

Cartoons Through the Years, Part Two

When it comes to cartoons in New Orleans, one cannot say enough about the achievements of John Chase (1905 – 1986). Upon his death in 1986, the *Times-Picayune/States-Item* wrote:

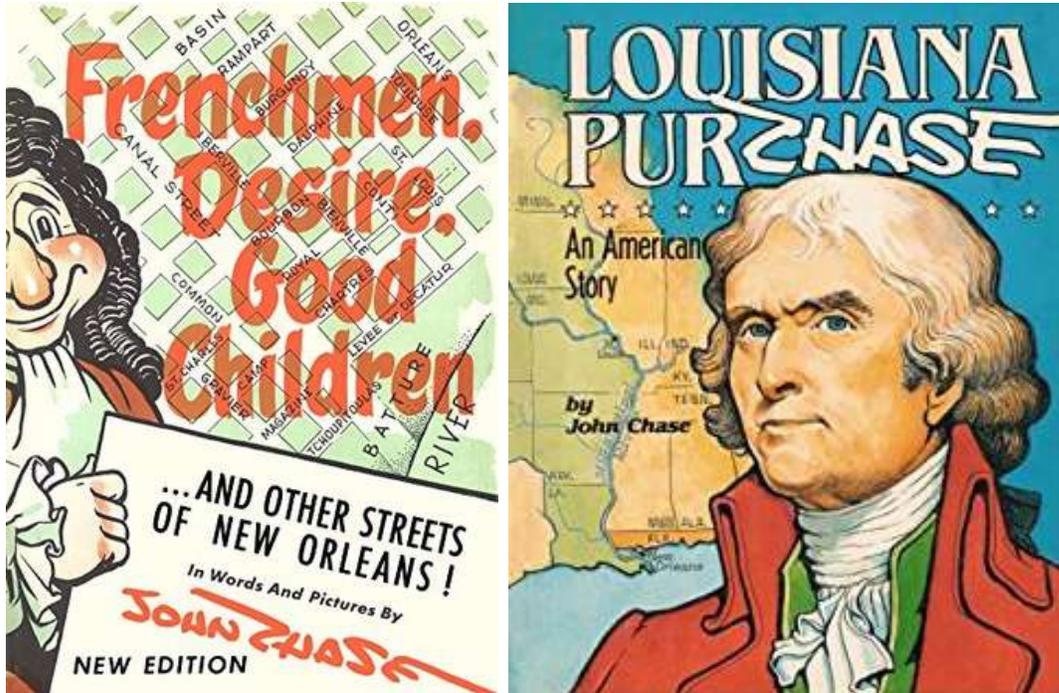
“Few people transcend the status of ordinary citizen to become venerated institutions. John Churchill Chase was such a person. A cartoonist, illustrator, scholar and historian, Mr. Chase had become a New Orleans institution long before his death.”



John Churchill Chase, pipe in hand, at his drawing board

The tribute also emphasized his “keen sense of humor” and mentioned his time as “editorial cartoonist for The States-Item and later for WDSU-TV.” His “wit that he directed at politicians and other public figures was more subtle than savage,” and his “long and distinguished career” drawing “more than 15,000 cartoons since 1925” brought him honors “in abundance.” One included “national recognition for a cartoon after the devastating Mississippi River flood of 1927.”

His best known book, *Frenchmen, Desire, Good Children ... And Other Streets Of New Orleans!*, cleverly and breezily tells the history of the Crescent City by means of its street nomenclature. It won the 1949 Louisiana Literary Award and remains an ever-popular local gem.



Two great histories, written and illustrated by Chase

After graduating from Isidore Newman in New Orleans, Chase attended the Chicago Academy of Fine Arts (founded 1878). In 1882, the Academy was renamed the Art Institute of Chicago, which (in addition to Chase) trained:

Walt Disney (1901-1966);

Herblock (1909-2001);

Bill Mauldin (1921-2003);

