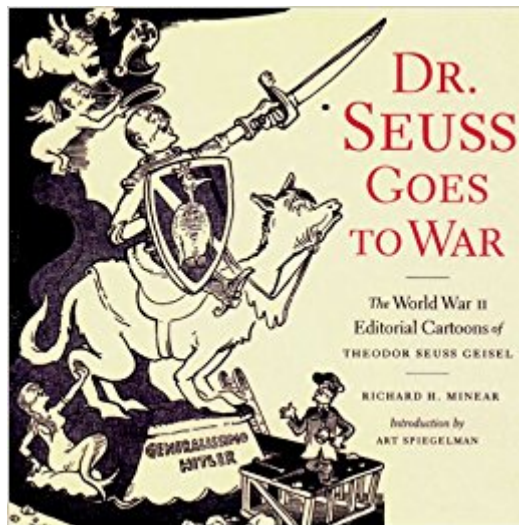


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# Dr. Seuss Goes To War: The World War II Editorial Cartoons Of Theodor Seuss Geisel



## Synopsis

A treasure trove of World War II-era political cartoons by the creator of *The Cat in the Hat*. For decades, readers throughout the world have enjoyed the wonderful stories and illustrations of Theodor Seuss Geisel, better known as Dr. Seuss. But few know Geisel's work as a political cartoonist for the New York daily newspaper *PM* during World War II. In these trenchant cartoons, Geisel captured the Zeitgeist--especially the attitudes of the New Deal liberals who read *PM*--with signature Seussian flair. *Dr. Seuss Goes to War* features handsome, large-format reproductions of almost 200 of the best of Geisel's cartoons from this time. The cartoons savage Hitler, Japan, Stalin, Mussolini, and "isolationist" leaders such as Charles Lindbergh. They exhort readers to give full support to the war effort, put up with shortages, buy U. S. savings bonds, and help control inflation. They are sharply critical of anti-Semitism and anti-black racism--and, shockingly, undeniably racist in their portrayal of Japanese Americans. An introduction and commentary by Richard H. Minear, historian of the era and author of *Victors' Justice*, place them in context and illuminate the national climate they reflect. Lovers of Dr. Seuss will take renewed delight in his whimsical and imaginative illustrations even as they may be disturbed by the attitudes reflected in some of his work. Those for whom World War II is an abiding passion will find a brand-new look at the war and American involvement. And those concerned with American attitudes--particularly in the press--will find that Dr. Seuss's cartoons of 1941 and 1942 bring back to life the mood and the issues of the day.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Before Yertle, before the Cat in the Hat, before Little Cindy-Lou Who (but after Mulberry Street), Dr. Seuss (Theodor Geisel) made his living as a political cartoonist for New York newspaper PM. Seuss drew over 400 cartoons in just under two years for the paper, reflecting the daily's New Deal liberal slant. Starting in early 1941, when PM advocated American involvement in World War II, Seuss savaged the fascists with cunning caricatures. He also turned his pen against America's internal enemies--isolationists, hoarders, complainers, anti-Semites, and anti-black racists--and urged Americans to work together to win the war. The cartoons are often funny, peopled with bowler-hatted "everymen" and what author Art Spiegelman calls "Seussian fauna" in his preface. They are also often very disturbing--Seuss draws brutally racist images of the Japanese and even attacks Japanese Americans on numerous occasions. Perhaps most disturbing is the realization that Seuss was just reflecting the wartime zeitgeist. Dr. Seuss Goes to War marks the first time most of these illustrations have appeared in print since they were first published. Richard H. Minear's introduction and explanatory chapters contextualize the 200 editorial cartoons (some of whose nuances might otherwise be lost on the modern reader). Those who grew up on Seuss will enjoy early glimpses of his later work; history buffs will enjoy this new--if playful and contorted--angle on World War II. --Sunny Delaney

Few fans of Dr. Seuss's whimsy are likely to be aware that before authoring *The Cat in the Hat* Theodor Seuss Geisel penned editorial cartoons for the New York daily PM. This new collection presents approximately half the newspaper cartoons that Geisel drafted for the pro-New Deal paper from the start of 1941 (when his main targets were the isolationists who opposed U.S. intervention in European and Asian affairs) until 1943 (when he accepted a commission in the U.S. Army). Minear (history, Univ. of Massachusetts) has done a fine job of selecting, arranging in thematic order, and providing historical commentary for these cartoons, which are full of Geisel's expected visual wit; seeing the early development of his eccentric animal menagerie is a special treat. As Art Spiegelman notes in his introduction, Geisel's Uncle Sam seems to have been practice for what would become the Cat in the Hat. "The prototype for the cat's famous headgear is actually...Uncle Sam's red-and-white-striped top hat! The Cat in the Hat is America!" writes Spiegelman. Recommended for larger libraries. AKent Worcester, Marymount Manhattan Coll., New York Copyright 1999 Reed Business Information, Inc.

