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## Dr. Seuss and Uncle Sam

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## Dr. Seuss and Uncle Sam

### Abstract

This is an examination of the WWII era political cartoons of Theodor Geisel (aka Dr. Seuss), which covered a variety of topics ranging from isolationism to anti-Axis propaganda to racism and bigotry at home. The project further investigates the attitudes of German-Americans towards Hitler, using Geisel's very vocal hatred of the Nazi leader to compare his sentiments with many of his contemporary peers.

### Keywords

Political Cartoons, German-American Community, Anti-Isolationism, Dr. Seuss, Theodor Geisel

### Disciplines

Illustration | Military History | United States History

### Comments

Written for HIST 300: Historical Methods

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# **Dr. Seuss and Uncle Sam**

By Ziv Carmi

History 300, Dr. Isherwood

One of the most famous American children's authors, Dr. Seuss (the pseudonym of Theodor Geisel) is responsible for many classic and timeless stories. It is fair to say that most Americans know of the whimsical imagery and language within Geisel's picture books; however, far fewer know of his earlier career drawing political cartoons from 1941 to early 1943. Despite his upbringing in a German household, Geisel grew to hate fascism, particularly Nazism, and expressed his opinions through his art. In a series of over 400 political cartoons, Geisel vocalized his opinions on isolationism, anti-Semitic and racist bigotry, and fascism. Geisel particularly targeted the America First isolationist movement and anti-tolerance, both of which he believed were the domestic outlet of Nazism. Unlike some German-Americans at the time, Geisel was outspoken in his political views and his hatred of the Third Reich.

Born in Springfield Massachusetts, Geisel grew up surrounded by a strong German presence. His paternal grandfather, the owner of the large Springfield Breweries company, had served in the cavalry during the Austro-Prussian War prior to his immigration to America and marriage to another German immigrant. On his maternal side, his grandparents had immigrated from Bavaria and founded the Turnverein, a gymnasium social club popular amongst Springfield's German-American community.<sup>1</sup> Despite the relatively small German-American community in Springfield, it was quite active; Geisel was raised regularly speaking German at home and participating in events at the Turnverein and Schützenverein riflery club, among other activities.<sup>2</sup> In other words, culturally, Geisel lived entrenched in German ways and beliefs, despite being a third generation American.

Geisel's connection with his German heritage might have largely contributed to his hatred of Hitler. Years before World War II began, in 1936, Geisel and his wife Helen embarked on a trip

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<sup>1</sup>Brian Jay Jones, *Becoming Dr. Seuss: Theodor Geisel and the Making of an American Imagination* (New York: Dutton, 2019), 5-6.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid, 12.

through a European continent on the brink of war. Biographer Brian Jay Jones writes that the omnipresent Nazi propaganda and presence throughout Germany, as well as the promotion of Hitler's racial ideals during the 1936 Olympics, unsettled Geisel.<sup>3</sup> Since Geisel was so connected to his German heritage, it is possible that he disliked seeing how his ancestral homeland had been transformed and blamed Hitler for turning it into an oppressive dictatorship.

Apprehensions about Hitler were felt across much of the German-American community. Like citizens of all backgrounds across the United States, many German-Americans found Nazism to be a vile ideology.<sup>4</sup> While some agreed with Hitler's promises to restore their native country, this was not always the case. Most German-Americans had assimilated into the more liberal American political culture and as such, did not particularly care for internal German politics.<sup>5</sup> As many stayed silent about Hitler due to apathy towards internal German politics, their indifference was often interpreted by others as complicit support. However, as Europe grew closer to war, German-Americans like Geisel began speaking out against the Nazi regime.<sup>6</sup> Indeed, by December 1941, anti-Nazi sentiments within the community were extremely high, resulting in about 1/3 of American troops during the Second World War being of German descent.<sup>7</sup>

Another possible reason for Geisel's hatred of Hitler could have been his desire to avoid another conflict that would incite a wave of anti-German hatred across America. During World War I, an adolescent Geisel was met with bigotry from his community. As he walked to school and back, other children taunted him as a "Drunken Kaiser" and shouted threats as they threw rocks and

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<sup>3</sup>Ibid, 108.

<sup>4</sup>Monica Forsthoefel, "The German-American Community during World War II," *Armstrong Undergraduate Journal of History* 10, no. 1 (April 2020):52,

<https://digitalcommons.georgiasouthern.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1088&context=aujh>

<sup>5</sup>Ibid; Michael Neiberg's *Path to War* discusses "Germanness" as perceived by German-Americans in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, particularly how they saw Prussianism and militarism as distinctive from the wider German culture.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid, 53.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid.

fragments of brick at him and his dog Rex.<sup>8</sup> Geisel later recounted that he “sometimes fled home with coals bouncing off [his] head.”<sup>9</sup> The abuse grew so bad that his sister Marnie became agoraphobic as a result.<sup>10</sup> This anti-German hatred swept across the United States, resulting in the vandalism of German-American homes and businesses, physical assaults on German-American citizens, and at least one lynching.<sup>11</sup>

Anti-German sentiments were perpetuated by prominent political figures, including former President Theodore Roosevelt, President Woodrow Wilson, and James Watson Gerard, Wilson’s ambassador to Germany. While the prejudice against German-Americans subsided following the 1918 armistice, biographer Donald Pease wrote that Geisel’s trip to Germany had “awakened painful memories of [his] family’s persecution,” suggesting that Geisel feared the animosity Americans felt towards Hitler would extend to German-American citizens.<sup>12</sup>

Whatever might have motivated his vehement sentiments against Hitler, Geisel began publicly criticizing the dictator after the fall of France in June 1940. As Geisel said years later, he was finishing his latest book, *Horton Hatches the Egg*, while listening to the news of Nazi tanks rolling into Paris. In his authorized biography, Judith and Neil Morgan write that Geisel said he “didn’t know how to end the book anyway so [he] began drawing savage cartoons [of Hitler].”<sup>13</sup> However, Geisel, always the storyteller, tended to embellish his memories for dramatic purposes—Jones notes that it was unlikely Geisel had not finished the book given that it was published five

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<sup>8</sup>Donald Pease, *Theodor Geisel: A Portrait of the Man Who Became Dr. Seuss* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 14.

<sup>9</sup>Jones, *Becoming*, 24.

<sup>10</sup>Pease, *Theodor Geisel*, 14.

