Caricature and comics

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Political cartooning, declares Fatma Müge Göçek, has the potential to generate change by ‘freeing the imagination, challenging the intelligence, and resisting state control’ (Göçek 1998, p. 1). When text forms of rhetoric address political issues, they often put us on the defensive, but we tend to let our defences down when we read comics. Because we perceive them as ‘enjoyable rather than manipulative’, they can have a powerful impact on our attitudes (Turner 1977, p. 27).

Most readers of comics take them lightly, but those who are the targets of drawn satire can react violently. The Holy Inquisition considered anyone who produced images that lampooned the church or its doctrine to be a heretic. Oliver Cromwell made it a capital offence to create demeaning images of him. Honoré Daumier’s cartoon depicting King Louis-Philippe as a bloated monster cost him six months in prison (Regan, Sinclair & Turner 1988, p. 11).

Today, we tend to think of a political cartoon as a single panel drawing on the editorial page (or web page) of a newspaper, but over the centuries, the power of cartooning has manifested in diverse forms (e.g. a single caricature of an individual, a series of satirical paintings, a multiple-page picture story, a web-based comic strip).

In the following sections, I will define concepts associated with caricature and comics, explain how the comics form creates meaning and engages emotions, and provide a historical overview of the development of caricature and cartooning, including a few examples of how they were employed, sometimes to great effect, in political campaigns and conflicts of the day.

The terms caricature, cartoon and comics will appear frequently in this chapter. Unfortunately, not only has the meaning of these terms varied over time and across cultures, but the usage has been inconsistent even in a particular culture at a particular time. The definitions below provide a general understanding of the forms of communication covered in this essay, but in perusing the history of caricature and comics, we should expect to encounter some variance in how these terms are used by the sources cited.

A caricature is a portrait in which the subject is recognisable, but one or more features, usually facial features, are distorted or exaggerated. In England, the term caricature was sometimes used broadly to refer to any humorous or satirical drawing (Bryant & Heneage 1994, p. vii).
The term **cartoon** was originally used to refer to a preliminary sketch for a painting. In the July 15, 1843 issue of the humour magazine *Punch*, a satirical drawing was labelled ‘Cartoon, No. 1.’ Five more similarly labelled drawings appeared in subsequent issues. This usage helped establish the cartoon as a product in its own right, rather than simply a part of the process of making a piece of art. In contemporary usage, cartoon usually refers to a drawing done in a single panel, such as an editorial or gag cartoon.

Walter Herdeg and David Pascal define **comics** as multiple static, juxtaposed drawn pictures forming a sequence that is printed on paper and, usually, presents a narrative (1972, pp. 9–10). In *Understanding comics: The invisible art*, Scott McCloud builds on Herdeg and Pascal to create what has become the most oft-repeated definition of the art form: ‘Juxtaposed pictorial and other images in deliberate sequence, intended to convey information and/or produce an aesthetic response in the viewer’ (1993, p. 9). These definitions are meant to apply the term comics to the comic strip, the comic book and the graphic novel, and exclude single-panel cartoons. However, in common usage, single-panel forms of cartooning are often called comics, and perhaps there is some justification for the classification. David Carrier believes understanding a caricature or single-panel cartoon often requires consideration of what happened before, or is likely to happen after, the depicted action (2000, p. 12). Therefore, he argues, some caricatures operate as ‘protocomics because understanding them requires imagining a later moment of the action’ (Carrier 2000, p. 16).

Drawing comics for any medium is referred to as **cartooning**, and the person who does the drawing, whether it be a comic strip for the *Boston Globe*, an editorial cartoon for the *Washington Post*, a satirical cartoon for *The New Yorker* magazine, or an issue of *Batman*, is referred to as a cartoonist.

Over the centuries, cartoonists have produced a variety of forms of comics. Because artists are seldom concerned with the boundaries articulated by theorists, the simplistic distinctions offered below often get blurred in practice, particularly for cartooning distributed in a digital environment.

The purpose of the **editorial cartoon** is not so much to tell a story as it is to make an argument or communicate a concept. Editorial cartoons rely heavily on visual metaphor and do not always require dialogue. Single-panel editorial cartoons have traditionally been placed in the opinion section of a newspaper, but can increasingly be found online at sites such as *The Nib*.

