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THE EVOLUTION OF THE EDITORIAL CARTOON INDUSTRY:
A CONTENT ANALYSIS OF EDITORIAL CARTOONS BY STAFF CARTOONISTS

by

Gwynneth E. Bradley

A Thesis

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the

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Abstract

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Many newspapers have replaced their staff editorial cartoonists with editorial cartoons from syndication subscription services. Critics have described this action as cheapening the industry by leaving readers without valuable local commentary and fewer politically themed cartoons. However, there has been no quantitative data to show how often staff cartoonists draw locally themed or political cartoons. A content analysis was performed on the staff-drawn cartoons at the daily Memphis newspaper, *The Commercial Appeal*, which employed several award-winning cartoonists until 2008 when the position was eliminated. The ratio of locally themed cartoons to nationally and globally themed cartoons by staff cartoonists from 1980 to 2008 was measured along with the frequency of political and non-political cartoons. The research showed an average of 22.7% of staff-drawn cartoons were locally themed, but amounts varied among the cartoonists. Also, the number of political cartoons was in decline before the switch to syndication services.

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Introduction

For decades *The Commercial Appeal*, the major daily newspaper in Memphis,

Tennessee, employed award-winning cartoonists, including Pulitzer Prize recipient

Michael Ramirez. However, in March of 2009 the newspaper ended this tradition when it

laid off staff cartoonist Bill Day, a winner of awards from the National Cartoonists

Society and The Association of American Editorial Cartoonists (AAEC, 2009; Cavna,

2009). The elimination of the position of staff cartoonist was a policy decision to trim the

newspaper's budget (O. Sanford, personal communication, March 2, 2011). Now the

newspaper's editorial cartoons are selected from a syndication service. It is a change that

is becoming popular with many newspapers, a rapidly growing nationwide trend in which

staff editorial cartoonists are replaced by such services, which typically cost less and also

allow editors greater control over content as they pick from a pool of cartoons instead of

relying on the staff cartoonist's output. Newspapers experiencing lower circulation

numbers and less revenue are routinely cutting editorial cartoonists from the staff as a

way to help balance the budget and are subscribing to national-level cartoon services

instead (Trostle, 2004). In fact, the number of editorial cartoonists employed on

newspaper staffs has declined by more than 50% since the 1980s (Plante, 2004, p. 11).

This industry shift has created an uproar among cartoonists and critics who are

disdainful of the syndication practice, saying that it cheapens a genre rooted in the

nation's earliest days and costs readers valuable and irreplaceable local commentary.

According to Hess and Northrop (1996), locally themed editorial cartoons have often

exposed "hometown corruption, mismanagement, and fraud" and served as a catalyst to

correct such practices, a community service that a syndicated, nationally themed cartoon could rarely do (p. 77). Also, because syndication services draw upon a pool of cartoons with content that appeals to as wide an audience as possible, these services inevitably provide cartoons that focus solely on national issues. But contrary to the claims of many detractors, such practices have been part of the American cartooning industry throughout its history. In what is widely regarded as the first editorial cartoon in the nation, Benjamin Franklin drew an image about national unity, and it was meant to be dispersed throughout the colonies (Lordan, 2006). Moreover, the way in which editorial cartoons first took hold was in nationally printed magazines, such as *Harper's Weekly*, *Puck*, and *Judge*, which required nationally themed content (Hess & Northrop, 1996).

Yet many critics (Hess & Northrop, 1996; Lamb, 2004; Plante, 2004) insist that once syndicates become the sole source of editorial cartoons, the audience is left without the value of locally themed editorial cartoons, such as the opportunity to increase awareness of the wrongdoing of local figures or to incite changes within the community. But what these critics have not addressed is how often staff cartoonists actually focus on such local issues. In short, what is actually lost when a staff cartoonist is replaced by a syndication service?

These detractors have operated on the assumption that the content of cartoons created by staff cartoonists has been largely of a local focus and frequently pointed at people or events relevant only to the local community. Locally themed editorial cartoons by nature have a more limited scope of issues and events than those with national themes, that is, themes that are of interest to audiences across the nation and not just to a

particular community. These themes could include national and global political affairs as well as topics relating to national cultural norms.

Neither critics nor newspaper publishers have presented any quantitative data showing the actual effect of the removal of staff cartoonists. However, by carefully tracking the evolution of staff-drawn editorial cartoons, including whether they feature local or national topics, it is possible to develop a clearer image of the type of content that is lost when syndication services become the sole source for editorial cartoons. Although the research would not mark the qualitative value provided by an on-staff cartoonist, it would examine how much local commentary is eliminated along with the position.

In addition, critics have also claimed that syndicated cartoons would "water down" the effectiveness of the opinion section because syndicated content can be less political. However, staff cartoonists may have also drawn several, if not a considerable number of, editorial cartoons that did not feature political events or figures throughout the years. Just as local themes may be limiting at times, so may political issues. Quantification of the types of editorial cartoons — political or non-political — would illustrate whether syndicated cartoons do indeed chisel away at a largely political opinion section or if non-political topics were already frequently depicted.

Literature Review

The Role of Editorial Cartoons

Both critics and cartoonists have described the function of an editorial cartoon in varying ways. What is for some a "daily source of minor amusement" is for others a "critical tool in framing public opinion on the most important people and issues of our

times" (Lordan, 2006, p. ix). In his survey on 1970s editorial cartoons, Hynds (1979) defined an editorial cartoon as "a sketch or pictorial drawing of some subject or person of current interests," but that explanation could also include an illustration found in the newspaper (p. 54). More recently, Hess and Northrop (1996) offered yet another explanation of an editorial cartoon's role: a simple "visual representation" that can interpret the news and "political abstractions" (p. 14). It is the visual element, according to Lamb (2004), that makes commentary from editorial cartoons so unique from and more powerful than written commentaries or columns.

Indeed, an exact and agreed-upon description of an editorial cartoon's role is impossible to find if only because there is such a wide variety of cartoons that appear on editorial pages. Generally, editorial cartoons feature an opinion or perspective on current events, but the issues addressed can be political or cultural. A cartoon may feature local, national, universal, or abstract figures and themes. The goal of the cartoonist, and thus the cartoon, may be to inspire a social movement, to make an entertaining commentary, or to bring focus to a neglected issue. In the broadest of terms, an editorial cartoon is "visual satire" (Lamb, 2004, p. 49).

Lordan (2006) also attempted to explain the role of the editorial cartoon by defining the role of cartoonists and observed that they exist in a realm of their own while having traits of both artists and journalists: "The goal of journalism is to present facts; the goal of the editorial cartoonists is to persuade, to entertain, or to do some combination of the two. The cartoonist uses the tools of the artist, under the deadlines of the journalist, to produce a product that is judged by the standards of neither. The editorial cartoonist is,

ultimately, a hybrid form best described as 'creative critic'" (p. 91). More specifically, he stated that an editorial cartoonist is "attempting to stimulate thought or convince his audience of his position" (Lordan, 2006, p. 109). For some, that description is too mild. According to Hess and Northrop (1996), cartoonists are meant to lead an offensive front and attack all but the average person, rarely doling out accolades and frequently receiving hate mail.

Other editorial cartoonists, however, including Bill Maudlin and Hugh Haynie, have contested the notion that a cartoon should influence a reader's beliefs at all. To them, the best cartoons only direct the audience toward an aspect of a current event (Lordan, 2006). Mauldin, for example, began his career drawing editorial cartoons during World War II that focused on the realities of war for ordinary soldiers. His characters Willie and Joe were less concerned with battlefield glory than with getting basic supplies (Hess & Northrop, 1996). Unlike the active participant that Hess and Northrop described, Mauldin was the kind of editorial cartoonist that Bernard Reilly of the Library of Congress calls a removed observer "who…exposes foibles of public figures and public life" (as cited in Hess & Northrop, 1996, p. 15).

