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**Graphic Editorials Fighting the Status Quo: Artists and Social Critics During the World Wars**

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Introduction
One thing that can be said when speaking about politics: “the more things change, the more they stay the same.” Television pundits and social media color our imaginations with breaking news and commentaries, some of them true, but dry; other commentaries are more colorful and sometimes less truthful. But, the power of images lingers. Images ofdecades gone by picture historical events and express sentiments and visions of the status quo of a time. Images can be more powerful than words. Benjamin Franklin’sPhiladelphia Gazette (May 9, 1754) was a weekly newspaper that contained political cartoons and commentaries. They expressed the public’s views and commentaries and provided a more direct way to express opinions about events.

“Stop Them Damn Pictures”
These are the words that prompted politician Boss Tweed screamed to his cohorts in response to Thomas Nast’s scathing images of his administration. He went on to say that even though his constituents couldn’t read words, they could see and understand political cartoons which were featured in newspapers. Tweed fully understood the power of images and its effect on the viewer.

Starting with the broken snake above the words “Join or Die” which was featured in Benjamin Franklin’s Philadelphia Gazette (May 9, 1754) to Steven Sack’s visual commentary of the overcrowded Republican candidates for the 2016 presidential election, see middle right image from the Star Tribune, political cartoons have been the mainstay in American politics. More often than not, these parodies explained the complexity of government and politicians in a satirical, witty, and humorous way. The public would recognize the characters involved and make their deductions of government and politicians in sardonic, witty, and humorous ways.

Who commissioned these cartoons? The news media often enlisted artists to illustrate their publications. Magazines like Puck frequently featured political art to depict the horrors not presented in print. World War I was truly the domino that shattered the status quo of ruthless monarchies. The use of deadly gas to destroy the enemy caused devastating casualties. America, which had wanted to stay neutral reluctantly joined the war effort. It is possible that scathing posters and cartoons hinting at cowardice prompted America to enter the war.

After this war, Europe, in particular, Germany was left impoverished, almost toothless. The discontent and aching poverty led to the rise of Adolf Hitler and the rise of the Nazi party. The artist drew the unspeakable inhumane actions of one country against the world. There are also the often neglected study of black soldiers in political imagery. "Black and White" - for example, the solidarity movement of African Americans and the rise of Hitler and the Nazi party. Caricature was used to express disdain of the two World Wars. World War II poster for U.S. Government Bonds rendered in stark black and white on a white background. The two World Wars provided graphic artists a blank canvas in which to depict the horrors not presented in print. World War I was truly the domino that shattered the status quo of ruthless monarchies. The use of deadly gas to destroy the enemy caused devastating casualties. America, which had wanted to stay neutral reluctantly joined the war effort. It is possible that scathing posters and cartoons hinting at cowardice prompted America to enter the war.

Not Just Cartoons: War Posters
Visual political sentiment was not limited to caricatures in cartoons. Posters rendered in a painterly style were also used in the war of public opinion. Following in the tradition of the large Neoclassic paintings of Jacques-Louis David and others 19th century painters, war posters used vivid colors, like red and blues, to call the viewers attention to the plight of war. Often these posters pondered for purchasing war bonds or shaming America to join the war effort with images of rag-tag, children or skeletal remains.

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Conclusions: Effectiveness of Political Cartoons
Using art as an expression of political propaganda existed since antiquity. The advent of broadsides and newspapers saw black and white cartoons as the main tool for this kind of art. Instead of proclaiming the greatness of rulers, these graphic editorials attacked corruption, fascism, even race prejudice. Caricature rendered in stark black and white on a white background, made the subjects ridiculous but identifiable to the public. Colorful posters were created to arouse compassion and definitely raise money to support the war cause. Both the cartoons and posters had the desired effect. People were horrified to give their sons to the armed forces and give their money to buy war bonds. Boss Tweed was correct about the power of images. Even if most people won’t take the time to read, they will read images and form their impressions from them.

Hateful Drawings in “Black and White”
Fascism wasn’t the only cause of war during the early 20th century. Racism also played an ugly role. Black soldiers were drafted into the cause, but were relegated to menial work such as latrine duty. They could fight along with their white comrades and were not given a heroes welcome. This cartoon, appeared in Chicago’s The Defender, a Black publication. The cartoon shows America rushing off to save Europe, while injustices against blacks were left undone.


Further information
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