substitute proposals were made public on Jan. 15, Carl Hirsland, president of IAW, Ford branch, told me: "I've seen three or four thousands of other UAW members who are just as disappointed as I am. . . I don't know what Reuther can be thinking about. A shorter work week means more jobs and more money. It should be high on every list. I don't know how the program Reuther's scheme is to be

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LAURA GRAY  
(Nov. 17, 1909 — Jan. 11, 1958)

(Continued on page 2)

Figure 5.10: *The Militant*, 20 January 1958.

Source: <https://www.marxists.org/history/etol/newspape/themilitant/1958/index.htm>

While it is impossible to gauge how many readers beyond the *Militant* readership encountered Slobe's cartoons, her work made an impact within party circles. They were also a reminder that the notion of shared laughter was protean; it could tighten the bonds of hegemony or help cultivate a revolutionary culture. Perhaps her greatest contribution to the movement was shoring up readers already disposed to rejecting capitalism and Stalinism in tandem. For a community not known for its levity, this was no small achievement. When she died unexpectedly at the age of forty-nine in 1958, news of her passing circulated quickly to SWP branches in London, Paris, and Toronto. Almost immediately, there was discussion within the party about raising funds for a collection of her cartoons. Preis penned a moving tribute that reflected on the promise cut short by her premature passing. The long-time party activist counterpoised Slobe's frail health in "direct contrast to the strength of her noble spirit." Socialists everywhere, he wrote, should be "appalled at the series of catastrophic blows she endured and overcame."<sup>59</sup>

Despite her continual membership with the sectarian, and increasingly centralized SWP, *The Militant* cartoonist never used her forum to attack rival Trotskyist sects. In showing this restraint, she recalled an optimism of the Popular Front as well as an earlier Trotskyism before

<sup>59</sup> Art Preis, "Laura Gray—Socialist and Militant Artist," *The Militant*, 20 January 1958.

factionalism had wrested the dissident movement of its most energetic and innovative thinkers. As such, Slobe and her collaborators approached the political cartoon as a tool of movement building. Moreover, the traces of collective authorship that underpinned Slobe's images disproved the oft-cited claim that "committee work" ensured "the death of an editorial cartoon."<sup>60</sup> Like the workers in her drawings, Slobe recognized that capitalism's division of labour separated execution and conception. Undoubtedly, her own experience as a precarious artist living and working in postwar New York provided her ample evidence that this insight was not confined to large-scale manufacturing; it also characterized a range of freelance work in the culture, media, and advertising. For this reason, Slobe's creative practice recalled Dunayevskaya's insights into the labour process. While corresponding about automation with Marcuse, Dunayevskaya wrote: "It is a question of the voices one hears, the sights one sees, the feelings one experiences depending on which side of the production line you stand."<sup>61</sup>

As many scholars of cultural labour have noted, historically, cultural work has been one field where automation in production has met its limits. The market distribution of artists' work, rather than direct supervision over the labour process of cultural work, has been the space where, in Braverman words, "the weaving of the net of modern capitalist life" was most entangling.<sup>62</sup> Slobe did not break through the form's aesthetic formalism, in part, because she did not have the security or luxury of time to experiment. While her centering of workers recaptured the spirit of *The Masses*, Slobe and her collaborators conceived the political cartoon in ways that resembled the medium's formal constraints. Nonetheless, her concrete labours when cartooning were not a form of value-producing abstract labour. In this, she managed to retain some autonomy.

### **"The Old Is Dying and the New Cannot Be Born"**<sup>63</sup>

From the 1920s onward, the trade union press, along with socialist papers such as the *Daily Worker* and *The Militant*, became the main conduit for circulating left-wing perspectives in print. Karla Kelling Schlater, a researcher of twentieth-century leftist print culture, notes that in the 1920s and 1930s "labor union publications . . . increased after Socialist and Wobbly papers declined." During the early Cold War, as radical publishers faced threats of jailtime and

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<sup>60</sup> Lamb, *Drawn to Extremes*, 132.

<sup>61</sup> Quoted in Kevin B. Anderson and Russell Rockwell, eds. *Dunayevskaya-Marcuse-Fromm Correspondence 1954-1978* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2012), 227.

<sup>62</sup> Braverman, *Labor and Monopoly Capital*, 104.

<sup>63</sup> Gramsci, *Selections from the Prison Notebooks*, 275-276.

communist periodicals were suppressed, the Federated Press syndicate, which had been founded in 1920, became an important conduit for circulating labour news.<sup>64</sup> Fred Wright, who was employed by the United Electrical, Radio, and Machine Workers of America (UE) for four decades, saw his cartoons circulated by the Federated Press syndicate to unions papers throughout the country. As one of the few major American unions in the postwar era that did not accommodate anticommunism, Wright's cartoons reflected the UE's sense of solidarity. Labour cartoonists Mike Konopacki and Gary Huck describe Wright as "a worker artist, drawing on worker culture to draw worker culture." Readers, they note, also interacted with Wright's cartoons, by cutting them from union papers and displaying them at work.<sup>65</sup>

Despite his ample drawing skills, Wright's cartoons were not widely known in cartoonists' circles. But Wright was known to anti-Communists. Along with other cultural workers on the left, Wright was mentioned in a 1957 congressional report on subversive cultural activities.<sup>66</sup> He began his career in the late 1940s, selling his first cartoon to *The Pilot*, a publication for the National Maritime Union (NMU). In 1949 Wright was hired as the staff cartoonist for the *UE News*, remaining with the union paper until 1984. Stephen Kercher describes Wright as "a saxophone-playing jazzman who . . . used cartoons as sharp rejoinders to the Taft-Hartley Act, McCarthyism, and other postwar onslaughts against the American labor movement." Kercher adds that Wright's "class-conscious, prolabor cartooning left virtually no trace in mainstream publications."<sup>67</sup> This is somewhat misleading, though, as Wright inspired similarly politically inclined artists to take up a pro-labour cartooning. Huck, who succeeded Wright at the *UE News* and who started a syndicate with Konopacki in the 1980s that supplied the labour press with cartoons, were just two notable devotees of his work.

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<sup>64</sup> Karla Kelling Schlater, "The Labor and Radical Press, 1820 to the Present: An Overview and Bibliography," *Pacific Northwest Labor and Radical Newspapers* <https://depts.washington.edu/labhist/laborpress/Kelling.htm>

<sup>65</sup> Mike Konopacki and Gary Huck, "Labor Cartoons: Drawing on Worker Culture," in *The New Labor Press: Journalism for a Changing Union Movement* Sam Pizzigati and Fred J. Solowey, eds. (Ithaca, NY: ILR Press at Cornell University, 1992), 139-140.

<sup>66</sup> "Scope of Soviet Activity in the United States: Hearings Before the Subcommittee to Investigate the Administration of the Internal Security Act and Other Internal Security Laws," December 3-4, 1956. The senate report listed Wright's cartoons for *The Dispatcher*, the official publication of the International Longshoremen's and Warehousemen's Union (ILWU) and the "Communist-controlled Federated Press," 2845, 2848-2849.

<sup>67</sup> Kercher groups Fred Wright alongside *Los Angeles Times* cartoonist Paul Conrad and graphic artist Ben Shahn, who worked with Adlai Steven's presidential campaigns, as political cartoonists whose drawings and caricatures "could sting" but whose "cultural influence" was minimal. See Kercher, *Revel With a Cause*, 34.

Wright's anti-capitalist missives incorporated speech bubbles, sequential panels, and comic art. His linework was considerably more playful than the prevailing style that typified editorial cartooning at the time. Often described as "cartoony," Wright's humorous slant on the day-to-day grind of mass production was backed by a fiercely pro-union perspective.<sup>68</sup> He also contributed to animation shorts produced by the UE, which typically ran ten to twenty minutes and focused on educating the union's rank and file on episodes in American labour history. Thematically, the trade union cartoonist mainly focused on the shop floor, but he also occasionally ridiculed the right. In the *Barry Goldwater Coloring Book* (1964), a thirty-page interactive booklet, Wright pictured the Republican candidate in Napoleon garb with a six-shooter in his holster, often riding his horse backwards. Wright's cartoons were accompanied with terrifying quotes from the senator. Wright pictured Goldwater galivanting around with John Birchers, the KKK, and fascists. Each illustration also included drawing instructions, and thus, invited the reader to take part in the fun. The book's distributor, the leftist publisher, Marzani & Munsell, sold it as part of anti-Goldwater series that could be purchased through the mail.<sup>69</sup>

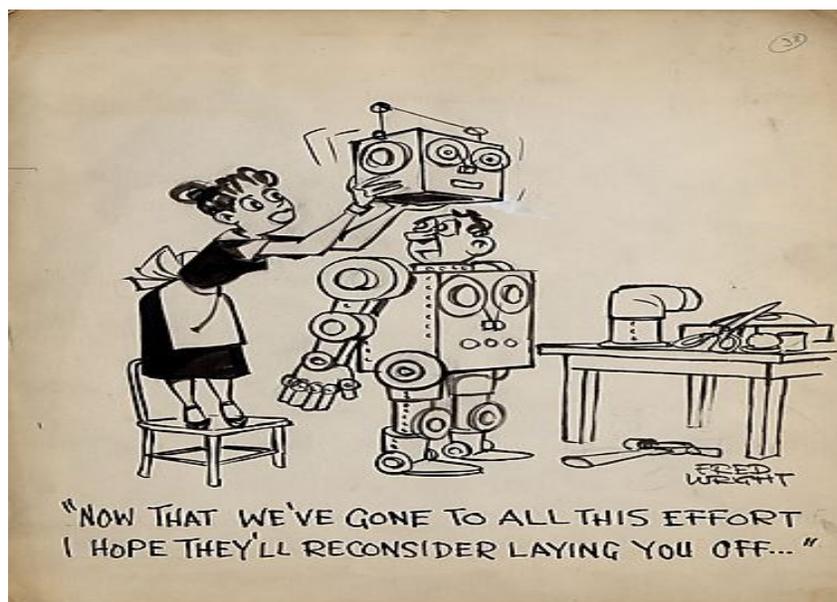


Figure 5.11: Fred Wright, "Now That We've Gone to All This Effort..." Undated. *UE News*.

Source: <https://digital.library.pitt.edu/islandora/object/pitt%3Aue13.1.1142>

<sup>68</sup> "Guide to the Fred Wright Papers, 1949-1986," University of Pittsburgh's United Electrical, Radio, and Machine Workers of America Special Collection. For an online exhibit of Wright's cartoons, "Drawing on the American Labor Movement: Labor History Cartoons of Fred Wright," <http://exhibit.library.pitt.edu/fredwright/> Accessed 1 February 2021.

<sup>69</sup> Fred Wright, *The Goldwater Coloring Book* (New York: Marzani & Munsell, Inc., 1964). Unpaginated.

Wright's comical take on workers' interactions with bosses skirted genre classifications while demonstrating a playfulness and serious class politics that was all but absent in mainstream cartooning. For Benjamin the rise of daily print in the nineteenth century eclipse oral communication and the epic story form. These developments corresponded to changes in consumption as well as urban space, both of which atomized social life in ways that made these media forms ascendent. As Benjamin wrote:

The value of information does not survive the moment in which it was new. It lives only at the moment; it has to surrender to it completely and explain itself to it without losing any time. A story is different. It does not expend itself. It preserves and concentrates its strength and is capable of releasing it even further after a long time.<sup>70</sup>

Twentieth century cartooning saw a somewhat analogous situation. While both comic strips and editorial cartoons were delivered in the same mode of communication — the daily newspaper — the former's multi-panel structures allowed cartoonists to relay a story that did “not expend itself.” This narrative structure preserved a storytelling component more suited for parsing the complexities of consumer capitalism. Another reason why the editorial cartooning form had come to exhaust its critical and aesthetic energies had to do with the medium's aversion to exploring structural causation. As a younger subset of readers showed with their embrace of comic books, textual minimalism in graphic art had become pat. Likewise, in a postwar visual culture teeming with advertising, television, and film, imagined ideals of femininity, masculinity, and middle-class whiteness reverberated across a mediascape where an editorial cartoon appeared as one image among many. This posed a problem since editorial cartoonists did not have the same access to global markets as cartoonists who laboured in comic strips or animation. Because of the contingent nature of humour, editorial cartoons fared less well with foreign audiences when compared to a strip like *Blondie* or a comic book such as *Donald Duck*. Even Walt Kelly's *Pogo*, whose swamp creatures conversed in a dialogue heavy on vernacular, struggled to translate domestic commercial success abroad.

