

## Hearst: Lampooning the King of Yellow Journalism

Oct 17, 2024–March 2, 2025

From his start as business manager of the student journal *The Harvard Lampoon*, William Randolph Hearst (1863–1951) used sensationalist headlines and stories of scandal, sex, and violence to build a powerful media empire. But Hearst’s attempt to sway public opinion and further his political ambitions through his newspapers, radio stations, and movie studio sparked a career-long backlash. Starting in the 1890s, his detractors made him the target of ridicule as a “yellow journalist,” a false populist, and by the 1930s, a reactionary enemy of democracy. In a final twist, filmmaker Orson Welles satirized Hearst’s private life and public persona in *Citizen Kane*, released in 1941, just as the publisher’s finances forced him to relinquish control of his business empire.

Curated by Florida International University history students Gisselle Mestre Delgado and Thiago Abad-Sanchez, under the guidance of FIU adjunct professor Dr. Francis Xavier Luca, Wolfsonian chief librarian and curator of library collections.

### Warring Yellow Journalists

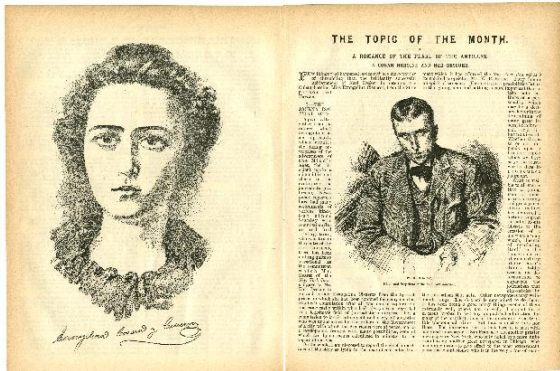
After persuading his father to make him publisher of the *San Francisco Examiner* at age 24, Hearst went on to purchase the *New York Journal* in 1895. Thanks to the family fortune, he could afford to operate at a loss, offering high salaries and signing bonuses to lure away many of rival publisher Joseph Pulitzer’s editors, top reporters, and even the cartoonist responsible for the popular comic strip, the “Yellow Kid.” Hearst and Pulitzer’s circulation war coined the term “yellow journalism” while satirical magazines caricatured the two warring publishers as irresponsible kids printing exaggerated and falsified stories to push the nation towards the Spanish-American War of 1898.



“Yellow Kid” cartoon by Richard Felton Outcault (American, 1863– 1928); Joseph Pulitzer and William Randolph Hearst as “Yellow Kid” warmongers by Leon Barritt (American, 1852–1938) for *Vim* 1, no. 2 (June 29, 1898). Courtesy of the Library of Congress.

## Making News & Inciting War with Spain

As Spain brutally repressed an independence movement in Cuba, Pulitzer and Hearst used headlines, atrocity stories, and editorials to demand U.S. intervention. Embodying his paper's motto, "While others talk, the *Journal* acts," Hearst insisted on making news, even organizing a daring jailbreak in Havana to free a rebel's daughter. In February 1898, when the warship U.S.S. *Maine* mysteriously exploded in Havana Harbor, both publishers printed bold headlines blaming Spain without proof and demanded that President McKinley lead the country into war. Others adopted the publishers' rallying cry, "Remember the Maine," printing sheet music bemoaning the fate of the warship and calling for vengeance. Once the Spanish-American War began in April 1898, Hearst's newspaper boasted: "How do you like the *Journal's* war?"

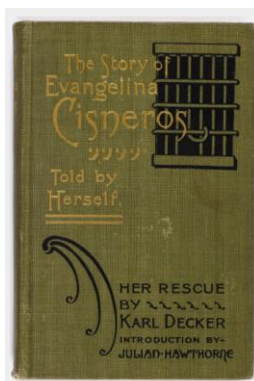


Periodical clippings, "**A Romance of the Pearl of the Antilles: A Cuban Heroine and Her Rescuer,**" from *Review of Reviews*, 1897

William Thomas Stead (British, 1849–1912), author

Eager to generate sympathy for the Cuban cause, Hearst fixated on the story of Evangelina Cisneros, the daughter of a Cuban rebel jailed by Spanish authorities in Havana. The publisher instructed his reporter, Karl Decker, to free and smuggle her to the United States. Upon Cisneros's arrival in New York, Hearst printed a serialized account of the escape, organized parades in her honor, arranged a meeting with U.S. President McKinley, and sent her on a national speaking tour to promote the "liberation" of Cuba.

