Bernard Kassoy’s McCarthy-Era Political Cartoons in the New York Teacher News

Barb Morley, Digital Archivist,
Kheel Center for Labor-Management Documentation and Archives, Cornell University
Source: Kheel Center, Cornell University
Source: Kheel Center, Cornell University
Source: Kheel Center, Cornell University
Source: Sheila Kassoy Krstevski
Source: http://www.amalgamated-bronx.coop/gallerybkassoy.html
Source: http://www.biddingtons.com/os/itemhtml/ht501363.shtml
Source: http://www.times-herald.com/local/WPA-art-on-display-at-UWG-s-Bobick-Gallery-through-Friday--1931427
Source: Kheel Center, Cornell University
1916 - Organized as Teachers Union of the City of New York, Local 5, affiliated with the American Federation of Teachers

1918 – TU welcomed African Americans as full members

1928 – TU called for the curriculum to include the social, political and economic contributions of African Americans

1932 – School Board cuts teacher salaries

1941 – TU charter revoked by the AFT, they re-affiliated with United Public Workers of America (CIO) as Teachers Union of New York City, Local 555

1950 – Board of Education Timone Resolution banned the Teachers Union from operating in the school, and the Board of Education refused to negotiate with them.

1950-1955 – 239 teachers and other Board employees forced out through dismissal, resignation, or retirement

1964 – Local 555 disbanded by member vote
1919 – **NY Lusk Law** required teachers to apply for certificates of loyalty and character, which could be revoked for unacceptable behavior.

1921 – NY introduced a **loyalty oath** for teachers and other public employees

1938 – **US House Un-American Activities Committee** holds closed-door hearings about ‘subversives’ in NYC public schools focusing on union members. School charter required that teachers cooperate with investigations

1940 - **NY Rapp-Coudert Committee** investigated ‘subversives’ in NYC schools and colleges. Accused not allowed legal counsel, right to cross examine witnesses, or transcripts of the proceedings

1949 – **NY Feinberg Law** made current Communist Party membership sufficient cause for dismissal. Teaching ability was not considered relevant. **City Charter Section 903** makes assertion of 5th Amendment rights cause for dismissal

1950 – **Korean War** revitalized civil defense concerns and Truman urged reinstatement of state loyalty oaths
Cartoonists

- Define significant people and events as subject matter
- Assert the their own interpretation of the facts
- Draw conclusions
- Select essential elements and encode representations using caricature, symbols, and succinct phrases

Reader Interpretation

- Subjects repeated over time – war, the economy, academic freedom, patriotism, civil rights, corruption – build the reader’s visual vocabulary
- Readers with detailed subject knowledge and analytical endurance are more successful interpreting the layers of information
Most Frequent 4 Topics, 1950-1956
Including multiple-subject cartoons

- Fair pay = 68
- Acad. Freedom = 53
- Board of Ed. = 47
- Buildings = 35
Source: Kheel Center, Cornell University
Bernard Kassoy. “Help for the mountain climber.” Pencil, pen, and ink on paper, Dec. 12, 1953
Source: Kheel Center, Cornell University
Bernard Kassoy. “And make sure we get it.”
Pencil, pen, and ink on paper, Jan. 21, 1950
Source: Kheel Center, Cornell University
Bernard Kassoy. “Not for us, pal. We have our pride.”
Pencil, pen, and ink on paper. Sept. 25, 1954
Source: Kheel Center, Cornell University
Bernard Kassoy. “Forbidden territory.” Pencil, pen, and ink on paper, February 14, 1953
Source: Kheel Center, Cornell University
Bernard Kassoy. “In protective custody.”
Pencil, pen, and ink on paper, Oct. 6, 1951
Source: Kheel Center, Cornell University
Bernard Kassoy. “No others need apply’ – the Mayor.” Pencil, pen, and ink on paper. May 17, 1952
Source: Kheel Center, Cornell University
Bernard Kassoy. “Supervisor into inquisitor.”
Pencil, pen, and ink on paper, March 15, 1952
Source: Kheel Center, Cornell University
Bernard Kassoy. “At least it’s a step forward.”
Pencil, pen, and ink on paper, April 5, 1952
Source: Kheel Center, Cornell University
Source: Kheel Center, Cornell University
Source: Kheel Center, Cornell University
Middle Frequency 3 Topics, 1950-1956
Including multiple-subject cartoons

