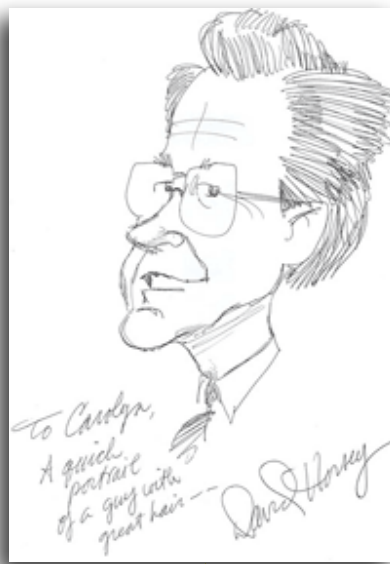


*Outside of basic intelligence, there is nothing more important to a good political cartoonist than ill will.*

Jules Feiffer, [Pulitzer Prize-winning cartoonist](#)

## The Art of Editorial Cartoons & Political Caricatures



by

Dan Youra

Creator of [Utoons](#) and [Right On Toon](#)



*"Too many of today's artists regard editorial cartooning as a trade instead of a profession. They try not to be too offensive. The hell with that. **We need more stirrer-uppers.**"*

*Bill Mauldin*

*The political cartoonist is not necessarily bound by the same ethical standards as journalists.*

Dr. Paul Parker, political science, Truman State University  
[American Political Cartoons: An Introduction](#)

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*Successful political cartoonists fuse creative caricature, clever situational transpositions, and honest indignation.*

Roger A. Fischer, [Them Damned Pictures: Explorations in American Political Cartoon Art](#)

## QUOTES

The cartoon is really **an exaggeration** to get at **an underlying truth**, which it conveys through a message, demonstrating a mood around the social or political situation that inspired the cartoon.

Charles Press, [The Political Cartoon](#)

Political cartoons invoke not only truth but **a higher artistic truth**, above the ethical parameters of the printed word. They have the ethical imperative to lift transitory journalism into **transcending art**.

Roger A. Fischer, [Them Damned Pictures: Explorations in American Political Cartoon Art](#)

Most political cartoons are **"designed to influence viewers** with regard to specific political events of the day"

Charles Press, [The Political Cartoon](#)

Political cartoons are a unique creation--pictorial editorial and artistic social commentary. The medium of the political cartoon, which combines the political and the artistic with journalism, allows them to make social **commentary beyond the boundaries of the written word**.

Dr. Paul Parker, political science, Truman State University  
[American Political Cartoons: An Introduction](#)

Relying on **symbolism** and **caricature**, experimenting in **fresh imagery**, political cartoons help people think about politics. Whether their purpose is to promote the status quo, raise social concerns, or to spur people to fight hard for change, **political cartoons have changed the face of history**.

Dr. Paul Parker, political science, Truman State University  
[American Political Cartoons: An Introduction](#)

What political cartoonists portray may be an **imaginary situation** in **allegory** or a **figure greatly distorted** by **caricature**, but to the artists this is the **essence** of what is actually happening.

Charles Press, [The Political Cartoon](#)

## BRIEF HISTORY OF POLITICAL CARTOONS

Dan Backer, American Studies, University Virginia  
[Brief History of Political Cartoons](#)

Political cartoons are for the most part composed of two elements: **caricature**, which parodies the individual, **and allusion**, which creates the situation or context into which the individual is placed.



Caricature as a Western discipline goes back to Leonardo da Vinci (1452 -1519) and his artistic explorations of "the ideal type of deformity" -- **the grotesque** -- which he used to better understand the concept of ideal beauty.



The sketch of "A Captain of Pope Urban VIII" (1568-1644) is representative of the **new genre** in that it is a quick, impressionistic drawing that **exaggerates prominent physical characteristics to humorous effect**.



While caricature originated around the Mediterranean, **cartoons of a more editorial nature** developed **in Germany** with the introduction of the printing press. Martin Luther (1483-1546) perfected the use of woodcutting and metal engraving to advance his Reformation by distributing pamphlets which depicted abuses of the Vatican's hierarchy.

The cartoon became a substantial medium of commentary which took serious issues and presented them in a manner which was not only funny, and therefore more socially acceptable, but also **designed to affect the viewer's opinion**.

