

THE FUNNIES OF AUGUST: AMERICAN EDITORIAL CARTOONS IN THE
OPENING MONTHS OF THE SPANISH CIVIL WAR

by

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HONORS THESIS

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ABSTRACT

This thesis studies American editorial cartoons depicting the Spanish Civil War of 1936. The other goal of this thesis is to create an exhibit display case in the Taylor-Murphy building showing select comics from the research for casual audiences. I chose comics specifically because the opinions of newspaper political cartoons appeal or market to a wide portion of the public, making them a compelling source to study the popular opinion and media of the time. The comics came from the pages of the *New York Times*, *Chicago Daily Tribune*, and *Washington Post* and from the months of July, August, and September 1936. The newspapers were chosen for their status as major publications, their name recognition to modern exhibit viewers, and to limit the scope of the project. Cartoons were researched from these publications in the time frame of July 17th, the beginning of the military coup, to September 30th. The end of the date range was chosen to limit the scope of the project and to focus on this specific historical moment at the onset of the war. Few studies have been completed on the American cartoons that portrayed the Spanish Civil War, so this project is helping to fill that void. Some of the trends noticeable in these months were a set of common visual clichés, simplification of the conflict, rejection of both sides of the Civil War, and an association of the political left in Spain with Roosevelt and the New Deal. Major papers often agreed the war was a disaster brought on by extremist ideologies of fascism and communism and held little sympathy for either cause, lamenting instead the destruction of Spain and the Spanish people. This study revealed not just how the media espoused opinions on the war and how it was portrayed, but also how

it was utilized by cartoonists to make statements regarding contemporary politics in America.

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I. REFLECTION

Introduction

This thesis, and forthcoming exhibit case, presents American editorial cartoons from the *New York Times*, *Chicago Daily Tribune*, and *Washington Post* about the Spanish Civil War. I researched cartoons from these publications in the time frame of July 17th, the beginning of the military coup, to September 30th, 1936. This end date was chosen somewhat arbitrarily to limit the scale of the project, but it also allowed me to focus on the specific historical moment of the conflict's beginning. The cartoons featured are a representative selection of some of the broader trends I noticed in the cartoons, but also are visually interesting and meaningful on their own. The exhibit case will be in the Taylor-Murphy building located at Texas State University and contain an introduction, reproductions of the cartoons, and an accompanying label analyzing the cartoon. More details about the exhibit's design and design philosophy make up Chapter II, while the materials of the exhibit itself make up Chapter III.

The first of my exhibit labels begins with a prophetic quote from *Uncertain Glory*, a work of historical fiction by Spanish Civil War veteran Joan Sales.¹ Sales writes, "I could tell you, for example, that foreigners will turn this huge mess into stirring stories of bullfighters and gypsies."² The quote is from a fictional character referring to romantic novels, but the message of the quote, that foreigners will tend to distort the Spanish Civil War with Spanish stereotypes and simplifications from their view of what Spain is, runs through my thesis.

¹ "Joan Sales," New York Review Books, accessed March 29, 2020, <https://www.nyrb.com/collections/joan-sales>.

² Pete Ayrton, ed., *¡No Pasarán! Writings from the Spanish Civil War* (New York, NY: Serpents Tail, 2016), xiii.

Some of the visual trends noticeable in these cartoons were popular clichés associated with banditry, Spanish stereotypes, fascism, and communism. Other broad, thematic trends included simplification of the conflict, association of the conflict with the potential threats of Soviet Russia and Nazi Germany, rejection of both sides of the Civil War, and an association of the conflict with American political issues such as the New Deal and the upcoming election of November 1936. For this exhibit, I have refined these trends into three themes that will contain two cartoons each: Domestic Lens, Evil Ideologies, and European Intervention.

