

# POLITICAL CARTOONS IN U.S. HISTORY

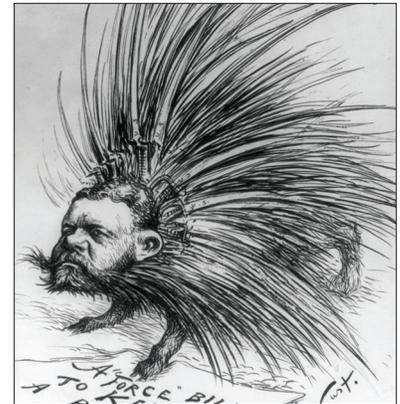
For over two hundred years, whenever a debate has broken out in the United States, political cartoons have been there to take part in the argument—and sometimes to push it to its limits.

## HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Beginning in 1754, when Benjamin Franklin's "Join or Die" cartoon appeared in the Pennsylvania Gazette, political cartoonists have long used their skills to praise, attack, caricature, lampoon, and otherwise express their opinions on the most urgent political issues of the day.

Political cartoons began as a street-level phenomenon. In the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, they were often posted on walls or passed from person to person, as well as being published in newspapers. In the end of the nineteenth century, they were an important part of the growing popularity of newspapers and magazines, and the intense competition for readership made provocative cartoons a valuable selling point.

At the beginning of the twenty-first century, political



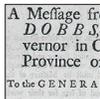
A Federal Bayonette and Saber  
Lodge Porcupine  
[http://www.loc.gov/pictures/  
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cartoons appear in a wide range of online publications and can still stir up controversy.

Analyzing a political cartoon can lead to a deeper understanding of the issues addressed by the cartoon, as well as the historical context from which the issues arose. However, it can also raise interesting questions about the point of view of the cartoonist and shed light on the methods different cartoonists use to persuade their audience.

The items in this primary source set are grouped around several major events in U.S. history. Each group contains at least one cartoon and documents that can provide some context on the issues the cartoon addresses.

## The French and Indian War (1754-63)



The French and Indian War (1754-63) was the original inspiration for “Join or Die.” Benjamin Franklin became the main proponent of the “Albany Plan of Union,” which proposed combining the colonies into a single political entity. Colonial delegates approved the plan unanimously after some debate and revision, but each of the seven colonies rejected the plan. The accompanying leaflet provides some insight into the desire for a union of colonies as well as the urgency of defending them against France.

## Britain’s Attempt to Levy Taxes on Basic Goods



The conclusion of the French and Indian War in 1763 was followed by Britain’s attempt to raise revenue by levying taxes on basic goods. American colonists fumed over the fact that these taxes were imposed without any input from their colonial legislatures—an issue that was later addressed in the Declaration of Independence. From Britain’s point of view, the British government had committed blood and treasure to defending the American colonies. Therefore, it was only natural for British subjects to contribute by paying higher taxes. The accompanying cartoon depicts American ire by portraying a mob of Bostonians tarring and feathering a seemingly innocent “excise-man.”

## The Defeat of the British Warship *Boxer*



The defeat of the British warship *Boxer* by the American frigate *Enterprise* during the War of 1812 marked a major U.S. naval victory. The accompanying document is an official account by one of the senior officers of the *Enterprise* to the United States Senate. The political cartoon shows King George III bleeding profusely from the nose as he spars with James Madison. John Bull often was used to personify Great Britain, much as Uncle Sam is used to personify the United States today.

## The Second Bank of the United States



The Second Bank of the United States was established in 1816 and was criticized as a monopoly. The bank was supported by Federal funds and deposits, but essentially was privately owned. The Bank’s president pushed for an early renewal of the Bank charter in 1832, an election year. Then, President Andrew Jackson swiftly vetoed the re-charter and transferred millions of dollars of Federal funds from the Bank. The accompanying cartoons demonstrate two different views of this event, one depicting the veto and removal of funds a flagrant exercise in tyranny; the other portraying the Bank as a monster being vanquished by President Jackson.

## Lincoln's Request to Congress

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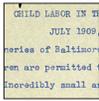
With the nation on the brink of civil war, President Abraham Lincoln made a dramatic request to Congress for troops and funds for military action on July 4, 1861. The first document, from the Senate Journal, recounts Lincoln's address to Congress. The second image portrays the reaction of a "Southern gentleman" to this news.

## 1912 Presidential Candidates



The 1912 presidential candidates Woodrow Wilson and Theodore Roosevelt battled over the question of which candidate was the true "trustbuster." The first cartoon depicts Roosevelt as a hunter; the various trusts are depicted as game. The second cartoon depicts Roosevelt wielding a baton labeled "legalized monopoly" while conducting a chorus representing the different trusts. The cartoon also notes that Wilson states that Roosevelt is pro-monopoly. Since trusts were a source of potent political anger, each candidate attempted to bolster his anti-monopoly credentials.