**Comic strips** generally present a narrative told in a sequence of panels. Most comic strips use character dialogue or thoughts as one means of advancing the narrative. For most of their existence, comic strips have appeared grouped together on one or two pages, or in their own section of a newspaper. There are now many more comic strips that appear exclusively online than there are strips printed in newspapers.

**Comic books** are multiple-page comics – the exact form of which often varies by culture (e.g. relatively thin, paper-cover pamphlets in the US, thick manga in Japan, or hard-cover albums in Europe). Comic books typically present genre narrative (e.g. romance, superhero) meant for entertainment, but they have also been used for education and propaganda.

As a marketing strategy, the term **graphic novel** is likely to be applied to any long comic book or trade paperback collection of comic-book issues. However, there are increasing numbers of graphic novels that occupy a distinct cultural space because they are issued by mainstream book publishers and are largely read by people who would never deign to read a comic book.
Arguably, the various formats and means of distributing comics constitute distinct mediums of communication, yet they all make use of the attributes of the comics art form that stimulates readers to perform the operations that construct meaning.

Perhaps the most important attribute of the form is that comics are reductive in creation and additive in reading.

The reduction involves both simplification and exaggeration. During the act of creating a comic, the stories and concepts in the comics creators’ minds are necessarily reduced and simplified by the economy of expression of the comics art form. The best single-panel comics usually involve the ‘condensation of a complex idea in one striking and memorable image’ (Gombrich 1963, p. 130). In comic books and graphic novels, only a fraction of the moments from an imagined narrative are actually shown on the page. Will Eisner claims it is in this act of ‘encapsulation that the artist employs the skill of narration’ (1985, p. 39).

The use of stereotypes simultaneously exaggerates and simplifies. Stereotypes exaggerate some characteristic of a group, usually to accentuate the difference between the stereotyped group and others. American superhero comics published during the Second World War, provide ‘extreme examples of caricature and rhetorical exaggeration’ of the physiognomy and morality of the German and Japanese enemy (Murray 2011, p. 182). Simplification comes into play because once stereotypes exist in someone’s mind it takes only a few key words or images to activate concepts such as the noble savage or the greedy businessperson. Even when not alluding to a pre-existing stereotype, physical characteristics, personality traits and actions can be exaggerated to quickly communicate information about a person or a situation (Harrison 1981, p. 69). The ancient idea that outward appearance reflects the quality of the soul permeates mainstream superhero comics; the heroes are almost always beautiful and the villains are often grotesque. Stereotypes are a useful, probably inescapable, tool for constructing conceptions of a world ‘altogether too big, too fleeting for direct acquaintance’ (Lippmann 1965, p. 16).

Cartoonists create comics by reducing the ideas or narratives they have in mind to static pictures and (usually) words within panels. Readers expand the comic into their own imagined narratives or ideas by supplying information or context not explicitly present in the images. Marshall McLuhan (1964) classifies comics as a cool medium because of the high degree of reader participation and Kathleen Turner calls comics ‘enthymematic’ because they require ‘participation in order to be completed’ (1977, p. 28). Most of the information readers add to expand the narrative is derived from ideology, intertextuality and inferences.

The nature of each reader’s additions is greatly influenced by the reader’s world-view. Roland Barthes cautions that with a popular text considered to be entertainment, readers are not fully engaging their critical-thinking skills. Instead, they are likely to be unconsciously in a mythic mode of thinking, applying the values that seem natural to each reader’s world-view, in order to construct the meaning of the text (1993, p. 11).

Some of the ways in which readers fill in the gaps are less a matter of ideology and more a reflection of specific cultural information. For instance, the broadsheets sponsored by William III, King of England, sometimes used the thistle – well known at the time as part of the coat of arms of the House of Stuart – rather than a person to represent the king’s Stuart rivals. In nineteenth-century Europe, a drawing of a bicorn hat was a widely recognised symbol for Napoleon or the Bonaparte dynasty, but could also be used to imply that someone had dictatorial ambitions (Scully 2014a, p. 31). Images such as the thistle and the bicorn hat are making use of intertextuality, referring to another text. Because intertextual references prompt readers to add information from historical events, popular culture, or well-known
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literature, the symbolic visual lexicon of comics is usually tied to a certain time and place, and virtually meaningless in other cultures and other eras. However, some visual metaphors, such as the Statue of Liberty or Uncle Sam used to personify the United States, become known across cultures and can endure for generations.