As it may be apparent, this thesis is about analyzing the cartoons of a few American cartoonists on the Spanish Civil War rather than visual media from Spanish sources in the war itself. Besides the “The Victim”, which originally was published in British humor magazine *Punch* but was reprinted in the *Chicago Daily Tribune* and *The New York Times*, cartoons in the exhibit are from American cartoonists, though other reprinted European cartoons found during my research are referenced.^{3 4} Drawing on American sources for this war can tell an interesting, transatlantic story about how some cartoonists portrayed foreign events to Americans. And in thinking of the exhibit case, these cartoons also may be more approachable to a broader, American audience, as they may contain recognizable tropes to casual viewers. The text of the labels reflects the broader target audience and spatial demands of the exhibit space in its brevity, both in actual length and in its analysis

³ Bernard Partridge, “Editorial Cartoon 3 -- no Title,” *Chicago Daily Tribune (1923-1963)* (Chicago, IL), Sep 25, 1936, <http://libproxy.txstate.edu/login?url=https://search-proquest-com.libproxy.txstate.edu/docview/181771989?accountid=5683>.

⁴ Bernard Partridge, “Editorial Cartoon 1 -- no Title,” *New York Times (1923-Current File)* (New York, N.Y.), Aug. 23, 1936, <http://libproxy.txstate.edu/login?url=https://search-proquest-com.libproxy.txstate.edu/docview/101762304?accountid=5683>.

to an extent. The analysis connected to each cartoon is short to retain casual attention, while remaining academic.

Research Process

My research process for this project primarily involved using Texas State University's ProQuest Historical Newspapers databases. I used ProQuest Historical Newspapers: *Chicago Daily Tribune* (1923 – 1963), ProQuest Historical Newspapers: *New York Times* (1923 – Current File), and ProQuest Historical Newspapers: *Washington Post* (1923 – 1954). I then went through each newspaper's issues from July 1st, 1936, to September 30th, 1936. I started with July 1st in case I could find any cartoons referencing Spain earlier than the outbreak of the war, but ultimately found none and included comics only from July 17th to September 30th. The databases had already split each day's newspaper into categories of the kind of materials in them, meaning I could search exclusively for the editorial cartoons in each paper. I read every cartoon classified as an editorial cartoon in that period for each newspaper. I saved every cartoon that mentioned the Spanish Civil War or Spain, as well a few cartoons on different subjects that provided further context on the period dealing with international events, politics, and perceptions of political ideologies.

The "Primary Sources Referenced" contains all of the cartoons that reference Spain or the Spanish Civil War found, as well as some that provided useful context. Though my analysis drew some inspiration from looking through all the editorial cartoons in my chosen period, the number of contextual cartoons referenced is admittedly limited to a few. Of course, there are more editorial cartoons in the period of July 17th, 1936 – September 30th, 1936 than are referenced in this thesis that could add to an understanding of cartooning and

its depictions of international events in this period, but it is beyond the scope of this project to fully catalog and examine them. A future project may be to examine a broader selection of editorial cartoons in this period. Additionally, author names on some cartoons were difficult to read, so they are left without them in the references.

II. EXHIBIT DESIGN

Selection of Space

The space I have chosen to present my exhibition is in the Taylor-Murphy building. There are two glass cases within the Taylor-Murphy building that I will be using. The usage of these glass cases has been secured through my thesis supervisor. I have chosen them for this ease of acquisition and for their central place within a public building where many students and faculty pass through. I hope to reach as many people as possible through this space, so the target audience is broad.

Poster Stand and Advertising

Because the Taylor-Murphy display cases are not immediately visible from the front entrance, I will acquire a poster stand to set in a place that is visible as someone enters the front doors. The poster stand will preferably be within the range 36 – 67 inches tall, as the average height of adult American women and men are close to this range.⁵ Moreover, it is important to keep panels low enough for people with disabilities.⁶ This will serve the purpose of catching people's attention, directing them to the cases on the right, and displaying the title panel. The title panel will include a large, attention-grabbing print of a

⁵ "FastStats - Body Measurements," Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, May 3, 2017), <https://www.cdc.gov/nchs/fastats/body-measurements.htm>.