---

*Even if the facts are not consistent with their pictorial representation of the situation, political cartoonists methods of effecting public opinion and altering for the better the course of human events qualifies them to make statements in picture that would be considered false if they were statements in print.*

Dr. Paul Parker, political science, Truman State University  
[American Political Cartoons: An Introduction](#)

## POLITICAL CARTOONS & POLITICAL CARICATURE IN AMERICA

Dan Backer, American Studies, University of Virginia  
[Brief History of Political Cartoons](#)

### BENJAMIN FRANKLIN (1705-1790)

**Join or Die** image by Ben Franklin



[The Ungentlemanly Art: A History of American Political Cartoon](#) by Stephen Hess and Milton Kaplan

The image, acknowledged to be the **first political cartoon in America**, depicts a snake whose severed parts represent the Colonies. Franklin's image, based in the popular superstition that a dead snake would come back to life if the pieces were placed next to each other, is significant in the development of cartooning, because it became **an icon**. It could be displayed in differing variations throughout the existing visual media of the day, such as on the **Don't Tread on Me** battle flag.



Franklin's image would always be associated with the causes of **colonial unity** and the **Revolutionary spirit**. **Join or Die** became a symbol to which all Americans could respond. Franklin's snake had established a **connection between a drawing and a specific political idea** in the American imagination.

---

### TOM NAST (1840-1902)

**Tom Nast's Boss Tweed in Harper's Weekly 1871**



[A Century of Political Cartoons: Caricature in the United States 1800 to 1900](#) by Nevins and Weitenkampf

The tale of Nast and Tweed is **one of the most celebrated specimens of graphic social protest in American history**. Abraham Lincoln is frequently quoted as saying Nast was his best recruiting sergeant for the Civil War. After he became the featured cartoonist at Harper's much of his art was focused on the local New York scene. Once the corrupt Tweed Ring fell, his own professional career began a slow process of deterioration. The primary shortcoming of Nast's work overall is that the quality of his satire never matched the quality of his art. Cartoons such as "Let Us Prey" are typical of his work because they are "devastating in effect" i.e. they overwhelmingly achieve the goal of ridiculing their subject, but as a measure of sophistication they are more akin to base insults than the kind of deft criticisms found in more subtle satire.



**ROBERT MINOR** (1884-1952)



Published in [The Masses](#), New York 1916

[Click for large image](#)

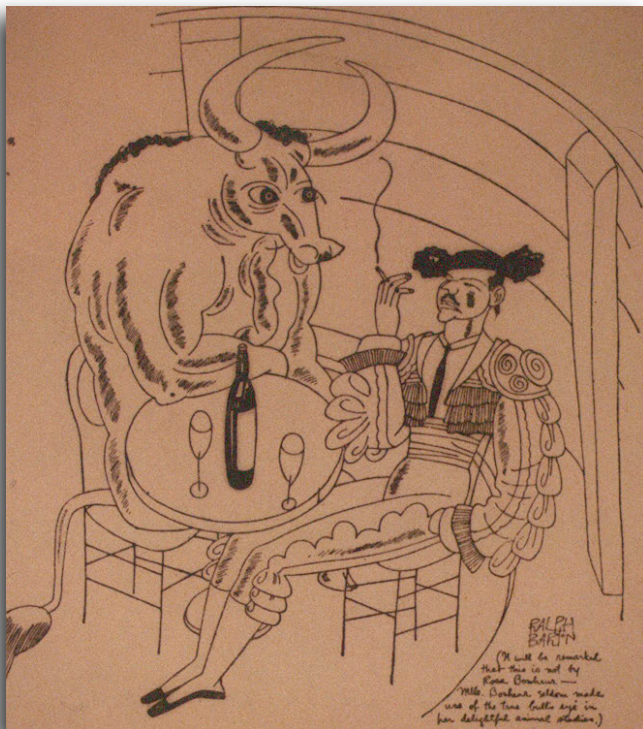
[Foundation for Caricature & Cartoon](#)

Library of Congress and  
National Portrait Gallery

The United States experienced political upheaval prior to World War I, as the Socialist Party attracted thousands of voters in the 1912 election. American editorial cartooning underwent a major transformation. *The Masses* attracted artists and writers who wanted to express their opinion without the confines

of editorial review. Under John Sloan, art editor from 1912 to 1914, the periodical published images of the working class in their rare hours of leisure or lampooned the wealthy for not working. The political idealism and artistic ability of Robert Minor, one of the highest paid and talent editorial cartoonist of the time, challenged American attitudes toward World War I, workers and the Russian Revolution.