While in principle, the limits of print capitalism were boundless, traditional print practices stipulated a strict separation between editorial and comic strips pages. Cartoonists, then, were slotted into distinct markets for syndicated features, whether they wanted to or not.

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<sup>70</sup> Benjamin, “The Storyteller,” *Illumination*, 34.

This contributed to newspaper cartooning's declining cultural influence, signs of which were already visible in the mid to late 1950s. *Mad* magazine's popular multi-panel sendups of postwar culture, followed by Jules Feiffer's existential musings on postwar alienation in his *Village Voice* strip, marked emergent trends in visual satire that the magazine industry, rather than daily newspapers, was better positioned to exploit. Notably, few graphic artists who would publish regularly in alternative print media were dues-paying members of the NCS and the AAEC.<sup>71</sup>

Whereas mainstream cartoonists in McCarthyite America were incentivized to stay within the bounds of anticommunism, a decade later these discursive lines shifted dramatically. The comics controversy of the late 1940s and early 1950s presaged this shift. During its first Senate appearance in 1954, the NCS and Comics Council looked for shrewd ways to disassociate comics strips from comic books. The NCS strongly objected to any proposed national censorship legislation. Instead, the Society endorsed a "local option" that would recognize the authority of local and state officials to regulate content displayed on newsstands within their own jurisdictions. According to the NCS's statement,

We believe good material outsells bad. We believe people, even juveniles, are fundamentally decent. We believe, as parents and as onetime children ourselves that most young people are intrinsically attracted to that which is wholesome. Our belief in this sound commercial theory is only in addition to our belief in free expression and the noble traditions of our profession. Our history abounds in stalwarts of pen and pencil who have fought for freedom of others. For ourselves as artists and free Americans we too cherish freedom and the resultant growth of ideas.<sup>72</sup>

The statement performed a highwire act by trying to defend print freedoms without appearing to endorse the salacious comics content being scrutinized by the senate. Its invocation of "noble traditions" would likewise be echoed by the NCS in subsequent appearances before Congress.<sup>73</sup> As Amy Nyberg has shown, the Comics Code requirement that comic books needed to obtain a Seal of Approval before hitting newsstands exacerbated what was an already collapsing market

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<sup>71</sup> For more on how the NCS navigated the comics controversy, see chapter 2 of this study.

<sup>72</sup> For the full transcript of the hearings, see Walt Kelly Correspondence, Box WK5, folder 1, BICLM.

<sup>73</sup> This episode is also briefly discussed in chapter 2, section 2.

for the genre of horror and crime comics.<sup>74</sup> The industry's adoption of a self-regulating regime had other, more lasting, unforeseen consequences. In 1955, William Gaines, the publisher of EC Comics who had come under fire during the 1954 hearings, converted *Mad*, one of the few profitable comics in his line, into a magazine format. Gaines' decision was motivated by the desire to retain *Mad*'s chief editor, Harvey Kurtzman. But the rebranding had the additional benefit of allowing the new imprint, *Mad Magazine*, to escape the strictures of the Code.

In the long run, *Mad* had the "sound[er] commercial theory." By turning popular culture into source material, Ethan Thompson argues that *Mad*'s self-referential satire "armed" adolescent readers with sophisticated ways to decode dominant cultural codes. Unsurprisingly, these playful parodies caught the attention of "worried youngsters and concerned mothers" who wrote letters to FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover asking if the magazine was "communistic."<sup>75</sup> Hoover, as was his wont, kept tabs on *Mad*, but anti-Communists were leery of appearing to interfere with a robust magazine market that did not fall under the Comics Code's mandate. Thus, *Mad* mocked consumer culture by becoming part of it. This was a significant development. As Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) leader Tom Hayden, later recalled: "My own radical journey began with *Mad Magazine*."<sup>76</sup>

For younger readers, *Mad*'s subtle jabs at postwar institutions like the nuclear family and its skewering of media advertising made for illicit reading. Through "mutually assured disparagement," the magazine upended traditional authority.<sup>77</sup> In the late 1950s *Time* dubbed this new humour "sick comedy." The term was a catchall phrase that encompassed a diverse range of humourists, from comedian Lenny Bruce to the satirical songsmith Tom Lehrer. According to *Time*, these "sicknits" dispensed "social criticism liberally laced with cyanide."<sup>78</sup> At a time when newspaper cartooning had become formulaic, *Mad*'s inventive mélange of "sick" humour and punchy graphics defied easy categorization. While *Mad* cartoonists like Sergio Aragonés may not have been household names, their creative style melded the lightness of the Sunday funnies

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<sup>74</sup> For the more comprehensive account of the Comics Code, see Amy Kiste Nyberg, *Code of Approval: The History of the Comics Code* (Jackson, MI: University Press of Mississippi, 1998).

<sup>75</sup> See Ethan Thompson, "What, Me Subversive? *Mad Magazine* and the Textual Strategies and Cultural Politics of Parody," *Parody and Taste in Postwar American Television Culture* (New York: Routledge, 2011), ch.2, 45-75.

<sup>76</sup> Jan Herman, "MAD Magazine + Tom Hayden = SDS," *The Huffington Post*, 5 December 2007.

<sup>77</sup> James J. Kimble, "Mutually Assured Disparagement: Enmification and Enlightenment in Early 1950s *Mad*," *Studies in American Humor, Special issue: Mad Magazine and Its Legacies*, no. 30 (2014): 123-134.

<sup>78</sup> *Time Magazine*, "The Sicknits," 3 July 1959.

with the irreverence of late-night television. By requiring that readers have familiarity with the material being satirized, the magazine's interactive content also made younger readers feel like that they were in on the joke.

*Mad* inspired its share of imitators, as well as more transgressive offshoots. In 1958, former *Mad* writer, Paul Krassner, founded the satirical magazine, *The Realist*. Incensed by what he saw as thinly veiled hypocrisies of postwar culture, Krassner aimed to provide "satirical commentary on the tragicomedy currents of our time" while also covering issues "treated only superficially by the general press."<sup>79</sup> His broadsides against organized religion, sexual mores, and the Cold War cut a swath through "the American way of life." At times, however, his penchant for courting controversy overrode the magazine's political commitments. As *The Realist* increased its circulation in the 1960s, feminists rightly saw in the magazine's lewd, and occasionally violent depictions of sex, the same male chauvinism coursing through mainstream culture. As Terry Joel Wagner notes, Krassner effectively combined "vulgarity and protests" to oppose Jim Crow and the Vietnam War, but his main quarrel remained with those he saw as "the cultural censors."<sup>80</sup>

Despite his personal crusade, Krassner considered his magazine as "a central clearing house for cartoons that were considered in bad taste or too controversial for mainstream media."<sup>81</sup> Other satirical magazines, cut in a similar mould, quickly followed suit. Before becoming a serious print journalist, Victor Navasky founded the *Monocle* while a law student at Yale in the late 1950s. Navasky's "leisurely monthly" likewise set out to "challenge the pieties of the day."<sup>82</sup> Yet, in contrast to Krassner's "angry, young magazine," the *Monocle* tracked more towards Mort Stahl's erudite routines than Bruce's profanity-laced routines.

Over the years, both satirical magazines provided platforms for up-and-coming graphic artists like David Levine and Richard Guindon as well as syndicated cartoonists like Frank Interlandi and Lou Myers. Along with his twin brother, Phil, who was a cartoonist for *Playboy*,

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<sup>79</sup> Paul Krassner, "Editorial: An Angry Young Magazine" *The Realist*, no. 1 (June-July 1958), 1-2.

<sup>80</sup> For more on the magazine's history and its growing influence on counterculture print trends, see Terry Joel Wagner, "'To Liberate Communication': the *Realist* and Paul Krassner's 1960s," (MA thesis: Louisiana State University and Agricultural and Mechanical College, 2010).

<sup>81</sup> Quoted in the oral history collection, *We Told You So: Comics as Art*, Tom Spurgeon and Michael Dean, eds. (Seattle, WA: Fantagraphics Books, 2016), 589-590.

<sup>82</sup> Victor Navasky interview with UC Berkley's "Conversations with History" series, 2005. Full interview at <http://globetrotter.berkeley.edu/people5/Navasky/navasky-con2.html>. Accessed 1 Feb 2021.

Frank Interlandi's career arc captured an emerging fluidity between alternative and mainstream cartooning. A self-described "painter at heart," Interlandi dabbled in abstract Impressionism. Unlike Laura Slobe, however, cartooning provided him with a steady income. After serving in WWII, he began publishing cartoons with student newspapers in Iowa before landing a full-time staff position with the *Des Moines Register*. In 1961 he was awarded the prize for best editorial cartoon by the prestigious Sigma Delta Chi journalist society. A year later, he moved to the *Los Angeles Times* and in 1964 would be joined by noted liberal firebrand, Paul Conrad. As Southern California became a seedbed for counterculture thought in the 1960s, the Interlandi twins formed a loosely knit group of west coast-based cartoonists with ties to alternative media. They met regularly at a pub strategically located by a nearby postal office in Laguna, California. As local journalist Barbara Diamond described: "The post office, where the group daily mailed their cartoons to publications, at that time was near the White House restaurant on South Coast Highway. When the post office moved to Forest Avenue, the group moved with it."<sup>83</sup>

A decade earlier, Frank Interlandi's straddling of cartooning genres made it somewhat difficult for his syndicate to classify for prospective subscribers. In a 1953 ad in *Editor & Publisher*, the Register and Tribune Syndicate described Interlandi as "an amiably antagonistic young man" who provided a "fresh editorial breeze." Yet, the syndicate noted Interlandi stayed away from the typical headlines that editorial cartoonists commented on and instead touched on "subjects only generally in the news" such as "the United Nations, the possibility of atomic warfare, subversives, the Fifth Amendment." According to his syndicate, Interlandi's social satire aimed to show "all too plainly the confusion and occasionally pathos of the individual citizen caught up in a world moving too fast." The syndicate recommended the feature as "a bridge between a straight gag panel and a political cartoon" and suggested editors view Interlandi's cartoon panel as "an adjunct to the editorial page" rather than "a substitute for a regular editorial cartoon." The syndicate also made sure to reassure editors that when it came to politics, Interlandi did not "crusade for individual causes" or "take sides."<sup>84</sup>

In 1962, chafing against these print strictures, Interlandi sent an unsolicited submission to *The Realist*. The cartoon depicted a man strolling by a civil defense poster that posed the

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<sup>83</sup> Barbara Diamond, "The Last of a Special Breed," *Daily Pilot* 11 February 2010. <https://www.latimes.com/socal/daily-pilot/news/tn-dpt-xpm-2010-02-11-cpt-interlandiobit02122010-story.html>. Accessed 1 February 2021.

<sup>84</sup> Mather Wallis, "Editorial Page Breeze In Satirical Cartoons," *Editor & Publisher*, 31 October 1953.

question: “What Would You Do in the Event of Atomic War?” A speech bubble forms and the man confesses: “I’d shit!”<sup>85</sup> Interlandi’s cartoon caught the attention of his mainstream peers, some of whom, believed that it was deserving of a Pulitzer. In an accompanying note to Krassner, Interlandi explained why he choose *The Realist* to publish this particular image:

I did the cartoon with the intention of sending it to the syndicate, but when it came to putting the punch line in, I couldn’t think of anything but “I’d shit!” The more lines I tried, the less funny it got, and the surer I was that the original line was the best and only one –it was a genuine reaction; the feeling of being helpless and returning to infantilism. But why do I have to explain a cartoon? Naturally I knew the syndicate would reject it, so they never did see it, but I wanted to see it printed and I thought of you.<sup>86</sup>

Mainstream newspaper and magazine editors considered curse words and depictions of violence as strictly verboten. Thus, *The Realist* provided an attractive option since it allowed Interlandi to drop the pretense of neutrality that his syndicate ascribed to him in the 1950s. Lou Myers, another cartoonist who published frequently in mainstream print, likewise discovered a suitable creative outlet in *The Realist*. His whimsical child-like drawing style followed a loose sequential panel structure that allowed him to tell brief vignettes. Often, Myers pictured his characters addressing the reader. In one such cartoon, Myers showed a deranged man regurgitating civil defense talking points, which prompted the reader to reflect on the absurdity.