⁶ Billie Bailey, Janice Hall, Sheila Hanke, Frank McKinney, Jennie Morgan-Bailey, Pete Sixbey, Jerome Thompson, and Michael Vogt, *The Field Guide for Museums*, (the State Historical Society of Iowa, 2004), 34.

cartoon from my research, the title, the location of the exhibit, the dates it will be presented, and an arrow pointing viewers to the exhibit to the right. It will be similar to what the J. Paul Getty Museum's *Complete Guide to Adult Audience Interpretative Materials* calls the "the branding title," which is the title of the exhibit combined with a significant graphic that introduces a viewer to the exhibit.⁷ As the J. Paul Getty Museum suggests using the same design for the title panel and advertising, I will use the design of the branding title in advertising flyers around the Taylor-Murphy building and campus if permitted. The consistency in outward presentation offered by placing flyers that match the title panel will allow people to easily identify and find the exhibit, which could be hard to find otherwise.

Organization of Materials Within the Cases

The organization of the materials within the cases will be challenging due to the limited space within the cases and the limitation of there being two of them. This limitation will be overcome by keeping the size of the exhibit materials small and the text short, but experimentation with various sizes of the materials will be undertaken to maximize and optimize attractiveness of the images shown, readability of text, quality of text, and the quantity of material that will be depicted. The case is also divided into two sections, consisting of primarily vertical space. This means the presentation of information will necessarily need to be read from up and down.

The general organization of the labels and images within each case will be fairly simple. I will utilize the *Field Guide for Museums* for the terminology regarding labels, which are simply informational markers that further explain museum objects. Secondary

⁷ Charissa Bremer-David, Catherine Comeau, Clare Kunny, Elizabeth Morrison, Merritt Price, David Saunders, Toby Tannenbaum, and Davina Wolter, *Complete Guide to Adult Audience Interpretative Materials: Gallery Texts and Graphics*, (J. Paul Getty Museum, 2011), 9.

labels provide information and history about an object and identification labels provide the basic details about an object.⁸ For each section, a label will be placed at the beginning of that section that identifies the theme of that section. Following that label, there will be a succession of the following format down the vertical column of space: A picture of a cartoon depicting the Spanish Civil War will be presented. Next to the cartoon will be an identification label necessary to keep track of the basic date and title of the cartoon. Under the identification label and next to the cartoon there will be a secondary label. This design is meant to make the identification label and secondary label symmetrical with the cartoon panel. This format will be continued in the next column of vertical space within the case. The viewer will read each cartoon down from the section label and then start back at the top of the second column, or the viewer's gaze can dart around to various cartoons that appeal to them within the case. Each cartoon's analysis will not be cumulative of the preceding cartoon's analysis. Thus, a passing viewer could conceivably read one or two cartoons and their accompanying labels before moving on and still understand the analysis.

Though each section of the case will discuss a different theme within the wider subject of cartoons depicting the Spanish Civil War, each will keep to the format laid about above. The overarching goal of engaging the casual viewer in my research without presenting overcomplicated information will be aided by the lack of any cumulative effect within the organization of the materials.

Sizing of Materials

As for sizing of the materials, it will depend on the case measurements. Each compartment of the case is approximately 32 inches in width and 45 inches in height. Three

⁸ Billie Bailey, Janice Hall, Sheila Hanke, Frank McKinney, Jennie Morgan-Bailey, Pete Sixbey, Jerome Thompson, and Michael Vogt, *The Field Guide for Museums*, 34.

cartoons will be on a print 8.5 inches in width and 10 inches in height, including “The Victim,” “Will You Walk Into My Parlor?,” and “Placing the Bets.” Each secondary label will be two prints 8.5 inches in width and 7 inches in height. Each identification label will be on a print be 3.5 inches in width and 2 inches in height. Some cartoons are closer to squares and will be on prints 11 inches in width and 10 inches in height. These include “The Marx ‘Brothers’,” “Under Two Flags,” and “Raising Some Trouble Of Our Own.”

