

# DR. SEUSS GOES TO WAR

*The World War II*  
Editorial Cartoons of  
THEODOR SEUSS GEISEL

RICHARD H. MINEAR

*Introduction by*  
ART SPIEGELMAN



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# *Dr. Seuss Goes to War*

The World War II Editorial Cartoons of Theodor Seuss Geisel

RICHARD H. MINEAR

*Published in cooperation with the Dr. Seuss Collection  
at the University of California, San Diego*



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CHRONOLOGICAL LISTING OF CARTOONS

What? Dr. Seuss, beloved purveyor of genial rhyming nonsense for beginning readers, stuff about cats in hats and foxes in socks, started as a feisty political cartoonist who exhorted America to do battle with Hitler? Yeah, right! And Ad Reinhardt—the guy who painted austere black-on-black abstractions used to draw comic strips explaining modern art to the uninitiated! Both these unlikely phenomena in fact did occur in the pages of what may well have been America’s most remarkable daily newspaper, New York’s *PM*. This short-lived “popular front” tabloid eschewed all paid advertising, though it did print announcements of department store bargains as news items. (It also first published “Barnaby,” the once-revered intellectual comic strip by Crockett Johnson, who later created the Harold and the Purple Crayon kid books.)

In some happier alternate universe, *PM* is still being published daily and Dr. Seuss was awarded the Pulitzer Prize for his anti-Fascist *PM* cartoons of 1941 and 1942. Actually, Dr. Seuss did get a Pulitzer in the universe we inhabit: a special citation in 1984 “for his contribution over nearly half a century to the education and enjoyment of America’s children and their parents.” Presumably, though, most of that award committee was as unaware of the heretofore “lost” cartoons in this volume as the rest of us. While it’s true that most of these cartoons lack the weight and gravitas of the cartoons by Herblock that did get the Pulitzer in 1942, they are still very impressive evidence of cartooning as an art of persuasion.

These cartoons rail against isolationism, racism, and anti-Semitism with a conviction and fervor lacking in most other American editorial pages of the period. These are virtually the only editorial cartoons outside the communist and black press that decried the military’s Jim Crow policies and Charles Lindbergh’s anti-Semitism. Dr. Seuss said that he “had no great causes or interest in social issues until Hitler,” and explained that “*PM* was against people who pushed other people around. I liked that.” More of a humanist than an ideologue — one of those Groucho rather than Karl Marxists — Dr. Seuss made these drawings with the fire of honest indignation and anger that fuels all real political art. If they have a flaw, it’s an absolutely endearing one: they’re funny.

Many of the editorial cartoonists of the time used grease crayon for their effects, evidence of their roots in the Honoré Daumier tradition. Dr. Seuss’s twisted roots, on the other hand, were in the vaudeville tradition of early comic strips and gag cartoons. Theodor Geisel (Dr. Seuss’s “real” name) began his career in the late 1920s, doing gag cartoons for the two most important humor magazines of the time, *Judge* and *Life*. He received his first renown for a long-lived series of cartoons advertising a bug spray called *Flit*. (One of the more memorable images reprinted in this volume has Seuss’s Uncle Sam eagle about to shoot a Flit spray gun labeled “U.S. Defense Bonds and Stamps” at enormous Adolf, Tojo, and Benito bugs.) In 1935, he briefly turned out a comic strip for King Features called “Hejji.” And he produced four well-received children’s books before hooking up with *PM*, though his grand-scale success as a children’s book artist didn’t come until the late 1950s. But the idioms of the picture book, the comics, gag cartoons, and advertising informed his *PM* work. Over the past twenty-three years the newspaper editorial cartoon has reduced its ambition, basically becoming a gag cartoon with political subject matter. Dr. Seuss’s political cartoons were, perhaps, ahead of their time in seeking to entertain as well as convince. This is by no means to deny Seuss’s earnestness, it’s just that — much as with Chaplin’s *The Great Dictator* — comedy was too frail a weapon to deal mortal blows to Hitler. (On the other hand, it’s also true that the far more vitriolic cartoons of George Grosz and John Heartfield were no more adequate to the task.)

One of the great pleasures in this collection of drawings (beyond the not inconsiderable one ~~getting a painless history lesson on the side~~) is the affirmation of just how good the good Doctor really was: good at communicating his ideas clearly and just plain old-fashioned good. He called 'em as he saw 'em, and most of the time he was on the side of the angels. The greatest pleasure, though, lies in watching the artist develop his goofily surreal vision while he delivers the ethical goods. The unique galumphing menagerie of Seussian fauna, the screwball humor and themes that later enraptured millions (as well as earning millions of dollars for the artist), come into focus in these early drawings that were done with urgency on very short deadlines.

The *PM* cartoons make us more aware of the political messages often embedded within the sugary pill of Dr. Seuss's signature zaniness. For better or worse, the didactic moralist struggled for supremacy over the iconoclastic jokester in much of his mature — could that be the right adjective? — work. *Yertle the Turtle* (visually prefigured in a stack of turtles forming a victory V in a March 2, 1942, cartoon) is an anti-fascist tract. *The Sneetches* is clearly a plea for racial tolerance (what are those stars on thar bellies, if not Magen Davids?). An environmental message overwhelms any of the nonsense in *The Lorax*, and the polemic for nuclear disarmament in *The Butter Battle Book* created a blizzard of controversy when it first appeared in 1984.

The Cat in the Hat's red-and-white-striped leaning tower of a stove-pipe has become an American icon only slightly less recognizable than the Disney mouse ears. Seeing the slightly battered lid on the Seuss bird that represents the United States in many of the *PM* drawings (presumably it's an eagle, though it looks as much like a Sneetch and suspiciously like the prominently beaked Theodor Geiss himself) is disorienting enough to bring on an epiphany: the prototype for the cat's famous headgear is actually an emblem deployed in countless political cartoons: Uncle Sam's red-and-white-striped top hat! The Cat in the Hat is America!

And now, rescued from the newsprint where they moldered unseen for over half a century, these cartoons let us know what happens when Horton hears a *Heil*.