<sup>11</sup>Library of Congress, “Shadows of War,” accessed April 20, 2021, <https://www.loc.gov/classroom-materials/immigration/german/shadows-of-war/>

<sup>12</sup>Pease, *Theodor Geisel*, 61.

<sup>13</sup>Judith and Neil Morgan, *Dr. Seuss & Mr. Geisel* (Boston: Da Capo Press, 1995), 98.

days after Paris fell.<sup>14</sup> Pease, also contradicting the account, wrote that a speech delivered that night by Senator Nye of North Dakota, a staunch isolationist, was what inspired Geisel to begin cartooning.<sup>15</sup> Despite the conflicting narratives behind Geisel's initial motivations, all three biographies agree that a friend, Virginia (Zinny) Vanderlip Schoales, introduced his work to Ralph Ingersoll, the owner and editor of *PM*, a progressive New York newspaper.<sup>16</sup> It was in *PM* that Geisel's many cartoons were published and disseminated across America.

Geisel critiqued a series of serious topics through his *PM Cartoons*. While these cartoons tackled pressing matters, they were often infused with the classical Seussian humor, whimsy, and absurdity that would characterize his books. For example, two of his six cartoons that feature Stalin (Geisel did not want to promote the dictator, hence his sparse appearances in the cartoons), published December 24, 1941, and January 16, 1942, respectively, show him in fairly ridiculous situations (Appendix 1). In one, the Russian dictator is depicted as a chef serving "Roast Adolf," using the Soviet hammer and sickle as serving instruments. In another, titled "The Wonders of Russian Science," Stalin is piloting a robotic bear, reminiscent of his later creation, the Cat in the Hat's D.I.R.T. machine, towards Germany. In both cases, these cartoons, while commenting on the Nazi failures in the Eastern Front, incorporated Geisel's characteristic sense of humor, which often drew its comedy from the inane absurdity of unrealistic situations.

Indeed, even the main subjects of Geisel's wrath were met with wacky and oftentimes imaginative creations. Hitler, by far the most heavily criticized figure in his cartoons, was a target of many of these crazy situations. For example, on November 12, 1942, he was portrayed as riding a winged "Soaring Dachshund" towards victory, weighed down by two cans labeled "Africa" and

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<sup>14</sup>Jones, *Becoming*, 447; there is a possibility that Geisel might have been examining final proofs before the book went to print, but that is probably doubtful given both the short timeframe and the fact that he claimed he did not know how to finish the book (which, of course, is not likely to have happened only five days before publication).

<sup>15</sup>Pease, *Theodor Geisel*, 61.

<sup>16</sup>Morgan and Morgan, *Dr. Seuss & Mr. Geisel*, 100.

“Russia” hanging from the dog’s tail (Appendix 2). In another instance, Geisel’s series of three cartoons from January 1942, “Mein Early Kampf,” featured Hitler’s infant antics, from giving the stork a hotfoot to cutting his teeth on a bust of Bismarck, exaggerating his insane goals and erratic personality to a point that it was far more humorous than terrifying (Appendix 3). This exaggeration of personalities was a prominent tactic of Geisel; one of his more memorable cartoons targeting Mussolini, published December 22, 1941, depicts a “Bundles for Benito” flier, displaying a naked Mussolini covered only by a copy of *Mein Kampf* held by a belt (Appendix 4). Along with the image of the dictator comes a request to “send anything but books (I’ve already got one).” This cartoon exaggerated the stereotype that the Italian dictator was an idiot who blindly followed Hitler. Mussolini’s stupidity was a common feature caricatured by Geisel, reducing the Italian dictator to a joke in nearly every cartoon he featured in.

Besides caricaturizing his subjects, Geisel would also often utilize silly costumes or transformations. Over the course of his cartoons, Hitler dresses as a mermaid (September 17, 1941 and June 3, 1942), dresses as Santa Claus with Mussolini (Appendix 5)- complete with fake beards (December 15, 1942)- and, with his allies, forms a trio of insects (Appendix 6) repelled by Uncle Sam’s “war bonds and stamps” insecticide (December 19, 1941). These transformations did not just occur to Hitler and company, however. Isolationists don “Ostrich Bonnets” (Appendix 7) to “relieve their Hitler Headaches” and stick their head in the sand to avoid the news (April 29, 1941), and two isolationist senators become a horse (including Senator Nye, who Geisel called a “horse’s ass” when he was inspired to draw this April 26, 1942 cartoon), for example. While these sorts of transformations rarely (if ever) occurred in Dr. Seuss’s fantastic children’s stories, they are very much in the same vein as the crazily dressed characters and fantastic creatures populating his worlds.



Even the cartoons that do not target certain figures have the iconic Seussian charm. Several of the earlier cartoons feature Seuss's signature rhyme scheme, such as one published June 23, 1941 (Appendix 8), which depicts Uncle Sam sitting in the middle of a bombing and criticizes America for their inaction on entering the war: "Said a bird in the midst of a Blitz, 'Up to now they've scored very few hitz, so I'll sit on my canny old star spangled fanny...' and on it he sitz and he sitz." Other motifs later appearing within Dr. Seuss books, such as a circus setting, appear frequently throughout the cartoons. For example, a July 8, 1941 cartoon details "The Great U.S. Sideshow," featuring "the Lads with the Siamese Beard," a meek and grinning figure labeled "America First" entwined with a leering Nazi (Appendix 9). Indeed, it appears that, despite the change in tone and subject matter, Geisel's artistic style and whimsical settings remained fairly consistent throughout all of his work.

While Geisel went after all isolationists, clearly equating those sentiments with sympathy towards the Nazis, he often focused on Charles Lindbergh. The popular figure, a Nazi sympathizer and vocal advocate of isolationism, and, according to Geisel, "one of our nation's most irritating heroes," resulted in his "[getting] irritated into becoming a political cartoonist."<sup>17</sup> According to Pease, Geisel's targeting of Lindbergh was also meant to challenge the belief that German-Americans at large were sympathetic to Hitler, thus cooling the negative prejudices against them.<sup>18</sup> While this is certainly possible, it is also likely that Geisel especially disliked Lindbergh due to how influential he was in the late 1930s. One of Geisel's most memorable cartoons criticizing Lindbergh, published on September 18, 1941, titled "Spreading the lovely Goebbels stuff," said all one needed to know about his sentiments on both the figure and the America First movement (Appendix 11). This cartoon featured Lindbergh wearing a gas mask while spreading a mixture of fish skeletons, dead cats, and other noxious materials from the back of a "Nazi Anti-Semite Stink

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<sup>17</sup>Jones, *Becoming*, 137.