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Book, ***The Story of Evangelina Cisneros***, 1898

Evangelina Cosio y Cisneros (Cuban, 1877–1970), author  
Continental Publishing Company, New York City, publisher

After publishing a serialized version of Cisneros's escape in the *New York Journal*, Hearst hired ghost writers to compile and publish the young woman's autobiography in book format.

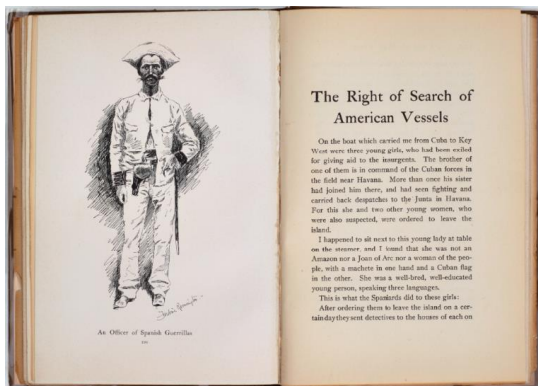
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Cartoon, from *Fakes in American Journalism*, 1914  
 Fred Zumwalt (American, 1883–1939), cartoonist  
 Buffalo Publishing Company, New York City, publisher

A reformer active in the Socialist Party of America, Max Sherover dedicated an entire chapter to Hearst in this book outlining the corruption of journalism by private interests. Here, cartoonist Fred Zumwalt pictured Hearst furiously writing on his typewriter while instructing his reporters to remain in Cuba. Allegedly, Hearst told them, “You furnish the pictures and I’ll furnish the war.” Orson Welles recreated the rumored incident in *Citizen Kane*.

The Wolfsonian–FIU, Purchase, XC2018.06.3.13



Book spread, “**The Right of Search of American Vessels,**” from *Cuba in War Time*, 1898

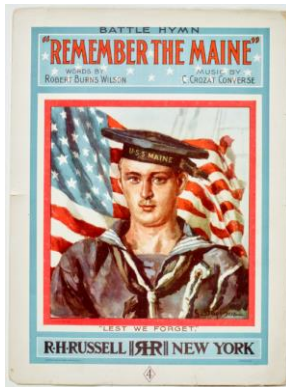
Richard Harding Davis (American, 1864–1916), author  
 Frederic Remington (American, 1861–1909), illustrator  
 R. H. Russell, New York City, publisher

In this book about the Cuban conflict, artist Frederic Remington apologized for a deceptive story and illustration he had penned for Hearst’s *New York Journal*. The original newspaper story featured an illustrated account of three male Spanish officers conducting a nude strip search of a woman on an American-flagged vessel. Here, Remington admitted that a female detective conducted the search modestly and in the privacy of the woman’s cabin.

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Cartoon by Frederic Remington in *New York Journal* (1898)



Sheet music, *Battle Hymn, "Remember the Maine,"* 1898

Robert Burns Wilson (American, 1850–1916), lyricist  
C. Crozat Converse (American, 1832–1918), composer  
R. H. Russell, New York City, publisher  
The Wolfsonian–FIU, Joseph K. Albertson Collection, Gift of the Monroe County Public Library, Key West, Fla., XC2015.08.3

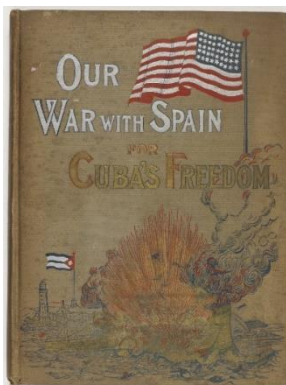


**Fan**, c. 1898

J. W. Clapp, Chicago, maker

This fan celebrates the U.S. naval victory in the Battle of Santiago de Cuba with images of the conquering warships set within a victory wreath decorated with an American flag, a soldier's sombrero, a bugle, and weapons. An advertisement for a Chicago grocery store appears on the opposite side, illustrating how commercial interests capitalized on national pride and wartime excitement.