Despite such innovations in form, alternative cartooning’s zeal for transgressive humour sometimes made for questionable content. In another *Realist* cartoon from this period, Myers imagined George Wallace receiving a threatening phone call from Mao Zedong. As the panel develops, Mao tells the anxious southern governor in broken English that China supports the Black freedom struggle. The one-sided conversation quickly devolves, however, into a threat of mass rape. Mao warns that his invading army in Alabama will look for “nice white girl” with “faw blon hair an bloo eyes...we not wear Tlogans.”<sup>87</sup> While the cartoon mocked Wallace’s fears of miscegenation, it also trafficked in racist stereotypes and used sexual violence to make

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<sup>85</sup> Frank Interlandi, *The Realist*, no 23 (February 1961), 23.

<sup>86</sup> Interlandi’s cartoon was praised “at an editorial cartoonists’ convention.” This was likely in reference to the AAEC’s 1961 convention in Los Angeles that spring. Within the AAEC’s official conference minutes, no specific reference to the reaction to Interlandi’s cartoon is mentioned. See, *We Told You So: Comics as Art*, 589.

<sup>87</sup> Lou Myers, “George Wallace Speaking,” *The Realist*, no. 55 (December 1964), 19.

its point. Invoking the “yellow peril” to ridicule a segregationist hardly constituted a critique on race relations. Thus, Myers missed an opportunity to connect these pathologies in a way that upended them. Furthermore, due to the cartoon’s suggestive dialogue, no mainstream syndicate or editor would ever publish it. Ironically, the absence of editorial standards in alternative print media occasionally led its contributors to reinforce that which they professed to expose.

In the early 1960s, amidst the backdrop of the Berkeley Free Speech and Civil Rights movements, the discourse around freedom of expression contained loftier aims than displaying bawdy material. But as the obscenity charges against Krassner’s friend, Lenny Bruce, showed, many in the counterculture saw the two goals intersecting. This made for confusing politics at times. While a loosely libertarian socialist ethos permeated the pages of *The Realist*, its politics were somewhat fuzzy. For every essay that thoughtfully compared the ritualized practices and “psycho-dynamics” of capitalism with religion, parodies such as Krassner’s “Fuck Communism” sticker campaign showed how power did not always factor into *The Realist*’s calculations.<sup>88</sup> Riling the left, of course, was not the same as offending the puritanical tastes of conservatives. Fundamentally, these targets did not possess the same influence in American life. What Krassner and his contributors tended to miss was how expressive individualism served as a poor barometer to gauge the stress tests of democracy.

To his credit, Krassner paid his contributors for their work, a practice that would become exceedingly rare in the underground press. It was little surprise, then, that many alternative media contributors looked for work in commercial media. For cartoonists who already published in both mainstream and alternative print, the counterculture injunction against “selling out” was sidestepped by the claim that one could still find ways to subvert corporate culture. Myers, for example, turned to advertising in the late 1960s. In a rare practice, he included his signature line in his ads. According to Steven Hiller, Myers “achieved his client’s marketing goal while taking a playful swipe at corporate life.”<sup>89</sup> Yet as mainstream culture incorporated more counterculture themes, such playfulness raised questions about what was being subverted.

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<sup>88</sup> Robert Anton Wilson, “Negative Thinking—Is Capitalism a Revealed Religion?” *The Realist* no. 27 (June 1961): 6-10.

<sup>89</sup> Stephen Heller, “Obituary: Lou Myers, Cartoonist With a Satiric Style, Dies at 90,” *New York Times* 21 November 2005.

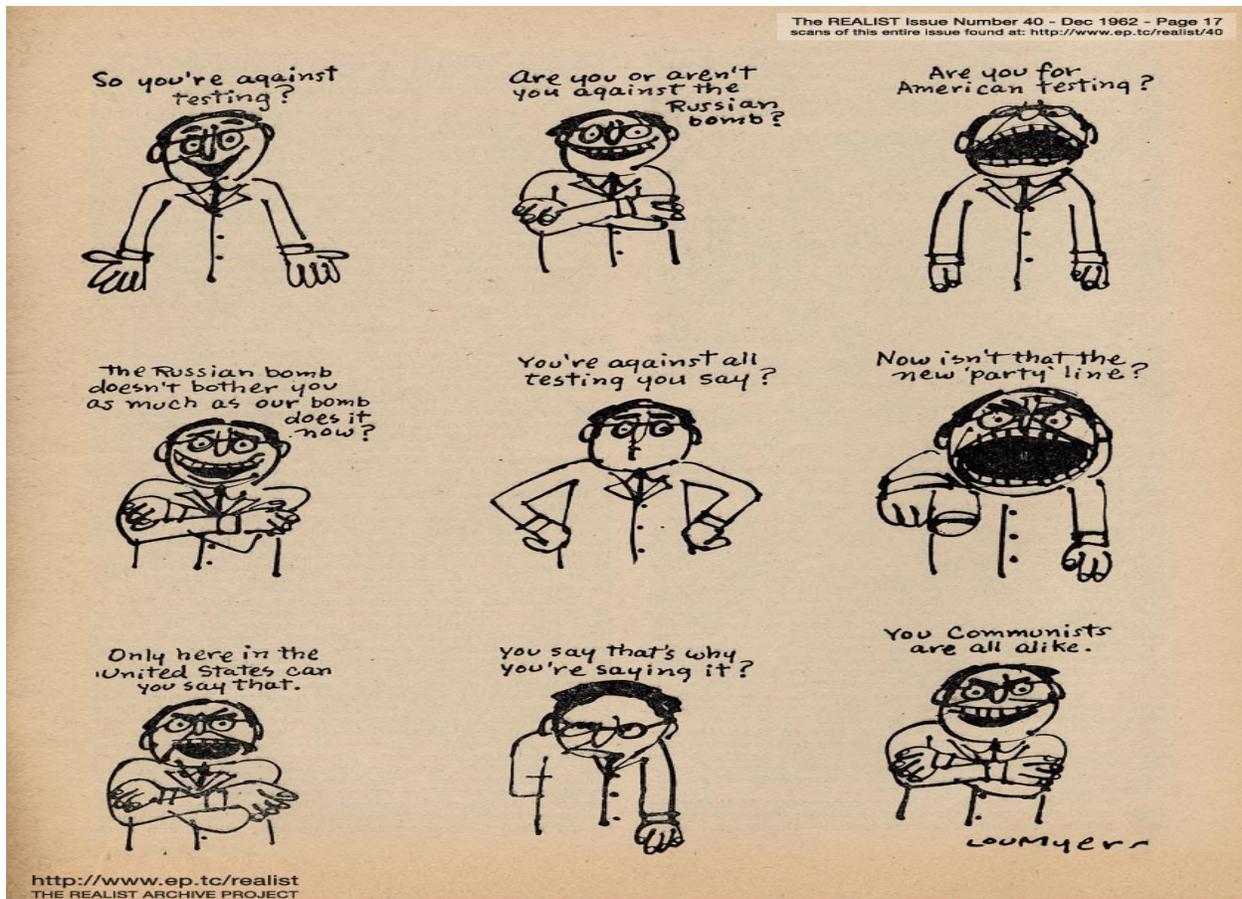


Figure 5.12: Lou Myers, “So You’re Against Testing?” *The Realist*, no. 40 (December 1962), 17.

Source: *The Realist Archival Project*. <http://www.ep.tc/realist/40/>

Cartoonists, too, began asking whether the commodification of political satire undermined its stated purpose. Many alternative cartoonists also appeared indifferent to what venues reprinted their work. In a 1961 *Realist* interview with Jules Feiffer, the popular *Village Voice* cartoonist explained his resistance to having “any definite shape of political being.” When asked about socialist publications reprinting his work, Feiffer replied,

I’ve also allowed my strip to be reprinted in religious publications but I’m an atheist . . . *The New Republic* is going to run some of my strips but I’m no liberal. And if William Buckley ever came around . . . As long as the cartoons are run without change, I’m glad to see them circulated.<sup>90</sup>

<sup>90</sup> “An Impolite Interview with Jules Feiffer,” *The Realist*, no. 23 (February 1961): 1, 12.

Feiffer's answer was revealing, indicative, as it was, of changing attitudes about print affiliation. Whereas socialist cartoonists like Art Young had once claimed to seek out publications with shared political visions, questions surrounding authenticity had become muddled. Feiffer's reflections were no doubt borne of his diverse industry experiences which began in the workshop of Will Eisner's syndicated strip, *The Spirit*. While apprenticing under Eisner in the late 1940s, Feiffer's tasks were divided between storyboarding, lettering, and occasionally, writing.<sup>91</sup> During the Korean War, Feiffer was drafted into the army, an experience he would later describe as radicalizing. While serving stateside, he began experimenting with a long-form comic style. One such comic, "Munro," told the story of a young boy mistakenly drafted into the army. The story's format mocked the regimentation of army life but also anticipated in some respects what would later become graphic novels. However, after resuming his career, Feiffer began pitching his "cartoon narratives" to publishers who roundly rejected them on the grounds that no market existed for comics aimed at an adult audience.<sup>92</sup>

Undeterred, in 1957, Feiffer approached the *Voice's* editors, offering, at first, to draw cartoons for the weekly for free. His wavy, squiggly line bore few of the conventional benchmarks of editorial cartooning, but his politically enthused content quickly gained a following within Greenwich Village and beyond. Feiffer's strip developed in sequential panels and monologues which allowed his anxiety-riddled characters to speculate on the sources of their neuroses. Originally entitled, "Sick, Sick, Sick," the strip became eponymously renamed after being picked up by the Hall Syndicate in the late 1950s. A frequent critic of atomic diplomacy among other postwar ills, Feiffer also displayed an activist streak, giving public talks at college campuses and events sponsored by the Committee for a Sane Nuclear Policy (SANE).

The lack of any discernable class politics in alternative cartooning owed in part to the influence of comic books. In American comics, workers were rarely pictured. Politics, however, were integrated into storylines. Bradley Wright notes that, during the late 1930s and WWII, Superman and Captain Marvel battled fascists and "expressed hope for international cooperation."<sup>93</sup> Growing up in a leftist Jewish household in the Bronx, these antifascist

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<sup>91</sup> For a summary of Feiffer's career, see Webb, "Laughter Louder Than Bombs?" *American Quarterly*, 252-259.

<sup>92</sup> For a compelling autobiography in his industry experiences, see Jules Feiffer, *Backing Into Forward: A Memoir* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010).

<sup>93</sup> Bradford W. Wright, *Comic Book Nation: The Transformation of Youth Culture in America* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins Press, 2001), 65-69.

narratives resonated with Feiffer. In the 1960s he wrote one of the first in-depth studies of the medium.<sup>94</sup> By that point in his career, the Hall Syndicate's success in distributing his work both nationally and internationally had granted Feiffer to pursue creative interests in other media.

Feiffer's meteoric rise in the industry signalled that "the art of ill will," as he described it, was undergoing profound changes.<sup>95</sup> Some newspaper editorial cartoonists defended their traditional turf in the face of this print challenge. Karl Hubenthal remarked that his editor asked him to explain the "sick" humour in one of his "competitor's cartoons." Hubenthal confessed that its appeal escaped him.<sup>96</sup> Cartooning's professional societies were slow to adapt to this changing print climate. While the AAEC hosted George Wallace at its annual convention, satirical magazines were busily flaying the segregationist in cutting cartoons. Moreover, this burgeoning graphic arts scene was building links of its own. I

In 1963 Navasky appointed *Realist* contributor, Edward Sorrel, as its art director. After Walt Disney's death in 1966, Krassner commissioned *Mad* cartoonist Wally Wood's infamous Disney Memorial Orgy cartoon, partly as a way to decry the sentimentalism surrounding the mogul's death.<sup>97</sup> Just as *Mad* had resonated with a readership becoming self-conscious consumers, so too, did alternative cartooning speak to an emerging New Left that was becoming conscious of its own political power. It was no surprise, then, that the national SDS office hung up two pictures on its walls: one, a portrait of Bob Dylan, and the other, a Feiffer cartoon.<sup>98</sup>

Newspaper editors, meanwhile, were largely unmoved by the growing popularity of alternative cartoonists. In 1964 the *Philadelphia Evening and Sunday Bulletin* notified the Hall Syndicate that it had pulled two of Feiffer's recent strips. The paper's editor wrote that "when he does political cartoons lambasting Goldwater we can't run him," adding that the paper's opinions were confined "to its editorials and editorial cartoons."<sup>99</sup> While such threats may have given editorial cartoonists pause during the McCarthy era, by the mid-1960s Feiffer had no cause to worry about a wave of potential cancellations.