Determining whether an image should be treated as a visual metaphor or taken literally, requires the reader to make an inference about the function the image serves within the comic. Not all images are easily categorised, but, generally, an image in a comic performs one of three functions. Sensory Diegetic Images represent people, creatures, places, objects, or forces within the diegesis (the world of the narrative). Non-Sensory Diegetic Images represent those aspects of the world of the diegesis, such as thoughts, emotions, states of mind, or sensations, that cannot be detected by the senses. Hermeneutic Images are not part of the diegesis and should not be read literally. Hermeneutic Images, as the name implies, require interpretation by the reader (Duncan 2012, pp. 44–45).

In satirical and editorial cartoons, very few of the images are meant to be taken literally, and hermeneutic images often take the form of visual metaphors and intertextuality. Most comic strips, comic books and graphic novels present a narrative, and therefore, the majority of images in these forms are diegetic. However, readers of comics risk missing the point of a narrative if they fail to identify and interpret hermeneutic images.

Brief history of political caricature and cartooning

This overview is admittedly focused on the European and North American traditions of cartooning, but as Richard Scully points out ‘It has ultimately been the Western (combining a European and Anglo-American) mode that has shaped the political cartoon as a global form’ (2014b, p. 336). Marc Baer claims that in Europe, it was the eighteenth-century satirical caricature prints – influenced by a number of economic, technological, sociological, and aesthetic factors – that evolved into nineteenth-century cartoons (2012, p. 244). Yet, cartooning – using drawings for commentary or story-telling – certainly occurred long before the nineteenth century.

A case can be made that sequences of pictures on cave walls, urns, friezes, tapestries, and so on display some of the formal properties of the comics art form. Closer to the common meaning of comics are the illustrations that appeared in some illuminated manuscripts. There are numerous instances of books that use a sequence of pictures to relate an incident (Herdeg & Pascal 1972, p. 8). The fourteenth-century Holkham Bible Picture Book contains a few pages on which there are multiple panels, and character conversations are sometimes depicted in word scrolls (the predecessor of the word balloon). A precursor of caricature can be found in many illuminated manuscripts because it was a common practice to depict the sinful as exaggeratedly ugly.

Telling stories with pictures seems to be as old as civilisation, but it was only after Gutenberg introduced moveable type printing to Europe in the mid fifteenth century that comics in the Western world began to be identifiable as both an art form and a medium of communication. Woodblock and copper-engraving technology allowed for the addition of pictures to the products of the printing press.

The ‘long sixteenth century’

Printing technology was used to produce beautiful and expensive works, such as the Gutenberg Bible, but the presses also churned out inexpensive and more widely distributed
media, such as broadsides and broadsheets. These large single sheets of paper (broadsides were printed on only one side and broadsheets were printed on both sides) were used for a variety of purposes. Many Christians who were illiterate, or could not afford a Bible, learned about their faith from broadsheets illustrated with scenes from ‘the life of Jesus, Mary, or one of the saints’ (Vansummeren 1998, p. 39). From the fifteenth century to the middle of the nineteenth century, inexpensive broadsheets used images to dramatise a wide variety of events – great storms, notorious murders, or the exploits of Francis Drake. Illustrated broadsheets provided the masses with a mediated reality of people and places they would never see in person.

According to W. A. Coupe (1993) developments in Germany – the theological Reformation led by Martin Luther, and the introduction of the moveable type printing press – spurred the birth of political cartoon satire. The propaganda aspect of the Thirty Years War (1618–1648) led to a resurgence of visual satire, particularly in the Netherlands. Protestants and Catholics were skewering each other, not only with swords, but with acerbic visual satire on broadsheets.