There are also editorial cartoons created with the intent to elicit amusement instead of critical thought. Some have suggested this type of cartoon has become more prolific of late, but the non-political style was also popular directly following World War I when many cartoonists chose to draw cartoons featuring flapper nightlife or sight gags (Hess & Northrop, 1996; Lamb, 2007). The style was visible as early as the beginning of the 1900s, when John T. McCutcheon joined the *Chicago Tribune* and interspersed hard-

hitting editorial cartoons with "homilies that offered comforting antidotes to the news that surrounded them" (Hess & Northrop, 1996, p. 77).

While there may not be agreement on the purpose of editorial cartoons or the duties of cartoonists, many agree the genre has held cultural and even political influence since the nation's beginning. Historically, editorial cartoonists have mocked political figures and even shaped the subject's persona in a way that may be recognized in decades to come. Clifford Berryman of the *Washington Evening Star*, for example, invented the iconic teddy bear to illustrate how Teddy Roosevelt's hunting trips affected his character (Lordan, 2006). In fact, cartoonists have created symbolic shorthand in many such instances. According to Hess and Northrop (1996), the familiar image of "Uncle Sam" was itself the product of an editorial cartoon during the War of 1812, more than a century before the appearance of the popular U.S. Army recruiting poster that depicted a stern Uncle Sam pointing his finger at the viewer. Additionally, Thomas Nast drew the symbol of the Republican Party as an elephant in 1874, Herbert Block invented the word "McCarthyism" in the 1950s, and Elkanah Tilsdale, used the image of a salamander in a political cartoon, which led to the term "gerrymander" in 1812 (Hynds, 1979; Lordan, 2006, p. 102, 105). Editorial cartoons are not just part of the American culture; they have also helped to shape it.

Two of the forefathers of the American editorial cartoon — though separated by nearly a century — are Benjamin Franklin and Nast. Franklin, creator of the first editorial cartoons in America, drew a severed snake in the 1754 cartoon "Join, or Die" to rally American colonists (Lordan, 2006). It is an image still iconic today. Nast has been

remembered primarily for the attention he paid to local government corruption in New York City, although he also drew nationally themed cartoons during the Civil War. Nast's famous series of local government cartoons portrayed William "Boss" Tweed and the "Tammany Hall Ring," the men who controlled New York City's government from the 1850s to 1871 (Lordan, 2006). In the midst of, and perhaps due to, Nast's continuous coverage of these men during these years, Tammany Hall forces lost a key election in 1871, and just two years later Tweed was imprisoned (Lordan, 2006). This case is often cited when the power of editorial cartoons is discussed.

By the 1850s, popular weekly commentary magazines, such as *Harper's Weekly* and *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper*, heavily featured editorial cartoons and thoroughly legitimized the editorial cartoon's form and role in news organizations (Lordan, 2006). Beginning in the 1880s, editorial cartoons were featured daily in newspapers, often on the front page (Hess & Northrop, 1996; Lamb, 2004). Newspaper editors counted on cartoonists to create content that would "titillate, entertain, or spark a reaction in the most potential readers" (Lordan, 2006, p. 27). As a result of these demands, an entire cartooning industry was born. Soon, feuding newspaper publishers Joseph Pulitzer and William Randolph Hearst, in search of the largest audience, battled for the best cartoonists, paying them high salaries and creating a "golden age" for editorial cartoons (Lamb, 2004, p. 72). By the 1920s, however, the mergers of many American newspapers brought about a practice — syndication of content, including cartoons — that some would see as a boon for business and which others would condemn because they eliminated positions (Hynds, 1979; Lordan, 2006).

Syndication and the Disappearance of Staff Cartoonists

In the first years of the 20th century, every major metropolitan newspaper and most mid-sized papers had at least one cartoonist on staff, but when newspapers began merging in the 1920s and syndication was introduced, some staff cartoonist positions were eliminated because editors could print cartoons without having to employ their own cartoonists (Lamb, 2004; Lordan, 2006). So while syndication of editorial cartoons may be on the rise today, it is certainly not a new phenomenon. According to Hess and Northrop (1996), however, cartoon syndication is not just more popular than it was in the 1920s, it has risen to the point where it supplies the majority of editorial cartoons and dictates the future of the medium by "decid[ing] whose cartoons will be distributed nationally and, thereby, which cartoonists will become widely known" (p. 17). This means that some cartoonists will benefit from syndication (Lamb, 2004). Moreover, Hess and Northrop argued that readers, especially those in small towns, benefit from editorial cartoon syndication because it offers them "a chance to laugh at the work of America's best cartoonists" and is therefore a positive consequence of syndication (p. 103).

But whether the situation is viewed as having a positive or negative effect on audiences, the position of staff editorial cartoonist is becoming a rarity as revenues for newspapers shrink and publishers and editors look to trim expenses (Trostle, 2004). Sometimes the cartoonist is simply fired, but there are also instances in which he or she is bought out, moved to part-time status, or simply not replaced upon retirement or death, and occasionally the newspaper employing them simply shuts down (Cagle, 2009). But regardless of the reason, it is undeniable that the number of editorial cartoonists has nose-

dived from 200 in the 1980s to fewer than 90 in 2004 (Plante, 2004, p. 11). According to

Cagle (2009), the precise number of editorial cartoonists in the United States is difficult

to define because so many have become freelancers or only work part-time, but he

estimated it as "certainly much less" than 100 (p. 1).

The typical decision facing those in charge of the editorial page is to pay the

comparatively cheap fee for syndicated cartoons or to continue employing an editorial

cartoonist on staff (Lindley, 2004). According to Stantis (2004), editors have little reason

to keep or hire a staff editorial cartoonist during what has been called the "current

market-driving dynamics" in the industry (p. 37). Supporters of syndication typically

defend this decision by asserting that it offers editors more choice, allowing editors to

pick from the best and most popular cartoonists from across the country. As Lordan

(2006) put it, "Why pay a regular salary for what is, inevitably, uneven output, when you

can choose from among the nation's best and pay à la carte?" (p. 81).

But balancing the budget by eliminating staff cartoonist is not the only reason for

editors to choose the syndication route. Many newspaper managers are unwilling to

recruit new cartoonists and potentially battle with a staff cartoonist with whom they

disagree, especially when it lets them choose cartoons that will not offend their readers, a

factor which some believe contributes to falling subscription rates (Pett, 2004). As Trostle

(2004) pointed out, "Bottom-line mentality and a concern for slipping circulation can

drive publishers and editors to fear controversy of any sort" (p. 9). Using syndication

services allows editors to avoid controversies because they can hand-pick cartoons that

will not be viewed as offensive to their audience. In turn, this lessens the risk of losing

readership and revenue, according to supporters of editorial cartoon syndication. It is a move that has been repeated throughout the industry's history. For example, after World War II when cartoonist Bill Mauldin began to feature harsh social criticisms in his cartoons instead of mild commentary on soldier life, he soon found himself without a job when a high number of readers cancelled their newspaper subscriptions (Hess & Northrop, 1996). It is also worth noting that some editorial cartoonists, Doug Marlette and Mike Peters, for example, have even abandoned the industry in favor of drawing comics for the "funnies" section of a newspaper to avoid battles with editors and publishers — a tactic that only contributes to reliance of syndicated editorial cartoons (Dewey, 2007).

Ultimately, however, fewer staff positions for editorial cartoonists and a dependence on syndication have resulted in less local commentary. Unless there is a news event tied to its particular locale, a newspaper using syndicated cartoons will not be able to feature an editorial cartoon about any local topic. According to Hess and Northrop (1996), for an editorial cartoon to be syndicated, it must by nature be appealing to the largest possible number of readers, which leads to "a homogeneity of style and approach…that undermine[s] the essence of cartooning: a unique point of view" (p. 103).