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<sup>94</sup> See Jules Feiffer, *The Great Comic Book Heroes* (Seattle, WA: Fantagraphics Books, 2003).

<sup>95</sup> This expression is often attributed to Jules Feiffer. See Dewey, *Art of Ill Will*.

<sup>96</sup> Hubenthal could have been referring to *Los Angeles Times*' cartoonists, Frank Interlandi and Paul Conrad. See Hubenthal, "Reflections of an Editorial Cartoonist," 24.

<sup>97</sup> Wally Wood, "The Disneyland Memorial Orgy," *The Realist*, (May 1967).

<sup>98</sup> McMillan, *Smoking Typewriters*, 13.

<sup>99</sup> A. Bergman to W. Robert Walton, 4 August 1964. See Jules Feiffer Correspondence. Box 10, folder 1. Library of Congress, Manuscripts Division.

While newspaper editors clung to their traditional understanding of cartoon and comic art, Feiffer spoke frequently about the future of satire, more broadly. In a 1965 talk delivered at the College of the Holy Cross, Feiffer startled his audience by proclaiming satire had become “meaningless.” For Feiffer, subverting expectations through satirical comment was “no longer a comment on the way we live” but rather had become “the way we live.” Feiffer blamed this state of affairs on what he frequently referred to as “the radical middle”; a mostly comfortable stratum of American society whose affluence had inured them to social problems. Tracing this lineage, Feiffer suggested this middle-class conformity first emerged in the post-WWI years before re-emerging in the early Cold War. Growing up in a leftist household, Feiffer’s rough timeline suggested that this culture of content thrived in times when the left had been in retreat. He concluded his talk by describing the recent student unrest at Berkeley as “the police rioting” and ended by advocating for the US’s immediate withdrawal from Vietnam.<sup>100</sup>



Figure 5.13: Jules Feiffer’s debut cartoon strip in the *Village Voice*, 24 October 1956.

Source: *The Village Voice*: Google News Archive.

<sup>100</sup> “Feiffer Attacks the ‘Radical Middle,’ Calls Social Satire ‘Meaningless,’” *The Crusader*, 14 October 1965. Jules Feiffer Correspondence. Box 10, folder 1. Library of Congress.

Feiffer's talk raised some key questions about whether social satire could exist without observable limits. In this, he was prescient, as the taboo-breaking trends would continue apace throughout the 1960s, but with less effectiveness. "We have become alienated and withdrawn," Feiffer told his college-age audience.<sup>101</sup> Locating the sources of this alienation were another matter. Laughter may have helped puncture this somnolent state, Feiffer suggested, but tipping over sacred Cold War cows followed a similar logic as editorial cartoonists who delighted in poking fun at politicians. Both methods of critique indulged the fantasy that art was a substitute for political action. While American mainstream cartoonists were fond of quoting famed British cartoonist David Low's advice to identify politicians' "stupidity" rather than their "badness," alternative cartoonists had no qualms doing both.<sup>102</sup> Yet, as they transgressed all barriers, the question became, what next?

The middle-class values that so many sixties' radicals rejected did not exist apart from the pathologies of American liberalism, US empire, and the consumer society. Yet, in a media context where the common cultural reference points were dissolving as fast as new media forms were being created, visual satire was tasked with showing what continued to stitch these antinomies together. Moreover, in the face of state violence, at home and abroad, satirists no longer had a readymade moral counterpoint in which to contrast with. In the tumult of 1968, this disjuncture became painfully vivid. In the leadup to the Democratic Party Convention, Yippies Abbie Hoffman and Jerry Rubin planned to run a pig for president as a protest candidate. However, the mock campaign, which recalled the quadrennial "Pogo for President" clubs in the 1950s, was quickly overshadowed by the mayhem that ensued outside the convention. As Democratic mayor Richard Daley unleashed the Chicago Police on anti-war protesters, the carnivalesque atmosphere quickly dissipated. Television cameras captured the melee that was then beamed into millions of American homes. There was no parody in the well-thumbed pages of *Mad* that could have prepared anti-war protesters for scenes like this. And while political humour was never meant to be a substitute for political education, the two had not been altogether distant in the 1950s and early 1960s.

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<sup>101</sup> Ibid.

<sup>102</sup> Quoted in Scott Long, "Convention is Challenge to New Ideas, Achievement," *AAEC News*, vol. 2, no. 1 (June 1960), pp. 3. Box AAEC 1, folder 7, BICLM.

Mike Davis and Jan Weiner describe counterculture cartooning as “one of the most distinctive elements of the underground press” and a “crucial [element] in defining the Sixties sensibility.”<sup>103</sup> Weekly rags like the *Los Angeles Free Press*, or *Freep* as was it was colloquially known, featured inventive cover designs, sploshy inks as well as cartoonists like Ron Cobb. With the advent of offset printing, the New Left forged parallel print networks through both the Underground Press Syndicate (UPS) and the Liberation News Service (LNS), both of which became “the Movement’s primary means of internal communication” and for sharing news.<sup>104</sup> These syndicates also distributed cartoons, strips, and graphics that extended the reach of counterculture graphic art to both a national and international audience.

In a cartooning style that drew from 1950s sci-fi imagery as much as it did comic art, Cobb’s grim humour won him accolades throughout the counterculture. He began his career in the mainstream, however. In the 1950s Cobb was as an animator on Disney’s production line. After working on *Sleeping Beauty* (1957), the studio let Cobb go and he began freelancing. In the mid-1960s Cobb met *Freep* publisher and editor, Art Kunkin. The *Freep* was one of the era’s most celebrated underground papers, but as its staff protested at the time, both its ownership and “management system [were] not too different from capitalist publications.”<sup>105</sup>

Nonetheless, the *Freep*’s media platform was significant. After seeing one of Cobb’s cartoons that *Playboy* had recently rejected, Kunkin hired him as the monthly’s cartoonist. According to Cobb, the *Freep* allowed him to publish “with limited censorship, so long as I didn’t get asked to be paid.” Despite the precarity, Cobb built his readership through the underground syndicates, and by the end of the decade, his cartoons were reprinted in an estimated eighty publications, including the *Berkley Barb*, the *Chicago Seed*, and the *East Village Other*. Additionally, Cobb’s cartoons were republished in Europe, Asia, and Australia. However, the hazy status of second rights meant this international exposure did not monetarily benefit Cobb. This forced him to supplement his income by designing album art and film posters. In 1972, Cobb relocated to Australia where he took up a career in production design, working on such blockbuster films as *Star Wars* (1977) and *Conan the Barbarian* (1982).<sup>106</sup>

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<sup>103</sup> Mike Davis and Jon Weiner, *Set the Night On Fire: L.A. in the Sixties* (London and New York: Verso, 2020), 190.

<sup>104</sup> McMillan, *Smoking Typewriters*, 6.

<sup>105</sup> Davis and Weiner, *Set the Night on Fire*, 716-717, ebook.

<sup>106</sup> Ron Cobb other early career experiences in a brief essay published on his website. See, Ron Cobb, “Going Underground,” <http://roncobb.net/cartoons.html>. Accessed 1 February 2021.

Cobb's peripatetic career path spoke to the challenges that cartoonists still faced in making a living from pillorying the institutions of postwar America. Moreover, as the FBI and local authorities began to wage a war of their own against the underground press in the early 1970s, the New Left's print energies were diverted to fighting trumped-up obscenity charges for political speech clearly protected by the First Amendment.<sup>107</sup> Even as some cartoonists with links to alternative print media were able to crossover into the mainstream, publishing in liberal periodicals did not grant them the leeway they had experienced with underground papers.

It is worth concluding this discussion by comparing two anti-war images from this era — one from David Levine and the other from Cobb — to show what limits remained. As a “red diaper baby,” Levine hawked copies of the *Daily Worker* while growing up in Brooklyn Heights. A gifted illustrator, Levine's celebrated 1966 caricature of Lyndon Johnson transposed one famous media image into another by turning the famous photo of the president showing off his gallbladder surgery scar to the press into a map in the shape of Vietnam. Levine's reworking of the Johnson photograph, replete with an exaggerated Pinocchio nose, was devastating. As brilliantly executed as the drawing was, caricature was an art form still premised on seeing politics through the prism of personalities.

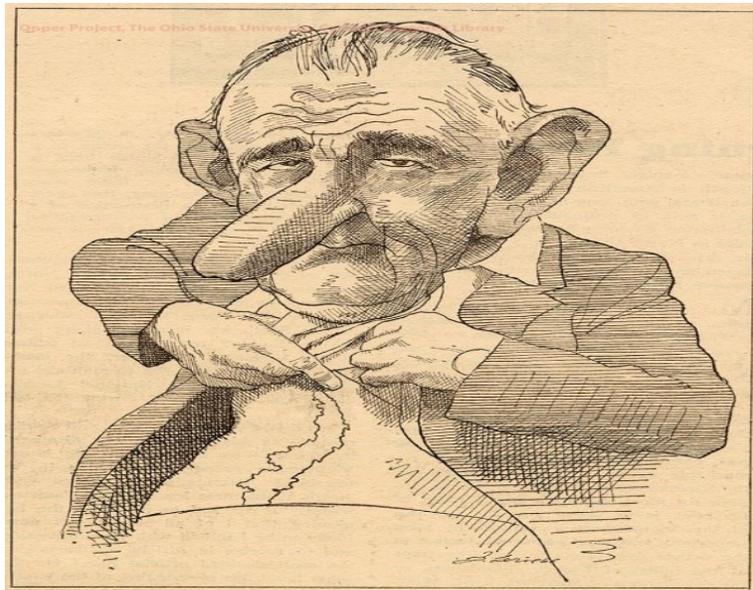


Figure 5.14: David Levine, “Johnson’s Scar,” *New York Review of Books*, 1966.

Source: Billy Ireland Cartoon Library and Museum, Ohio State University.

<sup>107</sup> For more on how local authorities and the FBI used obscenity charges and other tactics against underground papers, see McMillan, *Smoking Typewriters*, 127-133.

Years later, Levine described how “political satire saved the world from going to hell” in this turbulent era.<sup>108</sup> Without question, Levine’s cartoons resonated with millions who felt betrayed by their government. Yet, Cobb’s antiwar commentary went further in identifying root causes. In one stunning cartoon for the *Freep*, Cobb invoked violence without showing it. But whereas Levine focused on the failures of the political arena, Cobb used the self-justifying rhetoric of “self-determination” to make it appear as a threat. Given this difference, it was no surprise that Levine’s image became emblematic of the era’s disenchantment with American liberalism, while Cobb’s more searing critique has all but been forgotten.



Figure 5.15 Ron Cobb, *Los Angeles Free Press*, circa early 1970s.

Source: <http://roncobb.net/cartoons.html>

<sup>108</sup> Quoted in Michael Carlson, “David Levine Obituary,” *The Guardian*, 31 December 2009. <https://www.theguardian.com/artanddesign/2009/dec/31/david-levine-obituary>. Accessed 1 February 2021.

### **Cartoonists Have Only Interpreted the World, the Point is to Change It**

In 1966 the AAEC held its annual convention in Kansas City, Missouri. A year after its much-publicized visit to Washington, expectations for the Kansas convention were high. The *Kansas Star* hosted the festivities as the attendees were treated to special tours of the Hallmark headquarters as well as the Truman Presidential Library. Truman, whose meeting with the NCS had inaugurated a tradition that each of his twentieth-century successors observed, planned to attend the AAEC convention but cancelled at the last minute. While the AAEC missed out on a former president joining them, Nixon flew to the convention at his own expense. Like Johnson's White House address to AAEC conventioners the previous year, Nixon used the occasion to ingratiate himself with the press and delivered a speech in which he called for "a wider use of air power around the cities of North Vietnam." After winning the presidency, Nixon extended the scope of aerial bombing to include neighbouring Laos and Cambodia, and thus ignited a fresh round of antiwar protests. Some cartoonists gathered at the Kansas convention would eventually oppose the war, but most saved their scorn for Nixon's deceit for the Watergate scandal.<sup>109</sup>

A year after the AAEC's Kansas meeting, the Association held its first convention outside the US. In 1967 John Collins, staff cartoonist for the *Montreal Gazette*, hosted the AAEC convention in Montreal during Expo' 67. Montreal mayor, Jean Drapeau, who helped bring the group north, was named an honorary AAEC member. Three years later the AAEC decamped across the Atlantic for a convention in London. In a moment that squared the circle in English-language cartooning, several *Punch* cartoonists joined the festivities.