<sup>18</sup>Pease, *Theodor Geisel*, 63.

Wagon,” indicating that Lindbergh’s isolationist rhetoric laid in the same vein as Hitler’s racial policies, all of which, Geisel opined, were disgusting and downright toxic to Americans.

The idea that isolationism was bad for America was a recurring theme in Geisel’s cartoons. Indeed, one of his most famous cartoons was published October 1, 1941, featuring a woman wearing an “America First sweater” and reading a storybook titled “Adolf the Wolf” to her two children (Appendix 12). It is captioned “And the Wolf chewed up the children and spit out their bones... But those were Foreign Children and it really didn’t matter,” sarcastically satirizing the isolationists who were turning a blind eye to the atrocities perpetrated by Hitler abroad. This cartoon resurfaced and was controversially spread across social media sites as a criticism of President Donald Trump’s “America First” policy, namely his January 27, 2017 executive order curbing immigration and the acceptance of refugees from Middle Eastern countries.<sup>19</sup> Although this cartoon has a very different meaning in a modern context, its resurgence in popularity shows the timeless nature of some of Geisel’s cartoons.

While some of his cartoons seem to address enduring topics such as intolerance towards people of varying backgrounds and inaction abroad, others addressed topics that were inexcusable. For example, on February 13, 1942, “Waiting for the Signal From Home...”, one of Geisel’s most uncharacteristically bigoted cartoons, was published. This cartoon depicts a long line of Japanese-Americans, portrayed stereotypically wearing bowler hats and glasses with small lines for eyes, stretching along the West Coast to get a package of TNT from a building labeled “Honorable 5<sup>th</sup> Column” (Appendix 14). While racist, Geisel’s fears were not unique amongst Americans. This cartoon was published only a few months after the unprecedented surprise attack on Pearl Harbor amidst rampant fears of further Japanese attacks on the West Coast. Furthermore, Lieutenant

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<sup>19</sup>Hafner, Josh, “Dr. Seuss’s Political Cartoons Re-Emerge Amid Criticism of Donald Trump,” *USA Today*, February 2, 2017, <https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/politics/onpolitics/2017/02/02/dr-seuss-political-cartoons-re-emerge-amid-criticism-donald-trump/97391132/>

General John DeWitt, the head of the Western Defense Command and a publicly outspoken bigot (In 1942, DeWitt would note that “A Jap’s a Jap. It makes no difference whether the Jap is a citizen or not.”) spread unsubstantiated conspiracies of the Japanese “Fifth Column” that would turn on their adopted homeland, exacerbating these fears.<sup>20</sup> The anti-Japanese hysteria culminated in President Franklin Delano Roosevelt’s Executive Order 9066, passed six days after Geisel’s cartoon was published.

Living in the seaside community of La Jolla, California at the time, there is no doubt that Geisel was worried about a Japanese attack on his home. Indeed, ten days after the publication of Geisel’s cartoon, a Japanese submarine launched an attack on the Ellwood Oil Fields in Goleta, about two hundred miles up the coast from where Geisel lived. According to the Goleta Valley Historical Society, this was the first attack on the US Mainland since the War of 1812, and the 25 shells launched- most of which did not explode- caused about \$500 of damage (\$8,000 when adjusted for inflation) and one injury: a soldier who was hurt during his attempt to deactivate an unexploded shell.<sup>21</sup> The attack on Ellwood was one of the only instances of a Japanese attack on American soil and, besides its use in propaganda throughout the war, faded into obscurity (to the frustration of the author, a community member, it is rarely mentioned amongst the region’s local history).

While Ellwood merely became a curious event without serious ramifications to America’s war effort, at the time Geisel created his cartoons, the fear of similar attacks across the West Coast was high. At the time of the publication of “Waiting for the Signal From Home,” no attack had occurred yet, but the fear of the unknown and possibility of a surprise strike at any time likely raised

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<sup>20</sup>Jones, *Becoming*, 149.

<sup>21</sup>Modugno, Tom, “Attack on Ellwood,” *Goleta History*, October 19, 2014, <https://goletahistory.com/attack-on-ellwood/>

tensions within West Coast communities.<sup>22</sup> Recognizing this tension and fear can help contextualize the unjust animosity that so many people held towards Japanese-Americans, who they wrongfully believed would contribute to a potential attack. No matter what Geisel's fears were, however, this cartoon was drawn with incredible ignorance towards the topic of Americans' loyalties- especially given his own experiences during the First World War. Indeed, it is quite paradoxical that, in his cartoons, he was simultaneously so racist towards Japanese-Americans but fought for the equal treatment of black and Jewish citizens. This complexity shows how Geisel, like all people throughout history, held extraordinarily nuanced opinions about his world.

Geisel seemed to eventually realize the paradoxical nature of his racial attitudes, and, indeed, seemed to regret his prejudiced views. In fact, some scholars believe that his 1953 book *Horton Hears a Who*, which was dedicated to a Kyoto teacher he had met during a research trip to Japan on behalf of *Life* magazine and espoused the belief that a person was a person no matter what, was written to make an amends of sorts for his earlier, racist attitudes, particularly towards the Japanese.<sup>23</sup> Whether it was due to his realization that the interned citizens of Japanese descent were being discriminated against more than he and his family ever were or the influence of Ingersoll, a vehement critic of racism (particularly against Jews and African-Americans, but it is possible his progressive beliefs extended to Asian-Americans), Geisel's harsh rhetoric towards Japanese-Americans ceased. While he would target the fascist Japanese government in his artwork, "Waiting for the Signal from Home" was Geisel's sole cartoon promoting the belief that Japanese-Americans were subversives waiting to stab America in the back.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>22</sup>Burton, Farrell, Lord, and Lord's article for the National Park Service, "A Brief History of Japanese American Relocation During World War II," is a great source for details and context about the subject for those who would like to learn more about it.

<sup>23</sup>Pease, *Theodor Geisel*, 92-93.

<sup>24</sup>Jones, *Becoming*, 151.