Perceived Impact of the Loss of Local Commentary

Many in the newspaper and editorial cartoon industry, along with media critics, lament the dwindling number of editorial cartoonists who work full time at a newspaper as more editors opt for syndicated cartoons (Lamb, 2004; Stantis, 2004; Trostle, 2004). Perhaps the most cited concern has been that communities will suffer from a lack of local

commentary delivered by the unique medium of an editorial cartoon (Lindley, 2004; Stantis, 2004). By choosing cartoons from a syndication service, editors will only be able to print cartoons focusing on national and global issues instead of local topics. Loss of a local editorial cartoonist could mean a loss of a community leader. As Nast demonstrated and as Lamb (2004) observed, local editorial cartoonists have at times successfully encouraged change in political leadership or policy. Cartoonist Lee Judge, for example, focused on local topics while at the Kansas City Star and "forc[ed] city officials to address issues they might have otherwise ignored" (Lamb, 2004, pp. 140-141).

Some critics of syndication simply argue that relying on syndicated cartoons leads to a boring editorial page. In response to Plante's (2004) interview, Burgett H. Mooney III, publisher or the *Rome* (Georgia) *News-Tribune*, said syndicated editorial cartoons makes the editorial page "generic" (p. 13). Mooney, while citing the average newspaper's financial strain, agreed that having a staff editorial cartoonist is indeed a luxury, but he also believed it is necessary because a localized editorial page builds a bridge to readers in the community, which is the what newspapers should be doing. Thus, the elimination of staff cartoonists, which may seem like a sound financial decision in the short run, could ultimately result in a potential loss of revenue if readers are no longer interested in what the newspaper has to offer. According to Stantis (2004), a newspaper that uses only syndicated cartoons misses an opportunity to increase profit and popularity because it does not "provide its readers with a connection to local issues, not only with reporting but also with the cartoons it carries" (p. 37). Similarly, Pett (2004) contended that newspapers that use syndicated cartoons not only shortchange the audience, but also hurt themselves

by losing content that would interest readers and spark debate, possibly leading to increased readership. With such earning potential, it would make more sense to hire more editorial cartoonists instead of erasing their position, according to laid-off cartoonist Kirk Anderson (as cited in Lamb, 2004, p. 222).

Yet for some time, editorial cartoonists have been focusing on larger issues than the actions of local politicians. The first circulated editorial cartoons — those by Benjamin Franklin and his contemporaries — were not of a local, but of a national, nature. Similarly, cartoons published during the Civil War were also nationally themed. Thomas Nast, one of the heralded editorial cartoonists who focused on local issues, originally acquired notoriety by drawing editorial cartoons on national topics for *Harper's Weekly*, such as depictions of "noble Northern soldiers, damsels in distress, and most of all, warmongering, predatory Southerners…He emphatically defended the president, his policies, and their outcomes; he consistently eviscerated Southern leaders, motives, and traditions (Lordan, 2006, p. 38).

Certainly times of war call forth nationally themed editorial cartoons, but during the Progressive Era at the end of the nineteenth century, cartoonists primarily threw their weight behind criticism of affluent members of society and powerful banks, both of which were related to issues facing the entire population and not just a local audience (Lamb, 2007). In the 1890s, the most popular editorial cartoon was "Hogan's Alley," which featured the Yellow Dugan Kid sharing "his epiphanies from the streets and backyards of New York's working neighborhoods … and a prevailing feel of kids winking at any and all adult exertions" (Dewey, 2007, p. 39). After World War I, the

"rush of internal crises afflicting the country," as Dewey (2007, p.49) called it, prompted many cartoonists to tackle large-scale issues and topics of human interest including Prohibition, the stock market crash, and civil rights issues. Even after World War II, attention on national issues did not fade as the country became preoccupied with the threat of communism (Lamb, 2007).

In addition, according to Trostle (2004), the editorial cartoon industry was at its height in the early 1980s, after and partially due to the Watergate scandal. This event of national consequence, and others similar to it, led many staff cartoonists to draw fewer cartoons about local issues. This showed there has been a history of frequent attention to national issues in editorial cartoons. The argument could then be made that as the public became more interested in and tied to national and global affairs — wars, large-scale social movements, presidential scandals — cartoonists naturally and properly drew more cartoons about these issues and fewer about local topics. If so, this would then have led to a reduction of local criticism even before the replacement of staff cartoonists with syndication services. Still, critics continue to argue that a newspaper's audience will not be served as well by syndicated editorial cartoons, as there is then likely no chance of any local content in the printed editorial cartoons (Hess & Northrop, 1996; Lamb, 2007).

Research Questions

What must first be considered in the debate over the quality of the present and future nature of the editorial cartoon industry as compared to its past role is how often a staff cartoonist actually draws locally themed editorial cartoons. Critics have presumed that a sizable void will be left if there is no staff cartoonist and no more local

commentary. However, no statistics have been produced to support that argument. A

measurement of how often a staff cartoonist focuses on local topics in comparison to the

frequency he or she draws cartoons about national and global topics will create a

quantitative measure of how much of his or her output was locally themed and thus lost

in the case of replacement by syndicated cartoons. Furthermore, by looking at the

relationship over a period of time, research could show whether one kind of cartoon

focus, local or not, actually increased or decreased in frequency. The result of such

research would benefit the current debate, as it would present evidence to be used by

either side.

> Research Question 1: How often does a staff editorial cartoonist draw locally
>
> themed editorial cartoons in comparison to nationally themed cartoons?

An additional concern for many critics has been the possibility of a less political

opinion section should syndicated cartoons replace those created by staff cartoonists. An

increase in editorial cartoons about national and global issues could be paired with an

increase in cartoons about non-political topics, which some believe does not meet the

historical standards of the genre. Still, social factors such as human rights or civil liberty

issues, celebrities, changing social norms, and business agendas are typically national or

global topics, and whether it is due to an editor's choice or, as some would argue, the lack

of choice offered by a syndication service, there may indeed be an increase in cartoons

about such non-political themes. Many of these assumptions, however, have been made

without consideration of how often staff cartoonists were already drawing these kinds of

non-political cartoons. An examination of editorial cartoon content would quantify the

frequency of political cartoons to non-political cartoons drawn by a staff cartoonist and would also ark any possible increase or decrease in the amount of non-political cartoons over time.

Research Question 2: How often does a staff editorial cartoonist draw political cartoons in comparison to non-political cartoons?

Method

To complete research that would quantify the frequency of local topics in comparison to national topics in editorial cartoons, there must be a content analysis performed on a newspaper that uses a staff cartoonist. Although the daily Memphis, Tennessee, newspaper, *The Commercial Appeal*, no longer has a staff cartoonist, it did employ Bill Day until 2009 as well as several other award-winning cartoonists before him (AAEC, 2009; Cavna, 2009). Because of the newspaper's history of nationally recognized staff editorial cartoonists and its ultimate decision to eliminate the cartoonist position in favor of syndication services, it appears to offer an especially intriguing situation, and its editions from before Day's termination serve as the universe for the content analysis.

Due to the amount of data available, and to further stratify the sample, the analysis was performed on a selected time frame in which *The Commercial Appeal* published staff-drawn editorial cartoons. In order to determine the ratio of local to national topics and the ratio of further subcategories in editorial cartoons over time and for the research to include multiple editorial cartoonists from *The Commercial Appeal*, a sample was taken from a large time period. The sample was composed of the years

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between 1980 and 2008, the last full year Day served as the newspaper's staff editorial cartoonist. The year 1980 was chosen because both Trostle (2004) and Plante (2004) counted the 1980s as a peak in editorial cartoon creativity and productivity with a high number of staff cartoonists employed full time and because they pointed to the following decades as evidence of the decline of the genre. Taking a sample of the years between 1980 and 2008 resulted in 29 years of analysis. To represent content of each year, this research used two composite weeks taken from the twelve months of the year in which two randomly selected Sundays, Mondays, Tuesdays, etc., were chosen, which was shown to sufficiently represent an entire year of a daily newspaper by researchers Riffe, Aust, and Lacy (as cited in Kratzer & Thorson, 2007, p. 62). This made the sample size 406 days. The unit of analysis was a single item, the editorial cartoon, taken from *The Commercial Appeal*'s "Viewpoint" section, that is, the pages of the newspaper featuring commentary from staff, readers, wire services, and syndication services. Individual editorial cartoons were coded as having national or local, political or non-political themes.