Amid all this activity, Ollie Harrington and many other prominent leftist cartoonists did not appear on the AAEC's radar. Because white cartoonists hardly paid attention to the African American press, Harrington's earlier Bootsie cartoons were unknown to them. Cartooning's professional networks reflected these class and racial dynamics. The NCS did not have its first black member until 1965 when *Wee Pals* creator Morris Turner, who authored the first mainstream syndicated strip to feature recurring Black characters, joined the organization.

After leaving the US in 1952, Harrington joined an expatriate community of Black artists and writers in Paris, France. While the circumstances surrounding his departure were murky, anticommunism was a decisive factor in his self-exile. In Paris, he developed a close friendship

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<sup>109</sup> John Stampone, "Convention Notes—Kansas City, 1966," Box AAEC 1, folder 17, BICLM.

with Richard Wright. “Mississippi taught him to despise capitalist exploitation,” Harrington later wrote.<sup>110</sup> Despite growing up in different regions, both artists had known the scourge of American racism first-hand and had been involved in leftist organizing in the US. After leaving the Communist Party in the 1940s, Wright developed contacts with prominent Third World revolutionaries while living abroad. Harrington, meanwhile, was cautious of antagonizing French authorities. In late 1957 the atmosphere of Cold War paranoia came to “consume the group of black expatriates” during the Gibson Affair, a scandal which resulted from Richard Gibson forging Harrington’s signature on a letter denouncing French colonialism in Algeria.<sup>111</sup>

The spirit of camaraderie among the ex-pats further dissipated following Wright’s sudden death in 1960. Harrington, who suspected foul play, left Paris soon after. After being offered a contract as an illustrator with the German publishing house, Aufbau Publishers, Harrington relocated to East Berlin. In August 1961, he watched the Berlin Wall be constructed from his hotel room. The GDR would later grant him the status of a foreign press correspondent, and as an American citizen, he was able to travel freely between both sides of the city. Yet Harrington did not escape the gaze of the US national security state. In the 1960s, the FBI placed Harrington on the “Reserve Index” – a special category reserved for “communist” artists with access to mass media — which meant his file received annual updates until 1972. In addition to consulting with US consular staff abroad on his movements throughout Europe, the FBI briefed the CIA on Harrington’s whereabouts and tried unsuccessfully to restrict his travels by limiting what countries he was authorized to visit. Following Paul Robeson’s successful Supreme Court case in 1960, which granted the singer retention of his passport, the FBI was powerless to curtail Harrington’s movements. The Bureau, however, intercepted outgoing mail sent to Harrington from the US, including his correspondence with editors of the *Daily World*. Harrington’s widow, Hilda, also recalled a bizarre incident in which her husband appeared to be followed by an undercover vehicle in West Berlin. Harrington crossed regularly into the other side of the city, and during one such crossing, he was involved in a minor traffic accident. One of the drivers involved gave Harrington a phone number, which connected him to a US army base.<sup>112</sup>

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<sup>110</sup> Harrington, *Why I Left America*, 21.

<sup>111</sup> For his account of the Gibson Affair, see Richard Gibson, “Richard Wright’s ‘Island of Hallucination’ and the ‘Gibson Affair,’” *Modern Fiction Studies* 51, no. 4 (Winter 2005): 896-920.

<sup>112</sup> Quoted in Stephanie Brown, “‘Bootsie’ in Berlin: An Interview with Helma Harrington on Oliver Harrington’s Life and Work in East Germany, 1961-1995,” *African American Review* 44, no. 3 (Fall 2011): 353-372. For more on this incident, see 357-358.

For the most part, though, Harrington's years in east Berlin were less eventful than the Cold War setting would suggest. Hilda, who described her husband's politics as broadly socialist, recalled that his presence in the GDR made him an "oddball." As she put it years later after his death: "[Harrington was] an American with a passport and lots of international connections, and who could live on his own and didn't need the GDR to live."<sup>113</sup> While the Stasi kept a lengthy file on the Harringtons, the American transplant largely stayed out of "local affairs" and avoided criticizing the Soviet bloc. The cartoons he published in the German paper, *Eulenspiegel*, were given German subtitles and largely focused on international events, including anticolonial struggles in Vietnam, Cuba, and decolonization efforts in Africa. In the early 1960s, Kwame Nkrumah, invited him to Ghana. The invitation, which likely stemmed from Harrington's former association with Du Bois, spoke to his growing popularity outside the US. In the 1970s, Harrington also traveled to Moscow to judge a caricature contest. While he continued to freelance for European publications, it was not until 1968 — a year of worldwide revolt — that Harrington's graphic art embraced the full measure of his emancipatory politics.



Figure 5.16: Ollie Harrington, *Daily World* circa early 1970s.

Source: Billy Ireland Cartoon Library and Museum, Ohio State University.

<sup>113</sup> Brown and Harrington, "'Bootsie' in Berlin," 359.

Harrington's cartoons for the *Daily World* were less whimsical than his *Dark Laughter* panel that had provided a snapshot into life in Harlem through the eyes of his beloved Bootsie. In contrast to his earlier work, Harrington's post-1968 cartooning placed the Black freedom struggle in a more global perspective that linked anti-colonialism struggles with anti-capitalism. This internationalist turn did not result from him following trends in American cartooning, however. Living in Berlin, Harrington's access to alternative print media from the US was limited. While he developed a working understanding of German, Harrington's media consumption was restricted to magazines subscriptions as well as English-language radio. Thus, his *Daily World* cartoons, which comprised the bulk of his creative output from the late 1960s onward, was the result of following mainstream rather than alternative media.

While the logistical challenges involved in submitting cartoons to the *Daily World* were daunting enough, Harrington had to adapt his use of shading to the paper's production limitations.<sup>114</sup> The *Daily World's* staff did its best to accommodate Harrington's situation. In 1972 the communist paper profiled their staff cartoonist during his first trip back to the US in twenty years. In a lengthy interview, Harrington described the jarring experience of returning to the Harlem of the 1970s as well as his experience living in a socialist country:

Looking back on it all, it was probably inevitable that I should one day visit and then come to live in the GDR. The impressiveness of what has taken place here is indeed moving and convincing. If only Brecht and the others could have lived to see the day.<sup>115</sup>

To the end, however, Harrington identified as an American. Throughout the years, he and Hilda received many travellers, including Americans like Robeson and the labour organizers James and Esther Jackson, who had helped found the Southern Negro Youth Congress (SNYC). While he remained in touch with other radicals based in the US, outside his correspondence with the *Daily World*, Harrington had limited contact with American publishers. Some leftist cartoonists, however, were aware of his legacy. In 1974 Syd Huff, the author and illustrator of the popular children book series, *Danny and the Dinosaurs*, reached out to Harrington about a

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<sup>114</sup> The *Daily World* used photo offset instead of photo engraving, which meant with some darker images "everything in the background gets blotched." Seymour Joseph to Ollie Harrington, 29 October 1968. Unprocessed collection, BICLM.

<sup>115</sup> Bill Andrews, "In Praise of Ollie Harrington: His Pen and Ink Are Mighty as a Sword—Part II," *Daily World*, 25 February 1976, 8. Unprocessed collection, BICLM.

book of political cartooning he was working on. Huff wrote, that of the “400 or so” cartoonists profiled in the project, none were black.<sup>116</sup> Like Harrington, Huff faced harassment from anti-communists in the McCarthy era. In the Popular Front era, Huff contributed political cartoons for the *Daily Worker* under the name A. Redfield. The two cartoonists, however much linked, had experienced two very different careers. Redfield’s radicalism did not lead to self-exile as it did with Harrington. The reason was obvious, and not lost on Redfield, who, in stark contrast to his mainstream peers, sought to correct the whitewashing of American cartooning. Huff hoped to push back against the industry’s exclusionary practices by including Harrington into his project. His aim was to show “kids all over the world . . . what black aspirations are.”<sup>117</sup>



Figure 5.17: Oliver Harrington, *Daily World*, 21 June 1974.

Source: Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division.

<sup>116</sup> Syd Huff to Oliver Harrington, 26 October 1974. Unprocessed collection, BICLM.

<sup>117</sup> Syd Huff, *Editorial and Political Cartooning* (New York: Stravon Publishing, 1976).

Harrington, more so than any other cartoonist of his generation, had personified both the contradictions and aspirations of twentieth-century cartooning. Richard Wright likewise had first-hand knowledge of these cultural and social struggles. In his unpublished novel, *Island of Hallucination*, Wright's characters were derived from composite sketches of the artists and intellectuals who comprised the ex-pat black community in Paris. Wright based one character, Ned Harrison, on his friend Harrington. Throughout the novel, the Harrison character avoids being mired in the moral chaos around him, and at one point, says:

No man can stand absolutely alone and make any meaning out of life...When you begin distrusting the images that make your world, you're standing alone. Soon you'll begin to doubt everything. Your world turns into a dream. It's as though you were having a hallucination.<sup>118</sup>

Growing up in America, Harrington distrusted the images that made up his world, just as the character in Wright's novel did. But he was never alone in rejecting and countering the racist tropes that white America had conjured and thrust on Black Americans. For those readers who first encountered Harrington's work in the *Daily World* in the 1960s and 1970s, his power to distill abstract social forces into concrete images had not been diminished since he first had made a name for himself in the 1930s. If anything, time had sharpened these skills. Harrington's tour as a war correspondent for the *Pittsburgh Courier*; his stints in leftist organizing in the late 1940s; his harassment by anti-communists in the early 1950s to his eventual displacement in France and his decades living behind the Berlin Wall; each of these moments stitched together a larger story that could not be reduced to one image alone. Yet they could be pieced together, one by one, in a visual narrative that documented the litany of abuses, triumphs, disappointments, and joys that he and other Cold War dissenters discussed regularly in Parisian cafes, then later, in East Germany. For most American cartoonists, these locales were geostrategic nodes in a global conflict that also supplied them with their material. For Harrington, these places were sites of retreat and reflection. It was outside America where he began to articulate the connections between his country's mistreatment of African Americans at home, and US imperialism abroad.

Just as insight into American racism required looking beyond the nation itself, grasping the significance of Harrington's labours requires stepping outside any one definition or ideal of

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<sup>118</sup> Quoted in James Campbell, "The Island Affair," *The Guardian*, 7 January 2006.

what an American political cartoonist was imagined to be. Art Young believed that cartoons existed to lessen the burden of living in an unjust world. But for Young and others who followed in his footsteps, cartooning encompassed a range of emotion, not just laughter. As Harrington understood from an early age, satire translates anger into humour not to defuse moral outrage, but rather to strengthen it. When combined, the possibilities for critique are endless. Indeed, as Wright would later put it: “Soon you’ll begin to doubt everything.”

### **Conclusion**

As the lines separating alternative and mainstream cartooning began to blur in the late 1960s, some taboos remained, particularly in cartooning where critiquing American capitalism and US imperialism was tolerated, so long as it remained within a national framing that did not openly reject the main tenets of American liberalism. At a time when a canon of American cartooning was being forged, Robert Minor, Jesse Cohen, Laura Slobe, Fred Wright, Ron Cobb, Ollie Harrington, and countless others in alternative print media were notably absent from this selected tradition. This estrangement was not identical with alienation as such. As Harrington showed when he declined a staff position with a mainstream daily in the early 1940s, being able to express yourself politically was just as important as securing a paycheck.