Despite his continued utilization of racist stereotypes, something which has recently become controversial, Geisel would advocate for equal treatment towards all in his cartoons. In one of his most striking cartoons, for example, published June 30, 1942, Geisel depicted Uncle Sam tapping a musician playing an organ-like instrument labeled “War Industry” and telling him that “if you want to get real harmony, use the black keys [lying dusty and unused, these are labeled “Black Labor],” in a clear rebuke of segregated labor (Appendix 15). In an April 14, 1942 cartoon, “I’ll run Democracy’s War. YOU stay in your Jim Crow Tanks!” Geisel depicts an ugly, smirking, flag-waving “Discriminating Employer” in a tank attempting to haul two smaller ones behind it (Appendix 16). These smaller tanks are labeled “Jewish Labor” and “Negro Labor,” indicating that bigotry within the American workforce was holding back the war machine. In another, June 11, 1942 cartoon, Geisel depicts Uncle Sam spraying a “mental insecticide” into a man’s brain, killing the “Racial Prejudice Bug” (Appendix 17). Like the imagery of the “Jim Crow tanks” and “mental insecticide,” all of Geisel’s cartoons about racism often depicted ethnic prejudice as an ugly and widespread blight on American society and the American war effort.

While Geisel was often critical of America’s domestic affairs, on other occasions, he praised certain political figures. Throughout the summer of 1942, Geisel drew a series of cartoons titled the “Society of Red Tape Cutters,” where he honored those who could efficiently wage the war without the interference of the bureaucracy or government (there are several other cartoons where he was critical of Congress for impeding FDR’s policies). With Roosevelt as its inaugural member (Appendix 20), the Society grew to hold eight members, including then-Senator Harry Truman, Admiral Nimitz, Cordell Hull, and the one foreign inductee, Molotov of Russia. Despite Geisel and his wife being staunch Democrats and ardent supporters of FDR, it is clear that he often grew frustrated with the inefficiency of the government, which, at the time, was entirely Democrat-controlled.

Besides commentaries of events and issues inside America's borders, much of Geisel's wrath was turned towards the Axis powers abroad. Geisel often poked fun at Hitler's military failures, whether they were in Russia or in Africa. One of his cartoons, published September 7, 1941 poses the question "What's the cheery word from Russia?" and, in response, shows the dictator picking up a phone, only to be blasted by a stream of "MUD" that blows into one ear and out the other (Appendix 21). Several others, such as the November 20, 1942 cartoon "Lost your way, bud?" were published following the beginning of the Allied Operation Torch, depict Hitler as a blundering fool lost in Africa on his way to Stalingrad (Appendix 22). Geisel also satirizes Hitler's failure on the Eastern Front with equal venom. Utilizing the freezing Russian winter to great effect in these cartoons, Geisel shows Hitler as a feckless leader unprepared for the cold weather. For example, his December 4, 1942 cartoon depicts Hitler trapped within a massive snowball rolling down a mountain labeled "Russia", with the German leader shouting that he "would like to take this opportunity to prophesy a white Christmas!" (Appendix 24)

While Geisel often depicted Hitler as a buffoon, he also depicted him as a manipulative and calculating figure. This was likely to ensure that Americans viewing his cartoons did not underestimate their enemy and saw him as the dangerous threat that he was to both the Allies and his Axis puppets. The latter, in particular, created some unforgettable images. On July 21, 1942, Geisel published a cartoon entitled "Carry on my faithful dogs, and you shall each share equally" (Appendix 25). In this image, Hitler stands on the backs of Mussolini and Pierre Laval, the head of government of Vichy France. In front of them, he holds a fishing rod labeled "War Spoils (& I do mean spoiled)" as a lure. In this and many of his similar cartoons, Geisel opined that Hitler's European allies were his ignorant pawns, naïve of the fact that he would turn on them as soon as it became convenient. While, of course, this was meant as propaganda to intensify sentiments against the Nazi regime, it might have also been a warning to domestic Nazi sympathizers that, even if they

supported Hitler, he would betray their support and trust in him. This is likely, especially given Geisel's March 24, 1942, cartoon, "Snake in the Grass," which portrays Hitler as just that (Appendix 26). At this point, the American citizens who were Nazi sympathizers were reasonably quiet for fear of prosecution by the government. However, there were still widespread fears of a German "Fifth Column" within America, which might explain Geisel's rationale for directing this message towards potential Nazi sympathizers.

Following Hitler's declaration of war against America, most pro-Nazi groups had grown quiet, but there had been many vocal Nazi sympathizers throughout the late 1930s and early 1940s. Chief among them was the *Deutschamerikanische Volksbund*, more commonly known as the Bund. This group, which claimed to have a membership of more than 200,000 nationally, according to the Commission on Wartime Relocation and Internment of Civilians (CWRIC)'s 1983 report, was a branch of the German Nazi Party led by Fritz Kuhn, who called himself the "Bundsführer."<sup>25</sup> While the CWRIC wrote that the Bund claimed to have such a large membership, they destroyed their membership lists after America went to war with Hitler, and as such, it is difficult to ascertain an exact size of the organization. However, it is almost certain that their claim was exaggerated, and their ranks were far smaller than 200,000. Most modern academics approximate the Bund as being about 10,000 strong, primarily consisting of German nationals and immigrants who had fled the chaos of the Weimar Republic. Compared with the over 6 million citizens of German descent, this was but a small proportion of the German-American community and not at all representative of them at large.<sup>26</sup> Indeed, Geisel targeted the Bund in his May 26, 1941 cartoon, showing his own personal distaste for the organization (Appendix 27). Despite the Bund disbanding in December 1941, they cast a long shadow of doubt on the German-American community as a whole.

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<sup>25</sup>Forsthoefel, *The German-American Community*, 53.

<sup>26</sup>Ibid, 54.

While not treated as harshly as their Japanese-American counterparts, the German-American experience during WWII was still filled with suspicion and bigotry. In a 1942 survey, 82% of the people asked believed Germans to be the most likely ethnic group to have secret loyalties to a foreign (enemy) government.<sup>27</sup> Given that this survey was conducted during the height of anti-Japanese hysteria and the beginning of Japanese internment, the fact that the results indicated such a stark difference between the distrust of German-Americans and Japanese-Americans (only 24% of respondents answered “people of Japanese descent”) showed the incredible amount of scrutiny directed towards the group’s loyalties.<sup>28</sup> In fact, the fate of German-Americans were almost similar to those of their Japanese counterparts; the War Department considered including German and Italian nationals within Executive Order 9066 before deciding against it due to the logistics and optics.<sup>29</sup> However, with such a large population of German-Americans, not to mention the costly political ramifications of alienating a prominent voting demographic, it seems clear why they were not unjustly interned en masse like Japanese-Americans.<sup>30</sup> While Geisel never commented on the bigotry towards German-Americans in his cartoons (justifiably so, as that would have likely put him in the crosshairs of the federal government), it is very possible that he privately condemned it given his own experiences during WWI and his criticism of bigotry directed at Jews and African-Americans. However, since there is no record of his sentiments towards anti-German hysteria during WWII, it is impossible to know exactly how he felt on the matter.