The Wolfsonian–FIU, The Mitchell Wolfson, Jr. Collection, XC2018.07.6.1

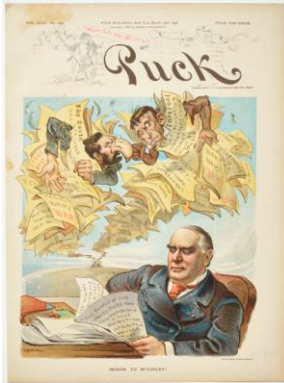


Book, *Our War with Spain for Cuba's Freedom*, 1898

Trumbull White (American, 1868–1941), author  
A. J. Holman & Co., Philadelphia, publisher  
The Wolfsonian–FIU, Gift of Jean S. and Frederic A. Sharf, XC2010.08.1.5

## CARICATURES OF THE YELLOW JOURNALISTS

In the prelude to and aftermath of the 1898 Spanish-American War, cartoons printed in *Puck* and other satirical publications caricatured Hearst and Pulitzer as warmongers. Often, these critiques surrounded the publishers with yellow-tinted papers to remind the public that these two men were to blame for unleashing the new brand of sensationalist and disreputable “yellow journalism.”



Magazine cover, “**Honor to McKinley!**,” *Puck*, 1898  
Udo J. Keppler (American, 1872–1956), illustrator  
New York City

*Puck*, a magazine famous for its political cartoons, mocked Hearst and Pulitzer, depicting Hearst as a monkey and giving Pulitzer exaggerated features in an antisemitic caricature. President McKinley appears below them, immune to their inflammatory calls for war.

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Magazine spread, “**Puck to the Rescue!**,” from *Puck*, 1898

Udo J. Keppler (American, 1872–1956), illustrator  
New York City

*Puck* celebrated the U.S. victory in the Spanish-American War while mocking Hearst and Pulitzer for inciting the conflict. On the right, the figure of Victory records the names of war heroes. Behind her, ironic statues of the publishers' top monuments covered with yellow papers, set before a war-torn landscape.

The Wolfsonian–FIU, Gift of Francis Xavier Luca and Clara Helena Palacio Luca, XC2024.03.7

## LOSING THE POPULAR VOTE

Positioning himself as a champion of the common people, Hearst's papers attacked corruption and economic exploitation as he pursued a political career in the early 1900s. His competitors belittled the wealthy press baron in cartoons picturing him as a clown and buffoon not to be trusted with high office. While the support of the New York political machine secured him two terms in the U.S. House starting in 1902, every other political campaign ended in defeat. Hearst failed to secure the Democratic Party's presidential nomination in 1904 and 1908; he lost New York City mayoral races in 1905 and 1909; and lost the New York gubernatorial race in 1906.



Magazine cover, **“Roosevelt Against the Field,”** *Harper's Weekly*, June 4, 1904

William Allen Rogers (American, 1854–1931), illustrator  
New York City

Hearst was one of many candidates hoping to secure the Democratic nomination in the 1904 presidential race. Hearst, portrayed here as immature, and other competitors are dwarfed by Republican President Theodore Roosevelt (while another Democratic candidate, William Jennings Bryan, is shown as a clown in the background).

The Wolfsonian–FIU, Gift of Francis Xavier Luca and Clara Helena Palacio Luca, XC2024.02.4.3



Magazine cover, **“Engaged by the ‘Big Show’ Now,”** *Harper's Weekly*, October 26, 1907

William Allen Rogers (American, 1854–1931), illustrator  
New York City

Angered that the Democratic Party chose William Jennings Bryan over him as their presidential nominee in 1908, Hearst created, funded, and supported an “independent” third-party candidate. This cartoon ridicules Hearst, showing him as a clown walking arm-in-arm with a circus elephant, suggesting that his actions helped secure Republican William Howard Taft's victory.

