Dr. Seuss, Political Cartoons & the Battle over Isolationism vs Intervention

A World War I Anniversary Exhibition

This exhibit explores the world of political cartooning and how artists engaged controversial issues about America’s involvement in the world. The focus of the thirty-two cartoons and posters is about American isolation and intervention during and after World War I and in the lead-up to World War II.

We invite you to explore the images and make some determinations regarding the artists’ intent. Jot down your ideas or share them with a friend, then turn over the exhibition labels and read about the cartoons. How accurate was your assessment? Did you understand the cartoon’s theme and message?

Here are some things to think about when exploring the images:

- What do you see in the cartoon?
- Think about the date and what was happening in the weeks and months before. How much do you know about the historical context of the cartoon? Can you describe the cartoon’s timing?
- Look for symbols. What do they mean and how do they represent the cartoon’s meaning?
- Study the title and other text. How does it help to convey the artist’s message? Why do some cartoons have text while others don’t?
- Explore the tone of the cartoon. Is it satirical, comic, tragic, ironic, critical, condemning, questioning, imploring, angry?
- Put it all together. What is the cartoonist’s point? What is the artist trying to convey?

Finally, consider this: In the aftermath of WWII the United States not only committed our nation to international involvement, but also placed the United Nations in New York City, a distinct statement that the U.S. was now the leading sponsor of a renewed world dialogue. Recently, President Donald J. Trump announced in his Inaugural Address that the U.S. must return to an “America First” philosophy. Do you see comparisons to earlier isolationist views? Do you agree that the U.S. should return to America First?

Dr. Matthew Warshauer, Guest Curator