## Child Labor in the Early Twentieth Century



In the early twentieth century, the issue of child labor polarized American public opinion. The 1914 cartoon photographed by Lewis Hine clearly depicts child labor as a blot on the nation. Those against child labor argued that the work was unsafe and dangerous for young children and that it impaired both their education and physical development. The attached 1909 document, written by Lewis Hine, reports on child labor in Maryland canneries. Hine worked in conjunction with the National Child Labor Committee to end the practice. He documented the dire working conditions of children across the country and produced numerous reports on the issue as well as a wealth of photographs.

## President Wilson and World War I



When hostilities broke out in 1914, marking the beginning of World War I, President Woodrow Wilson maintained a stance of neutrality for the United States. When the British liner *Lusitania* was sunk in May 1915, the deaths of nearly 1200 civilians, including 128 Americans, caused a shift in public opinion in favor of conflict. The William Allen Rogers cartoon depicts Woodrow Wilson with a nefarious-looking German diplomat, holding a note that says "Lusitania Conversation at a Deadlock," a portrait of a *Lusitania* victim in the background. Wilson urged the German government to stop attacking unarmed ships, but many believed that Wilson needed to take a bolder course of action.

## SUGGESTIONS FOR TEACHERS

Political cartoonists, like political writers, have a point to make. Assign, or allow students to select a cartoon to analyze. What point is the cartoonist trying to make? What techniques, such as symbols, words, caricature, exaggeration, and irony, communicate the message?

Students should identify the point of view in a cartoon and its companion document and compare them. Is the point of view in the companion document similar to or different from the point of view in the cartoon? In which document is it easier to discern the point of view? Which method of making a point is more effective? Why?

Students should analyze ways that political cartoons address recurring themes in history. The point of view expressed in a cartoon on the Chinese Exclusion Act, for example, could be compared with recent perspectives on migration and immigration.

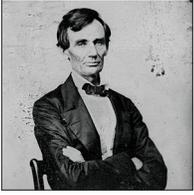
At the end of a survey course in U.S. history, cartoons can be used as part of an assessment. Ask students to put the cartoons in chronological order and to select two or three to analyze in depth, using their background knowledge about the events portrayed.

In an art class, students can examine how the style of cartooning has changed over time. What might account for the changes? What continuity exists? What might account for the continuity?



He Can't Put It Out  
<http://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/2001703874/>

## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES



### **The Alfred Whital Stern Collection of Lincolniana**

<http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/collections/stern-lincoln/>



### **An American Time Capsule: Three Centuries of Broadsides and Other Printed Ephemera**

<http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/rbpehtml/>



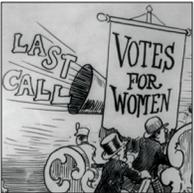
### **The Stars and Stripes: The American Soldiers' Newspaper of World War I, 1918-1919**

<http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/sgphtml/sashtml/sashome.html>



### **Cartoon Prints, American**

<http://www.loc.gov/pictures/collection/app/>



### **Cartoon Drawings**

<http://www.loc.gov/pictures/collection/acd/>



### **It's No Laughing Matter: Analyzing Political Cartoons**

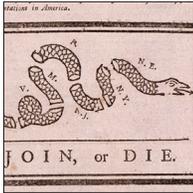
<http://www.loc.gov/teachers/classroommaterials/presentationsandactivities/activities/political-cartoon/>

## PRIMARY SOURCES WITH CITATIONS



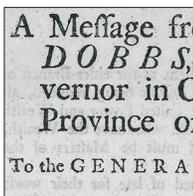
Nast, Thomas, artist. "A Federal Bayonette and Saber Lodge Porcupine." Cartoon. *The New York Gazette*, June 25, 1892. From Library of Congress: *Cartoon Drawings: Swann Collection of Caricature and Cartoon*.

<http://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/2009617073/>



Franklin, Benjamin. "Join or Die." Political cartoon. 1754. From Library of Congress: Serial and Government Publications Division.

<http://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/2002695523/>



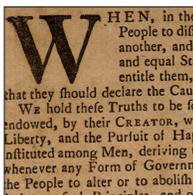
Dobbs, Arthur. "A message from His Excellency Arthur Dobbs, Esq; Captain-General and Governor in Chief, in and over his Majesty's Province of North-Carolina. To the General Assembly, held at Newbern, the twelfth day of December, 1754. [Proposing] a plan of union." Leaflet. 1754. From Library of Congress: *An American Time Capsule: Three Centuries of Broadsides and Other Printed Ephemera*.