Unlike in WWI, there does not seem to be any record of animosity towards Geisel for his German ancestry. While plenty of *PM* readers criticized Geisel for the content of his cartoons, including, interestingly enough, his use of Dachshunds in association with the Third Reich, it does

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<sup>27</sup>Ibid, 56.

<sup>28</sup>Ibid.

<sup>29</sup>Commission on Wartime Relocation and Internment of Civilians, *Personal Justice Denied* (Washington, D.C.: US Government Printing Office, 1983), 285-286.

<sup>30</sup>CWRIC, *Personal Justice Denied*, 289.



not seem like Geisel was really attacked for his ethnic background.<sup>31</sup> This was likely due to his public and vocal hatred of Hitler, which, in the eyes of those terrified of the “Fifth Column,” would have absolved him of any suspicion of loyalty towards the Nazis. Furthermore, in May 1942, the government gave him a War Savings Commendation and asked him to make cartoons about recycling materials for the War Productions Board and cartoons promoting war bonds for the Treasury Department (Appendix 28), which likely would have reinforced the idea that he was a patriotic American.<sup>32</sup> Furthering the image of his loyalty to the government, in late 1942 Geisel enlisted to serve in a US Army Signal Corps Unit under Director Frank Capra, and his daily cartoons ceased publication in early 1943. While not nearly as candid as his earlier *PM* cartoons, his Army work, including his “Private Snafu” cartoons, is digitally available, allowing people to see Geisel’s humor throughout the entirety of the war.

While it might be initially abrupt to see Hitler drawn in the same style as the Lorax or the Grinch, Geisel’s cartoons show a different side to the author. With the depiction of race in Geisel’s children’s books having recently become controversial, these cartoons can help contextualize his racial ideas, which, for the most part, were fairly progressive. Like his cartoons vocally urging for equality in the workforce, his anti-isolationist criticism was outspoken; however, many others within the German-American community were just as opposed to Hitler. The frequency and breadth of Geisel’s scathing commentaries shows an evolution in his thinking on some matters. While some remain timeless and others have become relics of the WWII era, one thing is clear: Geisel’s cartoons are an enlightening window that illustrate the complex and sometimes paradoxical thoughts of one of America’s most beloved authors.

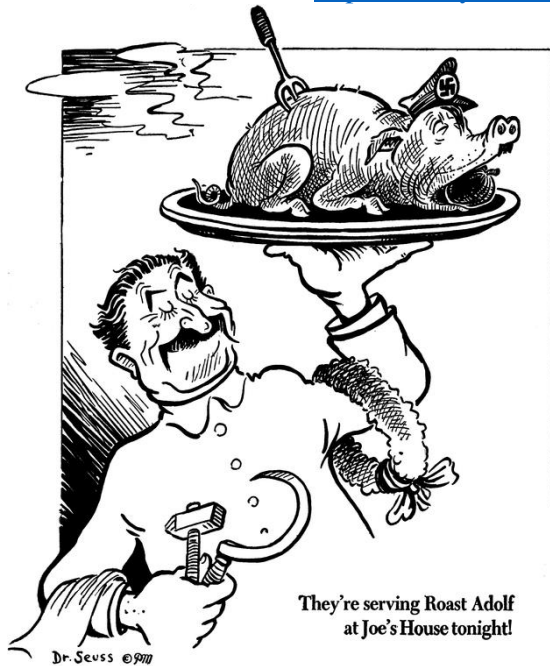
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<sup>31</sup>Jones, *Becoming*, 153.

<sup>32</sup>Jones, *Becoming*, 156.

## Appendix

Unless otherwise stated, all images come from UC San Diego's Special Collections and can be found at <https://library.ucsd.edu/speccoll/dswenttowar/#intro>

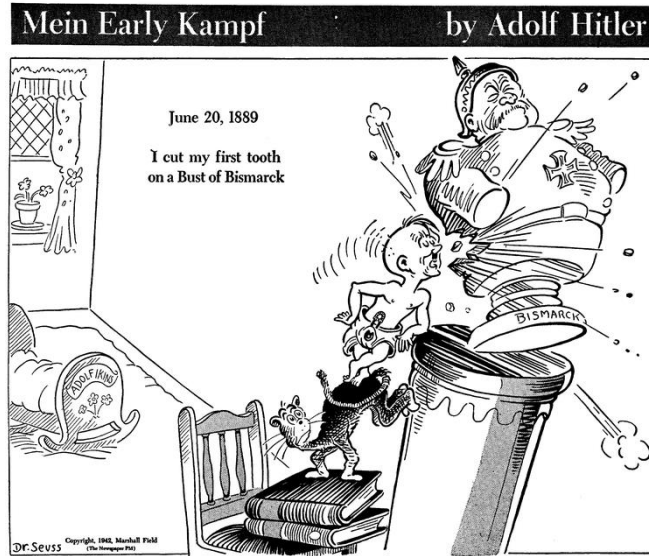


Appendix 1: "They're serving Roast Adolf at Joe's House tonight!" (December 24, 1941) and "The Wonders of Russian Science" (January 15, 1942). Note the classical Seussian absurdity of both situations; indeed, it seems that the cartoon on the right could be straight out of one of Geisel's later books!