1950: School funding=28, Workload=21, Teacher unity=19
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School Funding

Source: Kheel Center, Cornell University
Teacher Workload

Bernard Kassoy. “Achieve unity by September!”
Pencil, pen, and ink on paper. June 23, 1951
Source: Kheel Center, Cornell University
Source: Kheel Center, Cornell University
Bernard Kassoy. “No coercion?” Pencil, pen, and ink on paper, June 16, 1951
Source: Kheel Center, Cornell University
Teacher Unity

GOOD DEEDS IN '54:
T.U. DRIVE FOR
STAFF UNITY ON
COMPROMISE PAY PLAN
LEGISLATORS PRAISE T.U.
BUDGET BRIEFS
T.U. PRIMER FOR NEW TEACHERS
IN WIDE DEMAND
1600 AT RUSSELL TESTIMONIAL
DINNER... BUILD THE T.U.
PUERTO RICO SUPPLEMENT AND
JEWISH TERCENTENARY ISSUES,
OPEN-SCHOOL WEEK LEAFLET
REACH SCORES OF THOUSANDS
T.U. DEFENDS ACADEMIC
$16 IN PENSION GAINS


Source: Kheel Center, Cornell University
Least Represented 4 Topics, 1950-1956
Including multiple-subject cartoons

- War=10
- Student needs=9
- Cultural Diversity=8
- Substitutes=6
Source: Kheel Center, Cornell University
Bernard Kassoy. “Classroom intruder.” Pencil, pen, and ink on paper, November 24, 1951
Source: Kheel Center, Cornell University
Bernard Kassoy. “It’s later than you think.”
Pencil, pen, and ink on paper, March 25, 1950
Source: Kheel Center, Cornell University
Student Needs

Overcrowding
Low Salaries
Dilapidated Buildings
Inadequate Supplies
Delinquency
Worn-out Texts
Reading Defects
Delayed Entrance Age

Bernard Kasso. “Quiet! Board at work.” Pencil, pen, and ink on paper. Sept. 11, 1954

Source: Kheel Center, Cornell University
Source: Kheel Center, Cornell University
Cultural Diversity

Bernard Kassoy. “Another proud achievement.”
Pencil, pen, and ink on paper. Oct., 8, 1955
Source: Kheel Center, Cornell University


Source: Kheel Center, Cornell University
Bernard Kassoy. “A tree that must not grow in Brooklyn.” Pencil, pen, and ink on paper, Feb. 18, 1950
Source: Kheel Center, Cornell University
BD. of ED. TO RESIST DECISION GRANTING SICK PAY TO SUBS

NO TENURE

NO PENSION

LAYOFFS


Source: Kheel Center, Cornell University
Bernard Kassoy. “the most unkindest cut of all.”
Pencil, pen, and ink on paper, Jan. 19, 1952
Source: Kheel Center, Cornell University
Use and Management of Cartoon Collections

- Many researchers are not comfortable with graphic analysis so they are used as eye candy to garnish work based on text sources rather than as a source on which research is based.

- Knowledge of the issues and visual vocabulary may be lost over time and even contemporary readers may not understand the cartoon.

- Researchers and curators must develop a strong subject and period-related visual vocabulary.

- Difficult and expensive to implement metadata creation for visual materials to the degree needed for high rates of successful discovery.
Kassoy was clear in his critique of McCarthyesque investigations of ‘subversives’ and constraints on academic freedom. Why wasn’t he asked to testify about his affiliations and beliefs?

Why weren’t minorities featured in Kassoy’s cartoons more often, as they were in Teacher News?

Why didn’t he focus more attention on the struggles of substitute teachers?

Many of Kassoy’s cartoon captions or titles paralleled or quoted Teacher News headlines. What was his working relationship with the publication?
Thank you! Now... your thoughts?

Or, if you have questions or comments later, please feel free to contact me

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