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*Caricatures on American Historical
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- 1 Heinz-Dietrich Fischer, editor. *Caricatures on American Historical Phases 1918 - 2018: Pulitzer Prize Winning Editorial Cartoons from Wilson to Trump*
- 2 Lit Verlag GmbH & Co. KG Wien, 2019. Pp. 216. ISBN: 978-3-643-91154-4
- 3 Joseph Michael Gratale, The American College of Thessaloniki
- 4 The first sentence in John Berger's book titled *Ways of Seeing*, the author states the following: "Seeing comes before words." Although Berger's book was first published over forty years ago, his book's opening sentence still resonates in many parts of our visually fixated world today. For the past quarter of a century, visuality has become more and more pervasive and embedded in our cultural practices. By visuality, I am referring to the manifold mediums, repertoires, and forms of visual culture from TV, film, photography, video games, and advertising to the computers, tablets, cell phones, and the internet which facilitate the production, circulation, and consumption of images. Despite the proliferation of digital culture it is heartening to note that the political cartoon as a genre of political discourse, has not only survived but remains an important form of not only visual expression but also political critique and satire. This could not be more apparent in this edited volume by Heinz-Dietrich Fischer of Pulitzer Prize-winning editorial cartoons. Topical coverage of US political and social developments is vast and includes the realms of domestic and foreign policy. In terms of chronology, the volume begins at the end of World War One in 1918 and spans to 2018 and the presidency of Donald Trump. For every cartoon, Fischer ideally provides

important historical context, background information, and an analysis of each cartoon. In total, the volume includes fifty-two cartoons.

- 5 One of the great achievements in US political history dates back to the late 1700s when the Bill of Rights, the first 10 amendments to the US Constitution, was ratified by the Congress. Among those ten amendments are references to individual freedoms and rights, the limitations of the federal government, as well explanations about judicial processes. Interestingly enough, the first amendment refers to freedom of speech, which of course includes freedom of the press. An important benefit of living in a democratic society is this right of freedom of expression. It is by no means a universal right in the world we live today. Many non-democratic countries either limit journalistic freedom or impose stringent censorship controls. Equally disturbing are recent trends in democratic nation-states where freedom of the press is under assault. Sadly, this phenomenon has been largely spearheaded in the USA since the arrival of the Trump administration in 2017. It is a grim reminder of the vigilance that is required in a democratic society if its political rights are to be maintained and enjoyed by the populace.
- 6 This volume is an important reminder and testament of how journalistic and artistic freedoms, as guaranteed by the First Amendment, have been celebrated through political cartoons. It is interesting to observe how particular themes have been addressed decade after decade. This topical continuity reveals the persistent problems and challenges the US has been confronting throughout the twentieth century and into the twenty-first century. Such issues like war, political scandals, economic and social dislocations, political campaigns, and the theme of race are the key areas that cartoon artists have reflected on over the years. In the decade of the 1920s, for example, the US witnessed the resurgence of the Ku Klux Klan. The cartoonist Rollin Kirby addressed the Klan's activities in a series of cartoons in 1921, literally focusing the spotlight on this hate groups' activities and practices against, African-Americans, Jews, and Catholics. Focus in the 1930 shifted toward the misery that masses of Americans were experiencing due to the onset of the Great Depression. Images of the unemployed presented the new realities of hardship Americans faced, replacing the upbeat atmosphere of the preceding decade. The struggles associated with racial integration in the American South and the calamities part of America's war in Vietnam dominate the socio-political landscape of the US at mid-century and are taken up by cartoonists Paul F. Conrad and Eugene G. Payne respectively. For example, in 1970 Conrad drew a cartoon which was highly critical of the Nixon administration's military operations in Cambodia in which the president is depicted as a surgeon whose "patient" has died, with President Nixon literally covered in blood.
- 7 The topic of political scandals has been of long-standing appeal to cartoonists throughout the twentieth century. Watergate, the Iran-Contra Scandal, and President Clinton and Monica Lewinsky's sex affair were key issues of political discourse in the last quarter of the century. Such cases, though dissimilar in their constitutions, reveal the problems of the US political system as it relates to the office of the presidency and the excesses of the executive branch of government. This facet of executive leadership, or lack thereof, could not be more pertinent today. Thankfully, cartoonists continue to take to their pens to engage with a range of issues that are impacting on the social, cultural and political fabric of the country. Darrin Bell's 2018 cartoon depicting President Trump removing one hat from his head, inscribed with the phrase: Make

America Great Again, only to be wearing another hat underneath which reads: Make College White Again. Bell was referring to Trump policy actions that “reversed an Obama-era policy that urged universities to consider race as a factor in admissions” (208). It is poignant expressions such as this that make the art of political cartoons and their journalistic qualities so invaluable in our current age.

- 8 As one goes through this volume of political cartoons, it is a troubling reminder of the great challenges the US has faced historically in terms of race, gender, foreign policy, economic inequalities, and political scandals. The fact that such issues and problems continue to persist should make us mindful of how our efforts need to be multiplied in order to overcome such challenges. Equally important is the necessity of upholding the rights and freedoms of citizens, including freedom of the press and expression which is enshrined in the very first amendment of the US Constitution. For these reasons and more, this volume by Heinz-Dietrich Fischer, is an invaluable contribution to the genre of political cartoons and discourse as well as an important celebration of the right to freedom of expression.