# Some Important Dates

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|                |   |
|----------------|---|
| Oct. 3, 1935   | Italian invasion of Ethiopia  |
| May 1, 1937    | U. S. Neutrality Act  |
| July 7, 1937   | Sino-Japanese War   |
| Oct. 1, 1938   | German seizure of Sudetenland (Czechoslovakia)  |
| Nov. 9, 1938   | <i>Kristallnacht</i> pogrom in Germany  |
| Sept. 1, 1939  | German invasion of Poland   |
| Sept. 17, 1939 | Soviet Union occupation of east Poland  |
| Apr. 9, 1940   | German invasion of Norway and occupation of Denmark   |
| May 10, 1940   | German invasion of Belgium, the Netherlands, France, and Luxemburg                                |
| June 14, 1940  | German entry into Paris   |
| July 10, 1940  | Battle of Britain (to Spring 1941)  |
| Nov. 5, 1940   | Roosevelt victory over Wendell Willkie in Presidential election                                   |
| June 22, 1941  | German invasion of Soviet Union   |
| Aug. 1, 1941   | United States ban on gasoline export to Japan   |
| Sept. 15, 1941 | German siege of Leningrad (to Jan. 1943)  |
| Sept. 30, 1941 | German attack on Moscow (to December 1941)  |
| Dec. 7, 1941   | Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, Wake, Guam, Philippines, British Malaya, Hong Kong, and Thailand |
| Dec. 8, 1941   | United States declaration of war on Japan   |
| Dec. 11, 1941  | United States declaration of war on Germany and Italy   |
| Jan. 20, 1942  | Nazi decision on "Final Solution" at Wannsee Conference   |
| Feb. 15, 1942  | Singapore surrender to Japan  |
| Feb. 19, 1942  | U.S. Executive Order 9066, relocating Japanese Americans on the West Coast to internment camps    |
| May 6, 1942    | Allied surrender of Corregidor Island (Philippines)   |
| June 3–6, 1942 | United States defeat of Japanese at Midway  |
| Sept. 13 1942  | Battle of Stalingrad (to February 2, 1943)  |
| <hr/>          |   |
| May 7, 1945    | German unconditional surrender at Reims   |
| Sept. 2, 1945  | Japanese surrender aboard USS <i>Missouri</i> in Tokyo Bay  |

Theodor Seuss Geisel was born in 1904 in Springfield, Massachusetts.

A prosperous small city on the Connecticut River in western Massachusetts, Springfield boasted Mulberry Street and Terwilliger and McElligot clans. Today there is a Dr. Seuss Room in the building that houses its New England Historical Society, and there are plans for a larger national memorial. Theodor was third-generation American, the second child and only son of one of the prosperous German-American families in Springfield. An older sister was born in 1902. On both sides of the family, his grandparents had emigrated to the United States from Germany. His father's parents emigrated before 1870 and established a brewery in Springfield: Kalmbach and Geisel. The brewery became known as "Come back and guzzle." The brewery prospered until Prohibition took effect in 1920 and killed it.

German was the language of the Geisel household. The family's religion was Evangelical Lutheran, with services conducted in German. During World War I, Theodor, then a Boy Scout, sold U. S. war bonds. His grandfather, the immigrant Geisel, bought \$1,000 worth. Theodor was one of the Springfield Boy Scouts to win an award for successful sales.

After graduating from the Springfield public schools, Theodor enrolled at Dartmouth College, the class of 1925. While still in high school, he had drawn cartoons, and at Dartmouth he gravitated to the college humor magazine. A run-in with the college authorities over bootleg liquor forced him to publish his cartoons under an alias, so he chose his middle name, Seuss (the German pronunciation of Seuss rhymes with Royce). The "Dr." part came later. During his senior year, Theodor wrote to his father that he would get a college fellowship for postgraduate study at Oxford. His father boasted this to the editor of the local paper, who mentioned it in print. The fellowship did not materialize, but to preserve family pride, the elder Geisel footed the bill for the year at Oxford. That year convinced Theodor that academia was not for him. However, it exposed him to Great Britain, to France, and to Germany. The next year he spent in Paris, with trips to Switzerland, Austria, and Italy. "Dr. Seuss" never did earn a Ph.D., but when he became successful his alma mater conferred on him an honorary doctorate.

From 1927 to 1941 Dr. Seuss lived in New York City. He drew humor cartoons for an obscure humor magazine, *Judge*, which billed itself as "the world's wittiest weekly," and occasionally for more prestigious journals such as the *Saturday Evening Post*. One of his cartoons incorporated the bug-spray Flit, and it caught the eye of the wife of the advertising executive responsible for the account of Standard Oil of New Jersey, which manufactured Flit. For the next seventeen years Dr. Seuss was on the payroll of Esso (Ess-O, S[tandard] O[il of New Jersey]), earning the then-sizeable income of \$12,000 per year. So, during the Depression, when many Americans suffered severe financial hardship, Dr. Seuss did not. According to Dr. Seuss, "It wasn't the greatest pay, but it covered my overhead so I could experiment with my drawings." In a major break with his Republican father in 1932 he voted for Franklin Delano Roosevelt. Sometime after, Dr. Seuss moved to a spacious apartment at 1160 Park Avenue with a foyer, a large living room, a dining room, and two bedrooms.

The salary from Esso allowed for travel, both at home and abroad. On board ship returning from one trip to Europe, Dr. Seuss was struck by the rhythm of the ship's engines. After landfall he produced the line, "And to *think* that I saw it on *Mulberry Street*." It became the title of his first book.

Twenty-seven publishers rejected the book before a Dartmouth acquaintance at Vanguard Press bumped into Dr. Seuss on a New York sidewalk. Vanguard published the book in 1937. In 1938 Vanguard published Dr. Seuss's *The Five Hundred Hats of Bartholomew Cubbins*. After Vanguard merged with Random House, Random House published *King's Stilts* (1939) and *Horton Hatches the Egg* (1940).

Fame and fortune did not come immediately. In its first six years *Mulberry Street* sold 32,000 copies. *King's Stilts* sold fewer than 5,000 copies in year one and only 400 in year three. *Horton Hatches the Egg* sold 6,000 in year one and 1,600 in year two. The real takeoff in sales came in the years after the war. In 1957, Dr. Seuss published *The Cat in the Hat*, his breakthrough book. One source in 1959 puts Dr. Seuss's cumulative sales at 1,500,000 copies; in 1979, the then-current total was 80,000,000; and today's numbers are higher still. In any case, by 1941 Dr. Seuss had a steady income from Esso and the beginnings of a career as author of unconventional children's books.