During the sample taken, five primary staff cartoonists produced the editorial cartoons at *The Commercial Appeal*. Bill Garner, Bill Day, Roger Harvell, and Scott Stantis served during the 1980s. Michael Ramirez was staff cartoonist throughout most of the 1990s, and Day rejoined the newspaper in the 1990s and remained staff cartoonists through the early 2000s until the position was eliminated.

The author, who served as coder for the content analysis, developed the following six categories for the content analysis:

A. *National topics with political themes* (content featuring political affairs and political figures of national significance, i.e., beyond the Mid-South region — heretofore known as western Tennessee, eastern Arkansas, and northern Mississippi)

B. *National topics without political themes* (content featuring activities, personas, or cultural observations that are known to the national audience)

C. *Local topics with political themes* (content featuring political affairs and political figures primarily significant to just the Mid-South region)

D. *Local topics without political themes* (content featuring activities, personas, or cultural observations that are primarily relevant to only the Mid-South region)

E. *Global topics with political themes* (content featuring nations beyond the United States and is political in nature, including political figures and armed conflicts)

F. *Global topics without political themes* (content featuring nations beyond the United States and is not political in nature, including cultural observations and international events, i.e., Olympic Games)

Results

Presence of Local Topics in Content from Staff Cartoonists

The 1980s. During the first three years of the sample selected, Bill Garner was the staff editorial cartoonist for *The Commercial Appeal*, although he had been drawing cartoons for the newspaper since 1976. In all, his entire career at *The Commercial Appeal* stretched over eight years. Throughout his final three years, the majority of the topics he

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covered were either national or global in nature. In 1980, as seen in Table 1, 30% of his

cartoons were dedicated to national themes and 40% were about global issues. Compared

to the 30% of his cartoons that had a local emphasis the same year, the content appeared

to spread out evenly over the three divisions, but this still put locally themed cartoons in

the minority, as it was less than one-third of the year's content. The difference between

local and non-local coverage grew in the following two years as Garner drew even fewer

locally themed cartoons. Of his cartoons, local topics comprised 22.2% and 25% of 1981

and 1982, respectively. Viewing the three years as a whole showed that about 26.7% of

all his cartoons has a local theme.[1]

After Garner left *The Commercial Appeal*, Bill Day took over the position as staff

cartoonist for two years. During that time, just over 80% of Day's editorial cartoons

featured a non-local theme, a continuation of the trend by Garner. However, the average

of the two years does not adequately depict either year. Day's output initially created a

ratio that did not demonstrate a preference for either local or non-local themes. In 1983,

half of Day's images had a local focus while the other half was split between national and

global themes. But in 1984, his content demonstrated a sharp increase in editorial

cartoons with national themes. For every locally themed cartoon, he produced five

cartoons that focused on national or global issues. The amount of locally themed cartoons

Day produced was 33.3% less than it had been the year before, which resulted in the

largest margin between locally and non-locally themed cartoons in all of the 1980s.

[1] Rick Alley also drew a handful of editorial cartoons for *The Commercial Appeal* between 1982 and 1983, but as there were only three examples of his work found in the entire sample, his work did not appear to significantly affect the overall outcome of those years and was not individually assessed here.

Table 1

Comparison of the Breadth of Location in Staff-Drawn Editorial Cartoons in the 1980s

Location Level	1980	1985	1989
Local	30%	62.5%	22.2%
National	30%	12.5%	33.3%
Global	40%	25%	44.4%

The proportion of local and national topics was significantly altered when Roger Harvell became the staff cartoonist in 1985. His preference for local and non-local coverage was the opposite of what Day's had been the year before. For every cartoon about a national topic, Harvell produced five that focused on a local issue. Following Harvell's brief stint, Scott Stantis was staff cartoonist for *The Commercial Appeal* from 1986 to 1989. He brought a return to form by producing more nationally and globally themed cartoons than locally themed cartoons. Just 20% of the cartoons he drew featured local issues in 1986, and for each of his remaining three years, just 22.2% of his output was locally themed. The majority of the remaining cartoons drawn by Stantis focused on national issues with the exception being 1989, which showed globally themed cartoons as the most frequently printed (Table 1).

Of the entire decade, an average of 28.6% of all staff-drawn editorial cartoons had a local theme. The mode of the sample, however, showed that most often the percentage

of locally themed cartoons in a year was 22.2%. In the 1980s, Harvell drew the most

locally themed cartoons during his one-year tenure in 1985, which is shown in Table 1.

Indeed, two-thirds of Harvell's editorial cartoons featured a local theme. Day's choices

varied the most — he produced both the lowest yearly average of locally themed cartoons

(in 1984) and the second-highest yearly average of locally themed cartoons (in 1983). But

as a whole, he drew locally themed cartoons less frequently than did the other cartoonists

that had also been employed at *The Commercial Appeal* during the 1980s. The average

produced in those two years showed that only 19.4% of Day's cartoons featured local

topics.

The 1990s. As staff cartoonist at *The Commercial Appeal* from 1990 to 1997,

Michael Ramirez led the newspaper through a decade in which fewer editorial cartoons

focused on local matters. Of all the editorial cartoons he produced at *The Commercial*

Appeal, only 11.1% had a local theme — the least amount drawn by any of the

cartoonists in the sample. It was 8.25% less than the amount of locally themed cartoons

Bill Day drew from 1983 to 1984, the period closest to Ramirez's low. Moreover, in the

samples taken from 1993 and 1995 there was not a single locally themed cartoon

produced by Ramirez (Table 2). He drew an average of 11.6% more cartoons with

national and global topics than Day, Scott Stantis, or Bill Garner, all of whom had also

favored national issues.

The year that Ramirez most often contributed locally themed cartoons to the

"Viewpoint" page was 1994, in which 22.2% of his editorial cartoons featured local

topics. But that year was sandwiched between the years he focused on local matter the

least, showing there was no consistent incline or decline of locally themed cartoons drawn by Ramirez. Instead, the amount of locally themed cartoons he produced varied from year to year. In the first three years Ramirez was on staff, the amount of locally themed cartoons he produced began at 14.3%, dipped to 10%, and then rose to 18.2%. Finally, during the last two years he on staff, an average of 11.8% of his output was locally themed.

Table 2

Comparison of the Breadth of Location in Staff-Drawn Editorial Cartoons in the 1990s

Location Level	1990	1995	1999
Local	14.3%	0%	28.6%
National	71.4%	100%	42.9%
Global	14.3%	0%	28.6%

In 1998, Day returned to *The Commercial Appeal* and replaced Ramirez as the staff editorial cartoonist. During the last two years of the decade, the amount of locally themed cartoons in the "Viewpoint" section increased due to his output. For 1998, one out of every three of Day's cartoons featured a local topic, increasing by 166% from the year before. The following year, 28.6% of Day's cartoons were locally themed. While he

had drawn fewer locally themed cartoons than the previous year, it was still about 20%
more than what had been Ramirez's average output.

Day's average output of locally themed cartoons for the final years of the 1990s
was nearly 31%, which was 8.8% more than what Ramirez had drawn in 1994, the year
he had most frequently produced locally themed cartoons. It was also a higher average
than the outputs from Garner, Stantis, and Day's own earlier period spent at *The
Commercial Appeal*. Because of his greater focus on local issues, Day's contributions led
to a slight increase in the total percentage of locally themed cartoons of the decade, but
the average of the 1990s still showed that just over 14% of staff-drawn cartoons had a
local theme — about half of what was produced in the 1980s.

The 2000s. From 2000 to 2008, 25.3% of the cartoons featured local themes, but
no single year's percentage closely matched that amount. Instead, the amount of locally
themed cartoons ranged from 9.1% (in 2001) to 50% (in 2007). There was no steady arc
to capture the amount of locally themed cartoons during the decade. Instead, the averages
typically grew in spurts and had sharp declines. For example, about 10% of Day's
cartoons focused on local issues during each of the first three years of the decade. But the
amount of locally themed cartoons he produced jumped to 44.4% in 2003, an increase of
over 300%. That ratio was similar the following year when two out of every five editorial
cartoons drawn by Day in 2002 had a local theme.