Given the history of the FBI intercepting mail and confiscating print materials that the state deemed subversive, it was ironic that a professional society as conservative as the NCS stressed the importance of a national mail system in facilitating the nation’s print diversity. It was also noteworthy that radical cartoons circulated through leftist print networks and readers who interacted with these images by way of cutting them out of periodicals to share and display in union offices, on placards, and other public spaces. Because political cartooning is a creative practice rooted in the exigencies of the present, we tend not to think of these images containing multiple temporalities. But as Eagleton reminds us, “the present . . . is not identical with itself;” it contains elements that “point beyond it.”<sup>119</sup> Radical cartoonists gestured towards a material context beyond the din and discord of their own moment. The potential for their images to disrupt dominant social perceptions of capitalism and the Cold War was not confined to the space and time in which they first appeared or were consumed. In this way, their work contained a utopian impulse. Rather appropriately, many sent their cartoons through the mail.

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<sup>119</sup> Eagleton, *Ideology*, 276.

### **CONCLUSION: Memory, Retrieval, and “Red Lines”**

Since the end of the Cold War, it has become a commonplace that it is easier to imagine the end of the world than the end of capitalism. This expression could easily be used to describe the representational limits of twentieth-century newspaper editorial cartooning. During the height of anticommunist hysteria in the late 1940s and early 1950s, dailies frequently published their staff cartoonists' commentary on US nuclear diplomacy. Block's popular Mr. Atom character became a medium mainstay as other cartoonists adopted anthropomorphized bombs alongside exploding mushroom clouds. These images rarely had an instigator “pushing a button” and thus worldwide conflagration was portrayed as an effect without a cause. This apocalyptic cultural imagination later found expression in the slate of popular disaster films that closed out the “American century.” But whereas the narrative protocols of film require causality to further the plot, the visual metaphors in editorial cartoons featuring the bomb made use of allusion, symbolism, and connotation. Readers filled in these gaps by way of scanning headlines and editorials which did the work of identifying the communist menace as the real antagonist.

While magazines like *Time* and *Life* published doomsday scenarios with graphic details, newspaper cartoons largely pictured mass death in the abstract. Capitalism, on the other hand, was broached at a more granular level. Captains of industry, union leaders and their political allies were represented in mainstream cartooning because these personalities made headlines. Only in alternative print media did cartoonists like Jules Feiffer connect military Keynesian economy planning with Cold War rhetoric. It was also telling that in mainstream cartooning the symbolic figure of capital — replete with a top hat, monocle and wearing a suit emblazoned with a dollar sign — was nearly absent in editorial cartoons. Attempting to move away from the stock symbols of the past, editorial cartoonists in the 1950s consulted photographs and “scrap” of real-life objects to accurately render minor details of nuclear weapons, rocket ships, and airplanes. Yet in presenting these and other objects in finished form, they effaced the human labour that went into producing them, and thus, sketched out a Cold War imaginary without workers or victims. As a result, the structures that made capitalism a social system became invisible.

If the labour of maintaining US empire was erased in their images, when it came to their own jobs, editorial cartoonists articulated their professional identity in singular, masculine terms. They prized their ability to meet the daily print deadline while romanticizing their contributions to an idealized public sphere. While they had little control over how their work was presented or

distributed, they joined journalists, publishers, editors, and syndicates in reaffirming the myth of the crusading cartoonist, assailing public corruption while holding the powerful to account. As the editorial cartoonist job became a distinct graphic arts profession at the start of the twentieth century, the men who occupied this newsroom role became print workers who helped produce a commodity—the daily newspaper—while performing an ideological function for press barons, then later, corporate print media. They visualized norms of citizenship and nationhood by helping focus reader attention on the political arena where public figures provided them the grist for their humour mills. But by subscribing to a liberal conception of the public sphere, editorial cartoonists visualized a hegemonic perspective on what counted as “political.”

Editorial cartoonists’ self-image from these years has persisted down to the present. A telling example of this historical memory can be found in the 2014 HBO documentary, *Herblock: The Black and the White*. The film portrays the iconic *Washington Post* cartoonist in near reverential terms. Interviews with Block’s former *Post* colleagues, Bob Woodward and Carl Bernstein, are interspliced with musings from popular satirists such as *Daily Show* contributors, host Jon Stewart and comedian Lewis Black. Despite occupying different media poles, what unites each of the interviewees is a longing for a past when newspapers drove public discourse. This nostalgia for a media and print culture that has long since passed is paired with an awe and admiration for Block as a heroic truth-teller and political sage. As journalist Jeet Hert rightly noted in a review of the film: “The world that made Herblock possible is gone.”<sup>1</sup>

While the film provides rare photos of Block goofing around with *Post* staff, the film’s narrative mostly centers on the cartoonist’s idealistic civic engagement, the apotheosis of which was his memorable Watergate-era work. Block, who famously drew Nixon getting a “clean shave” after winning the presidency in 1968, is heralded for his prescience and journalistic instincts. As a biography, the film makes no attempt to connect Block with his editorial cartooning colleagues who likewise pilloried Nixon at the time. The *Los Angeles Times*’ Paul Conrad, for one, famously made Nixon’s “enemy list” for his relentless skewering of the president. By presenting him as a singular conscience, the film pivots between re-enactments of an actor playing Block and dispensing wisdom with quoted passages from his memoirs, along with reflections on how the sage cartoonist anticipated the direction of the paper’s coverage.

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<sup>1</sup> For his trenchant review of the film, see Jeet Heer, “Herblock Was a Fine Political Cartoonist. Liberals Don’t Need to Deify Him,” *New Republic*, 26 January 2.

More hagiography than history, the film paints the cartoonist as prophetic to the point of parody, crediting Block for his intuition in sensing that the president was involved in the cover-up. This framing ignores how Nixon was, as Stephen Whitfield has argued, a well-established “comic figure” long before the scandal broke. As Whitfield argues: “It is doubtful whether any one postwar American politician . . . ever invoked so much mirth” or anger as Nixon. The Republican’s hard-scrabble upbringing and “proximity to the central tradition of American individualism” made Nixon an easy target for derision when his “emotional inadequacies” and “moral failures” made for an incongruous gap that only comedy could fill.<sup>2</sup>

While *Herblock: The Black and the White* fails to demythologize the editorial cartooning profession, it provides a contemporary glimpse into how both cartoonists and the public have invested in a notion of perfectibility for American democracy. The film’s lack of context also omits the wider culture that produced Nixon. Before mouthing “sock it to me!” on *Rowan & Martin’s Laugh-in* on national television, Nixon had cultivated the good graces of the nation’s editorial cartoonists. Despite being one of the AAEC’s earliest supporters, editorial cartoonists did not spare him during Watergate, which unintentionally revived a medium that appeared to be languishing. But the limitations of the form prevented them from taking the full measure of the president’s crimes. Watergate’s political theatre provided one last staging of a Cronkite-esque moment in which editorial cartoonists’ moral indignation became one substitute among many that displaced a national reckoning with the imperial presidency. Uncovering a conspiracy that had encircled the Oval Office did not redeem American mass media’s spotty record covering the Vietnam War, a war that Block and his cartoonist colleagues opposed somewhat belatedly.

While editorial cartoonists alerted readers to what headlines and events were significant in the here and now, their work appeared in an ephemeral medium. After the threat of being replaced by photography or syndication subsided in the 1960s, the AAEC shifted its organizational energies to retrieval and preservation efforts that would help cement cartooning as a serious art form. In the mid-1960s the AAEC and the NCS began collaborating on establishing a “National Center of the Cartoon and Graphic Arts.” Art Wood, who headed the joint project, had envisioned a temporary museum in downtown Washington, D.C. that would later be moved to a more permanent site, preferably a “prominent location along Pennsylvania Avenue.” The NCS reported that the proposed museum would eventually become part of the National Art

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<sup>2</sup> Stephen J. Whitfield, “Richard Nixon as Comic Figure,” *American Quarterly* 37, no. 1 (Spring 1985): 114-132.

Complex, which would make it eligible to receive federal support for ongoing maintenance. As the National Council on the Arts considered the proposal in 1966, both trade groups petitioned President Johnson's Art Advisor, Roger Stevens, for funding.<sup>3</sup> Johnson, who would later host the AAEC at his Texas ranch in 1971, showed support but the project took decades to materialize.<sup>4</sup> In 1995 the National Gallery of Caricature and Cartoon Art opened in the nation's capital. After two years, it closed due to a lack of funding and Wood, who had been collecting newspaper art since the 1950s, donated his collection to the Library of Congress.

Finding institutional partners for this commemoration went hand in hand with organizing cartoon exhibits, "chalk" talks, and overseas tours, as well as planning annual AAEC conventions and the NCS's year-end Ruben Award galas, all of which helped pave the way for a contemporary selected tradition to merge with a curated "heritage" of American cartooning. The lack of secure public funding for these plans would mean that cartoonists would rely on corporate largesse and private donations to commemorate their medium. Established in 1974, the Cartoonists' Hall of Fame struggled to stay afloat and in 1997 the Hearst Foundation took over the fledgling museum, renaming it the William Randel Hearst Hall of Fame. Given his role in popularizing cartooning, rechristening the museum after the press baron was fitting, not least because the corporation that bore his name had become a far-flung media conglomerate whose corporate holdings were no longer dependent on profits from newspapers.<sup>5</sup>

Cartoonists' desire to preserve past cartoon and comic art was outgrowth of their fandom. But because cartoons and strips are packaged within a short-lived mode of communication, collecting these images has proved difficult. According to Cullen Murphy, Mort Walker, the creator of *Beetle Bailey*, was "appalled by the disregard" for past cartoon and comic art after seeing originals of George Harriman's *Krazy Kat* strip used as a sponge to help plug a leak in the offices of King Features.<sup>6</sup> He helped found the Museum of Cartoon Art in the mid-1970s, which relocated several times and was eventually closed due to a lack of funding.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> John Milt Morris to AAEC members, undated, 1966. Box AAEC 1, folder 17, BICLM.

<sup>4</sup> The NCS reported on the project's progress in newsletters in the mid-1960s. See Herbert Block Correspondence, Box 55, folder 10, Library of Congress, Manuscripts Division.

<sup>5</sup> Most of the Hearst newspaper were liquidated following the mogul's death. See Nasaw, *The Chief*, 593.

<sup>6</sup> Cullen Murphy, "Mort Walker, Historian," *New York Times*, 31 January 2018.

<sup>7</sup> National Cartoon Museum (NCM) closed in 2002 and its collection has since merged with the Billy Ireland Cartoon Museum and Library at Ohio State University.

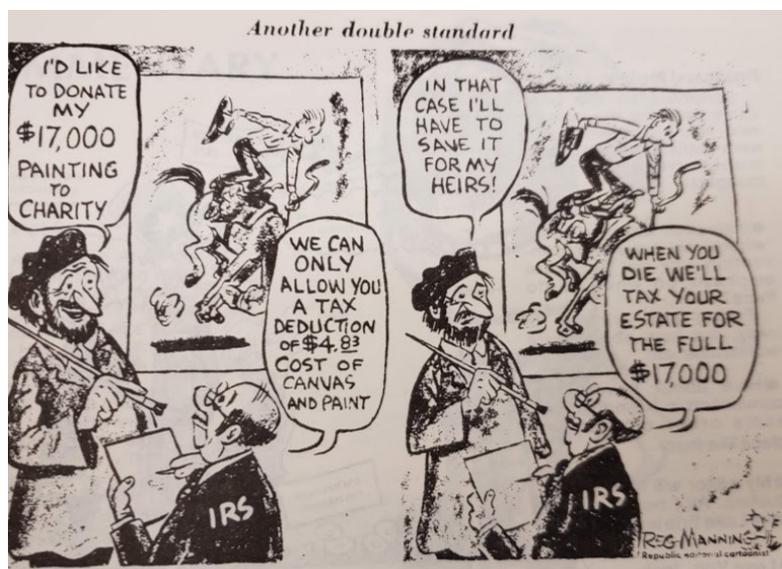


Figure 6.1: Reg Manning, circa June 1976, Box AAEC 2, folder 13.

Source: Billy Ireland Cartoon Library and Museum, Ohio State University.