But all was not well with the world. In September 1931, Japan seized Manchuria, igniting Asia's fifteen-year war. In September 1939, Germany invaded Poland and plunged Europe into six years of war. Dr. Seuss had strong views. His opposition to Italian fascism led him to set pen to paper for his first editorial cartoon. The cartoon exemplified the sharp wit, the wealth of detail, and many of the stylistic elements that were to characterize Dr. Seuss's work for the next two years. In the cartoon, Virginio Gayda, editor of *Il Giornale d'Italia*, a major publication of the fascist regime, is suspended before a giant typewriter, banging away. He wears the fez that Italy's fascist militia adopted for their uniform. Pieces of the typewriter fly off in several directions, and steam issues improbably from three vents. A *steam* typewriter? Who but Dr. Seuss could have imagined it? The steam does in the observatory bird at top right (note the crosses for eyes, a sure sign that the bird is dead). As we shall see, onlooker birds and other creatures play important roles in Dr. Seuss's wartime cartoons. The paper emerging from Gayda's typewriter becomes a banner that extends back over his head, where a winged Mussolini holds up the free end. This is Dr. Seuss's first version of Mussolini, but most of the elements we will see in later cartoons are already in place. The cartoon suggests that poisoned prose comes from the captive press: if Gayda is not captive, why can't he stand on his own two feet?



Dr. Seuss showed it to a friend who worked for *PM*, a left-wing daily newspaper published in New York from 1940–1948. The friend passed it on to *PM*'s editor, Ralph Ingersoll, who liked it. The cartoon appeared at the end of January 1941. Below it was this note:

*Dear Editor:* If you were to ask me, which you haven't, whom I consider the world's most outstanding writer of fantasy would, of course, answer: "I am." My second choice, however, is Virginio Gayda. The only difference is that the writings of Mr. Gayda give me a pain in the neck. This morning, the pain became too acute, and I had to do something about it. I suddenly realized that Mr. Gayda could be made into a journalistic asset, rather than a liability. Almost every day, in amongst the thousands of words that he spews forth, there are one or two sentences that, in their complete and obvious disregard of fact, epitomize the Fascist point of view. Such as his bombastically deft interpretation of a rout as a masterly stroke of tactical genius. He can crow and crawl better than any other writer living today. Anyhow...I had to do a picture of Gayda.

— Dr. Seuss

The editor added, in parentheses, "Dr. Seuss is a topflight advertising artist, most famous for his *FL* cartoons." With this cartoon, Dr. Seuss began his career at *PM*. In February and March, he published only three cartoons, all of them reactions to pronouncements by Gayda. But from late April on, Dr. Seuss published three or more cartoons each week. He worked as editorial cartoonist for *PM* from early 1941 to January 1943, nearly two full years, spanning months when the United States was in peace and months when it was very much at war.

In his monograph on *PM*, Paul Milkman describes the paper as "A New Deal in Journalism;" the play on words is intentional. *PM* was a new deal in many ways. It cost five cents per copy when it

competitors sold for two or three cents. It ran no comics (at least at first), crossword puzzles, or stock market reports. It specialized in photographs and other visuals using an improved "hot ink" printing process; the issue of November 26, 1942, for example, carried eight full pages of war maps, most of them full-page spreads and one of them a two-page spread. It accepted no advertising. It continued news stories onto back pages. It pioneered radio pages, the early equivalent of the newspaper television guides of today. It attracted some of the greatest names of the day in American journalism and letters: Erskine Caldwell, James Thurber, I. F. Stone, James Wechsler, Heywood Hale Broun, Lillian Hellman, and Jimmy Cannon: all wrote at one time for *PM*.

Most important, *PM* was outspoken in its politics. Ralph Ingersoll, a prominent journalist who had worked for *Time* and *Life*, was its founder and first editor, and he issued political position papers regularly. For example, this is one of his formulations of the *PM* stance: "We are against people who push other people around, just for the fun of pushing, whether they flourish in this country or abroad. We are against fraud and deceit and greed and cruelty and we seek to expose their practitioners. We are for people who are kindly and courageous and honest.... We propose to applaud those who seek to improve the way men live together. We are American and we prefer democracy to any other form of government." Or again: "The Fascist philosophy [represents] a live threat to everything we believe in, beginning with a democratic way of life.... We do not believe either that the study of the works of Karl Marx or membership in the Communist Party in America is antisocial."

*PM's*

10 cents  
WEEKLY

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**PM's Sunday Edition**  
Sunday, May 4, 1944

COMPLETE EDITION

*On the War Front* Page 2  
**Iraq** British March On Baghdad

*On the Home Front*  
**Radio** FCC Orders Blue Network To Quit (Page 6)  
**Subway** 4 Unsettled Commuters Take Slow Ride (Page 10)  
**Tenements** Strike for Decent Housing (Page 12)

Whirlaway Wins (Page 32)

— De Witt

## Who Sells Oil To Our Enemies? Answers

Three Oil Companies Say They Don't Sell to the Axis  
Two Say They Sell to Japan  
Ten Haven't Answered Yet  
—And Don't Forget W. R. Davis . . . See Pages 18-19

*What Are We Going to Do About It?* See Pages 14-21

PM SELLS NO ADVERTISING



On December 8, 1941, in the immediate aftermath of the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, Ingersoll sent a “Memo to the Staff” setting down “what [he] had to say” that day. It includes the following section:

3. That with the declaration of war, *PM*'s first job was done. The first serious job that *PM* undertook was giving the people of America the facts about the threat of Fascist aggression—at home and abroad. When the Fascists attacked us yesterday, this job was finished. We have nothing more to say about the threat for it has now materialized in the open attack that we have been so long convinced was inevitable.
4. That this is our satisfaction: that our warnings have contributed to the preparedness of this country....
5. That today we begin a new task. That this task is WINNING THE WAR.

Ingersoll surely claimed too much for *PM*, both in preparing the United States for war and in winning the war, but such was his ambition and *PM*'s sense of mission. *PM*'s daily circulation was about 150,000. In those days there were seven other mass-circulation dailies in New York City, including the *New York Times* (daily circulation: roughly 500,000) and the *Daily News* (daily circulation: over 2,000,000). As we shall see, the latter paper was the particular target of *PM*'s outrage.

On January 6, 1941, Ingersoll had further thoughts:

At present our particular interests are:

FOR—ALL OUT PRODUCTION OF WEAPONS...that comes ahead of everything for our stake is human lives. (We always take Victory for granted; we work to speed victory to save lives.)

FOR—INTELLIGENT TRAINING OF OUR ARMED FORCES....

FOR—INTELLIGENT LEADERSHIP....

FOR—DEMOCRACY AT HOME. The war against Fascism continues at home as well as abroad. It is one war, wherever. At home we now wage it in the name of winning the war on the field of battle. The big word MORALE covers it—too much like a tent to suit us.... LABOR'S INTERESTS ARE SYNONYMOUS WITH OURS—AND WITH THE COUNTRY'S....