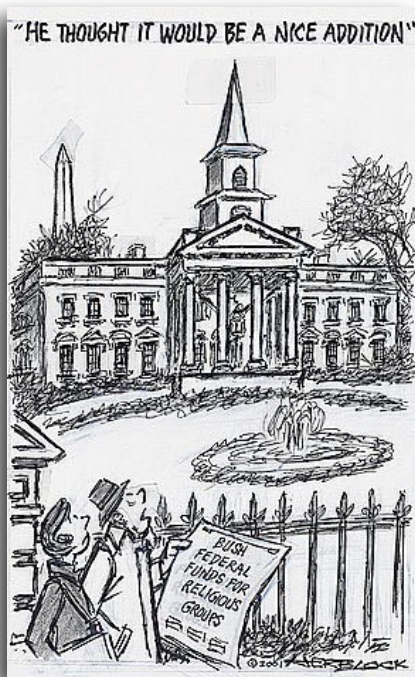
**RALPH BARTON** (1891-1931)



[Ralph Barton's Ernest Hemingway](#), *Vanity Fair*. Courtesy Diana Barton Franz. [Click for large image](#)

During the decade of the Twenties, Ralph Barton was arguably the best known and inarguably the highest paid cartoonist and caricaturist in America. Barton began by caricaturing one friend--Thomas Hart Benton--and ended with another--Charlie Chaplin. In between, he managed to hit just about everybody, from Matisse and Picasso to Lillian Gish and Sigmund Freud.

## HERB BLOCK (1909-2001)



[Herbert Block editorial cartoon in Washington Post, Feb 9, 2001.](#) [Click for large image](#)

***Bush Federal Funds for Religious Groups. Headline. He thought it would be a nice addition. Caption.***

[Herb Block Foundation Collection, US Library of Congress](#)

Herblock saw the separation of church and state as a fundamental principle of American democracy. This imaginative rendering of the White House expressed his displeasure at President George W. Bush's creation of the White House Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives.

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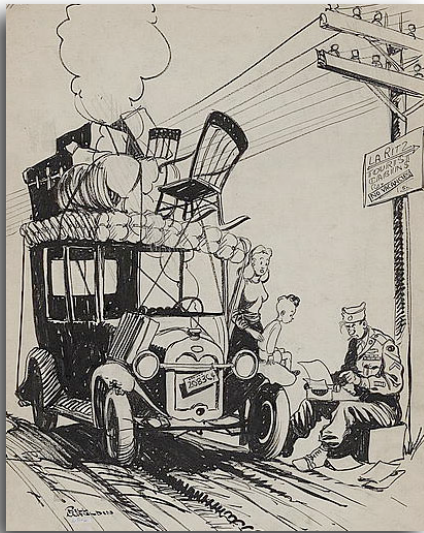
## BILL MAULDIN (1921-2003)

*"Too many of today's artists regard editorial cartooning as a trade instead of a profession. They try not to be too offensive. The hell with that. We need more stirrer-uppers."*

*Bill Mauldin*

***Don't bother Daddy. He's writing a sequel to 'Grapes of Wrath' 1944*** [Click for large image](#)

[Herb Block Foundation Collection, US Library of Congress](#)



In 1962, Mauldin joined the staff of the *Chicago Sun-Times*, refusing the title of editorial cartoonist, but accepting the title of "cartoon commentator." His work appeared on the op-ed page so that the readership would realize that the *Sun-Times* was publishing Mauldin's opinions and that the cartoonist was not a mere spokesman for the publisher.



