

Political Caricatures Are Weapons

by
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The English word **CARICATURE** comes from
the Italian word **CARICARE**, [definition – to load, as a rifle]

Italian verb. **caricare**
[definition – to load, as a rifle, ammunition, bomb]
[Italian caricatura, lit. “act of loading”]

Italian noun. **caricatore**
is a cartridge, magazine, clip

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Cartoons are popularized caricatures. The word “caricature” derives from the Italian verb “caricare” – to load (a rifle, ammunition, bomb), to charge, to attack, e.g., “The police charged the protestors.”; in sports to tackle (to trip up, bring down). The Italian noun “caricatore” is a cartridge, magazine, clip.

Thus, the word “caricature” essentially means a “loaded portrait”.

A caricature is a graphic or literary device used as a weapon in attack or defense against an opponent to get the better of an adversary. A caricature is not a physical sword, rifle or cannon. However, its impact can be effective in attack or defense, as in “the deadly weapon of satire” or “his power of speech was his best weapon.”

Early cartoons were launched in political battles between the colonies and the king, the left and the right, good and evil. Early comic strips drew dramatic sympathy of the “underdog” against the system. The current political battle is “real news” versus “fake news.”

Franklin's Defiant Snake

Ben Franklin's famous woodcut image "Join or Die" showing a snake cut into eighths with each segment labeled with the initials of one of the American colonies. It became a symbol of colonial freedom during the American Revolutionary War. First published in the **Pennsylvania Gazette** on May 9, 1754, Franklin's snake is considered to be America's first political cartoon.

Nast's Presidential Pencil

Thomas Nast (1840-1902), artist of Harper's Weekly "Father of American Caricature" was said to have re-elected Lincoln in 1864 with one of his cartoons. Lincoln himself commented that Nast was "his best recruiting sergeant." General Ulysses S. Grant (1822 -1885) attributed his election as president in 1868 "to the sword of General Sheridan and the pencil of Nast." Nast popularized the donkey as the symbol for the Democratic Party and the elephant, for the Republican Party

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

Jules Feiffer,
Pulitzer Prize-winning cartoonist

*"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
Pulitzer Prize-winning cartoonist

*"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

Newspaper War: Pulitzer vs. Hearst

A cartoon character, Yellow Kid, became the namesake of Yellow Journalism, which emerged in the newspaper battle between Joseph Pulitzer and William Randolph Hearst in the early twentieth century. Also referred to as the "Yellow Press," Yellow Journalism presents little or no legitimate well-researched news and instead uses exaggerations of news events, scandal-mongering, sensationalism, lavish use of pictures and imaginary drawings. By extension, the term "yellow journalism" is used today as a pejorative to decry any journalism that treats news in an unprofessional or unethical fashion. Yellow Journalism is characterized by faked interviews, misleading headlines, pseudoscience, and a parade of false learning from so-called experts.