Regulatory changes to the federal tax code provided the backdrop to these preservation and retrieval efforts. In the 1970s archivists and artists found common cause in opposing the Tax Reform Act of 1969. The bill, which Nixon had signed into law, meant artists could only claim the amount of expenses for art materials on their personal taxes. The bill also removed deductions for charitable donations, which stymied museums' ability to build their collections. As artists decided to hang onto their original drawings or personal collections, they joined the ranks of librarians, archivists, and museum curators who vocally opposed the '69 amendments on grounds that it hurt public institutions. In 1971 the American Library Association (ALA) reported that "donations of important classes of material by the creators have become almost non-existent, thereby impoverishing the research materials available to the public."<sup>8</sup> That same year the *AAEC Notebook* reported it had "high hopes" that the Internal Revenue Service (IRS) would restore tax deductions for charitable donations.<sup>9</sup> As a result, some of the original collections used to build an archive for American cartooning would depend on wealthy donors like Erwin Swann, a New York advertising executive who began collecting past cartoon and comic art in the late 1960s.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>8</sup> The ALA statement was adopted 25 June 1971. Found in Box AAEC 2, folder 13, BICLM.

<sup>9</sup> "Tax Report," *AAEC Notebook*, no. 25 (March 1971), Box AAEC 2, folder 13, BICLM.

<sup>10</sup> Erwin Swann's estate donated his collection to the Library of Congress in 1974 and 1977. For more on the Erwin and Carolyn Swann Foundation, see [https://www.loc.gov/rr/print/swann/swann\\_foundation.html](https://www.loc.gov/rr/print/swann/swann_foundation.html)

The progressive tax levelled at artists' estates after their passing motivated many to sell their personal collections rather than donate them to museums. In the mid-1970s, Walt Kelly's widow, Selby, declared bankruptcy and was forced to sell her husband's original *Pogo* drawings to pay a hefty tax bill. In 1977 the NCS, which had been consulting with tax lawyers and art appraisers since the early 1970s, invited Selby Kelly and other cartoonists' wives as part of a workshop on estate planning. In a newsletter publicizing the event to its membership, the NCS wrote that "the arbitrary tagging of high prices of art of every kind . . . can be ruinous and bankrupt our survivors with the imposed taxes."<sup>11</sup>

Like other artists in these years, cartoonists wanted to avoid saddling their heirs with a burdensome tax bill. What made this situation particularly onerous for cartoonists was that few owned the licensing rights to their characters. Copyright remained murky for editorial cartoons until the mid-1970s, when the Copyright Act of 1976 granted creators ownership of their published works. Before this change, selling unpublished drawings to private collectors was one of the few ways cartoonists could generate revenue after they stopped publishing.<sup>12</sup>

In 1977, Rep. Frederick W. Richmond of New York (D) introduced a bill that tax specialists hoped "would curtail the practice of selling the art to private collectors to pay off estate taxes." A year prior, the issue had gained public notoriety after painter Ted DeGrazia rode horseback into the dusty hills of Arizona's Superstition Mountains where he burned an estimated 1.5 million dollars' worth of his paintings in protest to federal tax laws. At the time, DeGrazia protested, "I can't afford to paint anymore."<sup>13</sup> Burning his impressionistic portraits of the Southwest's picturesque landscapes was symbolic in more ways than one. As DeGrazia torched the settler imagination that he had vividly expressed in his canvases, a new neoliberal imagination was beginning to be kindled.

For cartoonists, the move to an entrepreneurial ethic was motivated by more practical concerns than ideological ones. The two quickly converged as the Reagan administration cut funding for public arts and marketplace norms infiltrated more areas of cultural and social life. For most of their working lives American cartoonists had celebrated "free enterprise" as the engine of economic growth and the guarantor of personal freedoms. But when faced with the

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<sup>11</sup> NCS Newsletter, 25 September 1977, Box AAEC 2, folder 13, BICLM.

<sup>12</sup> The Copyright Act of 1976 granted creators ownership of their creations, including cartoons. But only cartoons that displayed a formal copyright notice were protected until the US adopted the Berne Convention in 1989.

<sup>13</sup> Guy Halverson, "We Want Tax Relief," *Christian Science Monitor*, 3 August 1977. Box AAEC 2, folder 13, BICLM.

issue of tax relief, many appeared less than thrilled with participating in the market. In the decades to come, to offset their personal taxes, they self-incorporated as limited liability companies and freelance contractors. Meanwhile, librarians and archivists had to increasingly rely on wealthy benefactors to help build a public archive of American cartoon and comic art.

**N.C.S. PROFESSIONAL MEETING**  
WEDNESDAY OCT. 12, 1977

**INHERITANCE TAX RELIEF**  
(FOR CARTOONISTS, THEIR WIVES, AND FAMILIES)

**FIGHT THE BIG BITE FROM THEIRS.**

● PLACE: WELLINGTON HOTEL, 7th AVE. AND 55th ST. N.Y.C.  
● TIME: 5:30 P.M. (STUDIO '58', MAIN FLOOR)  
● PRICE: \$8<sup>00</sup> PER PERSON (INCLUDES: LARGE HERO SANDWICHES COFFEE + SIDE DISHES)  
● There will be a CASH BAR! BUY YOUR OWN DRINKS!

**ATTENTION WIVES: THIS ONE IS FOR YOU!**

**DISTINGUISHED PANEL:**  
Hon. Frederick W. Richmond - House of Representatives  
Harry Devlin (son of our Harry Devlin) Chairman  
Cultural Laws Committee  
Thomas S. Carles (Cohen, Carles & Poo) Expert on Estate Planning and benefits of planning.  
Ruth Patterson; Selby Kelly; Maggie Musial.

**MAKE CHECK PAYABLE TO:** THE NATIONAL CARTOONISTS SOCIETY

Send Checks to: **MARGE DEVLIN**  
9 EBONY COURT  
BROOKLYN N.Y. 11229

Figure 6.2: NCS Poster advertising a workshop on “Inheritance Tax Relief,” circa 1977.

Source: Billy Ireland Cartoon Library and Museum, Ohio State University.

As the postwar economic boom came to a sputtering end in the 1970s, deindustrialization and de-unionization forced a reconceptualization of how labour-time and free time would be managed. A view of work as fulfilling, self-directing, and creative helped cement “the new spirit of capitalism.” The culture industries also anticipated offshore production. John Lett has shown how as early as the 1950s animation studios looked for cheaper labour in East Asia.<sup>14</sup> The move to flexible, precarious employment in advanced capitalist countries did not impact the newspaper industry in the same way, since it is mainly domestically produced. Throughout the 1980s and 1990s, employment remained stable for editorial cartoonists.

<sup>14</sup> John A. Lent, “The Global Cartooning Labour Force, Its Problems and Coping Mechanism: the Travails of the Marginalised Cartoonist,” *Work Organization, Labour & Globalization* 4, no.2 (Autumn 2010): 160-172.

Despite occupying an ambiguous place in newsrooms, in the main, they defined their job in terms of its situatedness within newspapers and a subjective complement to “objective” reportage. Claims to neutrality, whether about the marketplace, cultural institutions, or the public sphere, are, of course, assertions of power. Editorial cartoonists claimed authority by way of positioning themselves within —not against — these imagined neutral discursive spaces. Rather than question the headlines, they redirected readers to them. In this media feedback loop, the euphemisms of Cold War intervention — “police action,” “domino theory,” “banana republic”— were often reproduced in uncritical ways.

The digital era has upended this relationship. Cartoonists are most often in the news when they have provoked controversy or after losing their job. The two are not always unrelated. In 2019 the *New York Times*, whose cartoon reprints the AAEC had tracked assiduously in the early 1960s, announced it would discontinue editorial cartoons after a cartoon by Portuguese artist António Moreira Antunes, which appeared in its international edition, prompted a fierce backlash from Jewish groups. Antunes’ image, which depicted a blind President Trump being led by Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu as a seeing-eye dog, was within the medium’s topical bounds, but relied on anti-Semitic representation to get its message across. While Antunes said that he intended to draw attention to the US’s unwavering military and political support for Israeli treatment of Palestinians, the image gave succor to American Zionists like Alan Dershowitz, who led a protest outside the New York Times building in Manhattan. *Times* publisher A.G. Salzberger, whose father had once complained that editorial cartoons could not be edited, responded by severing ties with the syndicate that provided Antunes’ cartoon, and for good measure, its two inhouse cartoonists who contributed to the paper’s international edition. CNN anchor Jack Tapper, an amateur cartoonist himself, described the *Times*’ reaction to the controversy as the latest death blow for the “struggling art form.”<sup>15</sup> Other cartoonists lamented what they saw as a pattern from risk-adverse corporate publishers. This material context was quickly superseded by a debate on the limits of free speech. After being dismissed, Swiss cartoonist Michael Chappette gave a Ted Talk where he asked: “did we just invent preventive self-censorship?” Predictably, he blithely ignored the media platform he was using.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Lloyd Grove, “CNN’s Jack Tapper: New York Times’ Decision to Scarp Cartoons ‘One More Nail in the Coffin of a Struggling Art Form,’” *Daily Beast*, 12 June 2019.

<sup>16</sup> Michael Cavna, “The New York Times Cuts All Political Cartoons, and Cartoonists are Not Happy,” *Washington Post*, 11 June, 2019.

Lost in much of the commotion was the *Times'* concurrent announcement that the paper of record would continue publishing “visual journalism” such as its 2018 prize-winning *Welcome to the New World*. In a spirit redolent of Art Spiegelman’s pathbreaking graphic novel, *Maus*, writer Jake Halpern and cartoonist Michael Sloan explored themes of migration and violence by focusing on the plight of Syrian refugees integrating into American life. Their collaboration won the pair deserved acclaim. The growing popularity of serialized nonfiction graphic narratives has signaled mainstream acceptance of formerly underground comic art traditions.

While many cartoonists have since embraced new technologies, such as GIFs, animated political cartoons, and computer design, the impetus for this change has been the constant threat of job loss. In 2017 Nick Anderson was let go by the *Houston Chronicle*, leaving Etta Hulme’s home state, one of the largest media markets in the country, without a staff editorial cartoonist. A year after Anderson’s dismissal, Rob Rogers, one of the profession’s few left-leaning voices, was fired by the *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette* for his anti-Trump cartoons. After Rogers was let go, long-time staff cartoonist of the *Arizona Republic*, Steve Benson, was made redundant by his paper’s parent corporation, the Gannet Company. The paper’s editors advocated for Benson in an op-ed in which they celebrated his knack for creating content that had become “a ritual, for the powerful fearful of being skewered, and for readers looking for his take on the most important news of the day.” In response to this redundancy and other job losses, AAEC president Patrick Bagley issued a statement: “Steve [Benson’s] firing is not only a crime to journalism and Arizona, but to the future viability of the Republic.” Unmoved, the Gannet company, also cut loose longtime *Knoxville News Sentinel* staff cartoonist, Charlie Daniel, while the *Indianapolis Star*’s Gary Varvel opted for early retirement rather than face the inevitable.<sup>17</sup>

Editorial cartoonists have responded to professional decline by echoing the familiar refrain that tolerance of their work, or lack thereof, is the “canary in democracy’s coalmines.” The AAEC has reiterated time again that, “there is no ‘on the other hand’ in an editorial cartoon,” which makes it particularly vulnerable to igniting controversy. These defenses, pitched in contemporary registers of free speech, would not have been out of place in a Scott Long editorial from the early 1960s. What has changed is that cartoonists reach more readers than ever before. Monetizing online consumption has proven daunting, leading some to experiment with

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<sup>17</sup> Michael Cavna, “Another Cartoonist Loses His Job. This does not bode well for the future of newspaper cartooning.” *Washington Post*, 25 January 2019.

publishing formats by showcasing their work vis-à-vis subscription-based models. The AAEC has likewise relaxed its membership criteria while organizing forums and workshops to share and explore ideas that directly impact precariously employed members who, in recent years, now make the majority of its membership.

Now that the job of the newspaper staff editorial cartoonist has become rare, graphic artists have little incentive to adhere to the standards of the past. As Kathi Weeks reminds us, “What counts as work or social productivity and who might organize politically together or in proximity to one another in relation to its conditions change over time and space.”<sup>18</sup> And herein lies the rub: while the digital era and corporate media structuring has accelerated the professional decline for newspaper editorial cartoonists, technology has brought new opportunities for cross-genre and inter-media organizing that has yet to materialize in full force. Likewise, despite encouraging signs that political cartoonists no longer think of themselves as being separate and distinct from other graphic artists, the medium’s dominant memory still retains its hold.