Cartooning in northern Europe would soon become even more caustic as it assimilated a new element – caricature. The practice of exaggerating the features of the subject of a drawn portrait, what became known as caricatura, began in Renaissance Italy (McPhee & Orenstein 2001, p. 5). The Italian painters Annibale and Agostino Carracci are generally credited with the development, or at least popularisation, of modern caricature. Caricature, in its original incarnation, was an amusing diversion, a playful teasing of a friend or acquaintance. Gianlorenzo Bernini (1598–1680) saw caricature as a way of exaggerating elements of appearance and personality to reveal ‘a truer portrait of an individual’ (Moyle 2004, p. 30). Irving Lavin calls Bernini’s caricature of Pope Innocent XI ‘as a bedridden, sickly dwarf wearing an oversized papal crown’ (Posèq 2006, p. 16), the first true caricature of such an important person, ‘a monumental watershed in the history of art’ and the beginning of a new kind of social satire (Lavin 1983, p. 365). The once-amusing technique of caricature began to be used to belittle, to criticise.

Caricature became a valuable tool for cartoonists, whether their intent was to amuse or destroy. Moyle claims ‘cartooning in its modern sense was an outgrowth of caricature’ (2004, p. 37). In the late seventeenth and early eighteenth century, King Louis XIV of France, whose expansionism and aggressively anti-Protestant stance increased tensions throughout Europe, was the target of what might be considered ‘the first modern cartoon campaign’ (Ames). When Louis XIV banned caricature, many French cartoonists had their work published in the Netherlands (Wright 1875, p. 357). William of Orange of the Netherlands, later King of England, employed a number of print-makers to produce satirical broadsheets ridiculing Louis and bolstering the Protestant movement in England (Schulz & Robbins 1971, p. 10).

The eighteenth century

Satirical illustration had traditionally displayed or implied a narrative and presented exaggerated actions, rather than the exaggerated physical characteristics of caricature. In England, there was a ‘melding of caricature and satirical print’ (Moyle 2004, p. 38). The painter and print-maker William Hogarth (1697–1764) is sometimes mentioned as participating in this convergence, but Hogarth wanted to make it clear he had no truck with caricature. He produced the print Characters and caricaturas (1743) to demonstrate the difference between his character studies and caricatured figures. Hogarth rejected the idea of
Italian *caricatura*, dismissing it as bad drawing, and denied using the technique in his pictorial satires (Hogarth quoted in Paulson 1970, p. 238). Hogarth referred to his own work as comic history painting (Moyle 2004, p. 38) or modern moral subjects. According to Moyle, Hogarth ‘developed a new genre of satirical narrative and was effectively the father of topical political cartooning in Britain’ (*ibidem*).

William Hogarth’s 1721 *Emblematical print on the South Sea scheme*, with its focus on secular politics, is often considered to be a prime example of the transition from satirical print to political cartoon. However, Hogarth wanted to reach a wider audience, not all of whom would know or care about specific policies or political events, but many of whom took joy in seeing the upper classes ridiculed. Thus, in the decades following the *South Sea scheme* print, Hogarth was only mildly political, choosing instead to focus on social satire (Press 1981, p. 34).

In the mid 1700s, artists such as George Townshend (1724–1807) began combining Hogarth’s symbolic approach with caricature. Townshend’s 1757 drawing, *The Recruiting Serjeant* [sic], with a cast of characters in a specific setting and word balloons used for their dialogue, prefigures the new style of cartooning. In the 1760s, Townshend began creating caricatures that were distributed on cards. They were very popular and widely imitated. Townsend’s caricatures began appearing in magazines such as *Town and Country* and *Political Register*. Schulz and Robbins refer to Townshend’s drawings as ‘the basis of the English political cartoon’ (1971, p. 10).

By the end of the eighteenth century, more affordable prints and democratic societies that supported freedom of expression helped usher in a golden age of European cartooning. Political factions in multiple European nations engaged in bitter rhetorical battles, made more personal by the use of satirical prints.

James Gillray (1756–1815) was a more outrageous and offensive cartoonist than most of his contemporaries. The breadth of his cartooning skills – he could effectively use vulgarity and scatological humour, but also create deft and layered satire – made Gillray popular. He might have been the first person to make a living as a political cartoonist. For nearly two decades, his cartoons commented on all the important people and events in England and on the continent (Schulz & Robbins 1971, p. 11).

The drawings of Thomas Rowlandson (1756–1827) gravitated towards social satire rather than caustic political commentary. Even though his caricatures of public figures often made them look foolish or ineffectual, he tended to employ mild, rather than vicious, distortions of features. Rowlandson produced some proto-comics; his print *The loves of the fox and the badger, or the coalition wedding* (1784) had panels and word balloons. However, Rowlandson’s greatest impact on the development of comics probably came from his illustrations, which accompanied William Combe’s poems for three Dr. Syntax books published between 1812 and 1821. There was Dr. Syntax merchandise (hats, wigs and coats, etc.) (Hotten 1881), and a hotel in Tasmania was named after the character.

