

# Introduction

Cartoons come in many shapes and sizes, from gag cartoons and comic strips, to comic books and graphic novels. A more or less respectable cartoon format is the newspaper editorial cartoon. This symposium considers the state of editorial cartooning around the globe, from representations of gender, religion, student life, and popular culture in the United States, to visual politics in Indonesia, Yemen, Turkey, and South Africa.

The term *editorial cartoon* typically refers to the topical outbursts of image and text that punctuate and enliven the daily newspaper editorial page. Ideally, the editorial cartoon enjoys a certain degree of autonomy from the columns of print that surround it. A capable editorial cartoonist can use this autonomy to “grab people by the lapels, shake them and say, ‘Don’t you understand what’s happening?’” (Tom Tomorrow, quoted in Lamb 2004, 233). As the transnational protests and economic boycotts over the cartoons published in the Danish newspaper *Jyllands-Posten* in September 2005 made abundantly clear, editorial cartoons can also serve as

lightning rods for larger controversies.

The idea for this symposium was floated a few weeks before the Danish cartoon crisis and was motivated by reports that “the number

of newspapers employing full-time editorial cartoonists has steadily declined” over the past several decades (Leonard Downie, Jr., quoted in Lordan 2006, 158). The waning of two-newspaper cities, the consolidation of the newspaper industry, and outsourcing in the form of substituting syndicated material for staff-generated material have each contributed to the steady erosion of full-time employment opportunities. Thom Gephardt, a veteran editor at the *Cincinnati Enquirer*, estimates that “a major American newspaper hires an editorial cartoonist about as infrequently as the President of the United States hires a Chief Justice” (Ruby-Sachs and Pittman 2002).

When the Tribune Company eliminated editorial cartoon staff positions at the *Los Angeles Times* and the *Baltimore Sun* in 2005, the Association of American Editorial Cartoonists (AAEC) organized something called “Black Ink Monday.” On December 12, 2005, dozens of cartoonists “unleashed their biting commentary on the current state of affairs of the newspaper business, with a specific emphasis on corporate downsizing” (AAEC 2005). Cartoon-

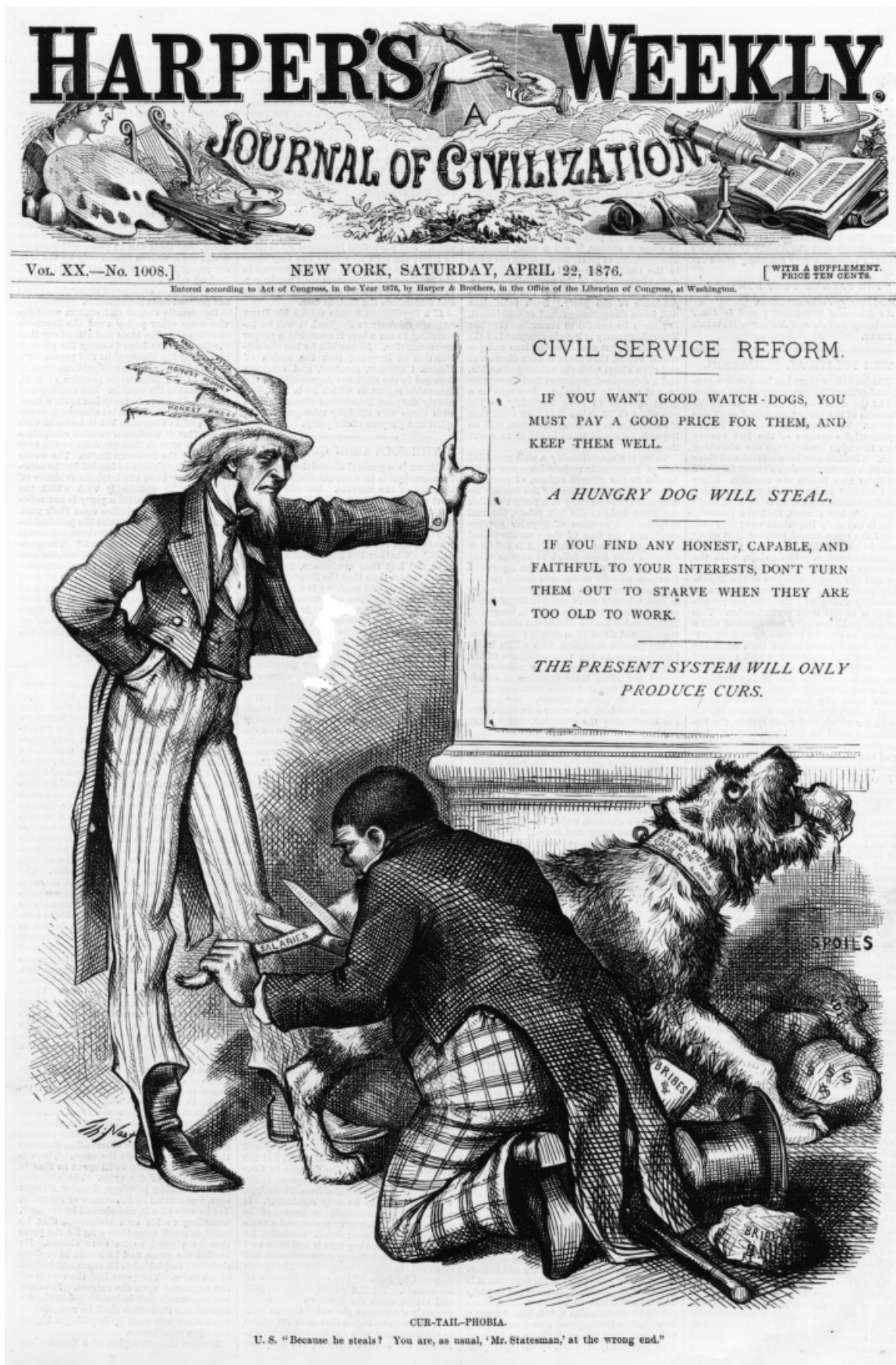
ists are notoriously difficult to mobilize, but the specter of job losses taps into larger concerns about opinion-based cartooning and the future of the newspaper. The prize-winning cartoonists Clay Bennett and Ann Telnaes touch on these issues in their symposium interviews (Margulies 2007; Harrison 2007).