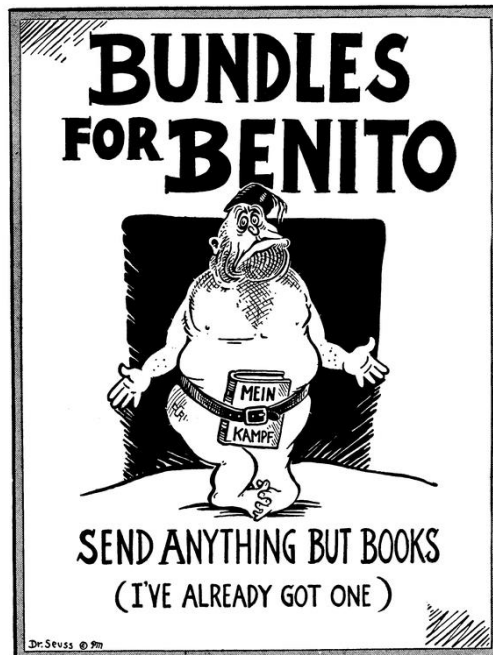
Tin Can for the Tail of the Soaring Dachshund



Appendix 2: "Tin Can for the Tail of the Soaring Dachshund" (November 12, 1942). This cartoon once again satirizes Hitler's manipulating nature (the dachshund is meant to represent Germany) and shows his ambitious goals getting bogged down by his two-front war. The flying dog, a classically Seussian creature, seems to be struggling, representing the loss of German morale as the tide seemed to turn against them in both Africa and Russia.



Appendix 3: The final addition to “Mein Early Kampf” (January 29, 1942), this cartoon exaggerated Hitler’s insane ambitions to reconstruct the German Reich and bring it back to the glory of what it was under Bismarck.



Appendix 4: “Bundles for Benito” (December 22, 1941). This cartoon exaggerates several stereotypes around Mussolini, namely the claim that he was stupid and that he blindly followed Hitler. Unlike Geisel’s portrayals of Hitler, which were often calculating and cold (and thus frightening), Mussolini was almost always depicted as a silly fool and incompetent leader.



Appendix 5: This year I'm afraid my kiddies suspect who I really am! (December 15, 1942). Geisel drew this as it appeared that the tide was beginning to turn. It appears that Geisel was commenting on the dwindling morale and lack of support within the two European Axis countries; he is satirizing their continued and empty promises of an Axis victory despite a clear lack of resources (as seen by the torn and empty bags).



Appendix 6: Quick Henry, THE FLIT! (December 19, 1941). Published shortly after America's entry into WWII, this cartoon pokes fun at Geisel's former career advertising for Flit while simultaneously promoting war bonds. It is interesting to note that Mussolini is, unlike the others, not portrayed as a mosquito. Between this portrayal of him and the other depictions of him throughout his cartoons, it seems that Geisel had significantly less respect for the Italian dictator than he did for Hitler (which was next to nothing as is).



We Always Were Suckers for Ridiculous Hats . . .

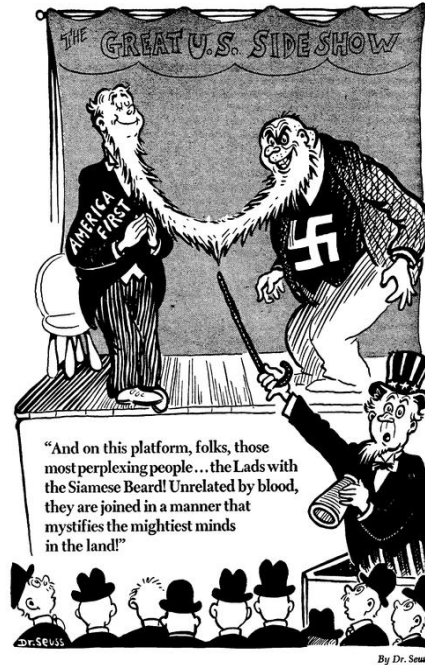
Appendix 7: “We Always Were Suckers for Ridiculous Hats...” (April 29, 1941). Geisel often portrayed isolationists as ostriches who buried their heads in the ground rather than acting upon the (worrisome) news about the war in Europe (see appendix 9 for another example). Note that the “hats” are being distributed by “Lindy”.



Said a bird in the midst of a Blitz,  
 “Up to now they’ve scored very few hitz,  
 So I’ll sit on my canny  
 Old Star Spangled Fanny . . .”  
 And on it he sitz and he sitz.

By Dr. Seuss

Appendix 8: “Said a bird in the midst of a Blitz...” (June 23, 1941). Like several other cartoons, if the content of this was not so violent and politically charged, one could swear it was ripped straight out of a Dr. Seuss children’s book. Many of his earlier cartoons utilized the rhyme scheme that made Dr. Seuss so memorable and beloved.



Appendix 9: “And on this platform...” (July 8, 1941). Once again, Geisel depicts the “America First” isolationist movement as inextricably tied to the Nazi party in yet another scathing condemnation.



Appendix 10: “Hey! Hide if you have to, but by thunder, stop nibbling!” (September 5, 1941). Another cartoon that shows the negative ramifications of adopting an America First policy. In yet another cartoon that depicted isolationism as harmful to America, Geisel does not make the direct connection between Nazism and isolationism that he made in other cartoons; however, this cartoon is equally clear in the dangers of America First policy.

### Spreading the Lovely Goebbels Stuff



Appendix 11: “Spreading the Lovely Goebbels Stuff” (September 18, 1941). This cartoon shows the toxicity of Nazism (and by extension, Lindbergh’s rhetoric). Through cartoons like this, Geisel makes it clear that anti-Semitism is something that is undesirable within America’s borders.

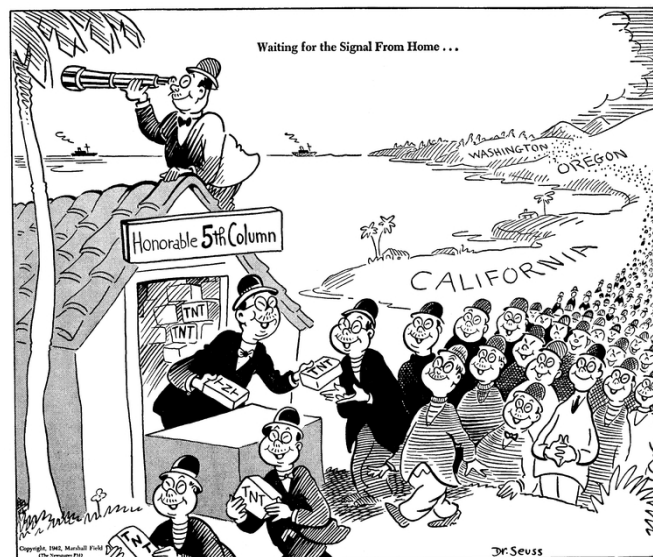
... and the Wolf chewed up the children and spit out their bones ...  
But those were Foreign Children and it really didn't matter.”