The Dr. Syntax stories were not comics; Rowlandson’s drawings, only thirty-one coloured plates in the first book, depicted isolated incidents rather than a narrative flow. However, the style of humour, and even the look of the main character, seem to have inspired the work of the father of the comic book: Rodolphe Töpffer.

In the late eighteenth century, ‘the English were afflicted with a cartoonomania’ (Schulz & Robbins 1971, p. 10). London had scores of print-seller shops catering to the upper-middle class. The century had begun with English artists inspired by Italian caricature, but by the end of the 1700s, the work of Rowlandson and Gillray was displaying a new approach to political satire and was influencing cartoonists on the continent (Schulz & Robbins 1971, p. 10).
The nineteenth century

In the nineteenth century, many cartoonists sought to leave behind their ribald past and their work shifted from vituperation to gentle satire, from vulgarity to ‘harmless fun’ suitable for children (Low 1942, p. 26; Kunzle 1990, p. 1). This was particularly true in England. For example, during the course of his career, both George Cruikshank (1792–1878) and his work became more genteel and in tune with the conservative sensibilities of the time (Jensen 1997, p. 14). The change in tone during the century was such that, by 1901, Prime Minister Balfour was able to say of the satirical magazine *Punch*, ‘I do not believe that the satire of that journal has ever left a wound’ (quoted in *Punch* 1914, p. 5).

The barbs of the French satirical cartoonists, most notably Charles Philipon, J J Grandville and Honoré Daumier, were still drawing blood and the ire of those in power. Charles Philipon (c. 1802–1862) co-founded the Paris publishing house Maison Aubert and launched *La Caricature*, a monthly satirical magazine, in 1830. *La Caricature* was aimed at an upper-class audience, but Philipon also edited the less expensive daily broadsheet, *Le Charivari*.

*La Caricature* soon became notorious for its aggressive attacks on citizen-King Louis-Philippe. Philipon’s four drawings transforming Louis-Philippe’s head into a pear captured the popular imagination and the pear image was soon appropriated by other artists and became a symbol of opposition to Louis-Philippe’s rule (Childs 1997, p. 156). Philipon declared of his magazines’ use of caricature: ‘We use it in turn to make a mirror for the ridiculous, a whistle for the stupid, a whip for the wicked’ (Goldstein 1989, p. 10). The magazines were repeatedly seized by the authorities. Philipon was prosecuted more than a dozen times and spent most of 1832 in prison (Melby 2009; Cuno 1983, p. 351). Moyle claims the ‘Modern political newspaper cartooning with its principles of symbolism and personalisation is very much the creation of Philipon’ (2004, p. 41).

While the French caricaturists were doing battle with their government, a Swiss professor named Rodolphe Töpffer (1799–1846) was creating gentler, but highly significant, cartoons that helped usher in a new era of narrative cartooning (Baetens & Surdiacourt 2013, p. 349). Töpffer was certainly not the first artist to make use of narrative comics, and while the visual conventions and story-telling techniques that came together in Töpffer’s work had been developing for centuries, there is something about the nature of his picture stories – his use of panels, juxtaposition and sequence – that seems to indicate that the gestation period was over and a new art form had been born. It is certainly justifiable to say that Töpffer laid the foundation for what has become known as comic books and graphic novels.

Töpffer’s work was fairly widely disseminated throughout Europe and even in the US. Some of the stories, such as the 1845 adaptation of *Histoire de Monsieur Cryptogame* in *L’Illustration*, appeared with his permission. In other instances, the stories were pirated. Three Töpffer albums were plagiarised in England in the 1880s, and one of those was re-used in the North American magazine *Brother Jonathan* as *The adventures of Obadiah Oldbuck* (Kunzle 2007, p. 175).