In 2005, there was a steep drop in the frequency of locally themed cartoons
produced by Day. Only 22.2% of his editorial cartoons featured local issues — an amount
17.8% less than the year before. Similarly, in 2006, his output of locally themed cartoons

was again about half of what the prior year's had been, dropping from 22.2% to 11.1%. In just three years, Day had gone from having four out of nine cartoons focused on local issues to just one out of nine. The next year, 2007, there was another increase in the amount of locally themed cartoons Day produced. Half of all his cartoons that year were about local topics, about four and a half times as many as there had been in 2006. This increase was only to be followed by yet another drop in Day's output of locally themed cartoons when only 30% of his 2008 cartoons featured local topics, a fall of 20%.

Table 3

Comparison of the Breadth of Location in Staff-Drawn Editorial Cartoons in the 2000s

Location Level	2000	2005	2008
Local	11.1%	22.2%	30%
National	77.8%	55.6%	50%
Global	11.1%	22.2%	20%

In all, the final years of staff-drawn editorial cartoons at *The Commercial Appeal* showed a resurgence of locally themed cartoons at the hands of Day, as seen in Table 3. During the previous decade, only about 14% of staff-drawn cartoons had local themes as opposed to the early 2000s when just over one quarter of the staff-drawn cartoons featured local issues. This rate was not consistent, though. Four of the final eight years

showed locally themed editorial cartoons comprising just 11.1% or less of the total production of staff-drawn content. While three of these years were at the onset of the decade, the fourth was in the latter half.

During the same decade, there were years in which the frequency shifted to the other end of the spectrum. The amount of locally themed cartoons in three years — 2003, 2004, and 2007 — made up about 40 to 50% of staff-drawn cartoons. Only one other year of the sample, 1985, surpassed those averages, and one year, 1983, matched the rate. Thus, the three examples of high local-issue output were above 82.8% of the rest of the sample. The extreme differences in the years between 2000 and 2008 created a range of 40.9% and led to an average ratio of almost 4:1 in favor of cartoons with non-local topics. The frequency of locally themed cartoons on the "Viewpoint" pages was not as high as it had been in the 1980s, but it was higher than it had been in the 1990s, when the rate was 7:1 in favor of non-local topics.

Presence of Political Topics in Content from Staff Cartoonists

The 1980s. For the whole of the 1980s, 77.6% of the staff-drawn cartoons depicted political content. There were, however, peaks and valleys from year to year, even among cartoons produced by a single cartoonist. As can be seen in Table 4, when Bill Garner was the staff cartoonist at the onset of the 1980s, his content began as very political, but the amount of political cartoons he produced decreased by his final year. Ninety percent of his cartoons were political in nature in 1980, and the following year the rate was nearly the same. But in 1982, only two-thirds of his cartoons were political. Yet even as the likelihood of his political cartoon output went from being 9:1 in favor of

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political cartoons to 2:1 in favor of political cartoons, Garner still favored political themes. Of the three years, an average of 83.3% of Garner's cartoons were political, producing more than the average of the entire decade.

Bill Day, the cartoonist after Garner, drew political cartoons with even greater frequency on average. During the two years he was on staff, the amount of political cartoons that comprised his output grew by nearly 20%. Initially, he created a ratio of political cartoons to non-political cartoons at 4:1 in favor of political content, and he approached the volume of political cartoons Garner had produced in 1980. During his second year on staff, however, Day surpassed that rate when 91.7% of his cartoons were about political issues. His output formed a ratio of 11:1 in favor of political cartoons.

Table 4

Comparison of the Political Content in Staff-Drawn Editorial Cartoons in the 1980s

Theme	1980	1985	1989
Political	90%	75%	66.7%
Not Political	10%	25%	33.3%

In the mid-1980s, staff cartoonist Roger Harvell initiated a trend of less political coverage in editorial cartoons, which is shown in Table 4. Once he took up the post of staff cartoonist in 1985, just 75% of his output had political themes — 8.3% behind

Garner's average output and 15.3% behind Day's. Political content still held the majority, however. In 1985, three out of four cartoons featured political content.

During the final four years of the 1980s, Scott Stantis drew even fewer political cartoons than Harvell had produced. Only 66.7% of Stantis' total output covered political topics. He produced the fewest political cartoons of all staff cartoonists that decade. He met Garner's lowest production of non-political content and then beat it, drawing political cartoons just 60% of the time in 1986. Stantis did not produce so few political cartoons each year, however. In both 1987 and 1988, close to 78% of his cartoons were political.

Yet when his content is taken as whole and compared with the averages from the other cartoonists of the decade, there was a definite downward slope of political cartoons in the second half of the 1980s (Table 4). In 1980, the ratio of political to non-political cartoons was 9:1 in favor of political content and was 2:1 by 1989. It was because of this that the high percentage of political cartoons at the beginning of the 1980s — 90% in 1980, 88.9% in 1981, 91.7% in 1984 — was tempered so that the amount of political cartoons for the decade was 77.6%. Of the non-political cartoons produced, they were almost entirely about national issues. Just 13.6% of the entire decade's non-political cartoons was about local issues. Local non-political cartoons only appeared in the samples taken from 1985, 1986, and 1989.

The 1990s. Because Michael Ramirez was the staff editorial cartoonist at *The Commercial Appeal* for most of the 1990s, the number of political cartoons he drew was the main contribution to the average for the decade. His frequency in producing politically themed cartoons was not entirely consistent throughout the eight years he

worked at the newspaper, though. In 1990, for example, 85.7% of his cartoons had political content, but the following year that amount fell by about 30% so that just 60% of all his cartoons were political in nature. A telling example was that only one out of seven cartoons from 1990 was non-political, but in 1991 the rate was two non-political cartoons for every three political cartoons. The lower rate was not repeated the next year, however, and the frequency of political cartoons drawn by Ramirez rose to comprise 72.3% of his content — about halfway between the amounts he drew in 1990 and 1991.

Table 5

Comparison of the Political Content in Staff-Drawn Editorial Cartoons in the 1990s

Theme	1990	1995	1999
Political	85.7%	77.8%	85.7%
Not Political	14.3%	22.2%	14.3%

There was another increase in the number of political cartoons he produced the following year as well. Seven out of every nine cartoons, or 77.8% of the year's output, featured political topics. For three years, he produced the same amount of political cartoons. In 1996, the number of political cartoons drawn by Ramirez again escalated, comprising almost 89% of his output, and the amount of non-political cartoons he produced was cut in half from what it had been the previous year. In fact, it was the

lowest average amount of non-political cartoons since 1984. On average, there were four political cartoons every week and only one non-political cartoon every other week in 1996. However, there was a drop in the amount of political cartoons he produced in 1997.

For his last year on staff, just 62.5% of his editorial cartoons were political — a dip of 26.4% from the year before. Thus, during his final two years at the newspaper, Ramirez showcased extremes in his production of political output. In 1996, he produced political cartoons more often than any other year he was on staff, and in 1997, he produced them less often than any other year. Of Ramirez's total output, just over three-fourths of his cartoons were political. Most of his political cartoons featured national content, as did most of his non-political content. Only 16.7% of his non-political cartoons were locally themed.

When Bill Day returned to the newspaper in 1998, about 83% of his cartoons were political, and that amount grew to 85.7% in 1999. In both years, Day drew over 20% more political cartoons than Ramirez had in 1997. In addition, the amount of political cartoons Day drew in 1998 and 1999 was 9.5% higher than the average Ramirez produced his entire time at the newspaper. All of Day's political cartoons for this period were nationally themed.

As in the 1980s, there were always more political cartoons than non-political cartoons in each year of the 1990s (Table 5). About three out of every four cartoons drawn, or 76.5% or the output, were political. Indeed, the overall percentage of political cartoons produced in those years was almost the same as the decade before. In the 1980s, 77.6% of the cartoons were political in nature — a difference of only 1.1%. Furthermore,

in both decades there were only three years in the sample that featured locally themed non-political cartoons, indicating that the majority of non-political cartoons were nationally themed.