As a commercial art form, the editorial cartoon is linked to the development of the modern daily newspaper. But the editorial cartoon may also be viewed as one form that cartooning can assume along a continuum of formats, styles, and genres. In recent years, the influential work of Scott McCloud (1993) has encouraged researchers to think of comics as a medium of sequences and juxtapositions, which places the editorial cartoon in an awkward conceptual relationship with multi-panel and multi-page cartooning, even though plenty of editorial cartoonists use multiple panels at least on occasion. The comics scholar Robert C. Harvey (1994; 1996) has argued, in contrast to McCloud, that comics are based on a “visual-verbal blend.” Their debate has focused the attention of scholars and interested readers on how comics work and how they may be distinguished from other art forms. Our focus on the editorial cartoon not only underscores the utility of Harvey’s notion of images and text as giving each other meaning, but highlights the important distinction between *simplification*, which cartoonists are routinely accused of, and *encapsulation*, which uses small spaces to capture large meanings. Editorial cartoons rely on the visual-verbal blend, but they also, at their best, exemplify the crucial difference between encapsulating difficult truths and dumbing things down.

The history of the editorial cartoon in this country reaches back to Ben Franklin, Paul Revere, and the emergence of a national press in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Early U.S. efforts were often inspired by the work of European illustrators such as John Tenniel, Gustave Doré, Honoré Daumier, and James Gillray. Innovations in printing, paper production, and image reproduction in the mid-to-late nineteenth century made it increasingly possible for newspapers and magazines on both sides of the Atlantic to incorporate timely drawings at reasonable prices. In the United States, formative creative figures such as Thomas Nast (see Figure 1), Homer Davenport, Joseph Keppler, and Art Young not only used their pens to put across their views and to influence the opinions of others, but honed the vocabulary, imagery, and sensibility of the modern political cartoon. Styles and subject

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Figure 1



Thomas Nast's cartoon cover for the April 22, 1876, *Harper's Weekly*. Reprint permission courtesy of the Library of Congress.

matter continue to evolve as cartoonists respond to changing social conditions and adapt to or resist prevailing winds of fashion and taste. There are a few recent surveys on the editorial cartoon (e.g., Hess and Northrop 1996; Lamb 2004; Lordan 2006; Trostle 2004), but nothing definitive. Perhaps the single most useful primary resource on newspaper editorial cartooning in recent decades is the *Best Editorial Cartoons of the Year* series (Brooks 1973–2006).

Editorial cartoons can be described as sites of dense visual information. They use symbols, icons, lines, and words to affirm, mock, and complicate the assumptions and boundaries of acceptable discourse. They draw on established narratives and genres even as they publicize the latest scandals. They decorate the page and distract the eye, and they encapsulate historical change and transmit coded messages. Most editorial cartoons are in black-and-white, but there is no formal reason why this should be so, and the use or absence of color can add a further dimension to the meaning of a particular cartoon.