Appendix 12: “... and the Wolf chewed up the children and spit out their bones...” (October 1, 1941). One of Geisel’s most famous cartoons, he sarcastically targets isolationists who ignored the atrocities perpetrated by the Nazis. This was reinterpreted in a modern context in 2017 as a response to President Donald Trump’s policies.

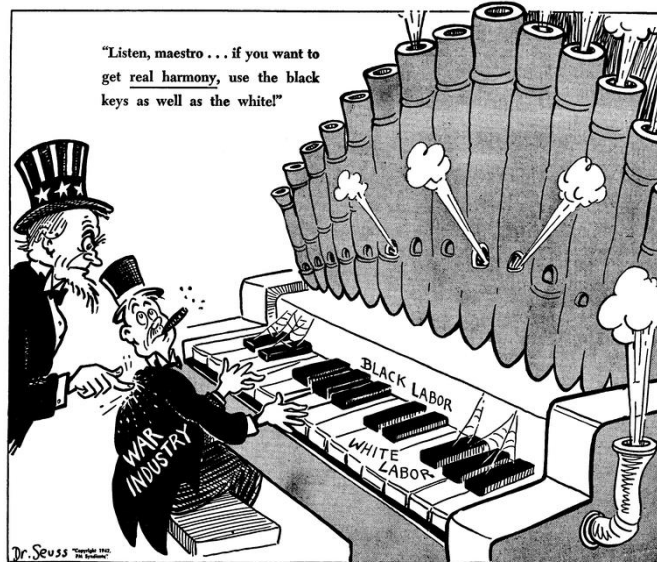


Appendix 13: “He Never Knew What Hit Him” (December 8, 1941). Published a day after the attack on Pearl Harbor, this cartoon mocks isolationists for not expecting the war to come to the United States and criticizes America for not being more proactive.

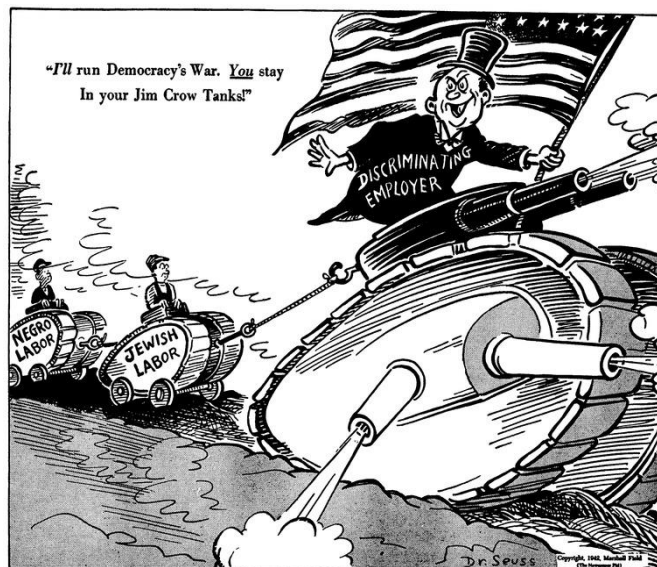


Appendix 14: “Waiting for the Signal From Home” (February 13, 1942). By far the least tasteful of Geisel’s wartime cartoons. This cartoon reflected the fears of many Americans who believed the racially charged and unsubstantiated conspiracies about Japanese subversives. As a resident of the seaside community of La Jolla, CA, Geisel might have been particularly afraid of a Japanese attack from the coast; the location of his home could have made him more susceptible to the unjust and abhorrent fear mongering despite his otherwise-progressive attitudes towards race (and his own experiences with ethnic prejudice during World War I). Indeed, his vocal hatred of racism towards African-American and Jewish citizens and use of racial stereotypes when drawing this racist cartoon of Japanese people make show how paradoxical and complex his beliefs (and those of his contemporaries) could be.



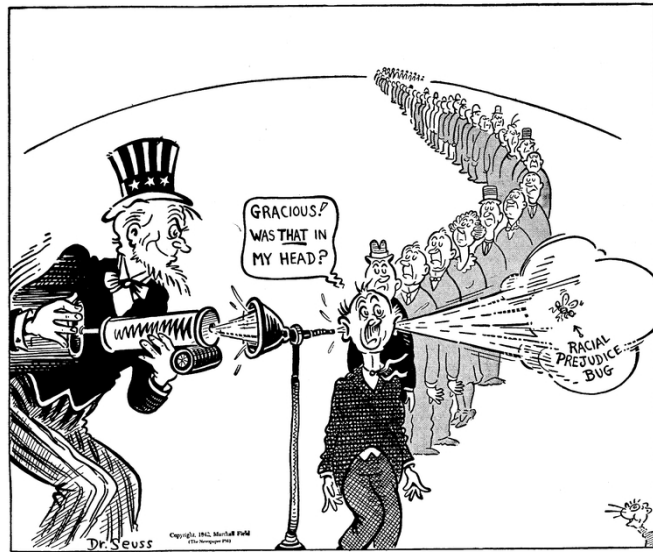


Appendix 15: "Listen, Maestro..." (June 30, 1942). This cartoon is a clear rebuke of segregated labor. The idea that American society must work in concert, regardless of race, to win the war is a common theme within Geisel's work.



Appendix 16: "I'll run Democracy's War. You stay in your Jim Crow Tanks!" (April 14, 1942). This cartoon not only paints discriminating employers in a poor light, it also claims that segregation and anti-Semitism were holding back the war effort as seen by the segregated tanks preventing the American tank from advancing.

### What This Country Needs Is a Good Mental Insecticide



Appendix 17: “What this Country Needs is a Good Mental Insecticide” (June 11, 1942). Both poking fun at his time creating ads for Flit insecticide and portraying racism as an invasive bug that needs killing, Geisel often portrayed racism as a blight on American society.



Appendix 18: “Come on, Sam... Try the great German manicure!” (April 1, 1942). Yet another instance of Geisel criticizing anti-Semitism, this time he explicitly connected it to Nazi sympathizers (and thus, to America’s enemy in the war) and made it clear that anti-Semitism would literally be cutting off a large part of the country. While, like in his other cartoons, this could be referring to the detriments of anti-Semitism towards the American labor force, his use of Uncle Sam here indicates a far greater magnitude; anti-Semitism did not just harm one part of America, it harmed every single American citizen.