Inspired by Töpffer’s picture stories, Gustave Doré (1832–1883) was attempting graphic narrative by the time he was ten. While still a teenager, he wrote, drew and lithographed *The Labours of Hercules* (1847), the last in a series of picture-story albums published by Maison Aubert. Doré seemed to have a natural affinity for the comics art form and was more aware of the page as a unit of composition than Töpffer had been (Mainardi 2007). Presaging a basic element of comics language, Doré uses lines to indicate force or speed. When the Golden Hind leaps off a cliff with Hercules holding onto its tail, Doré draws their bodies as just a blur of lines to indicate the speed of their fall.
Hercules was very much in the style of Töpffer, but the precocious youngster soon moved beyond imitation. In *Dis*Pleasures of a pleasure trip (1851), Doré experiments with page layout, panel shape and narrative technique. Doré was only twenty-two when he undertook a project more ambitious than any cartoonist before him had attempted. At 207 pages, *Dramatic and picturesque history of holy Russia in caricature* (1854) ‘is by far the largest comic strip album of the century’ and Doré employs ‘a dazzling array of graphic devices’ (Kunzle 1990, p. 129). Mainardi (2007) believes *History of holy Russia* marks ‘the close of the second chapter in the creation of modern comic books.’

In the UK, the picture story developed two rather distinct traditions in what Thierry Smolderen terms ‘the serious and the comic illustrated press’ (2014, p. 76). The picture stories that appeared in supplements of illustrated newspapers, such as the *Graphic* and the *Illustrated London News*, were subject to tight editorial control and tailored to the perceived tastes of a middle-class readership. The humour magazines allowed a greater range of styles and ribald satire that harkened back to Gillray and Cruikshank (Smolderen 2014, p. 76).

The English humour magazine *Punch*, founded in 1841, had the subtitle *The London Charivari* to indicate a debt to the French predecessor, but perhaps also to piggyback on an established brand name. *Punch* eventually eclipsed in popularity, if not quality, all its rivals in the UK and even the Paris magazines.

Early on, drawings in *Punch* were limited to spot illustrations, gag cartoons, and caricatures of well-known, mostly political, figures. A portent of content to come was the ‘Punch Pencilling’, a full-page, single-panel cartoon of social commentary that appeared in each issue. These pages functioned much like a modern editorial cartoon and often made use of visual metaphor. In 1843, the *Punch* editors changed our vocabulary by applying the term ‘cartoon’ to such satirical drawings (*The Economist* 2012).

*Punch* had an incredible influence on cartooning and visual satire. Rather radical in its early days, *Punch* satire gradually became more moderate in a successful attempt to expand readership by amusing without offending (Scully 2014b, p. 347). At the height of its popularity *Punch* was exported across the globe, and its influence on visual humour was magnified by many imitators that used the Punch brand name. There were many others, such as *Vanity Fair* (1859–1863) and *Fun* (1861–1901), that did not use the name, but attempted to copy the style.

Two notable humour magazines were *Judy* (1867–1910) and *Puck* (1871–1872, 1876–1918). Ally Sloper, the character that Roger Sabin (2003) calls the first comics superstar, debuted in the British magazine *Judy* in 1867. He was the first comics character to have a weekly magazine (*Ally Sloper’s Half Holiday*) devoted to him. *Puck*, first as a German-language magazine and then as a better-known English-language version, was the first successful humour magazine in the US. *Puck*’s attacks on monopolies, the women’s suffrage movement, and particular politicians had real impact on policy and elections. The satirical style of Joseph Keppler, *Puck*’s founder and lead cartoonist, influenced generations of cartoonists and the very nature of contemporary editorial cartoons.

While *Punch* imitators might have begun by aping the style of the original, many of them ‘came to embody aspects of the emerging national consciousness’ (Scully 2013, p. 9), often by embodying the qualities of the nation in a visual symbol.

According to Roger Butterfield (1947), cartoonists tried a wide array of visual symbols, from bucking horse to pine tree, to represent the American colonies and then the new nation. When the British derisively referred to the American colonists as Yankee Doodle or Brother Jonathan, it was meant to stress how uncouth they were, but the Americans soon co-opted these figures, employing them as down-to-earth, common-sense contrasts to the effete snobs
of the old world. Yankee Doodle was a creation of song and theatre, but it was in cartoons that Brother Jonathan took form. The 1813 cartoon *A Salutary Cordial* shows Brother Jonathan rather roughly pouring a dose of perry down the throat of John Bull, the national symbol of England. Readers at the time would understand that ‘perry’ referenced both a paregoric and Commodore Oliver Hazard Perry, the naval hero of the War of 1812. Brother Jonathan and Yankee Doodle eventually morphed into the Uncle Sam figure (Press 1981, pp. 216–221), a mainstay of US cartoons well into the twentieth century.