The identification label and the secondary label will be lined up with each other with one inch between them vertically and 3.5 inches from the right side of the case. When lined up parallel to the cartoon panel, the cartoon panel will be 3.5 inches from the labels and 3.5 inches from the left side of the case. In the instances where the cartoon is 11 inches in width, the measurements that are 3.5 above will be 2.67 inches. This will lead to an effect where each cartoon and its accompanying labels will make a rectangle that is 32 inches in width and 10 inches in height. There will be an inch between each rectangular cartoon unit vertically. At the beginning of every two rectangular cartoon units there a section label that is five inches in width and one-inch height introducing the theme of that section.

The left compartment of the case will vary somewhat, as it will begin with the introduction panel. The introduction panel will be in a larger font and be two prints 8.5 inches in width and 10 inches in height. Two inches to its left will be the thesis title in large font taking up space 13 inches in width and 10 inches in height.

Printing and Assembly of Materials

The cartoons will be printed at Texas State University’s Copy Cats printing service in the paper color 100# Dull White Coat Text. The labels will be printed from one of Texas

State University's standard printers. All materials will then be carefully trimmed of an excess paper and carefully applied to adhesive foamboard. The foamboard will then be carefully cut to fit the shape of each item. Each item will then be put in its proper place in the case through pins, or any another method approved by the Taylor-Murphy building.

Selection of Cartoons

After finding the cartoons, I then chose the cartoons to present in my exhibit case. My choice of cartoons was generally based on the following criteria: 1) Was it somewhat representational of a broader, repeated theme in the cartoons?; 2) Did it have its own interesting historical details regarding the Spanish Civil War and visual clichés?; 3) Was it visually striking?; and 4) Would a casual viewer find it interesting?. I then sorted the cartoons into sections based on themes. The themes are "Domestic Lens," "Evil Ideologies," and "European Intervention." Given the limited space, I chose to use two per theme.

III. CARTOONS, LABELS, AND PANELS

Exhibit Introduction Panel

"I could tell you, for example, that foreigners will turn this huge mess into stirring stories of bullfighters and gypsies."⁹ – from Joan Sales' *Uncertain Glory*

The Spanish Civil War erupted in 1936 when much of the nation's military rebelled against the Republic after January elections saw a leftist victory. Staggering inequality and societal divisions, years of simmering tensions, and growing outbreaks of violence between

⁹ Pete Ayrton, ed., *No Pasarán! Writings from the Spanish Civil War* (New York, NY: Serpents Tail, 2016), xiii.

the right and left culminated to in the Civil War, which left hundreds of thousands dead and Spain in the grip of Francisco Franco's fascist dictatorship.

Despite the war being a personal tragedy for Spain, it is, and was, often seen as an international conflict between the forces of communism and fascism and a steppingstone to a greater European war. This perception was solidified with the Spanish right receiving military support from fascist Italy and Nazi Germany and the left receiving backing from the Soviet Union, as well as the thousands of international volunteers who arrived in Spain. Contemporary observers often saw the Spanish Civil War as an overture to the greater showdown between the Soviet Union and Germany, or the rise of extreme ideologies globally.

In expressing their fears and uncertainties of this grim future, American newspapers commentated heavily on the "Spanish chaos." In the process, Americans used the dramatic, confusing, and diverse conflict as a toolbox from which they could build their own conception of current events, supporting their world views and politics. The political cartoons depicting the Spanish Civil War are a visceral representation of this process. In these images, military rebels were sometimes replaced almost entirely with Nazis. The democratically elected parliamentarians of the loyalist side were usually not included. Instead, the loyalist side was often portrayed as anarchist ruffians who brawled with Nazi thugs and destroyed Spain in the process. Both groups were sometimes depicted as essentially the same, or the whole war was simplified to just one big, nasty bullfight with apocalyptic consequences.