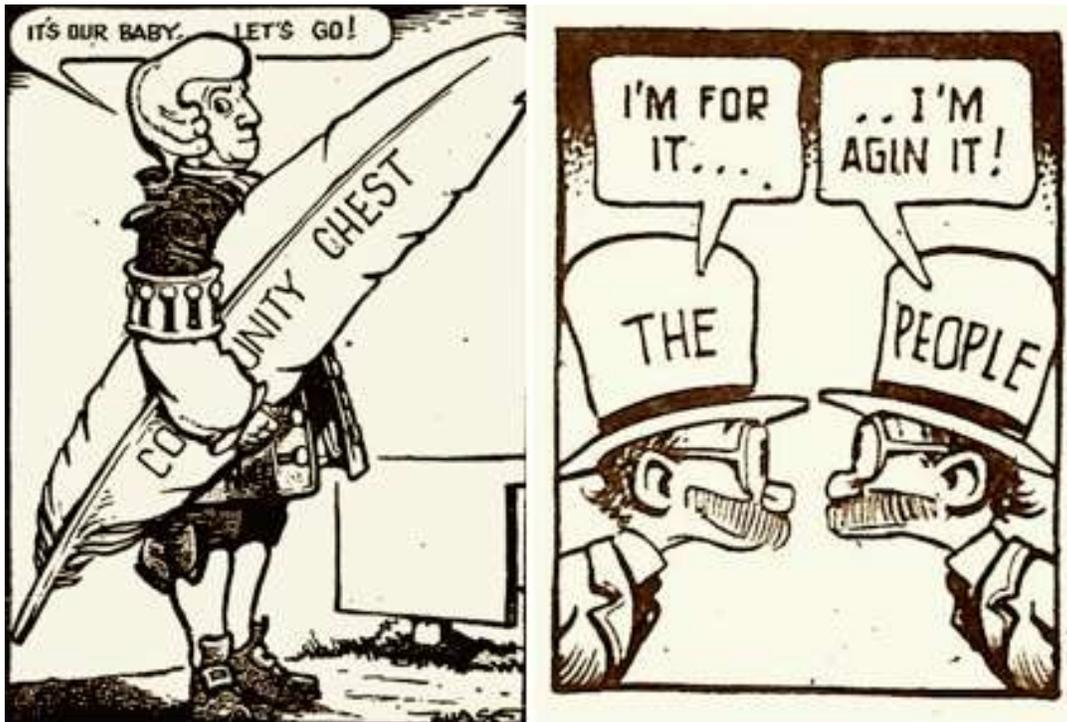
Edward Gorey (1925-2000) – noted for the Masterpiece Mystery sequence;

Shel Silverstein (1930-1999);

Gahan Wilson (1930 -); and

Don Herold (1889-1966); to name just a few.

Chase worked for Frank King at the *Chicago Tribune* as assistant cartoonist on the nationally popular comic strip *Gasoline Alley* and other cartoons, before returning to New Orleans in 1927 to take the job as editorial cartoonist for the *New Orleans Item*, later *The States-Item*. Chase's "every man" character in his cartoons was "Mr. New Orleans" or "The Little Man" with bushy moustache and eyeglasses, who was usually portrayed wearing a 19th-century long coat with a top hat.



In cartoons, as in life, the "People" don't always share the same views.

In addition to "Frenchmen", Chase's other works include the wonderful *Louisiana Purchase: an American Story*, a thorough history of the Louisiana Purchase by means of Chase's imaginative cartoons, delightfully humorous, yet highly informative.

Murals were another way Chase used his art to teach, as well as to entertain. Viewing his work on the wall of main branch of the New Orleans Public Library is like watching a movie on the big screen at the movie theater instead of at home on your television set.

Perhaps one of Chase's greatest contributions, remembered my good friend, Angus Lind, was "all of those great covers of Tulane football programs." "No matter how bad things were going on the field," Angus wrote, " – and they usually were – Chase's cartoons depicted a surreptitious Greenie football player with a wicked smile somehow outwitting his bigger, stronger opponent by setting a trap or bamboozling him. If nothing else, it provided a chuckle and eternal hope to the courageous few who attended games on Willow Street." Chase's program covers were full of optimism and humor and remembered fondly "during the impressionable years" of our youth.



After eight LSU wins, Green Wave fans could still feel optimistic

Enjoying some of Chase's cartoons from the past also reminds us that many issues that were around over fifty years ago are still relevant today. The cartoon below is one that was published during World War

II and had to do with the city's potholes. Aren't you glad we've finally got that problem fixed?



Don't you love the fish? The cartoon's caption was as follows:

"The founderous condition of New Orleans' streets is a frequent complaint among out-of-town visitors. Orleanians have become so used to corrugated surfaces and deep sink holes that they have come to take these hazards as a matter of course. Apathy, as always, is the Enemy of Good Government."

At least the local populous is no longer apathetic in 2017.