In the mid nineteenth century, the national consciousness of the US was torn asunder by the Civil War. Photography was still too primitive to truly provide a visual record of the conflict so it fell to the newly emerged illustrated press, an amalgam of journalism and cartooning, to make the brutality of the Civil War vivid for readers far from the front lines. *Frank Leslie’s Illustrated Newspaper* and *Harper’s Weekly* were the leading publishers of drawn journalism in the US, and they sent scores of artists into the field to sketch battles and camp life. Many of Thomas Nast’s (1840–1902) engravings for *Harper’s Weekly* were produced in the comfort of his New York City studio, yet he created powerful images that helped raise the morale of soldiers and citizens on the Union side of the conflict. Nast is best known for his relentless cartoon campaign against corrupt New York politician William ‘Boss’ Tweed, dehumanising him by depicting him as a vulture, or as a man with a money bag for a head.

Nineteenth-century cartoonists, such as Charles Philipon and Thomas Nast, were incorporating some of the visual conventions of the previous centuries, but they were also developing a new style of cartooning that would flourish in new venues, magazines and newspapers, and push aside some of the older forms of cartooning. Satirical prints flourished in the first half of the nineteenth century, with print runs of hundreds of thousands in the 1850s (Göçek 1998, p. 4). Yet, demand declined precipitously, and by the end of the nineteenth century, there was almost no market for the stand-alone satirical print in the tradition of Hogarth and Gillray (Leary 2010, p. 35). In the 1860s, a satirical magazine with many cartoons cost less than one stand-alone print. The humour magazines had pushed aside the satirical prints, but before the end of the nineteenth century, the magazines faced competition from a new form of cartoons that began appearing in newspapers.

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While the newspaper comic strip – as it appeared in the US – owed much to the cartoons that appeared during the final decades of the nineteenth century in weekly humour magazines such as *L’Asino, Puck, Judge,* and *Life* (Harvey 2009, p. 35), not all newspaper comics had the political edge of the cartoons in the humour magazines. Cartooning in newspapers rather quickly assumed two forms – the comic strip and the editorial cartoon – clearly differentiated by their placement in the paper and their formal qualities.

Many of the early newspaper comics were humour strips (Katzenjammer Kids, 1897; Happy Hooligan, 1900) with the ‘punchline’, often visual in nature, delivered in the final panel. The humour strips were soon joined by comics that presented fanciful adventures (*Little Nemo in Slumberland*, 1905), amusing misadventures (*Hairbreadth Harry*, 1906), or serious adventures (*Tarzan*, 1929). Early political comic strips such as *Lil’ Abner* (1934) and *Pogo* (1948) existed primarily to entertain, but they often engaged in political satire. The latter half of the twentieth century saw the appearance of intensely political comics, such as *Doonesbury, Bloom County, Boondocks* and *Tom the Dancing Bug*, that looked like comic strips, but functioned as editorial cartoons.
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Walter Hugh McDougall’s series of cartoons that ran in the New York Extra during 1884 ‘are probably the very first daily newspaper cartoons on political subjects’ (Press 1981, p. 264). Extra was short-lived, but later in the year when Joseph Pulitzer hired McDougall to create cartoons for The World, ‘daily editorial cartooning as a profession was born’ (Press 1981, p. 264). When it became clear that McDougall’s cartoons were increasing circulation, other newspapers in New York, and then throughout the nation, began to hire their own editorial cartoonists.

By the twentieth century, technological advances made it economically feasible for newspapers to run cartoons commenting on very recent events. Compulsory schooling and increasing democratisation of the political process in the Western world created a newspaper readership with the interest and background knowledge to appreciate editorial cartoons. Newspapers began to lure some of the most talented cartoonists away from the humour magazines and illustrated weeklies. The newspaper political cartoon became the most prestigious form of cartooning when the Pulitzer Prize added a category for editorial cartoons in 1922.