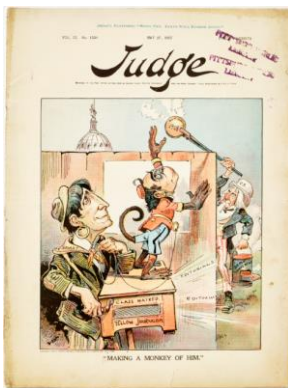
The Wolfsonian–FIU, Gift of Francis Xavier Luca and Clara Helena Palacio Luca, XC2024.02.4.2



Magazine spread, **“Hope for ‘The Common People!’,”** from *Judge*, May 18, 1907  
 Emil Flohri (American, 1869–1938), illustrator  
 New York City

This cartoon shows Hearst as Don Quixote. Armed with a knight’s lance bearing Hearst’s primary weapons—yellow journalism and muckraking (publicizing scandals)—the publisher sets off on his quest for high political office. Behind him, Don Quixote’s trusted squire Sancho Panza represents Hearst’s third-party Independence League, struggling to keep up under the weight of his rich master’s money bags. In the distance, the Yellow Kid waves goodbye, signaling Hearst’s attempt to leave behind his tainted reputation as a yellow journalist.

The Wolfsonian–FIU, Gift of Francis Xavier Luca and Clara Helena Palacio Luca, XC2024.01.15



Magazine cover, **“Making a Monkey of Him,”** from *Judge*, May 25, 1907  
 Eugene “Zim” Zimmerman, (American, b. Switzerland, 1862–1935), illustrator  
 New York City

Hearst appears here as an organ grinder outwardly promoting the presidential bid of Democratic candidate William Jennings Bryan (portrayed as a monkey), even as he has his own eyes on the prize just beyond reach.

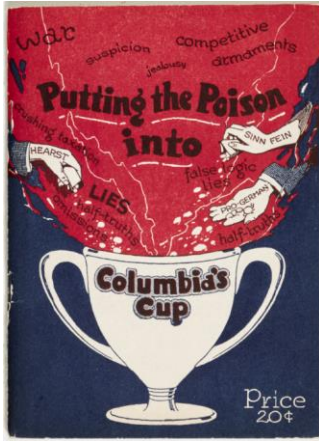
The Wolfsonian–FIU, Gift of Francis Xavier Luca and Clara Helena Palacio Luca, XC2024.03.8



Postcard, **Hughes, Hearst: H & H: Heaven or Hell? It’s Up to You,** 1906  
 Alva E. Stern, New York City, publisher

This campaign propaganda from the 1906 New York gubernatorial election uses shadow and light to contrast the candidates. Hearst lost the race to his Republican opponent, Charles Evans Hughes (1862–1948).

The Wolfsonian–FIU, Gift of Francis Xavier Luca and Clara Helena Palacio Luca, XC2024.01.16



Pamphlet, ***Putting the Poison into Columbia's Cup***, 1920  
Winfred C. Howe (American, 1876–1942), author

After Hearst's foremost editor penned *The Poison in America's Cup* (1919), a pamphlet reflecting his boss' anti-British, pro-German biases during WWI, a Milwaukee history teacher responded with this rebuttal accusing Hearst of publishing distortions, lies, and half-truths.

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## EARNING THE IRE OF THE LEFT

In the wake of the Russian Revolution (1917) and a Red Scare in the U.S. (1919–20), the wealthy press baron broke with progressive causes and adopted an anti-Communist and pro-authoritarian stance. By the 1930s, Hearst was negotiating lucrative deals that provided dictators Benito Mussolini and Adolf Hitler with a criticism-free outlet for spreading their propaganda in America. Liberals and leftists responded by attacking Hearst in word and image, associating him with vampire bats, rats, and swastikas even as they urged their fellow citizens to ignore Hearst news outlets.



Pamphlet, ***Hearst: Counterfeit American***, 1936  
W. S., cover illustrator  
Ann Weedon, author  
American League Against War and Fascism, New York City, publisher

This Communist-front pamphlet attacks Hearst's pretensions as an advocate of "100% Americanism" by depicting him wearing a Nazi uniform even as he drapes himself in an American flag.

