

# Cartoons for the Classroom

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



## Nothing is more patriotic than social criticism

Since the days that Harper's Weekly cartoonist Thomas Nast helped destroy New York City's "Boss Tweed," editorial cartoonists have made a profound contribution to our democracy by pointing out the naked truths of our emperors.

The Washington Post's Herbert Block, or

Herblock as he signed his drawings, captured the excesses of the Red Scare by caricaturing U.S. Sen. Joseph McCarthy. Herblock and Paul Conrad reduced Richard Nixon to the diabolical politician he was.

Nothing is more patriotic than social criticism. Editorial cartoons are as irreverent

as the Boston Tea Party and as American as the U.S. Constitution. The First Amendment doesn't exist so we can freely praise our elected officials, it exists so we can freely criticize them - and editorial cartoonists represent the most extreme form of criticism in the newspaper. Newspapers who give their cartoonist the freedom to express their own views, as free as possible from editorial restraint, reinforce the provocative message that an uninhibited exchange of opinions not only strengthens but maintains a democracy; in fact, it is necessary for a democracy.

The writer, Chris Lamb, Ph.D., is an associate professor of Communication at the College of Charleston and the author of *Drawn to Extremes: The Limits of Editorial Cartoons in the United States*, which will be published in 2004 by Columbia University Press.

### Additional resources

Association of American Editorial Cartoonists

<http://editorialcartoonists.com/>

The World of Thomas Nast

<http://www.lib.ohio-state.edu/cgaweb/nast/keller.htm>

"FIRE!"



Herblock / Washington Post, 1949

### Talking points:

In the anti-communist hysteria of 1949, the extreme efforts by Sen. Joseph McCarthy and others to stamp out all signs of subversion in the United States threatened basic American liberties. Today, the war on terrorism is putting some personal liberties at risk again. Many see the similarities between then and now. Does the message in Herblock's cartoon (above) fit today's climate just as well as it did during the McCarthy era? Is today's "hysteria" the same, or different?

### Get out your newspaper

Gather a couple week's worth of political cartoons and other graphics from your newspaper. Using the Cartoon Evaluation Form (available on the NIE website) dissect the toons explaining the message and symbols used.