Comic books were far less prestigious. Popular newspaper comic strips were reprinted and sold in booklets that became known as comic books. Malcolm Wheeler-Nicholson, who started the company that would eventually become DC Comics, realised hiring young talent to create original material for his comic books was cheaper than paying the reprint rights for comic strips. Most of this original material was created as multi-page stories, and creators began to make use of the page as a unit of composition. The art form for which Töpffer and Doré had laid the foundations was re-established in a new medium – comic books.

The news-stands were soon flooded with superheroes, funny animals and lovesick teens, but early on, it was evident that the comic book medium could be used for more than entertainment. Malcolm Ater was not the first to produce comic books for a political campaign, but from The Story of Harry S. Truman (1948) and A Man Named Stevenson (1952) to The Little Judge, George Wallace for the Big Job (1962), Ater made a career of using comic books to promote candidates. Comic books have also been used to promote world-views. Ariel Dorfman and Armand Mattelart (1971) argue that Disney comics, especially those featuring Uncle Scrooge, subtly inculcated young readers with a capitalist world-view. However, the US underground comix of the 1960s and 1970s were blatantly anti-establishment. In Europe, comics, magazines and albums were the ‘main channels of youth protest in the second half of the 1960s’ (Baetens & Surdiacourt 2013, p. 356). The superhero conflict in the Civil War storyline (2006–2007) spanning various Marvel Comics titles was a thinly veiled metaphor for the debate over how much privacy and personal freedom a citizen must give up for national security.

The twenty-first century

Modern cartoonists can construct their comics with an arsenal of techniques developed over the centuries by the likes of Bernini, Townshend, Töpffer, Philipon, Doré and Nast. Seth Tobocman’s six-page comic ‘The Carlyle Group,’ from the anthology The Bush Junta (2004), bestialises a subject, condenses a concept into an image and visually blends concepts. Tobocman’s controlling visual metaphor is the Carlyle Group as a serpent; sometimes a literal snake and sometimes a snake head coming out of a business suit. An elephant’s trunk terminating in a snake head visually links the Grand Old Party and the Carlyle Group. The stripes of a US flag, planted in an Iraqi oil field, morph into a huge snake (see Figure 30.1). The links between the Bush and Bin Laden families suggested in the text are reinforced by
Yet, even as cartoonists continue to employ age-old techniques, technology is changing the production and distribution of the comics medium and even some aspect of the art form. As the twenty-first century dawned, it was clear that some aspects of the Herdeg and Pascal definition of comics were becoming less applicable. Comics no longer have to be printed. Thousands of cartoonists who could not afford even a small print run can now make their work accessible to the entire world online. Comics no longer have to be drawn. There have been syndicated comic strips that utilise clipart or a few simple, often repetitive, drawings (e.g. Dinosaur Comics, This Modern World). Having something to say, or a keen sense of humour, has become more important than the ability to draw. The pictures in digital comics are not always static. When elements such as movement of characters, panning of the ‘camera,’ or music, are used extensively the work is arguably no longer comics but animation. Done deftly, however, as with Operation Ajax, a work can remain true to the comics art form while being more palatable to digital natives. Digital comics can also
Caricature and comics

Figure 30.2  Caricature and cartooning create visual rhetoric. ‘The Carlyle Group’ by Seth Tobacman from The Bush Junta (2004)

provide layers of information not possible, or at least unwieldy, in print comics. For instance, some of the comics published at the web site The Nib, or in the digital magazine Symbolia include features such as clickable links, embedded videos and additional information that pops up when the cursor is moved over a panel.

Conclusion

From the Protestant Reformation to the Vietnam War to the War on Terror, caricature and comics have been on the front line of ideological conflict. The rhetoric of comics can range from the obvious persuasion of editorial cartoons and government propaganda to subtle and indirect influence, such as comic books that depict anti-capitalism forces as evil.

It is still a dangerous world for cartoonists. In recent years, cartoonists have been jailed in Turkey, India and Tunisia. More recently, cartoonists have been murdered in Paris and Copenhagen. In the wake of the attack on the Charlie Hebdo offices, one commentator noted that comics are powerful because they ‘pack so much information, thought and provocation into such a small space’ (Phiddian 2015), and another observed that ‘political cartoons are a uniquely potent art form because images impact the human mind more quickly than almost any other form of communication’ (Heer 2015).

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