<http://hdl.loc.gov/loc.rbc/rbpe.13500100>



Revere, Paul, artist. "[Masthead and part of front page of The Massachusetts spy, or, Thomas's Boston journal showing a female figure of Liberty in upper left and rattlesnake labeled "Join or Die" symbolizing the 13 colonies, challenging a griffin, across the top]." Political cartoon. 1774. From Library of Congress: Serial and Government Publications Division.

<http://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/2002712180/>



"In Congress, July 4, 1776. The unanimous declaration of the thirteen United States of America." 1777. From Library of Congress: *Documents from the Continental Congress and the Constitutional Convention, 1774-1789*.

<http://hdl.loc.gov/loc.rbc/bdsdcc.02101>



"The Bostonian's paying the excise-man, or tarring & feathering." Political cartoon. 1774. From Library of Congress: Prints and Photographs Division.

<http://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/2004673302>



Charles, William, artist. "A Boxing Match, or Another Bloody Nose for John Bull." Political cartoon. 1813. From Library of Congress: Prints and Photographs Division.

<http://loc.gov/pictures/item/2002708982/>

Lawrence, brig, .  
 Niagara, brig, .  
 Caledonia, brig, .  
 Ariel, schooner, .  
 Scorpion, schooner, .  
 Somers, schooner, .  
 Trippe, sloop, .  
 Tigress, schooner, .  
 Porcupine, schooner,

"American State Papers, Senate, 13th Congress, 2nd Session; Naval Affairs: Vol. 1, 297."  
 From Library of Congress: *A Century of Lawmaking for a New Nation: U.S. Congressional Documents and Debates, 1774-1875.*

<http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/ampage?collId=llsp&fileName=023/llsp023.db&Page=297>



"King Andrew the First." Political cartoon. 1833. From Library of Congress: Prints and Photographs Division.

<http://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/2008661753>



"The downfall of Mother Bank." Political cartoon. 1833. From Library of Congress: Prints and Photographs Division.

<http://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/2008661758>



Jackson, Andrew. "Veto message from the President of the United States, returning the bank bill, with his objections, &c. To the Senate ... Andrew Jackson. Washington, July 10, 1832. Herald Office." 1832. From Library of Congress: *An American Time Capsule: Three Centuries of Broadsides and Other Printed Ephemera.*

<http://hdl.loc.gov/loc.rbc/rbpe.19403000>

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U.S. Senate Journal. 37th Congress, 1st Session, 5 July 1861, 14. From Library of Congress: *A Century of Lawmaking for a New Nation: U.S. Congressional Documents and Debates, 1774-1875.*

<http://memory.loc.gov/cgi-bin/ampage?collId=llsj&fileName=053/llsj053.db&recNum=13>



"Anti-Confederacy cartoon showing Southerner's reaction to Lincoln's Determination." Cartoon. 1861? From Library of Congress: Prints and Photographs Division.

<http://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/2002723206/>



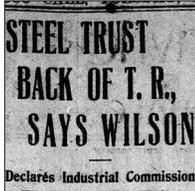
"No lack of big game [sic] The President seems to have scared up quite a bunch of octopi." Political cartoon. Between 1901 and 1912. From Library of Congress: Prints and Photographs Division.

<http://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/2010645532>



Ireland, Billy. "Wilson's suggestion for a cartoon." Political cartoon. 1912. From Library of Congress: Prints and Photographs Division.

<http://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/2010645527>



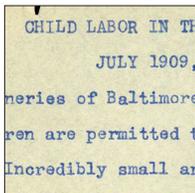
"Steel Trust Back of T.R., Says Wilson." *The San Francisco Call*. October 8, 1912. From Library of Congress: *Chronicling America*.

<http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn85066387/1912-10-08/ed-1/seq-2/>



Hine, Lewis Wickes, photographer. "Cartoon." Photograph. 1914 [?]. From Library of *National Child Labor Committee Collection*

<http://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/ncl2004000340/PP/>



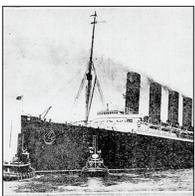
Hine, Lewis W. "Child Labor in the Canning Industry of Maryland." 1909. From Library of Congress: *National Child Labor Committee Collection*.

<http://www.loc.gov/pictures/static/data/nclc/resources/images/canneries3.pdf>



Rogers, W.A., artist. "Well, what are you going to do about it?" Political cartoon. 1915 [?]. From Library of Congress: *Cabinet of American Illustration*.

<http://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/2010717742/>



"1,300 Die as Lusitania Goes to Bottom; 400 Americans on Board Torpedoed Ship; Washington Stirred as When Maine Sank." *New York Tribute*, Vol. 75, Number 25,010, May 8, 1915. From Library of Congress: *Chronicling America*.

<http://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn83030214/1915-05-08/ed-1/seq-1/>