The 2000s. Drawing until the middle of March 2009, Bill Day was the final staff cartoonist for *The Commercial Appeal*, and how often he drew political editorial cartoons varied widely year to year during this last decade. At times, 90% of his output featured political content, but there were also years in which only about 54 or 55% of his cartoons were political. There was no steady incline or decline over the years but instead a constant shift in the type of cartoons he drew. At the decade's onset, two-thirds of Day's cartoons were political, but the following year the amount fell by 18.3% and political cartoons comprised just 54.5% of his output. As much as the percentage had descended in 2001, it grew at an even quicker rate the next year. In 2002, four out of five cartoons, or 80%, were about political topics. One year later, the amount of political cartoons drawn by Day was again at two-thirds.

Table 6

Comparison of the Political Content in Staff-Drawn Editorial Cartoons in the 2000s

Theme	2000	2005	2008
Political	66.7%	77.8%	90%
Not Political	33.3%	22.2%	10%

There were two years when 90% of Day's cartoons were politically themed. Both were years that held presidential elections, 2004 and 2008, which could explain the high volume of political cartoons (Table 6). The only figure contrary to that explanation is the number of political cartoons Day drew in 2000, also a presidential election year. While political cartoons were in the majority that year — indeed they were every year — they comprised only 66.7% of his output, 23.3% less than what was produced in 2004 and 2008. For the time between the latter two presidential election years, an average of 65.4% of Day's cartoons covered political matters, although the amounts had a range of 22.2%.

As for the entirety of the decade, there was a lower average of staff-drawn political cartoons than what the staff cartoonists had produced in either the 1980s or 1990s. While the average amount of political cartoons fell 1.1% from the 1980s to the 1990s, it fell another 5% during the early 2000s. Just 71.5% of the cartoons from 2000 to 2008 featured political content. Yet even though the rate of political cartoons for the last decade showed a slight decline, it also demonstrated that as far as content in editorial cartoons, political themes were always in the majority.

<div align="center">Discussion</div>

Cartoons with Local Content in the Minority

There was no consistent trend — downward, upward, or level — in how much locally themed content the staff cartoonists at *The Commercial Appeal* produced. The amount of locally themed cartoons that were drawn varied within each decade and at times even within each cartoonist's tenure. The frequent peaks and valleys of the 1980s can especially be attributed to the differing preferences among the staff cartoonists

<div align="center">30</div>

employed that decade. There were four primary editorial cartoonists during the 1980s: Bill Garner, Bill Day, Roger Harvell, and Scott Stantis. Only three of them favored national and global issues over local topics, however. Harvell stood apart as the only staff cartoonist of the 1980s — and the entire sample — to draw more locally themed cartoons than nationally or globally themed ones.

While the other staff cartoonists in the 1980s favored cartoons about national and global events, they did so at different rates. Almost 81% of Day's content was either about national or global issues. Similarly, about 78% of Stantis' output featured national and global topics, and just over 73% of what Garner produced was nationally or globally themed. As seen in Figure 1, two dramatic peaks during the decade prevented what would be a line depicting a fairly steady decline in locally themed content. Instead, it was unclear if anything more than the cartoonist's personal preference influenced the amount of locally themed content produced.

A factor supporting that presumption was the wide variation in the percentages produced by Day during the 1980s. During his two years on staff, local content initially comprised 50% of his output, but it comprised only 16.7% of his output the following year. As that year, 1984, featured a presidential election, it may partly explain the increase in nationally themed cartoons. But that was not the case in the output of the other cartoonists during presidential election years. For Garner, Stantis, and Michael Ramirez, the amounts of locally themed cartoons printed during presidential years were actually some of the higher rates of locally themed output they produced.

There was a rocky upward slope in the amount of locally themed cartoons produced each year during the 1990s, but this was entirely due to how much Day produced at the end of the decade when he returned as staff cartoonist (Figure 1). The cartoons printed up until Day retook the position of staff cartoonist showed a fairly regular, if low, production of locally themed cartoons once the two years that showed a complete lack of cartoons about local issues were eliminated. Those two years, 1993 and 1995, may be ignored because it is unlikely that Ramirez did not produce a single locally themed cartoon as they comprised at least 10% of his output during the other years he was on staff.
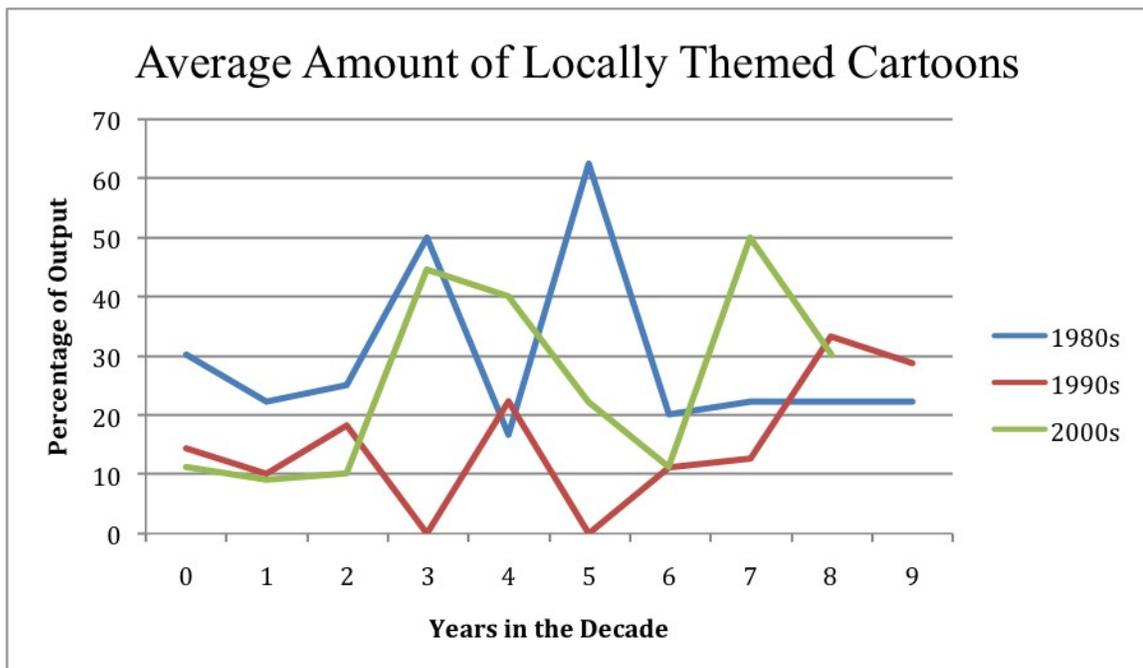

Figure 1. The frequency (%) of staff-drawn editorial cartoons that feature a local issue or figure each year from 1980 – 2008.

The average amount of locally themed cartoons in the 1990s, even with the figures from Day's years added in, was much less than what it had been during the 1980s. But as it was also less than the average output in the 2000s, it did not point to a consistent decline over the course of the sample. The reason for the lower output could have been a nationwide preoccupation with national issues, but it could also have been the preference of Ramirez or a blend of both reasons. Whatever the reason, the average amount of locally themed cartoons increased the following decade, which was also the last decade to feature staff-drawn editorial cartoons.

During the 2000s, Day produced 11.2% more cartoons about local issues than the decade before. Furthermore, there was an overall increase in locally themed cartoons by the end of the decade compared to the its beginning. However, the average rates throughout the term were inconsistent. There was a protracted and deep drop in the average amount of locally themed cartoons produced in the middle of the decade, which is depicted in Figure 1. From 2003 to 2006, the number of locally themed cartoons dropped each year. On two occasions, the percentage of locally themed cartoons was cut in half from the previous year's amount. While there was ultimately an increase in the amount of locally themed cartoons over the final eight years, it could not be assumed to be a stable one.