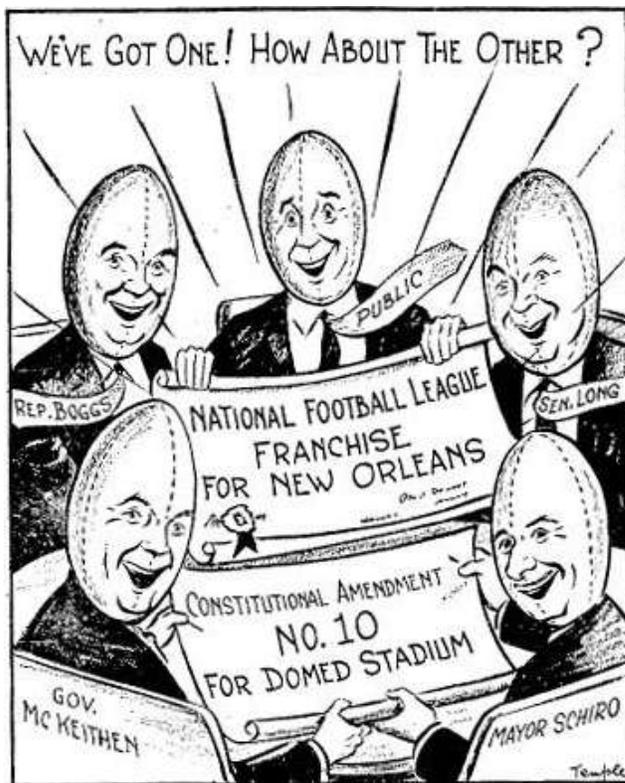
Chase also taught New Orleans history at Tulane, sometimes teaming up on the classroom instruction with his dear friend and colleague, Charles L. "Pie" Dufour. Angus referred to this dynamic duo, who as a team "were without parallel as local historians emeritus," as "Iberville

and Bienville.” He didn’t say which one was which, but he did relate this humorous anecdote on Chase:

“In the preface to his book, he thanked many people, including his wife, ‘who,’ he wrote ‘says she does so believe that I was at the library all the times I said I was at the Sazerac Bar. I also wish to thank the bartenders of the Sazerac Bar.’”

It was only fitting that in 1991, the city of New Orleans honored its native son - and Number One Historian of its streets - by naming a street in his honor. Six blocks of what had once been Calliope Street (between Convention Center Boulevard and Magazine Street) is today known as John Churchill Chase Street.

Chase was truly significant as a New Orleans cartoonist, but the city has been home to a number of others.



Cartoon by Keith Temple

Keith Temple (1899 - 1980), who was on the staff of the *Times-Picayune* for over 40 years, was an Australian-American editorial cartoonist. After finding himself in a New Orleans hospital as a result of being wounded during World War I, Temple saw his first editorial cartoon with the paper printed on May 23, 1923.

While working for the *Picayune*, Temple studied painting and sculpture at the New Orleans Arts and Crafts Club, and (prompted by a lawsuit involving one of his editorial cartoons) he also received a law degree in 1927, after having studied at Loyola University. He was also the recipient in 1966 of the George Washington Honor Medal from the Freedoms Foundation.

After retiring from the *Times-Picayune* in 1967, Temple was replaced by cartoonist Eldon Pletcher. A native of Goshen, Indiana, Pletcher (like Chase) was a student at the Art Institute of Chicago before joining the Army in 1943, where he saw action in the Battle of the Bulge. Being in the Army, he submitted cartoons to *Yank*, the weekly magazine that the military published around the world.



Cartoonist Eldon Pletcher, self-portrait

Editorial cartoonist at the *Picayune* from 1966 to 1984, Pletcher died in California at the age of 91. He was the winner of the Christopher Award in 1955 and amassed Freedoms Foundation Awards for more than a dozen years.

Baltimore, Maryland, native (born December 3, 1956) Walt

Handelsman, who is currently editorial cartoonist with the *Advocate*, is a two-time winner of the Pulitzer Prize for Editorial Cartooning, once in 1997 while with the *Times-Picayune* and again in 2007 for *Newsday*.

What does a cartoonist do when people are divided on an issue? He may try to sway people over to his point of view by means of a powerful image or message, or he may take a different path by simply showing that both sides feel strongly about their opinions. Chase demonstrated this division beautifully in his cartoon shown earlier in this article showing his moustachioed "Little Man" at odds with another "Little Man." Citizens obviously don't always see eye to eye on subjects of monumental proportions.