AGAINST—DEMOCRACY'S RECORDED ENEMIES. By the time the Fascists attacked Pearl Harbor and Hitler and Mussolini declared war on us, the Professional Isolationists had revealed themselves as American Enemies of Democracy.... We experienced hunters of American Enemies of Democracy have a special obligation—and privilege—to expose them. It takes doing. But we'll find ways to do it.



July 28, 1942

*PM* signed on to the New Deal of President Roosevelt, but it did so—in the words of historian Paul Finkler—“at precisely the moment when Roosevelt was abandoning New Deal politics to create a conservative interventionist coalition.” As the Administration moved toward the right, *PM* endorsed interventionism but clung to the Administration’s earlier social commitments.

Michael Denning’s *The Cultural Front* speaks of the Popular Front of the 1930s and early 1940s as a coming together of industrial unionists, Communists, independent socialists, communists, labor activists, and emigré antifascists behind a three-part program: antifascism and anti-imperialism, labor solidarity, social democratic electoral politics and civil liberties. Writes Denning “The Popular Front emerged out of the crisis of 1929, and it remained the central popular democratic movement over the following three decades.” Among the intellectuals, it brought together older “patrician” modernists such as Malcolm Cowley and Edmund Wilson and younger “plebeian” writers and artists: producer John Houseman, filmmaker Fritz Lang, playwright Bertolt Brecht, writers Ayako Ishigaki and Françoise Werfel, composers Kurt Weill and Béla Bartók. Denning labels *PM* “the Popular Front tabloid.”

Editor Ingersoll himself later had second and third thoughts about *PM* and its activism. This is clear from accounts of these years in his papers at Boston University. In one outline he wrote: “ ‘New Kind of Newspaper’ was to have been *A Crusade* all right—but a crusade not *for* any political or social reform but simply *against* the stupidity, the dullness, the lack of imagination and ingenuity—and the occasional venality—of the Big Business American Newspapers of the Twentieth Century. If there were any politics in this, they were reactionary rather than radical. They sought to go back to simpler days when the newspaper business was not to sell advertising space but to tell *news*. This was the diametrical opposite of the concept of the propagandist. Yet *PM* had become the propagandist and ended all propagandizing (and itself!).” To the last sentence Ingersoll appended in pencil: “—*the warmonger of all times.*” The date of this addition is not clear, but the insertion speaks eloquently of Ingersoll’s second thoughts.

For the years 1941 and 1942, Dr. Seuss drew editorial cartoons for *PM*. *PM* was on the left of the American politics, but what defined the spectrum? What were the issues? Who were the player

Fifty-two percent of those Americans eligible to vote went to the polls in November 1940 to vote in the presidential election pitting President Franklin Delano Roosevelt, a Democrat elected first in 1932 and reelected in 1936, against Wendell Willkie, a Democrat-turned-Republican. The war in Europe and Asia was a major issue. Should the United States oppose the Germans and aid the British? How? To what extent? At what risk? Willkie supported Roosevelt's foreign policy—aid for Britain—but attacked New Deal social programs. The result was Roosevelt's third victory and an unprecedented third term, although Roosevelt's margin of victory was much narrower than in either 1932 or 1936. Willkie won 22,000,000 votes to Roosevelt's 27,000,000 and eighty-two votes in the electoral college (in 1936, the Republican candidate had won eight). What is more, Republicans held on to most of the striking gains of 1938 in the House. Roosevelt won the election in part by promising not to take the United States into the war.



[May 24, 1942](#)

However, in his State of the Union address (January 6, 1941) President Roosevelt called for “full support of all those resolute peoples everywhere, who are resisting aggression and are thereby keeping war away from our hemisphere,” and he spoke disparagingly of the noninterventionists: “We must always be wary of those who with sounding brass and a tinkling cymbal preach the ‘ism’ of appeasement. We must especially beware of that small group of selfish men who would clip the wings of the American eagle in order to feather their own nests.” Four days later he submitted to Congress a bill to allow shipments on credit to Britain and other nations fighting Germany. This was the Lend Lease Act, which, somewhat amended, passed Congress late in March. The House vote was 260-166 with 135 of 159 Republicans voting no; and the Senate vote was sixty to thirty-one, with seventeen of twenty-seven Republicans voting no.

The rhetoric was heated, in part because this was a significant step away from neutrality, in part because the bill as submitted gave the President great power. Senator Clark of Missouri, a Democrat like the President, stated: “It is simply a bill to authorize the President to declare war...and to establish a totalitarian government.” Senator LaFollette of Wisconsin, a Progressive, called the bill “a bill forcing Congress to abdicate.” Socialist leader Norman Thomas derided it as “dictatorship in the name of defending democracy.” Roosevelt’s long-time antagonist Republican Representative Hamilton Fish of New York said: “It looks as if we are bringing Nazism, fascism, and dictatorship to America and



setting up a Führer here.” Roosevelt did have the support of Wendell Willkie, who as defeated Presidential nominee could claim to speak for the Republican Party.

Where was the American public on the issue of war and peace? Public opinion polls show that from the start of the fighting in September 1939 the American public preferred a British to a German victory by an overwhelming margin, but by the same overwhelming margin the public opposed American entry into the war. Particularly after the fall of France in June 1940, a majority of the American public was willing to help the British cause by any means short of fighting. Germany's military victories had increased public distaste for Hitler, but the public was not ready yet for war. Still, by 1941, when Dr. Seuss began drawing his editorial cartoons, the “isolationist” coalition had begun to fray badly.



October 13, 1942

It was into this volatile picture that Dr. Seuss plunged. He joined forces with *PM* to produce the cartoons in this volume. After the initial few months, during which the cartoons appeared anywhere on *PM*'s twenty news pages, they appeared most often on the editorial page, usually as the only illustration on that page. Side by side with the signed editorials, the cartoons enjoyed a prominence that place exceeded only by the cover, and a half dozen *PM* covers themselves carry Dr. Seuss's cartoon. Occasionally there are smaller Dr. Seuss drawings elsewhere, in among the letters to the editor promoting the sale of war bonds. Two such signed drawings depict Hitler and “Japan.” A third, unsigned but clearly from the pen of Dr. Seuss, depicts the aftermath of the sinking of a German submarine.

On December 7, 1941, the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor.