The averages of all the decades showed that the staff cartoonists of the 1980s contributed more locally themed content to the "Viewpoint" section than any staff cartoonists working in the decades after it. However, the difference between the averages of the 1980s and the 2000s was only 3.3%, in that 28.6% of the average yearly output in

the 1980s was locally themed and 25.3% of the average yearly output in the 2000s was locally themed. While that did demonstrate a decline from the first to the final decade of the sample, the percentage of locally themed cartoons included in the yearly output of 2008 was on the rise. In 2008, the amount of locally themed cartoons was almost 19% higher than it had been in 2000.

In addition, the amount of locally themed cartoons in the 2000s was actually an increase from the previous decade. In the 1990s, local content comprised just over 14% of a year's total output on average. Examination of the output of staff-drawn cartoons from both latter decades showed that the average number of local cartoons increased by almost 80% from the 1990s to the 2000s.

Whether Day would have built a higher average of locally themed cartoons drawn in the next decade is unknown due to the elimination of the staff cartoonist position. The rate might have remained fairly static, but there would likely be another drop in the frequency of locally themed cartoons because no high rate of locally themed cartoons was sustained for long during the other periods of the sample. How much his production of cartoons about local issues declined and for how long is also indeterminable. What can be surmised is that the number of locally themed cartoons produced in a year reflects the personal preference of the cartoonist on a year-to-year basis rather than a regular downward movement over time.

As for the rate of production for the entire sample, an average of 22.7% of all the staff-drawn cartoons were about local topics. At 22.2%, the mode of staff-drawn cartoons featuring local themes was only half of a percent lower than the average. This would

appear to confirm that local content comprised just over 22% of the total output of the last three decades of staff-drawn editorial cartoons at the newspaper. By taking the average of the two figures, it can be estimated that once syndication replaced the staff cartoonists at *The Commercial Appeal*, the audience lost 22.5% of editorial cartoon content. Afterward, that hole could only be filled with cartoons about national or global topics. This does not necessarily show how much the audience valued the locally themed cartoons and how that would have weighted the feeling of what was lost, but it does quantify what was lost.

According to Otis Sanford, former editor of the "Viewpoint" section, the value of having an on-staff cartoonist was much greater than any quantification could show. Sanford, editor from January 2007 to January 2011, believed the newspaper was "absolutely better off" when it had its own cartoonist (O. Sanford, personal communication, March 2, 2011). It was a decision made by the newspaper's publisher, who ordered cutbacks and believed the position could be filled by either the same person or another cartoonist working on a freelance basis instead, he said. The last staff cartoonist, Day, did not choose to serve as a freelancer for the newspaper and instead began to contribute to a syndication service.

To Sanford, featuring syndicated cartoons or an occasional freelanced cartoon by a local artist is simply not good enough (O. Sanford, personal communication, March 2, 2011). According to him, having a local editorial cartoonist on staff was a significant part of the newspaper's history and was an asset to the community by providing "a strong local voice … [that was] talented and thoughtful, very opinionated, and [able] to stir the

masses." Indeed, while Sanford was editor, Day's output of locally themed cartoons increased, and Sanford found the balance of local, national, and global issues to be a service to the "Viewpoint" section. Even Day's strong national voice had a local flavor, he said. Additionally, Sanford said that although the reaction to Day's lay-off was mixed: "Even those who didn't agree with [Day] were sad to see a local voice go."

Critics of the elimination of staff cartoonist positions built much of their argument on the belief that the newspaper would be worse off without the unique kind of local commentary a staff cartoonist can provide. However, the majority of the editorial cartoons written by *The Commercial Appeal*'s staff cartoonists were almost always about national topics. There was only one year during the sample in which the majority of the year's cartoons were about local issues. Only two years had an equal division of locally themed cartoons and non-locally themed cartoons. Moreover, the number of locally themed cartoons comprised less than a quarter of the entire sample. Numerically, locally themed cartoons were firmly in the minority.

Political Cartoons in Decline

Not once during the entire sample was there a year when there were more non-political cartoons than political cartoons. Even though some of the staff cartoonists may have favored non-political themes more than others, at no point during the sample did the yearly output of non-political cartoons reach beyond 45.5%. In fact, an average of the sample showed that about three-fourths of all the staff-drawn cartoons were political. Only on two occasions did the yearly amount of political cartoons come close to the yearly amount of non-political cartoons. There were, however, four years in which the

number of political cartoons drawn by staff cartoonist comprised 90% or more of the total amount of cartoons. However, there was some decrease in the output of politically themed editorial cartoons over the course of the sample, which can be seen in Figure 2. During the 1980s, 77.6% of the editorial cartoons drawn by the staff cartoonists were about political issues. The average amount of political cartoons comprised only 71.5% of the output in the 2000s.

There was not much of a decrease in the average production of political cartoons between the 1980s to the 1990s, however. During the 1990s, political cartoons comprised 76.5% of the output, falling just over 1% from the prior decade. Additionally, the two decades also shared the same mode in which 77.8% of the staff-drawn cartoons in a year featured political content. That rate of political cartoon production was present for five of the twenty years. In neither decade was there a year in which less than 60% of the content was politically themed.

Of the cartoonists in the 1980s, Bill Day drew political cartoons the most frequently. Just over 90% of his cartoons that decade featured political content. In 1984, Day produced the highest amount of political cartoons in a year during the entire sample. But if his figures from 1983 and 1984 were to be excluded, the amount of political cartoons can be seen as declining from Bill Garner's tenure at the start of the decade to Scott Stantis' time at *The Commercial Appeal* at the decade's end (Figure 2). Just over 83% of all of Garner's cartoons were political. While Roger Harvell was at the helm, that amount dropped to 75%. It then fell to 66.7% once Stantis took over the position as staff cartoonist.

This is not to say that the cartoonists of the 1980s were consistent from year to year. The range of Garner's output of political cartoons was 23.3%, which included years in which 90% of his content was political and when two-thirds of his content was political. The range of Stantis' political cartoon production was smaller at 17.8%, which showed greater consistency but also pointed to continued variation. The range of political cartoons produced during the entire decade was 31.7%.

For the 1990s, there was a smaller range for the different frequencies of political cartoon production, but the average production of politically themed cartoons from both decades was nearly equal. However, if Day had not rejoined the staff in 1998, the average percent of political editorial cartoons would likely have been less because only 75% of the cartoons Michael Ramirez drew featured political topics. During the final two years of the decade — when Day was again on staff — 84.5% of the cartoons were political. Indeed, Ramirez drew fewer political cartoons than Day, but he did not produce the lowest amount of politically themed cartoons. On average, Stantis drew the fewest political cartoons and favored non-political content the most. One-third of all the cartoons Stantis drew for *The Commercial Appeal* featured content that was not political.

During the last decade in the sample, there was a decrease of political content produced by the staff cartoonist, Day (Figure 2). The average amount of political cartoons during the 2000s comprised 71.5 of the total output — over 6% less than what was produced the first decade. In addition, the mode for the 2000s differed from the mode shared by both the 1980s and the 1990s. The mode of political cartoons in the 2000s was 66.7, about 11% less than that of the decades before. While the average and mode were

lower, however, there was not a consistent decline or plateau over the course of the decade. In fact, the amount of political cartoons varied the most in the 2000s. Both the sample's lowest and second-lowest rates of political cartoons in a year were during the final decade, which can be seen in Figure 2. Furthermore, there were two years in the 2000s that matched the sample's second-highest amount of political cartoons produced in a year. The varying amounts of political cartoons created a range of 35.5%, larger than the ranges produced by the 1980s and the 1990s. Even as the decade showed the most variation in the number of political and non-political cartoons, however, it was also the only decade during the sample to feature only one staff cartoonist for the entire decade.

One pattern that appeared during the 2000s and that was also present in the other decades was the correlation of presidential election years and high amounts of political cartoons being produced. Often the years with the highest percentage of political cartoons comprising the total output were years in which presidential elections were held. There were three presidential election years in the 2000s, and of them, two featured political content 90% of the time. The other two years in the sample that had a rate of political cartoons at 90% or more were also presidential election years. Most of the time, the surge in political content was contained to that one year. In such cases, the high percentage of political cartoons came between two years that featured fewer political cartoons.