Some editorial cartoonists are beloved members of their communities. Others receive hate mail. Paul Conrad of the *Los Angeles Times* made Richard Nixon's enemies list, while former CBS producer Bernard Goldberg (2005) found room for no fewer than three cartoonists—Ted Rall (#15), Jeff Danziger (#35), and Aaron McGruder (#88)—in his list of the *100 People Who Are Screwing Up America*. Many academics post cartoons on their office doors, but the number of our colleagues who write substantively on cartooning is roughly the same as the number who closely study campaign buttons, i.e., not very many. The power of cartoons to inspire and enrage public and elite opinion is a matter of historical record, yet editorial cartoons are mainly understood by the discipline as epiphenomenal paraphernalia rather than as, say, “a single, integral system of signification” (Varnum and Gibbons 2001, xi).

As Ilan Danjoux notes in his contribution to this symposium, the shaky status of the newspaper cartoonist does not mean that the cartoon itself is in crisis. Political cartooning exists beyond the editorial page. Many observers would describe *Doonesbury* and *Mallard Fillmore* as editorial cartoons, even though they are also comic strips. Weekly newspapers often feature opinionated cartooning in the free verse tradition

of Jules Feiffer (Rall 2002; 2004; 2006). *World War III Illustrated*, a trailblazing, irregularly published anthology of political comics, recently celebrated its 25th anniversary (Worcester 2006), and a growing number of comic books and graphic novels are explicitly concerned with current events. The success of titles like Alison Bechdel's *Fun Home*, Miriam Katin's *We Are On Our Own*, Art Spiegelman's *In the Shadows of No Towers*, and Marjane Satrapi's *Persepolis* has helped legitimate long form cartooning and has encouraged bookstores to find room for the grown-up graphic novel as a major retail category alongside literary fiction, crime, non-fiction, romance, and biography. A sign of the times: Bechdel's *Fun Home* was listed as book of the year for 2006 by no less an authority than *Time* magazine.

Cartooning's newfound cultural clout has been accompanied by the emergence of an increasingly sophisticated secondary literature that takes up questions of form, history, ideology, and genre (See, for example, Carrier 2000; Coogan 2006; Gordon 1998; Hatfield 2005; Kannenberg 2002; Magnussen and Christiansen 2000). The graphic novel has attracted an outpouring of serious-minded commentary from journalists and literary critics in recent years, some of which builds on and reproduces the puzzled skepticism that was characteristic of twentieth-century commentary on comics and cartoons (Heer and Worcester 2004). The unparalleled distributive capacity of the Internet means that cartoons are constantly traversing the planet, in the form of web links and email attachments. But neither the mainstreaming of the graphic novel, nor the emergence of comics studies, nor the global reach of the Internet can ensure that sentiment-free media companies will commit themselves to underwriting editorial cartooning in the new century.

Although this symposium was initially framed in terms of domestic cartoon politics, the growing controversy over the *Jyllands-Posten* cartoons suggested that a more inclusive framework was required. For this reason, the call for papers invited contributions on cases outside the United States, as well as on the Danish cartoon controversy itself. The result is a symposium that offers a rich mix of single-country case studies, comparative studies, theoretical excursions, thematic essays, interviews with leading cartoonists, and, of course, examples of the form.

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## SYMPOSIUM CARTOONISTS' BIOS

**Clay Bennett** is the editorial cartoonist for the Christian Science Monitor. He was awarded the Pulitzer Prize in 2002, and in 2005 he was elected president of the Association of American Editorial Cartoonists.

**Jeff Danziger** (cover image) is an award-winning editorial cartoonist. His most recent collection is *Blood, Debt and Fears: Cartoons of the First Half of the Last Half of the Bush Administration* (Steer Forth Press, 2006).

**Jimmy Margulies** has been the editorial cartoonist for the Record since 1990, holding the same position at the Houston Post from 1984–1990. His cartoons are nationally syndicated by King Features, and his state-oriented work appears in newspapers all over New Jersey. His cartoons can be seen at [www.northjersey.com/margulies](http://www.northjersey.com/margulies).

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**Ann Telnaes'** editorial cartoons have appeared in the Washington Post, Boston Globe, Le Monde, Chicago Tribune, Los Angeles Times, New York Times, and elsewhere. In 2001, she won the Pulitzer Prize for Editorial Cartooning. Her first book, *Humor's Edge*, was published by Pomegranate Press and the Library of Congress in 2004.

**Zapiro** is the pen name of Jonathan Shapiro. For over a decade, he has worked as the editorial cartoonist at the Mail and Guardian (South Africa); he is the author of eight collections of cartoons.