These cartoons repackaged the Spanish Civil War into something their distant readers could understand, playing to their fears of a world consumed by radical ideology.

While cartoons are an unusual source to examine, they can give us insight into the way many Americans might have perceived the Spanish War. By combining making current events funny, cartoons often drew readers from all backgrounds; they show us how the American media portrayed the war to average Americans. Through this exhibit, a selection of these cartoons is presented. They show that international problems are too often seen through an undiscerning and thick domestic lens.

Cartoons and Labels

Domestic Lens

“The Marx ‘Brothers’”¹⁰



¹⁰ Joseph Parrish, "Editorial Cartoon 2 -- no Title," *Chicago Daily Tribune* (1923-1963) (Chicago, Ill), Sep. 13, 1936, <http://libproxy.txstate.edu/login?url=https://search-proquest-com.libproxy.txstate.edu/docview/181834347?accountid=5683>.

Identification Label

“The Marx ‘Brothers’”

September 13th, 1936. Published in *Chicago Daily Tribune*.

Joseph Parrish

Secondary Label

Given the title, the comic insinuates that the three European countries are in a brotherhood or alliance of Marxist countries. By claiming Spain is in a family with other leftist countries, directly connected to Marx, the author lumps Spain in with those countries without consideration of its unique case. The author appeals to American anti-communist fears by constructing an unrealistic communist conspiracy amongst any countries with a loose connection to the ideology. The three countries are depicted as ugly by their rough beards and long noses. Their clothes are unpolished and simple compared to Uncle Sam’s suit, with Spain wearing what appears to be a serape, crooked hat, rifle, and perhaps a bandolier. This gives Spain an old-fashioned and violent look consistent with many caricatures of the country and soldiers in the Spanish Civil War. The ‘armed bandit’ caricature of Spain is the only symbol separating it from other communist bogeymen.

Uncle Sam is alarmed and confused at this proposal, while a bug-eyed little man in college graduation apparel grins the same grin up at him. This little man likely represents President Franklin Roosevelt or the New Deal as a whole. In a number of comics in the *Chicago Daily Tribune*, graduation apparel was a visual cliché associated with Roosevelt and the New Deal.^{11 12} While this cartoon has little to do with the Spanish Civil War itself,

¹¹ “Editorial Cartoon 3 -- no Title,” *Chicago Daily Tribune (1923-1963)* (Chicago, Ill), Sep 03, 1936, <http://libproxy.txstate.edu/login?url=https://search-proquest-com.libproxy.txstate.edu/docview/181828551?accountid=5683>.

¹² Casey Orr, “Editorial Cartoon 1 -- no Title,” *Chicago Daily Tribune (1923-1963)* (Chicago, Ill), Sep 05, 1936, <http://libproxy.txstate.edu/login?url=https://search-proquest-com.libproxy.txstate.edu/docview/181843882?accountid=5683>.

it is a good example of American cartoonists using the situation in Spain to comment on political issues at home, equating Roosevelt and the New Deal with communism in Spain. Cartoonists were often conservatives in this era and attacked the New Deal and communism abroad frequently.^{13 14} The cartoon implies that America will become as vile as the personification of Spain, Russia, and France if Roosevelt is elected in November.

This cartoon was created by Joseph Parrish (1905-1989), a lifelong cartoonist. He was the son of Tennessean coal miner but decided to become a cartoonist in high school. After some years drawing for Tennessean newspapers, he went to work for the *Chicago Daily Tribune* in 1936 until his retirement in 1970, and he was the chief editorial cartoonist from 1963 to 1970. He was particularly well known for his “Nature Notes” cartoon series, which educated readers about nature and were accompanied by colorful drawings.¹⁵

¹³ Stephen Hess and Sandy Northrop, *American Political Cartoons: The Evolution of a National Identity, 1754-2010* (Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2017), 94.