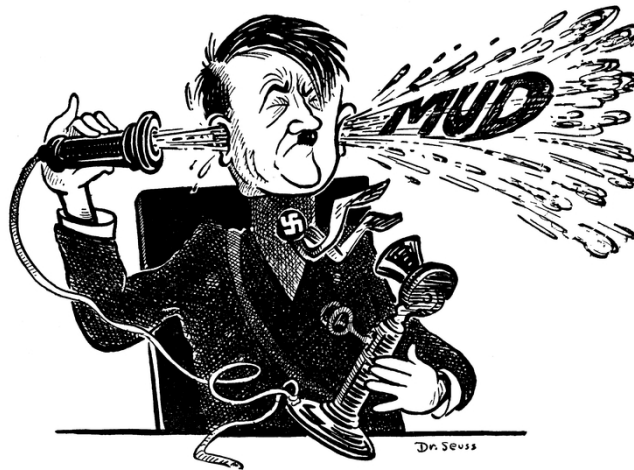
Appendix 19: “Only God can make a tree to furnish sport for you and me!” (July 20, 1942). Featuring Hitler and the Vichy France politician Pierre Laval (who had become the head of the government several months prior), this is one of Geisel’s most chilling cartoons. Without a hint of his usual whimsy, this depiction of Hitler and Laval shows a terrifying future that could only be averted by an Allied victory.

### Society of Red Tape Cutters Elects Roosevelt



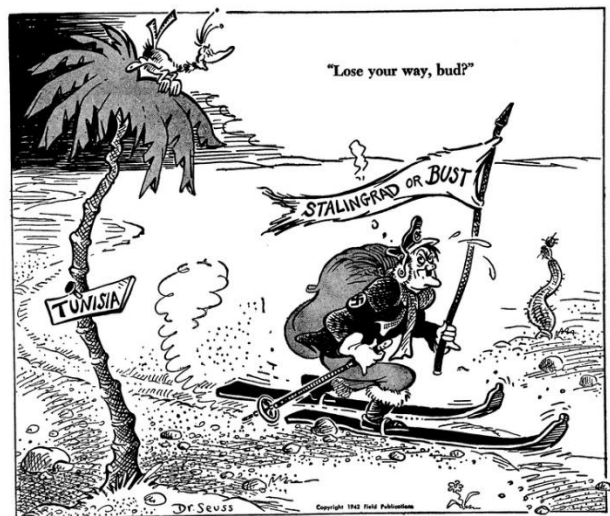
Appendix 20: “Society of Red Tape Cutters Elects Roosevelt.” (May 26, 1942). Geisel was a staunch supporter of Roosevelt (much to his very Republican father’s chagrin), so it is fitting that he chose to make FDR the inaugural member of the Society. Geisel was often critical of Congress and the bureaucracy from blocking Roosevelt’s policies and for raising taxes (despite his support for the New Deal).

What's the cheery word from Russia?



Appendix 21: "What's the Cheery Word from Russia?" (September 7, 1941). One of Geisel's earlier cartoons mocking Hitler for his military failures and bad strategy.

Slightly Diverted

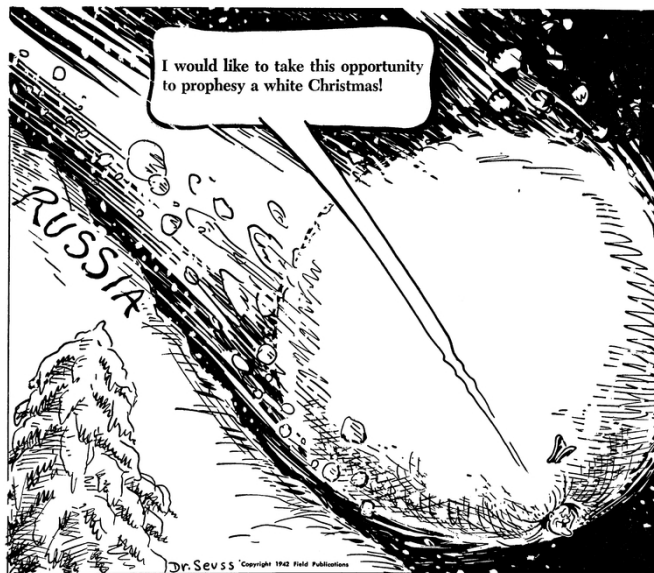


Appendix 22: "Slightly Diverted" (November 13, 1942) and "Lose Your Way, Bud?" (November 20, 1942). A commentary on Hitler's poor military strategy; a two front war was never a good thing for Germany, especially when (according to Geisel's depiction of Germany in these cartoons) Hitler, depicted as ever the blundering fool, was pouring his resources into the wrong front instead of reinforcing his troops losing in Russia.

"Hold tight, I'm switching to reverse! . . . Remember the gear we used so much last winter?"



Appendix 23: "Hold Tight, I'm switching to Reverse!..." (November 24, 1942). Yet another example of a crazy Seussian contraption (this time reminiscent of the Grinch and his sleigh), Geisel makes fun of Hitler's failure in Russia in the most Seussian way possible.



Appendix 24: "I would like to take this opportunity to prophesy a white Christmas!" (December 4, 1942). Once again poking fun at Hitler's inability to manage the Russian winter, Geisel once more portrays him as an impotent and feckless leader.



Appendix 25: “Carry on, my faithful dogs, and you shall each share equally!” (July 21, 1942). Once again playing off the stereotype of Mussolini and Laval being puppets of Hitler, this might have been a warning for any American who might still sympathize with Hitler.



Appendix 26: “Snake in the Grass” (March 24, 1942). One of Geisel’s simplest cartoons, it says all it needs to about the nature of Hitler and his tendency to turn on his “allies” when it was convenient for him.



Appendix 27: “She Embarrasses Ma and Pa a bit, but Fraulein Sure can Push!” (May 26, 1941). Geisel clearly disliked the Bund, and makes it clear here that he believes the isolationist America First were a product of the Nazi offshoot organization.



Appendix 28: “Starve the Squander Bug” (1943; courtesy of Gettysburg College Special Collections). While Gettysburg College’s Special Collections does not say exactly when Geisel drew this and for what purpose (and the information seems to be missing from a series of other collections that hold similar posters), it is likely a product of his work for the US Treasury Department.

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