The work of Walt Handelsman, The Advocate © 2017

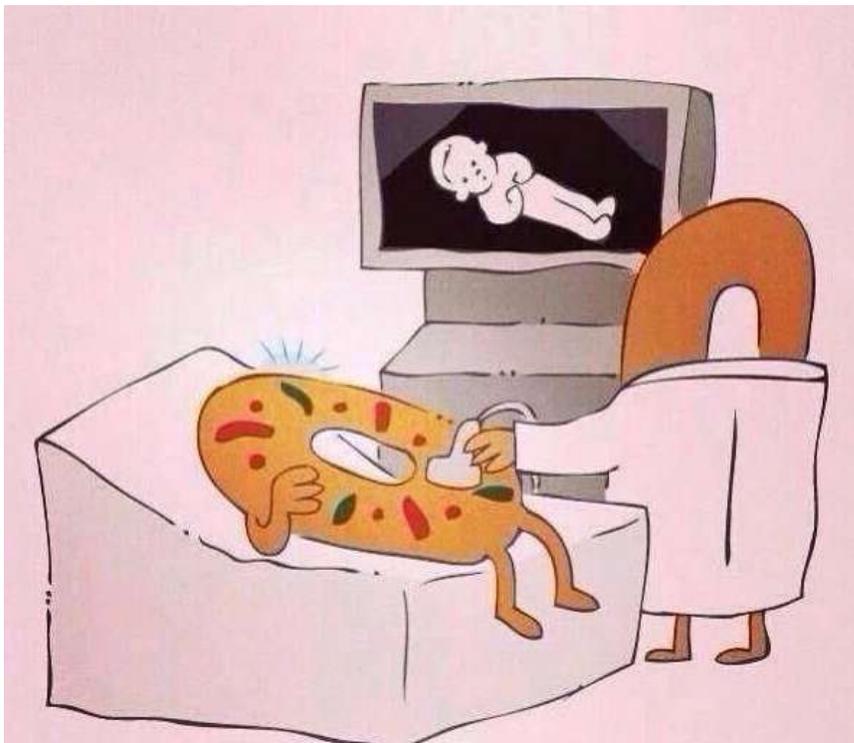
In the cartoon above, with only two words, Walt Handelsman found a way to cleverly represent both sides of the "monuments issue". "I'm History" obviously has two widely different meanings.

Walt is an exceptional cartoonist, especially on the national stage. His cartoons are often reprinted in *The New York Times*, *Time*, *Newsweek* and *USA Today*, and he has won numerous local and national awards for cartooning excellence. These include the 1996 Robert F. Kennedy

Journalism Award, the 1992 Society of Professional Journalists Sigma Delta Chi Award and the 1993 and 1989 National Headliner Awards.

Seattle native Michael Edward "Mike" Luckovich (born January 28, 1960) is another gifted editorial cartoonist, who like Walt Handlesman, is the recipient of two Pulitzer prizes. He was with the *Times-Picayune* four years before moving on to *The Atlanta Journal-Constitution* where he has been since 1989.

Mike has won a number of other prestigious awards, including the Reuben (the National Cartoonists Society's top award for cartoonist of the year). In 1989, he landed the Overseas Press Club's award for the "Best Cartoons on Foreign Affairs for 1989," and in 1991, he won the National Headliners award for editorial cartoonists. A *Newsweek* magazine poll in 1994 selected a Luckovich cartoon as one of the four best editorial cartoons of the year.



Sometimes New Orleans cartoons can be strictly provincial, like the one shown above. If you live in New Orleans, you know exactly what the humor is all about.

Through the years, notable graphic artists have created enduring images that demonstrate the power of art as a vehicle for political and social commentary or just to entertain or get a laugh. Caricatures and

cartoons are among the most enduring and effective of these images, and New Orleans has had its share of these effective movers of public opinion. Some were subtle, while others hit you over the head like a ton of St. Joe bricks.

Some caricatures were as harsh over a century ago as they are today. Often created under tight deadlines for reproduction in their publications, cartoons and caricatures represent the artists' thoughtful attempts to provoke, enlighten, amuse or persuade their audience. Sometimes they help us find our way through the founderous nature of our daily lives.

Founderous, by the way, means miry or swampy, difficult to navigate or likely to trip one up. Speaking of the city's geography or its governance, that word can certainly sum up New Orleans both literally and metaphorically. Cartoons can ease our way through much of that.

NED HÉMARD

New Orleans Nostalgia
"Cartoons Through the Years, Part Two"
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