¹⁴ Stephen Hess and Milton Kaplan, *The Ungentlemanly Art: A History of American Political Cartoons* (New York: Macmillan, 1975), 151.

¹⁵ Barbara Joyce, “Cartoonist Joe Parrish,” Winnetka Historical Society, 1995, <https://www.winnetkahistory.org/gazette/cartoonist-joe-parrish/>.



¹⁶ Joseph Parrish, "Editorial Cartoon 2 -- no Title," *Chicago Daily Tribune* (1923-1963) (Chicago, Ill), Aug. 08, 1936, <http://libproxy.txstate.edu/login?url=https://search-proquest-com.libproxy.txstate.edu/docview/181817999?accountid=5683>.

Identification Label

“Raising Some Trouble of Our Own”

August 8th, 1936. Published in *Chicago Daily Tribune*.

Joseph Parrish

Secondary Label

In this cartoon, Uncle Sam looks on curiously from the United States at Spain where an old-fashioned warrior fights a bull labelled “Radical Gov’t”. A helpful sign in the ocean explains that this conflict is the “Rightists’ effort to stop the red scourge” and clouds labelled “bloodshed” and “turmoil” rise from the fight. All the while, Uncle Sam ominously feeds a calf named “Radical Sentiment” with “the fostering of New Deal policies,” foreboding a grown up, radical threat in America’s future.

Bullfighting is a common symbol of Spanish culture to foreigners and is often used in visual clichés of Spain. To foreigners, bullfighting is often seen as romantic and quintessentially Spanish. By associating the destructive bull with the leftist government, the artist disregards that it was democratically elected and attacked by the “Rightists” in an attempted coup that led to the Spanish Civil War. Bitter political violence is simplified to a simplified image of a Spanish custom. And by being identified as a noble bullfighter fending off the beast of the communist government, the fascists are presented as valiant heroes. This cartoon also shows that the Spanish Civil War was used to comment on politics at home. The conflict is used to criticize the New Deal by saying that it is food for the same violent, communist beast that could rise in America and start a war like the one in Spain. Despite their crimes, the fascists are then depicted as a model to look to for resistance against radical government.

Evil Ideologies

“The Victim”¹⁷



THE VICTIM.
Spain—“Whichever wins, my agony endures!”

© Punch.

¹⁷ Bernard Partridge, “Editorial Cartoon 1 -- no Title,” <http://libproxy.txstate.edu/login?url=https://search-proquest-com.libproxy.txstate.edu/docview/101762304?accountid=5683>.

Identification Label

“THE VICTIM”

August 23rd, 1936. Printed in *New York Times*, but originally published in *Punch*.

John Bernard Partridge

Secondary Label

In this cartoon, communism and fascism are represented by two equally poorly dressed and swarthy men fighting with knives. These men are stereotypical bandits or brawlers, made more sinister looking to the readers of 1936 by their darkened skin. Behind them, the wild lines indicate a great fire or smoke. A distant burning town can be seen with smoke arising from it. Since the men are the main subject of the cartoon, it is likely meant to mean they are the cause of the disaster.

Because of their labels, communism and fascism are personified through those as violent ruffians. Given the men are similar in appearance, the message is likely that fascism and communism are equally dangerous and inherently violent. Casting Spain as a woman in danger draws on the cliché of women needing protection and being innocent, personifying the country of Spain as being an innocent victim of the conflict between the two ideologies. This cartoon takes the common viewpoint of many newspaper cartoonists that the war in Spain is between the equally evil communists and fascists, with little consideration for the fascist military coup triggering the conflict or the democratic fighters in the war.

This cartoon was created by British cartoonist Bernard Partridge (1861-1945). He worked in several different art formats in his career besides political cartoons, including

painting church interiors and acting. He came from a well-connected family and was knighted in 1925.¹⁸

¹⁸ “Bernard Partridge,” British Cartoon Archive, accessed March 30, 2020, <https://www.cartoons.ac.uk/cartoonist-biographies/o-p/BernardPartridge.html>.