Deteriorating material circumstances often invoke fears of cultural decline. This has been the case long before the internet transformed how Americans produced and consumed their media. War, and its aftermath, has often been the catalyst for changes in how cartoonists represent the world. In the 1920s, editorial cartoons migrated to editorial and opinion pages at a time when radical cartoonists were purged from mainstream print. In the post-WWII years, syndication fueled the profession’s first job panic. While the myth of the crusading cartoonist was forged much earlier, the material demands of producing under a daily deadline, combined with editorial cartoonists’ ideological investment in print journalism, created a professional identity that positioned them as a class apart from other graphic artists. This self-image was vulnerable to commercial pressures that were intensified by syndication. Moreover, it overlooked how editorial cartoonists did not satirize power so much as they commented on situations, which in some cases, humanized political authority. From this nexus emerged a belief that sparking controversy or eliciting strong reader reaction was an “occupational hazard” that placed them on “the frontlines of free speech” – a phrase that has since been recycled in countless anthologies and curated exhibits spotlighting cartoonists’ fragile relationship to public discourse. This received notion has in turn been mobilized by cartoonists and their defenders as a substitute gauge for measuring liberal democratic norms.

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<sup>18</sup> Weeks, *The Problem with Work*, 95.

In political cartooning, the desire to make forceful comment has always been in tension with a sense of public responsibility and media professionalism. While threats of censorship and libel have long haunted the profession, the courts in the US have consistently protected satirical speech.<sup>19</sup> Even so, many editorial cartoonists view freedom of expression in a conflictual relationship with public accountability, despite their own desire to want public engagement. When they have been called to account for recycling sexist, racist or ableist tropes, some have been responsive in recognizing that static images have relied on cultural stereotypes. The internet's instantaneous transmission means that online sharing of cartoons ensures that audience responses materialize in a mere instant. The global reach of American cartooning over the last half century has furthermore created a shared symbolic universe that traverses borders and national print contexts. Thus, the confluence of social forces that allowed Charlie Brown to be drafted in support of "Je suis Charlie" have been long in the making.<sup>20</sup>

Questions about intent and literalism have taken on a renewed sense of urgency in the wake of violent reactions to cartoonists. Following the Danish cartoon controversy of 2005 and the grisly slaying of five cartoonists on staff with the French provocateur and humor magazine *Charlie Hebdo* in 2015, American cartoonists have mostly doubled down on their commitment to principles of free speech. In response to the worldwide protests sparked by right-wing publisher *Jyllands Posten*'s derogatory caricatures of the Prophet Muhammad, syndicated Pulitzer-prize winner, Anne Telneas, a self-described "free speech absolutist," drew a cartoon that showed a cartoonist being boxed in by four red lines that were drawn by unidentifiable persons. The fear of being hemmed in by "red lines," however, gives license for "controversial" cartoons to subvert "political correctness."<sup>21</sup> After the Charlie Hebdo killings, few American cartoonists strayed from this sentiment. Garry Trudeau stood out for criticizing the magazine's history of racist provocation, including its tendency of "punching downward" and "wandering into the realm of hate speech." Telneas, who now occupies Block's former position with *Washington Post*, took issue with Trudeau's "dangerous logic" in an editorial in which she cautioned her colleagues to

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<sup>19</sup> For a summary of libel cases in cartooning, see Lamb, *Drawn to Extremes*, chapter 7, 185-208.

<sup>20</sup> Charlie Hebdo had taken its name from Charles de Gaulle and Charlie Brown. Some of the magazine's supporters at a Paris rally were seen wearing tee-shirts that "depicted Charlie Brown weeping into his palms under the caption 'Je suis Charlie.'" See Blake Scott Bell, "Good Grief: A Message from Charlie Brown to Charlie Hebdo: Opinion," 21 January 2015. [https://www.al.com/opinion/2015/01/good\\_grief\\_a\\_message\\_from\\_char.html](https://www.al.com/opinion/2015/01/good_grief_a_message_from_char.html)

<sup>21</sup> Anne Telneas, "Untitled Cartoon," *Washington Post*, 12 February 2006. The cartoon can be viewed online: <https://www.cartooningforpeace.org/en/dessinateurs/ann-telnaes/>. Accessed 1 August 2021.

“err on the side of unrestricted speech.”<sup>22</sup> When asked during a recent online discussion hosted by National Public Radio (NPR) about cartoonists’ relationship to their audiences, Telneas lamented criticism she receives from the left and suggested that creators’ responsibility is mediated vis-à-vis a sense of professionalism in conjunction with editorial oversight.<sup>23</sup>

Telneas’ free speech stance has a long lineage within the profession that ignores a crucial aspect of the job: cartoonists have always been subject to restrictions not of their own choosing. Market pressures combined with American exceptionalism have drawn “red lines.” Furthermore, the slippage from state-endorsed censorship laws to legitimate public criticism has been a common feature of this debate, as has the intense focus on authorial intent, none of which absolve cartoonists of criticism. More troubling is that satirists in general have yet to confront the growing reality that the far right can deliberately appropriate images meant to caricature them. While some American commentators have walked back their previous support for *Charlie Hebdo* in the wake of subsequent displays of Islamophobia, cartoonists have been reluctant to dissent from the profession’s traditional line. In response to the magazine’s recent offenses, Asma Barlas, a scholar of Islam, rightly noted that “it should be possible to condemn violence by Muslims without giving a free pass to those who defame and vilify their prophet and their religion.” Because humour can also be a form of ritual humiliation, she eloquently argued that “Defending domination in the name of freedom just confirms that not all conceptions of freedom are equally worth defending.”<sup>24</sup>

Not all cartoonists have accepted the shibboleths of the profession. In the 1960s, Fred Wright showed how segregationists mobilized the language of individual rights to justify their non-compliance with federal enforcement of civil rights rulings and legislation. In the late 1970s, Ollie Harrington commented on how fascists have often tried to seize public platforms through liberal means. This strand of critical cartooning was not hung up on designating individual responsibility, so much as it was centered on deconstructing the symbolic structures that propped up the Jim Crow South and fascism in Europe. In critiquing this caricature of “freedom” they took up a question posed by Marx in *The Eighteenth Brumaire*. By asking what were the

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<sup>22</sup> Anne Telneas, “Garry Trudeau’s Dangerous Logic About Charlie Hebdo,” *Washington Post*, 20 April 2015.

<sup>23</sup> “That’s Not Funny!”: Signe Wilkinson and Ann Telnaes on Cartooning in a Charlie Hebdo World,” hosted by the Library of Congress’ Prints and Photographs Division, 10 April 2015. These and other videos can be accessed at <https://anntelnaes.com/writings-and-interviews/>. Accessed 1 August 2021

<sup>24</sup> Asma Barlas, “Reprinting the Charlie Hebdo Cartoons Is Not About Free Speech,” *Al Jazeera*, 10 September 2020.

“circumstances and relationships that made it possible for a grotesque mediocrity to play a hero’s part,” Marx placed the symbolism of Napoleon III’s heroic reception in a larger class struggle that had been defeated, but whose battle over memory and history was still being waged.<sup>25</sup>

On the surface, asking cartoonists to engage with such contentious historical questions might seem unfair, given that cartooning, in most of its conceptual guises, is largely concerned with entertaining people, primarily through laughter. Humour, after all, is a highly contingent phenomenon that is notoriously difficult to define. While violence directed towards cartoonists is deplorable, it is important to also keep in mind that analyzing static images that recast racist, sexist or ableist tropes from the sole perspective of authorial intent, misses the point that cartoons are meant for public consumption. What publics they are addressing, and which ones they are insulting, are crucial questions. If they do not set out to court controversy, they do intentionally engage it. Moreover, the normative protections that national and local contexts once afforded cartoonists no longer insulate them in an era of transnational media and global communication networks. Thus, if images do not exist in a cultural vacuum any more than stories or symbols do, then it stands to reason that satire, whatever its mode of delivery, can cause legitimate harm.



Figure 6.3: Ollie Harrington, “But Don’t Forget to Read the Small Print!” *Daily World*, 13 June 1978. Source: Billy Ireland Cartoon Library and Museum, Ohio State University.

<sup>25</sup> See Karl Marx, “Preface to the Second Edition,” *The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte*, quoted in *Marx-Engels Reader*, 594.

Identifying as a professional, in a variety of knowledge fields, requires a degree of investment in the operative norms that have structured these discursive spaces. In cartooning, as elsewhere in mass media, salaried and waged cultural workers have typically been better positioned to drive discussion on the limits of form, genre, and professional expectations. This is no longer the case. Whether in the fields of media, culture, or academia, increasingly, the unwaged, precarious cultural or knowledge worker is defining new lines of critical engagement. The unspoken rules or professional codes of the past wield diminishing influence over how this work is performed and understood. Precarity is an unexpected leveler in an ideological sense, even as it continues to exact an enormous economic toll that cuts across racial, gender, and class lines. But in today's media environment, the question of whose labour is valued and whose is not, is no longer exclusively conditioned by the related question of who gets to speak and why. If digital capitalism has yet to supersede print capitalism completely, it has supplanted it in terms of cultural influence. As a result, scholars can no longer analyze the production and consumption of culture strictly within the binaries of producers and audience, waged and unwaged cultural worker. Likewise, since the work of producing, and interpreting, culture has become more complex, the unstable category of "professional" serves a less useful analytical frame for parsing how artists today relate to their audiences and work.

Distinguishing "popular" cartooning from its alternative forms is similarly fraught, considering how cartoon and comic art that once would have been marginalized in mainstream print now commands public attention for being innovative, critical, and more historically informed. To take one recent example, Indigenous illustrator Weshoyot Alvitre, who was raised in Southern California on lands once stewarded by her Tongva ancestors, has created strikingly original and insightful graphic narratives that have been inspired by Japanese *manga*.<sup>26</sup> With the advent of online platforms she and other alternative artists can interact with their audiences in ways that were once reserved for vetted "letters to the editor" or interviews with the proverbial "man on the street." Similarly, an online segment of the left, "seizing the memes of production" has shown that one need not be an artist to participate in visual culture. Everyone, it would seem, now can claim a media platform in miniature, for better and worse.

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<sup>26</sup> For a sample of other Indigenous comic artists working in the form, see <https://www.huckmag.com/art-and-culture/art-2/the-indigenous-artists-making-their-own-comics-industry/>. Accessed 1 September 2021.

These are the pivot points through which today's political cartoonists may reimagine a commons no longer attached to print. This preliminary work was sketched out by Laura Slobe, Fred Wright, and Ollie Harrington who developed a set of creative practices to contest hegemony in ways that the canonical cartoonists did not. But the memory and self-image of the crusading cartoonist retains its allure. As Denning reminds us, "class images last longer than classes under capitalism."<sup>27</sup> The symbolic power they project remain potent long after the structures that first made them relevant have dissolved.

Harrington recognized this as well as any cartoonist of his generation. After visiting the US in the early seventies, he wrote that "revolutions require expression."<sup>28</sup> It would be another twenty years before he returned to the US, at which point, the Berlin Wall had fallen, and crippling arthritis had robbed him of the ability to draw. However, he remained a keen observer, and like many east Berliners, he did not embrace a capitalist modernity that had been forestalled at mid-century. Instead of Cold War triumphalism, he remained cautious of a rushed reunification that had brought a resurgence of racism and xenophobia to Germany. In 1994, his AAEC colleagues invited him to their annual convention, which signaled an acknowledgment, however belated, of his contributions to a past that he rightly saw as not being past at all.

To borrow again from Marx, cartoonists have only captured fragments of these social changes, however imperfectly, but few have tried to dramatically rethink the set of cultural and economic arrangements that allowed some in their trade to thrive while others were sidelined. This thesis has taken a different approach by placing mainstream and alternative cartooning in tension to complicate any strict separation between the realms of freedom and necessity. It is worth recalling what many radical cartoonists recognized, namely that both art and activism require imagination, as much they do labour. Given the current state of the discipline, historians might consider how today's graphic artists are reimaging the figurative and conceptual boundaries of their field in a drastically altered material context. If the boundaries drawn never exist in a state of permanence, then the act of redrawing them is both a negation and a promise. Good thing, then, that drawing boards also come equipped with erasers.

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<sup>27</sup> Denning, *Culture in the Age of Three Worlds*, 229.

<sup>28</sup> Harrington, *Why I Left America*, 76.

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