However, there were three presidential election years during the sample in which the average amount of political cartoons was not a peak between two other years. When Stantis was staff cartoonist in 1988, there was a decrease in political cartoons the year after the presidential election, but the percentage of political cartoons during the election

year had been the same the year before. In 2000, there was a lower percentage of political

cartoons in the year following the presidential election year, but the amount of political

cartoons during the election year had been nearly 20% less than what it had been the year

before.

Unlike what occurred in 1988 and 2000, the year after the 1992 presidential

election showed an increase in the number of political cartoons produced. In 1993, the

amount of political cartoons in the year was continuing to rise. Just over 72% of the

cartoons in 1992 were political, and in 1993, political cartoons comprised 77.8% of the

year's output. That rate of political cartoon production remained the same for two more
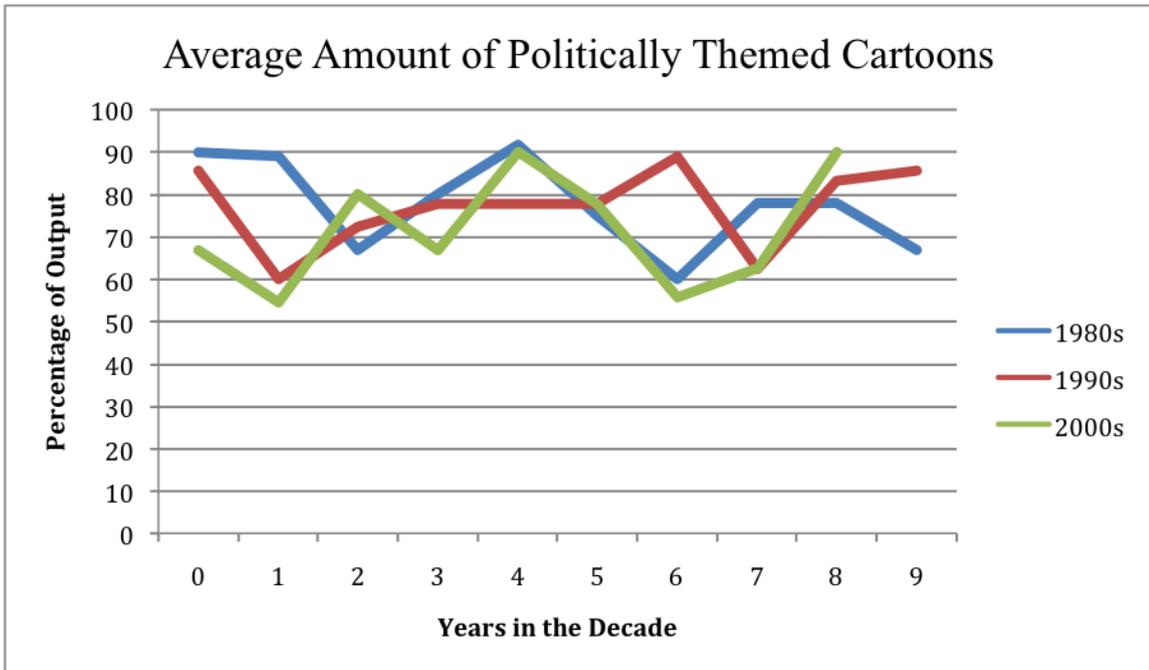
years.

Figure 2. The frequency (%) of staff-drawn editorial cartoons that feature political each
year from 1980 – 2008.

Even though there were exceptions, most of the presidential election years included in the sample featured a brief surge in the number of political cartoons produced. This may show that the sudden increase of political cartoons was dictated by the circumstances of the year rather than personal preference, unlike what was seen with the frequency in which locally themed cartoons were produced. While there were other years in which there was a high amount of political cartoons, the years with the greatest frequency of political cartoons were presidential election years. That the other years with percentages of political cartoons that were higher than average could similarly have been due to another significant national or global event. Or alternatively, local political issues of great impact could have been the source for increased political cartoons during the year. If that were so, it would suggest that events dictated if the editorial cartoon was politically themed. Whatever the driving causes were, however, more non-political cartoons were produced in the last decade of staff-drawn cartoons at *The Commercial Appeal* compared to the two prior decades. Yet even while the average amount of politically themed cartoons was in decline, there were still high percentages of political cartoons during presidential election years.

The Presence of Syndication Throughout the Sample

Syndicated cartoons were already frequently printed alongside the staff-drawn editorial cartoons even before the cartoonist position was eliminated. While the first years of the 1980s demonstrated a preference for staff-drawn editorial cartoons, there was an increased presence of syndicated cartoons by the mid-1980s. Just over one-third, or 33.7%, of all cartoons printed in the "Viewpoint" section from 1980 to 1984 were from

syndicated sources, while the rest were drawn by *The Commercial Appeal*'s cartoonist at the time, Bill Garner. But in 1985, nearly 58% of all the editorial cartoons printed in *The Commercial Appeal* were from a syndication service. The frequency of syndicated editorial cartoons on the "Viewpoint" pages continued to rise well past the average number of staff-drawn content throughout the course of the decade. By 1989, the earlier ratio was practically reversed as the majority of the newspaper's editorial cartoons — more than two-thirds — were syndicated cartoons.

The primary cause of this was the inclusion of "The Drawing Board," a feature meant to include more opinions to be present in the "Viewpoint" pages (O. Sanford, personal communication, March 2, 2011). Under the title "The Drawing Board," one or more syndicated editorial cartoons were printed to provide as much variation as possible while utilizing the unique format of the editorial cartoon. It was intended to run alongside the staff-drawn cartoons and not replace them. Only when the staff cartoonist was on vacation were syndicated cartoons printed on the first page of the "Viewpoint" section, which was reserved for the content produced by staff cartoonists.

The mode for the entire sample showed that staff cartoonists typically drew cartoons for nine days out of every two weeks. On these days, the staff-drawn editorial cartoons were printed on the first page of the "Viewpoint" section, at the top of the page and above the newspaper's editorials. The syndicated cartoons of "The Drawing Board" were then printed on the lower half of the same page or, more frequently, on the following pages. As the years passed, more syndicated cartoons were added to the latter pages of the "Viewpoint" section.

Sunday editions usually featured the most syndicated cartoons. As early as the mid-1980s, there was evidence of up to three syndicated cartoons printed on Sundays, which were often days the staff cartoonist was not working. There were as many as eight syndicated cartoons in Sunday "Viewpoint" pages in 1990 — quite a difference from the early 1980s when there was sometimes no syndicated content on Sundays.

Beginning in 1990, Michael Ramirez took over of the position of staff cartoonist for eight years, and during this time, more syndicated cartoons were printed on the latter "Viewpoint" pages. As opposed to the 1980s in which the decade's average showed about one syndicated cartoon for every staff-drawn cartoon, there was an average of about two syndicated cartoons for every staff-drawn cartoon in the 1990s. That average remained the norm throughout the 2000s until *The Commercial Appeal* abolished the position of staff cartoonist.

There was a unique twist to the types of syndicated cartoons used in the 2000s, however. While in the previous decades there had been some syndicated cartoonists whose cartoons were regularly featured in the "Viewpoint" section, there was one syndicated cartoonist whom *The Commercial Appeal* clearly favored — Michael Ramirez. Following his employment at the Memphis newspaper, Ramirez has since worked as staff cartoonist at both *USA Today* and *Investors Business Daily*, but his cartoons have also been syndicated through a subscription service. In an unusual way, *The Commercial Appeal* kept printing content from Ramirez even though he was no longer on staff. The same has been done with Bill Day because he has since begun to produce cartoons for distribution through a syndication service. The content of his

cartoons is still limited to national or global issues. So while the "Viewpoint" section

features cartoonists that have been or continue to be familiar with the community, none of

the editorial cartoons will reflect local issues.

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