“Under Two Flags”¹⁹



Under Two Flags

¹⁹ “Editorial Cartoon 1 -- no Title.” *New York Times (1923-Current File)* (New York, N.Y.), Aug. 09, 1936, <http://libproxy.txstate.edu/login?url=https://search-proquest-com.libproxy.txstate.edu/docview/101801534?accountid=5683>.

Identification Label

“Under Two Flags”

August 9th, 1936. Published in *New York Times*.

Unknown Artist

Secondary Label

This cartoon is simple and striking against a mostly white background. The long lines sweeping away from the blackened city gives the impression of the city burning and smoking. The giant man wears basic clothing and a bandanna, marking him as a bandit or working man. His face is dark, hairy, ugly, and has a wild eyed, scowling expression. He waves a flag labelled with the ideologies associated with both sides of the war, fascism and leftist thought.

This cartoon exemplifies the common cliché that both sides and ideologies were equally evil without further inspection. The giant bandit labelled “POLITICAL MADNESS” is meant to be detested by readers. Besides his ugliness and violent nature, he is negatively racialized through his hunched over, apish posture and dark, hairy skin. Even with white characters like this one, some cartoonists used negative visual stereotypes associated with black people to indicate the character as subhuman and barbaric. By having a figure such as this hold the flags of these ideologies and step all over Spain, the artist is claiming the ideologies and their followers to be subhuman and destructive. A subhuman and hairy bandit is a common visual cliché to represent soldiers of both sides but was especially associated with militant anarchists. They were an active group on the Republican side during the Civil War. However, it is an oversimplification to lump the diverse group of “leftists” on the side of the Republic in with them. Even the military rebels and their civilian allies on the side of “fascism” did not all agree on their political goals.

European Intervention

“Will You Walk Into My Parlor?”²⁰



“Will You Walk Into My Parlor?”

²⁰ Henry Eugene Elderman, “Editorial Cartoon 1 -- no Title,” *The Washington Post* (1923-1954) (Washington, D.C.), Aug. 05, 1936, <http://libproxy.txstate.edu/login?url=https://search-proquest-com.libproxy.txstate.edu/docview/150823621?accountid=5683>.

Identification Label

“Will You Walk Into My Parlor?”

August 5th, 1936. Published in *Washington Post*.

Henry Eugene Elderman

Secondary Label

This cartoon is a reference to the children’s poem *The Spider and the Fly*. In the poem, a spider lures a fly to its death with compliments and comments about how nice the spider’s web is. In this version, a spider wearing a roman helmet named “European Chaos” is shrouded in darkness and looks out upon flies named after various European countries. He sits on a web titled “SPANISH WAR” in a large, sinister font.

The spider and its web are a curious mixing of imagery. The spider’s Roman helmet associates it with the image of a war-hungry Roman Empire or Mars, the Roman god of war. Rather than being a direct comment on the Roman Empire, the symbol of the Roman helmet is just visual shorthand for war and warmongering. This indicates that war would be a part of the vague “European Chaos” that could occur. Though by making “European Chaos” a spider with creepy black eyes looming over the cartoon, it is made into a predatory and close threat rather than a vague idea of chaos. A force of nature that will capture the European countries, which are shown to be metaphorically vulnerable as hapless flies to a spider. The web of the Spanish Civil War draws them into to be consumed by war.

This likely represents the fear that intervention in the Spanish Civil War would lead to a wider war, as well as an American distaste for foreign conflicts especially after the First World War.²¹ This cartoon also looks down on the European powers, who it sees as

²¹ Michael Alpert, *A New International History of the Spanish Civil War*, 2nd ed. (Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 109.

hapless enough to stumble into a deadly trap. The threat of the Spanish Civil War to European countries is so magnified by this author that Italy, Germany, and Russia, who are commonly objects of fear and ridicule in political cartoons, are made small.