On December 11, Japan's European ally Germany declared war on the United States. The United States was at war, and the war began with a massive military setback. On December 8, Dr. Seuss published his first cartoon reacting to the changed situation.<sup>28</sup> (The number in the margin gives the page on which the cartoon appears.) It did not show Japan or Pearl Harbor. Instead, it showed a bird labeled "Isolationism," demolished by an explosion, "WAR." For months before December 7 "isolationism" and "isolationists" had been Dr. Seuss's targets. Dr. Seuss (and *PM*) had long wanted the United States to intervene in the European war. Editor Ralph Ingersoll named "Professional Isolationists" and "American Enemies of Democracy" (note the capital letters). Pearl Harbor did not change Dr. Seuss's campaign against these domestic enemies embodied by Charles A. Lindbergh, the America First movement, and Father Charles Coughlin; anti-black racists and anti-Semites; and the opponents of New Deal social programs.

Hitler was the most frequent subject of Dr. Seuss's wartime editorial cartoons, but Charles A. Lindbergh came in second, at least for the year 1941. Lindbergh was the first person to fly solo across the Atlantic, a feat that stunned the world in 1927 and turned him into an authentic international hero. In the 1930s, however, Lindbergh spoke in admiring tones of Hitler's regime, and in early 1941 Lindbergh joined the anti-interventionist organization America First and began speaking out against the interventionist steps of the Roosevelt administration, notably the Lend-Lease Act. On September 11, 1941, in Des Moines, Iowa, Lindbergh made a speech in which he made a distinction between the "Jewish race" and "Americans." That speech included these sentences:

I am not attacking either the Jewish or the British people. Both races I admire. But I am saying that the leaders of both the British and Jewish races, for reasons which are understandable from their viewpoint as they are inadvisable from ours, for reasons which are not American, wish to involve us in the war. We cannot blame them for looking out for what they believe to be their own interests, but we must look out for ours. We cannot allow the natural passions and prejudices of other peoples to lead our country to destruction.

The charge of anti-Semitism has stuck to Lindbergh's name ever since, and it served to discredit as well the "isolationist" cause to which he had lent his prestige.

I keep "isolationist" in quotation marks because, as in the Ingersoll position paper, it is a rhetorical label that simplifies a highly complex phenomenon. Those opposing American involvement in the war in Europe did so with a variety of motives. Some were pacifists. Others looked back to Versailles and the harsh peace it imposed on Germany; these people saw a part of Hitler's foreign policy as a reaction to Versailles and thus were reluctant to endorse sharp criticism of it. Others distrusted great-power politics of any kind, but particularly support for Britain and the British empire. Others feared the changes war would bring to the United States. Still others distrusted President Roosevelt. The "anti-isolationists" or "interventionists" read the situation differently: that Hitler and Nazi Germany were a threat not simply to Germany's European neighbors but to civilization, that aiding Britain would enable Britain to fight on, that a British collapse would leave the United States alone in a hostile world. However, those advocating this position, as *PM* did, labored under the difficulty that for political reasons the Roosevelt administration had to camouflage its desire

intervene in the war in Europe.

~~Between “isolationists” and those advocating intervention lay a large divide. In *Second Chance: The Triumph of Internationalism in America During World War II*, a book critical of “isolationism,” Robert A. Divine suggests that the “internationalists” (proponents since Wilsonian times of an active role for the United States in international affairs) were a relatively homogeneous group. He lists the characteristics:~~

Virtually all were old-stock Protestant Americans. Descendants of English and Scottish settlers, they were Anglophiles who believed that the United States had inherited England’s role as arbiter of world affairs. As representatives of a social class that had taken on many of the characteristics of a caste, they showed little sympathy for the plight of colonial peoples. The world they wanted to save was limited to Europe and its overseas possessions; they took Latin America for granted and neglected the Orient. Bankers, lawyers, editors, professors, and ministers predominated; there were few salesmen or clerks and no workmen in their ranks. The business community was represented by men who dealt in the world markets.... Small manufacturers, real-estate brokers, and insurance executives were conspicuously absent. Above all, the internationalists lived in the Northeast, with only isolated cells scattered through the provinces in university towns and such cosmopolitan centers as San Francisco and New Orleans.

In more recent times in the United States, the leading “internationalist” organizations—the Foreign Policy Association, the Council on Foreign Relations, and later the Trilateral Commission—have come under attack. The times have changed, but the fault line endures.

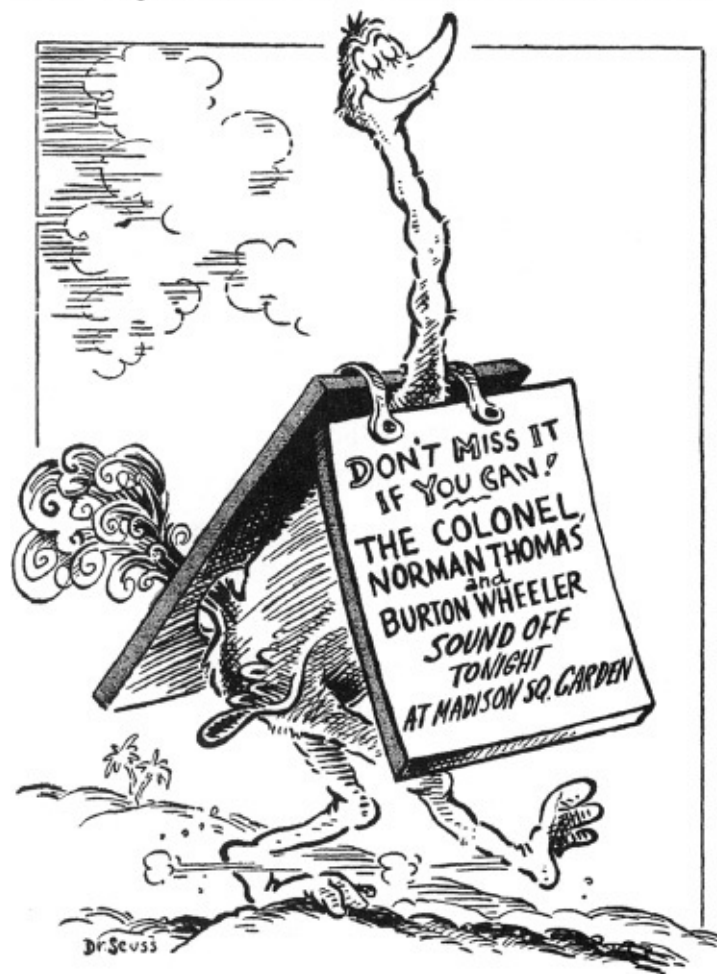
Complicating the picture for President Roosevelt was the fact that key parts of his electoral base—Southerners and Irish Americans—were generally against intervention, at least early on. But that was not a concern for *PM* and Dr. Seuss. In their biography of Dr. Seuss, *Dr. Seuss and Mr. Geisel*, Judith and Neil Morgan report that Dr. Seuss had written a bit of doggerel about Lindbergh and hung it on his studio wall. It speaks of Lindbergh’s having flown the Atlantic “With fortitude and a ham sandwich” but concluded that Lindbergh “shivered and shook/At the sound of the gruff German landwicht.” By the time of Pearl Harbor, Dr. Seuss had depicted Lindbergh in a dozen cartoons. On April 28, 1941, Dr. Seuss drew “The Lindbergh Quarter,” which includes the ostrich that becomes Dr. Seuss’s representation of “isolationism.”<sup>29</sup> This is the bird that the explosion of war blows up into the air on December 8. This was not an innovation. Dr. Seuss had drawn an ostrich with its head in the sand before the war. Then the issue was “Sex, sex, everywhere Sex! Even ostriches hiding their heads have ulterior motives.” Nor was the image new in the national debate: in his State of the Union speech on January 3, 1940, President Roosevelt had said, “I hope that we shall have fewer ostriches in our midst. It is not good for the ultimate health of ostriches to bury their heads in the sand.” But Dr. Seuss was put it to good use. On April 29, Dr. Seuss drew smiling simpletons lining up to don “ostrich bonnets” offered by the “Lindy Ostrich Service, Inc.”<sup>30</sup>

