

Herbert Block: Greatest Hits (1947-1998)

Herbert Block was America's political cartoonist extraordinaire during the last half of the twentieth century. Some of his most memorable work focused on the Great Depression, the rise of totalitarian regimes and World War II, communism and the Cold War, McCarthyism, civil rights, Vietnam, gender equality, Watergate, pollution and the environment, and more. His cartoons were syndicated in over 200 newspapers.

To his credit, Block insisted on total editorial independence, regardless of whether or not his message agreed with his newspaper-employer's stance on political issues. It was not unusual for Block to address policy shortcomings in presidential administrations or what he believed to be character flaws within the White House, even if his commentary meant running afoul of the President. Typically, Republicans more than Democrats were subjected to the Block gauntlet, but neither party was immune from his judgment.

Block started drawing as a young teenager, crafting the familiar "HERBLOCK" signature (a clever amalgamation of "Herbert" and "Block") in high school. His first professional cartoon appeared in the Chicago *Daily News* on April 24, 1929. It advocated conservation of America's forests.

Though his parents were conservative (his father voted for Herbert Hoover in 1928), Block's political affinity was liberal. Hence, he became a supporter of Franklin D. Roosevelt at the onset of the Great Depression. Despite being an ardent admirer of FDR, he nevertheless challenged the President's 1937 "court-packing" scheme.

Throughout the decade, Block accentuated the menacing Soviet and Nazi aggressions. He opposed American isolationists. While he criticized Joseph Stalin and other communist leaders, he also believed the United States was overreacting to the danger of communism. After spending two World War II years in the Army doing cartoons and press releases, he was hired as the chief editorial cartoonist for the Washington *Post*, working there until his death 55 years later.

One of Block's frequent targets during the 1950s was Senator Joseph McCarthy. In fact, Block is credited with coining the term "McCarthyism" to describe the Wisconsin senator's mad witch-hunt for communists where they were not to be found. Although the *Post* officially endorsed Dwight D. Eisenhower in the 1952 presidential election, Block supported Ike's opponent, Senator Adlai Stevenson. Consequently, for a very brief time, the *Post* refused to publish Block's cartoons! Throughout the 1950s, Block was critical of Eisenhower for not taking a definitive stand against the rampaging McCarthy as well as the President's apparent disregard for civil rights.

In the following decade, Block confronted the United States war effort in Vietnam, causing President Lyndon B. Johnson to drop plans of bestowing the cartoonist with the Presidential Medal of Freedom. Block would eventually be awarded this honor in 1994 by President Bill Clinton.

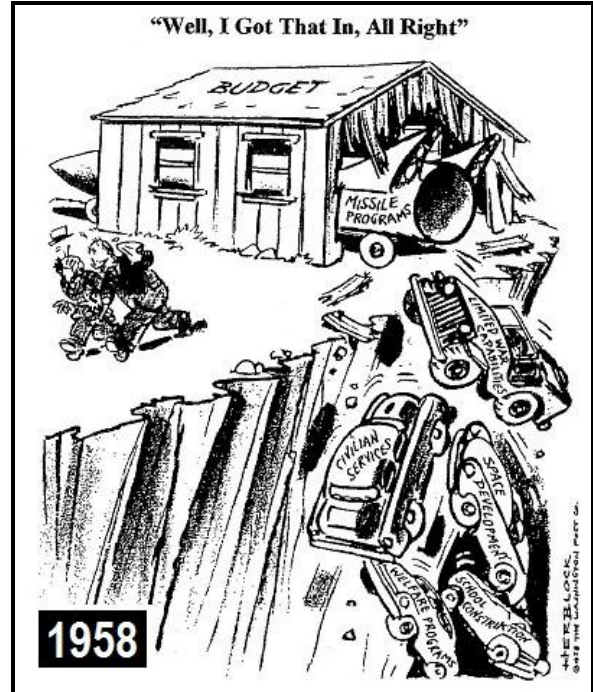
Some of Block's most brilliant cartoons were those attacking President Richard Nixon and his cronies during the Watergate scandal of the early 1970s (conjuring the spirit of a bygone master political cartoonist, Thomas Nast, and his pen-and-ink crusade against corrupt New York politician William M. "Boss" Tweed during the late 1800s). Block's portrayal of Nixon crawling out of an open sewer—reprising a theme Block used in 1954 to portray McCarthy—enraged Nixon. The President promptly canceled his subscription to the *Post*, but contrary to popular thought, Block's name was not added to the infamous Nixon "Enemies List" (although the *Post* was cited as well as its editor and several reporters were specifically listed).

In the 1980s and 1990s, Block satirized all the Oval Office occupants—Ronald Reagan, George H. W. Bush, and Bill Clinton—in addition to taking on current issues such as gun control, abortion, political influence of fundamentalist Christian groups, and the tobacco industry. Block continued his illustrious career into the new millennium by lampooning newly elected President George W. Bush. His final cartoon appeared in the *Post* on August 26, 2001.

Over the course of a distinguished stretch across nine decades, Block was recipient of numerous honors and awards, not the least of which were three Pulitzer Prizes in Journalism for editorial cartooning (1942, 1954, and 1979) and another for public service (1973 jointly with *Post* colleagues for reporting the Watergate affair). In 1966, he was commissioned to design the U.S. postage stamp commemorating the 175th anniversary of the Bill of Rights. Near the end of his career, Block's work was the subject of exhibitions at the Smithsonian Institution and the Library of Congress. A handful of HERBLOCK gems, representing multiple topics and spanning several decades, appear below. They are arranged chronologically.







1965

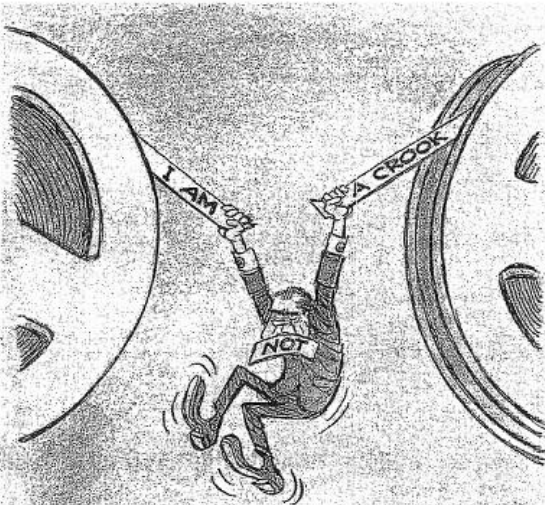


"I GOT ONE OF 'EM JUST AS SHE ALMOST MADE IT BACK TO THE CHURCH"

"We'll Let The Overcoat Out All The Way, And The Robe Will Hardly Show At All"



1968



1974

"THIS HERE COUNTRY AIN'T BIG ENOUGH FOR BOTH OF US"



1977