This cartoon was created by Henry Eugene Elderman (1910-1963), a cartoonist and animator. He became the editorial cartoonist for the *Washington Post* in 1932 but became unreliable in his work and was fired in 1942.²² Still, his cartoons were widely reprinted, and he was a runner-up for the Pulitzer Prize in Editorial Cartooning in 1936.²³ He would go on to create cartoons for the army's *Victory* magazine during World War II.

²² "Elderman, Gene (1910 - 1963)," The Political Cartoon Archive, accessed March 30, 2020, <http://www.politicalcartoon.co.uk/cartoon-gallery/artists/elderman-gene-1910-1963/?c=usa-cartoons>.

²³ Heinz-Dietrich Fischer, *Editorial Cartoon Awards 1922-1997: From Rollin Kirby and Edmund Duffy to Herbert Block and Paul Conrad* (München: Saur, 1999), XXIX.

“Placing The Bets”²⁴



Placing The Bets.

²⁴ Henry Eugene Elderman, “Editorial Cartoon 1 -- no Title,” *The Washington Post* (1923-1954) (Washington, D.C.), Jul. 29, 1936, <http://libproxy.txstate.edu/login?url=https://search-proquest-com.libproxy.txstate.edu/docview/150837693?accountid=5683>.

Identification Label

“Placing The Bets”

July 29th, 1936. Published in the *Washington Post*.

Henry Eugene Elderman

Secondary Label

Personifications of the powers stand around betting on their choice of ideology at a horse race. Germany, Italy, and Russia are betting enthusiastically on their choices, shaking stacks of money around to emphasize their excitement. Hitler even says, “Shoot Th’ works on number two!,” a phrase meaning to spend all one’s money or effort on something.²⁵ Democracy is scratched out, however, leaving Britain and France confused of what to do with their #3 tickets. Though it depicts Britain and France’s perspective, this is still an American comic. It likely represents of the view that the Spanish Civil War between detestable communists and fascists with nothing democratic, or just ‘American’, to get behind.²⁶ Britain and France’s supposed confusion is equivalent to America’s confusion.

In this cartoon, the bets likely represent support to a side of the war in terms of money, weapons, or some other support. While an exaggeration, this cartoon imagines an unrealistic, enthusiastic, and full investment into the conflict by Russia and the fascist countries early in the conflict. In truth, support from Italy, Germany, and Russia was secretive, only just beginning, or still ambivalently waiting in late July when this cartoon was published.²⁷ It is true that later in the war foreign aid from the fascist powers and Russia became essential to both sides, but this cartoon still exaggerates how much was

²⁵ “Shoot The Works: Definition in the Cambridge English Dictionary,” Cambridge Dictionary, accessed March 27th, 2020, <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/us/dictionary/english/shoot-the-works>.

²⁶ Mark Falcoff and Fredrick Braun. Pike, *The Spanish Civil War: 1936-1939: American Hemispheric Perspectives* (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 1982), 27.

²⁷ Michael Alpert, *A New International History of the Spanish Civil War*, 29-31, 37-38, 49-50.

“bet” on Spain by the time of its publication.²⁸ This indicates the cartoonist was looking at the conflict from a highly international view, amplifying the role of the foreign superpowers in the war to present a scarier picture of the conflict. The Spanish Civil War is understood through American anxieties surrounding Soviet Russia and the fascist powers in this cartoon.

²⁸ Helen Graham, *The Spanish Civil War: A Very Short Introduction* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 39-41.

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APPENDIX

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THE FUNNIES OF AUGUST

AMERICAN EDITORIAL CARTOONS IN THE
OPENING MONTHS OF THE SPANISH CIVIL WAR
A CASE EXHIBIT IN
THE TAYLOR-MURPHY BUILDING BY ROOM 101

APPENDIX B: TITLE PANEL



THE FUNNIES OF AUGUST

AMERICAN EDITORIAL CARTOONS IN THE
OPENING MONTHS OF THE SPANISH CIVIL WAR