In mid-May 1941, Dr. Seuss depicted Uncle Sam happily in a separate bed from Europe with its contagious diseases: “Stalin-itch, Hitler-itis, Blitz Pox, Nazi Fever, Fascist Fever, Italian Mumps.” The latter had killed the cat stretched out beneath the bed labeled “Europe.” Later that same month Dr. Seuss depicted Uncle Sam sitting atop a nest in a forest with only one other tree still standing.<sup>32</sup> Trees labeled Poland, France, Holland, Norway, Greece, Yugoslavia, and “etc.” have fallen victim to the assault of a woodpecker with the face of Hitler and a ferocious beak. The only other tree left standing is England, and the woodpecker has already cut its trunk halfway through. Says Uncle Sam, “Ho hurry! When he’s finished pecking down that last tree he’ll quite likely be tired.”

A drawing of May 23 urged people to listen to radio coverage of an event at Madison Square Garden featuring Lindbergh (“the Colonel”), the socialist Norman Thomas, and Senator Burton Wheeler. The drawing is Dr. Seuss’s, but the note underneath must have come from the editor: “P

isn't in the habit of drumming up listeners for appeasement meetings. But sometimes it is worth listening to people just to note what they *don't* say." The questions *PM* wanted the "isolationists" answer were these: "If Britain is defeated, do you think we will have more democracy, or less, in the U. S. A.? If Britain is defeated, do you think the U. S. A. will be more secure, or less, from attack by Hitler? Which will bring militarism more quickly to the U. S. A., and make it last longer—a British victory or a Hitler victory?" The notice concluded: "If Lindbergh, Wheeler, and Thomas fail to answer these simple questions, it doesn't matter much what else they may say. Because in the answers to these questions lie the real issues facing America today." This cartoon raises a question I cannot answer: Did Dr. Seuss draw his editorial cartoons to order? Or did he have free rein? This drawing and several others appear to have been specifically commissioned, but often there is no immediate connection between Dr. Seuss's editorial cartoon and the rest of the editorial page.

*Yes—By All Means—Listen, and Think!*



A cartoon in late May showed a blithe "America First" lolling in a bathtub labeled "American hemisphere."<sup>33</sup> With him in the tub are a crocodile, a shark, an octopus, and a lobster, all wearing swastikas. Note the drainpipe with its leak and the right rear leg of the tub (well off the floor). On May 29, Lindbergh made a speech in which he stated: "Mr. Roosevelt claims that Hitler desires to dominate the world. But it is Mr. Roosevelt who advocates world domination when he says it is our business to control the wars of Europe and Asia, and that we in America must dominate islands lying off the African coast." (Lindbergh's reference was to Fernando de Noronha, an island off the coast of Brazil, not Africa). Lindbergh called for "new policies and new leadership." Dr. Seuss responded on June 2: in his cartoon of that date Lindbergh pats a Nazi dragon on the head while warning against Roosevelt.<sup>34</sup> Dr. Seuss further developed these ideas early in July in a cartoon not included in the

volume. In the cartoon a flock of ostriches parades with a sign “Lindbergh for President in 1944” while an ominous hooded figure (“U. S. fascists”) skulks behind, carrying a smaller sign: “Yeah, but why wait till 1944?”

On June 9, Dr. Seuss depicted Hitler as an artist. (Of course, Hitler was a failed artist.<sup>35</sup>) He is work on a portrait of a female “Germania” surrounded by the torch of truth, a dove of peace, and a happy workman; she sits atop a volume labeled “Law,” and across her ample bosom is the word “Plenty.” Note the two Hitler-faced *putti* with haloes. John Cudahy was a Democrat who had served as ambassador to Belgium (1939–1940). A hardline opponent of the Soviet Union, Cudahy went to Germany and interviewed Hitler; the interview appeared in the *New York Times* in early June 1941. An editorial *PM* characterized the incident as “boosting Nazi propaganda.”

Two days later, Dr. Seuss drew “By the Way...Did Anyone Send that Aid to Britain?” Eight old men sit around a table; the calendar on the wall read 1951, ten years in the future.<sup>36</sup> The men have long beards, are festooned with cobwebs, and their beards intertwine. Even the cat has a beard. A skeptic might ask: If the ten years between 1941 and 1951 have not brought Nazi victory, why the worry? But short-term delay, not long-term outcome, is Dr. Seuss’s point here. In late June, an unhappy “America First” tries to blunt the thorns of a cactus labeled “Stiffening U. S. Foreign Policy.”<sup>37</sup> (Count the steps on the impossible stepladder!) In July, Dr. Seuss drew two cartoons under the title, “The Great U. S. Sideshow”; both show freaks of nature. One (July 3, not included in this volume) shows a literally gutless “Appeaser” —there is nothing at all between his front and back suspenders. In the other (July 8), “America First” and a Nazi are joined at the beard.<sup>38</sup> This was the theme Dr. Seuss and *PM* emphasized: connections between “isolationists” in the United States and their enemies abroad—fascism and Nazism.

