

Herb Block

1909–2001



WHY HE MADE HISTORY Herb Block, better known as Herblock, was an outspoken political cartoonist who coined the phrase McCarthyism and drew attention to the Watergate scandal. He was one of the most influential newspaper staffers in the twentieth century.



As you read the biography below, think about how Herblock's political commentaries challenged the role of government. What effect did his drawings have on politicians?



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Herbert Block was born in Chicago, Illinois, in 1909. Raised in a family that was very interested in art, history, and politics, Block was encouraged to develop his drawing talent. After high school, he began working in the newspaper business. Pseudonyms, or pen names, were common at the time. So, at his father's urging, Block combined and abbreviated his name to become Herblock.

During his sophomore year at Lake Forest College, the English and political science major applied for a temporary job at the *Chicago News*, replacing an editorial cartoonist who was leaving. The *Chicago News* was so impressed they gave him a full-time job. Block never returned to college.

Over the years, Block worked for a newspaper service that distributed his cartoons to papers around the country. He also drew cartoons for the U.S. Army. After serving time in the military, he settled into a job at the *Washington Post*. He spent the next 55 years at the *Post* commenting on the most pressing issues of the twentieth century, including Stalinism, fascism, the arms race, the Cold War, Watergate, the Vietnam War, environmental conservation, women's rights, and the civil rights movement.

As the *Post's* editorial cartoonist, Herblock drew 13 presidents, criticizing the decisions made by both Democrats and Republicans in the Oval Office, occasionally infuriating the politicians. Presidents Eisenhower and Nixon were so incensed by Herblock cartoons they both canceled their subscriptions to the *Post*—several times.

In his cartoons he spoke out against Senator Joseph McCarthy's anti-Communist smear campaign. Herblock was the first to coin the term

The Cold War Begins

Biography

“McCarthyism.” McCarthy shaved twice a day because Herblock had drawn him unshaven and looking menacing.

Herblock’s career spanned more than 72 years. He won three Pulitzer Prizes for journalistic excellence and shared a fourth for the *Post’s* coverage of the Watergate scandal. He also received a Presidential Medal of Freedom, the highest award given to civilians.

WHAT DID YOU LEARN?

1. **Identify** What were some of the key issues Herblock addressed in his cartoons?

2. **Identify Cause and Effect** What impact did Herblock’s cartoons have on the politicians he drew?

ACTIVITY

Herblock’s political cartoons were commentaries on some of the greatest political issues of the twentieth century. Other artists continue to use political cartoons to provide commentary on current events. Choose a social issue and draw a cartoon or sketch that expresses your point of view on the issue.