The book is a collection of cartoons by Theodore "Dr. Seuss" Geisel in the period up to and just following the US entry in to WWII in December of 1941. Full page versions of the cartoons are

accompanied by a detailed commentary by Richard Minear, retired professor of history at UMass Amherst. It's an intriguing collection, demonstrating many of the styles and characters that Seuss developed in his children's books (he had already published several, like "To Think That I Saw It On Mulberry Street," "The 500 Hats of Bartholomew Cubbins," "Horton Hatches the Egg," and "The Seven Lady Godivas"), and a more pointed and political kind of commentary that informed his later work but was much less vocal. Well worth a look for (adult) fans of Dr. Seuss who also have an interest in history and the WWII era.

Like most people, I grew up reading Dr. Seuss books and I read them to my kids. It's odd to see the familiar drawings dealing with such grim material, but it gave me a better idea how he became such a wise author and why so many of his stories have that evil-gets-you-no-where theme. All wars are terrible, but WWII will always stand out as one of the most tragic and evil chapters in human history and this author saw it all and understood it. This book gave me a greater understanding of how badly Dr. Seuss wanted to teach very young children how to get along, be fair, overlook differences and just learn to live and accept other so that there will be no more wars, no more discrimination. The social messages of *The Sneetches*, *Yertle the Turtle*, *The Lorax*, *Horton Hears a Who*, etc. now mean so much more to me. I am looking forward to being a grandmother so that I can read these stories again...And this time give deeper and very different answers to what it all means.

The Dr. Seuss known to children in his later career, is said to have regretted much of his depictions of the Japanese and sometimes of the Germans in his "Goes to War" book, but it is a lesson in sociology and the consciousness, the anger, the justified paranoid stance, in America and environs during WWII. He helped gather energy from the bewildered masses of America to help the War Effort and although he may have regretted his passionate and powerful cartoons of the war years, we needed his way of reaching the hearts, minds, and the pocketbooks of citizens here in order to help coalesce the ultimate reported 72% of Americans who totally gave themselves to winning the war. We should be grateful for the likes of this patriot, Dr. Theodore Seuss Geisel. Chris/Sancho

Theodore Seuss Geisel working as Dr. Seuss created 400 editorial cartoons for PM, the short-lived "popular front" (read radical) New York City daily newspaper from January, 1941 to January 1943. This authoritatively annotated selection of 210 examples culled from the paper's archives by University of Massachusetts History Professor Richard H. Minear follows Geisel's work as he made the case for U.S. entry into the war against the Axis, and, once the war started, as he called for its

the all-out support. In his introduction, Art Spiegelman, our foremost editorial cartoon critic, writes that "In some happier alternate universe...Dr. Seuss [would have been] awarded a Pulitzer Prize for his anti-Fascist PM cartoons." Others have compared Geisel's WW II work to that of Herblock in this country and to that of David Low in Britain. For much of the period, Geisel's cartoons appeared every day, sometimes twice. Minear concluded that, with one or two possible exceptions, Geisel always came up with his own ideas, a luxury he was afforded by PM's editor Ralph Ingersol whose editorial stance -- "[w]e are against people who push other people around" -- suited Geisel just fine. He took on the America Firsters, isolationists, profiteers, slackers, anti-Semites, and the military's Jim Crow practices as well as Hitler, the Japanese leaders, and Mussolini. The artwork got better as it went along and the creatures he created would, in some cases, show up years later in his children's book work. To summarize, Geisel's record as an editorial cartoonist would, by itself, assure him a hallowed place in the history of American journalism. That we have largely overlooked it is a function, not of its lack of significance, but of the weight and importance of his work as a children's book author and illustrator. WW II is history, our need to raise children who can read well will always be with us. Fortunately, "The Cat in the Hat" and "Horton The Who" and all of the other wonderful Dr. Seuss books are there to help us. End note: For more on Geisel, see the reviews (including mine) of "Theodore SEUSS Geisel" by Donald E. Pease in the Oxford University Press "Lives and Legacies" series (2010). Art Spiegelman's introduction also ran as a "Notebook" piece in the New Yorker under the title I have borrowed for this review.

Before he was the groundbreaking children's author, just about when he first thought that he saw it on Mulberry Street, Dr. Seuss was a biting political cartoonist, crusading for American involvement in World War II. Who knew? Not me, that's for sure. His political cartoons are collected and accompanied with a very thorough annotation by a worthy historian. So there are lots of levels. First, there is the buzzing pleasure of seeing drawings so patently Seussical, railing against Hitler and American isolationists. That buzz never really faded for me throughout the book. Second, there is the extraordinary "prequel" window on the illustrator who is in the fabric of our lives. There are the equivalents of grinch and sneeches in political cartoons! there's the Cat in the Hat's Hat, but it is signifying Uncle Sam! Extraordinary. Third, there is a peek into a different political time: the liberals are the hawks; the courageous condemners of fascism and anti-semitism are also the promoters of overtly racist depictions of Japanese and Japanese-Americans. Finally, you can browse the cartoons casually, examine them systematically, or learn the micro, day-by-day developments in the lead up to World War II detailed in the annotations (many references in the drawings will be lost on

the contemporary reader without these explanations). In this last, the book is a great, accessible, history text.

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