On July 16, Dr. Seuss drew a happy whale on a mountain-top chortling: “I’m saving my scalp/Living high on an Alp.../(Dear Lindy! He gave me the notion!)” Particularly in 1941 Dr. Seuss incorporated rhymes and puns into his cartoons.<sup>39</sup> The first of these (not included here) came in June and showed “Uncle Sam” at home (“Home Sweet Home”) in his armchair, feet up on a hassock, glass with straw in it on a table by his side, blithely ignoring a “blitz”: “Said a bird in the midst of Blitz,/”Up to now they’ve scored very few hitz,/So I’ll sit on my canny/Old Star Spangled Fanny...’/And on it he sitz and he sitz.”

There are others. On July 18 (a cartoon not included in this volume), two isolationist clams commented on the dangers of the Atlantic Ocean: “Cried a clam with an agonized shout,/‘Don’t be so aggressive, you lout!/That’s Hitler’s Atlantic;/You’ll make the man frantic!/Good gracious, don’t stick your Neck Out’!” And in August a limerick accompanies a cartoon of Stalin knitting.<sup>167</sup> But this was the last. Perhaps indicating Dr. Seuss’s maturation as an editorial cartoonist, he later was to de-emphasize words and focus instead on balancing words and image.

On an August cover, “The Appeaser” (is it Lindbergh?) offers lollipops to Nazi dragons.<sup>40</sup> A September cartoon has Lindbergh attempting to mate the American eagle and a jellyfish.<sup>41</sup> (Note that the jellyfish has eyes — two of them; note also the beards and mustaches of the learned audience.) In September, “America First” assures Uncle Sam, as they stand beside a railroad track, that the Nazi express roaring toward them will turn off onto a very flimsy “Appeasement Junction.”<sup>42</sup> Lindbergh made his Des Moines speech, on September 11. One week later, in “Spreading the Lovely Goebbels Stuff,” Dr. Seuss draws Lindbergh atop a “Nazi Anti-Semite Stink Wagon.”<sup>43</sup> (Paul Joseph Goebbels was Hitler’s Minister of Propaganda.) On September 26 Dr. Seuss drew “Appeaser’s Mirror,” a critique of defeatism: a fun house mirror—“Take one look at yourself and despair!”—gives a health

Uncle Sam a black eye, a long beard, and a crutch.<sup>44</sup> On October 1, a mother labeled “America First” reads the tale of “Adolf the Wolf” to her frightened children; she reassures them: “...and the wolf chewed up the children and spit out their bones... But those were *Foreign Children* and it really didn’t matter.”<sup>45</sup>

Four days later—two full months before Pearl Harbor—came the hilarious “I was weak and run down.”<sup>46</sup> Before: “I had circles under my eyes. My tail drooped. I had a foul case of Appeasement THEN I LEARNED ABOUT ‘GUTS’ that amazing remedy For all Mankind’s Woes.” After: “ I FEEL STRONG ENOUGH TO PUNCH MISTER HITLER RIGHT IN THE SNOOT!”

Senator Burton Wheeler (D-Montana) was a staunch opponent of intervention. On October 17, he said: “I can’t conceive of Japan being crazy enough to want to go to war with us.” One month later, he added: “If we go to war with Japan, the only reason will be to help England.” On November 7, pillorying Wheeler, Dr. Seuss invoked the story of Admiral George Dewey, the American hero of the battle of Manila Bay in the Spanish-American War.<sup>47</sup> Dewey was the attacker, and he became famous for saying to the captain of his flagship: “You may fire when you are ready, Gridley.” Dr. Seuss’ admiral is Wheeler, and he speaks from the bottom of the ocean; a torpedo has blown out the port side of his flagship. The Nazi sub that did the deed lurks not far away as Wheeler fulminates: “You may fire when I am damn good and ready, Gridley.” At the end of November—still before Pearl Harbor—Dr. Seuss relegates “Isolationism” to a museum along with a pair of dinosaurs.<sup>48</sup>

In early 1942, *PM* launched a campaign to convince the government to act against the anti-Semitic Roman Catholic priest Charles E. Coughlin. Coughlin had a radio show and published a magazine *Social Justice*, that *PM* wanted banned from the U. S. mail. On March 30, *PM* printed a ten-page attack on Father Coughlin that included a ballot for readers to sign and mail to the attorney general. *April Social Justice* was banned from the mail for violating the Espionage Act of 1942. As Paul Milkman comments, “*PM*’s zeal to silence the fascist and pro-fascist mouthpieces shows an alarming absence of concern for civil liberties.” Dr. Seuss contributed a number of cartoons to this campaign. On February 9, 1942, he drew “Still Cooking with Goebbels Gas.” Earlier he had linked Lindbergh and Goebbels; here it is Coughlin and Goebbels and “The same old Down-with-England-and-Roosevelt Stew.” On March 23, “Vater Coughlin” appears as engineer on “The Berlin-Tokyo Rome + Detroit railroad, pulling freight cars loaded with “Axis propaganda.”<sup>50</sup> (Coughlin’s home base was just outside Detroit.) Note the swastika on the front of the locomotive and the steam that blasts the unfortunate onlooker in the face. On March 30, he had Hitler himself reading *Social Justice* and phoning Coughlin: “Not bad, Coughlin...but when are you going to start printing it in German?”<sup>51</sup>

Few of Dr. Seuss’s editorial cartoons dealt with the postwar world. When his last editorial cartoon appeared in January 1943, the end of the war was still more than two years off. But beginning at the end of August 1942, Dr. Seuss *did* plan the peace or at least restate his opposition to American “isolationism.” In August, he ridiculed “The Gopher Hole of Isolation.”<sup>52</sup> Then came five cartoons dedicated to this theme in December 1942 (of twenty-one in all) and one in January 1943 (of four). We don’t know the date on which Dr. Seuss decided to leave *PM*, but in his last five weeks, the fight against “isolationism” was very much on his mind. On December 14, a giant Uncle Sam was shown watching tiny figures at work on FOUNDATIONS FOR POST-WAR ISOLATIONISM.<sup>53</sup> A huge sign read “DANGER! SMALL MEN AT WORK !” In a Christmas Day cartoon, a man peeks out from a shelter after the cyclone of war has passed; the title, “With a Whole World to Rebuild...” underlines the pettiness of the shelter-dweller, who thinks only of patching up his fence, labeled “ISOLATION.”<sup>54</sup> Finally, on Ne

Year's Day 1942, Dr. Seuss depicted a seedy gentleman labeled "REACTION" offering an "Isolation Lollipop" to Baby 1943.<sup>55</sup> Dr. Seuss may not have drawn the postwar settlement, but he went on record against U. S. "isolationism."

