

Cartoons for the Classroom

Presented in cooperation with the Association of American Editorial Cartoonists (AAEC)



Dark laughter

Black voice in political cartoons

Until his death in 1995, Oliver Harrington was considered the dean of African-American cartoonists. His life and career were remarkable in many ways. He was forced to abandon his homeland because of racism; he was isolated by the Cold War; and he fought injustice with his art for more than sixty years. His panel cartoon *Bootsie*, chronicled life in Harlem and appeared in a variety of publications from 1933 until 1963. Social and political commentary were integral to the feature from the start and it eventually appeared to a wide readership in the *Amsterdam News*, the *Baltimore African-American* and the *Pittsburgh Courier*. The black press was, and still is, the major outlet for black cartoonists. Harrington's outspoken efforts against racism forced him to leave the country in 1951 when opponents began to label him a communist. He continued drawing until his death in Berlin.

— Biographical information adapted from
View from the Back Stairs
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Dark Laughter is the title of a collection
of work by Ollie Harrington,
which is available at Amazon.com



Oliver Harrington

Caption: Dr. Jenkins, before you read us your paper on inter-stellar gravitational tensions in thermo-nuclear propulsion, would you sing us a good old spiritual?

Get out your newspaper

Gather a week's worth of political cartoons from your newspaper. Using the Cartoon Evaluation Worksheet (available online at the NIE Website) analyze each cartoon and explain the message. Are people of color depicted in any of the cartoons you've collected? If so, how are they portrayed. Are black people only portrayed when the topic is poverty or race? In toons that don't feature people of color, if the characters were changed to African-American, would the message change? How?

Talking points

Harrington's toons often provided glimpses into a racially-polarized world. This toon comments on the inability of African-Americans to have their accomplishments recognized. How different is the world today? And how much remains the same? Explain your answers with examples from current events.

Additional resources

Association of American Editorial Cartoonists (AAEC)
<http://editorialcartoonists.com/>

Pioneering Cartoonists of Color
<http://www.clstoons.com/paoc/paocopen.htm>