**EDWARD SOREL** (1960s)



Edward Sorel drawing of [Spiro Agnew in parody](#) of World War I poster. 1973. Published in *Harper's*. Courtesy of Edward Sorel. [Click for large image](#)

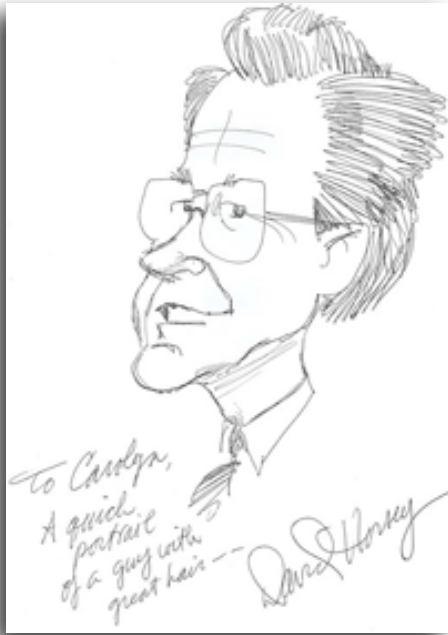
Caricature is by its very nature an impolite art, and in certain hands a subversive one as well. During World War II it seemed downright unpatriotic to ridicule our own political leaders, and the world of show business, which until then had inspired America's "Golden Age of Caricature," suddenly seemed trivial when compared to the global conflict. Aside from Arthur Szyk's renderings of the Axis gang, there was not much going on in the field. In spite of some lovely (but small) examples in *The New Yorker* by William Auerbach Levy, Alfred Frueh, and Aaron Birnbaum, and by Al Hirschfeld in *The New York Times*, caricature remained a

languishing art until the mid-1960s. Then, thanks to Vietnam, the proliferation of news magazines, and the explosion of David Levine's caricatures in *The New York Review of Books* and *Esquire*, caricature began to make a comeback. The current crop of impolite portraits admittedly has fewer masters than America had in the 1920s (Miguel Covarrubias, Ralph Barton, Will Cotton, Garretto, Auerbach-Levy, Boardman Robinson, Frueh). Still, they approach both politics and show business with an irreverence not seen in this country since the turn of the century. Furthermore, in Levine, Robert Grossman, Philip Burke, Barry Blitt, Pat Oliphant, and I like to think, myself, there is such variety of style, technique, and approach that one might suspect a second "Golden Age" to be in the offing.

Edward Sorel, [Anything Goes: Caricature Since the 1960s](#)



**DAVID HORSEY** (1980s 90s)



*Caricature by David Horsey of fellow cartoonist Dan Youra*

**David Horsey is a Pulitzer Prize-winning cartoonist who works for a Seattle website.**

David Horsey started as cartoonist for the University of Washington *Daily* newspaper and went to work as an employee at the Seattle Post-Intelligencer, until its demise in the newspaper bubble. Horsey's work is representative of political cartooning in the late 20th century, drumming liberal themes and promoting progressive causes in mainly black and white images on editorial pages of metropolitan newspapers.

**DAN YOURA** (21st Century)



*Omam Manhattan Mosque*

[Click for large image](#)

[RightOnToon.com](#)

[Obama Jive Collection](#)

Dan Youra combines the best traditions of editorial cartoons and political caricatures in **colorful depictions** of US and world leaders in the 21st century. A critic of totalitarian regimes on the left and the right, **Youra's artwork soothes the observer with an aura of fine art, then delivers a stinging dose of truth serum.** His art is **reviewed** as **beautiful, marvelous** and **superlative**. A lone wolf, whose howls in defense of freedom are muted by roaring prides of liberal lions marauding the media wilderness, **Youra creates pictures that speak louder than words.**

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

### REVIEWS

[What people say](#) - reviews of Youra's art

[More reviews](#)

### WEBSITES

[Utoons.com](#) - Youra Cartoons

[RightOnToon.com](#) - YouraBlog.com

[Caricatures](#) - Portraits of US and world leaders

[ObamaJive.com](#) - Obama caricatures

[FreePatty.info](#) - Political campaigns

[Utoons.info](#) - Youra's Utoons brand

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## ONLINE COURSE

### ONLINE COURSE IN POLITICAL CARTOONS: IT IS NO LAUGHING MATTER

*It is important to learn about the techniques used to convey political messages and attitudes. In this lesson, high school students learn to evaluate political cartoons for their **meaning, message, and persuasiveness.***

Victoria Mayers, Lynn Stone, Beth O'Connor

[It Is No Laughing Matter: Analyzing Political Cartoons](#)