As we have seen, Dr. Seuss portrayed the United States in two ways: as human Uncle Sam and a bird. Uncle Sam wears a bow tie, cutaway, striped pants, and top hat; unlike Dr. Seuss's other top hats (on the heads of folks he is ridiculing), this hat has stars around the band and vertical stripes. The bird—witness the cartoon showing Lindbergh attempting to crossbreed eagle and jellyfish—is an eagle, though bird lovers may be forgiven if they don't recognize it as such.<sup>41</sup> And note that the eagle's wings often end, virtually, in fingers. Dr. Seuss's use of this bird to represent the United States drew a rebuke from one reader, who complained in a letter to the editor (December 18, 1941): "Much as I admire and appreciate the work of Dr. Seuss, I question the fitness of continuing to picture our Uncle Sam as an ostrich. At least he should be transformed into an Eagle." Without correcting the reader's misapprehension, Ralph Ingersoll reprinted one of Dr. Seuss's Uncle Sams and this sentence: "He looks pretty perky to us."

Dr. Seuss never drew President Franklin Delano Roosevelt. His representations of the United States were Uncle Sam and an eagle, and, sometimes, in a sense "YOU + ME." Dr. Seuss idolized Roosevelt. He quoted Roosevelt and honored him by conferring on him the first membership in his imaginary "Society of Red Tape Cutters," as we will see. But he never *drew* Roosevelt.<sup>188</sup> It is not that Roosevelt was not suitable material for caricature: before and during the war American cartoonists often depicted him, jaunty demeanor, cigarette in holder at a confident angle, and—despite the fact that in real life he was confined to a wheelchair—often standing or striding. But Dr. Seuss's United States is always an idealized figure distinct from its president. In the next chapters we will contrast that treatment with Dr. Seuss's treatment of Germany, Italy, and Japan.



*He looks pretty perky to us.—Ed.*

December 18, 1941

In American society in the early 1940s, relations among the races—primarily, black-white relations—were rocky at best. During the 1930s, there were on average more than ten lynchings per year. Jim Crow laws were in place throughout the country. The U. S. military was still segregated, as were schools and major league baseball. In 1943, riots paralyzed northern cities when black workers joined

assembly lines that had been all-white.

Dr. Seuss saved some of his most biting cartoons for issues of racism and anti-Semitism. In April 1942, he showed a “Discriminating Employer” —castigating “Jewish Labor” and “Negro Labor”: “I run Democracy’s War.<sup>56</sup> You stay in your Jim Crow Tanks!” Note the evil expression on the employer’s face, and note that Dr. Seuss’s “Negro” differs from his “Jew” only in skin tone. On June 11, 1942 Uncle Sam uses a Flit gun to disinfect American brains. Says John Q. Public as a “racial prejudice bug” blows out of his ear, “Gracious, was *that* in my head?” As many other Americans await their turn to be spritzed, the cat in the lower right corner smiles approvingly.<sup>57</sup> On June 16, an estimated 18,000 blacks gathered at Madison Square Garden to hear A. Philip Randolph kick off a campaign against discrimination in the military, in war industries, in government agencies, and in labor unions. On June 26, a Seuss cartoon, “The Old Run-Around,” shows “Negro Job-Hunter” entering a maze which leads only to dead ends, not to “U. S. War Industries.”<sup>58</sup> (How *any* job-hunter were to get to “U. S. War Industries” is a puzzle.)

In a cartoon later that month an angry Uncle Sam taps an organist labeled “War Industry” on the shoulder: “Listen, Maestro...if you want to get *real harmony*, use the black keys as well as the white. Cobwebs on the black keys underline the fact that they haven’t been used.<sup>59</sup> In July’s “War Work to Be Done,” a white employer posts a sign on a woodpile: “No Colored Labor Needed.”<sup>60</sup> Two blacks comment: “There seems to be a white man in the woodpile!” (The original expression is “There seems to be a nigger in the woodpile.” The term “nigger” was clearly pejorative, but the origins of the expression are obscure; it may have meant simply something unexpected.) In August a black bird called “Race Hatred” perches on the shoulder of segregationist Democratic Governor Eugene Talmadge of Georgia.<sup>61</sup> Note that the bird wears a black hood (why not the white hood of the Ku Klux Klan?) and that Talmadge’s whip dwarfs the fenced-in state of Georgia. It is not easy to tell which of the tiny figures are black and which white, but the figures themselves are all similar, as are the houses in front of which they stand.

As we have seen, Dr. Seuss linked racism and anti-Semitism and opposed both. Anti-Semitism was one focus of his assault on Charles Lindbergh. A *PM* cover of September 22, 1941, stated the case in reaction to Lindbergh’s speech of September 11 at Des Moines. Dr. Seuss placed a chagrined Uncle Sam in stocks, and a sign hanging from his beak reads, “I am part Jewish.”<sup>62</sup> The “sheriffs” who have placed him there are Lindbergh and Senator Gerald P. Nye (D-Wisconsin), one-time New Deal ally of President Roosevelt. A later cartoon involving Nye (April 26, 1942; not included here) depicted him as the hind part of a horse. According to Seuss biographers Judith and Neal Morgan, Ralph Ingersoll feared a lawsuit. But what arrived in the mail from Senator Nye was something else: “[The] issue Sunday, April 26...carried a cartoon, the original of which I should very much like to possess. May I request its mailing to me?”

In a grim cartoon of July 20, 1942, ten bodies hang by their necks from trees, each one bearing the stark label “Jew”; Hitler stands with Pierre Laval, an additional noose at the ready.<sup>101</sup> On October 2, 1941 (a cartoon not included here), Dr. Seuss drew “Japan” puzzling over *Mein Kampf* and musings: “Now what in blazes am I going to use for Jews?” A photo of Hitler hangs on the wall, signed, “Your Old Pal, Adolf.” Shortly before Christmas 1942 Dr. Seuss depicted “Race Hatred” as Adolf Hitler’s “annual gift to civilization”; a “U. S. anti-Semite” stands poised to help Hitler wrap the present.<sup>63</sup> The wreath on the wall is filled with swastikas.

December 28, 1942, was the eighty-sixth anniversary of the birth of Woodrow Wilson, the



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