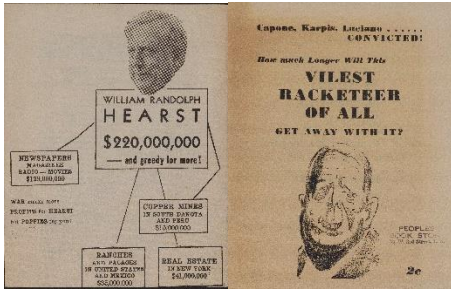
The Wolfsonian–FIU, Purchase, XC2000.53.1



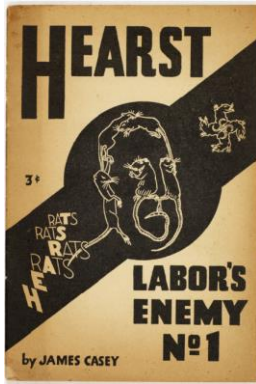
Pamphlet, ***Why Hearst Lies About Communism***, 1935  
Jacob Burck (American, b. Poland, 1907–1982), cover illustrator  
William Francis Dunne (American, 1887–1953), author  
Workers Library, New York City, publisher

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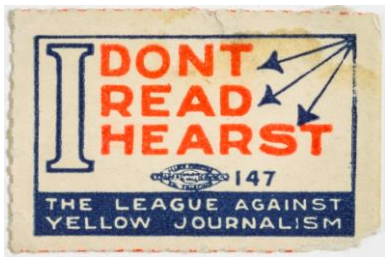




Pamphlet, ***Vilest Racketeer of All***, 1936  
 American League Against War and Fascism, New York City, publisher  
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Pamphlet, ***Hearst: Labor's Enemy No. 1***, 1935  
 Workers Library Publishers, New York, publisher  
 The Wolfsonian–FIU, Purchase, XC2002.01.1.1



Sticker, ***I Don't Read Hearst***, c. 1936  
 The League Against Yellow Journalism, publisher

Critics of Hearst's media empire organized several anti-Hearst events, including a July 4th "Independence from Hearst" holiday on Coney Island in New York City. Additionally, they warned the public about his far-right political agendas and encouraged a boycott of his newspapers, magazines, radio stations, and newsreels.

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Stickers, ***To Keep the Hearst Octopus from Strangling the Chicago Newspaper Guild on Strike***, 1938  
 Chicago Newspaper Guild, Chicago, publisher

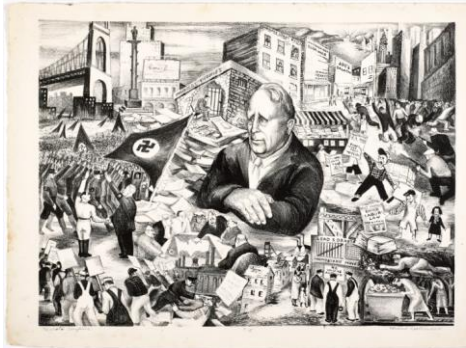
In December 1938, the Chicago Newspaper Guild went on strike, accusing Hearst's papers of contract violations and discriminatory firing of union correspondents. During the strike, the union printed propaganda stamps representing Hearst as a grasping octopus linked to various right-wing ideologies. After 508 days, the strike was resolved on terms favorable to the union.

The Wolfsonian–FIU, Gift of Francis Xavier Luca and Clara Helena Palacio Luca, XC2024.06.1



Sticker, **25¢ to Help Labor Smash Hearst Attack on Chicago Newspaper Guild**, c. 1938

American Federation of Labor (AFL), Congress of Industrial Organizations (CIO), et al., Chicago, publishers  
The Wolfsonian-FIU, Purchase, XC2002.06.7.3.2

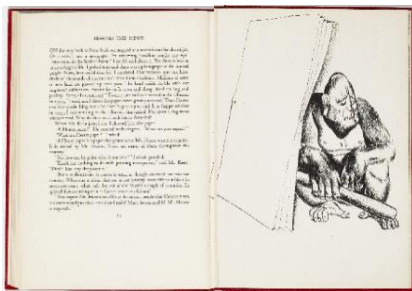


Print, **Hearst's Empire**, c. 1940

Maxine Seelbinder Merlino (American, 1912–2013), artist  
New York City  
Lithograph

Active in New York City in the 1930s and '40s as a freelance illustrator and printmaker, Maxine Merlino lampooned the media tycoon for backing an “America first” foreign policy during a time of high unemployment and domestic struggles at home, and Fascist and Nazi aggression abroad.

The Wolfsonian-FIU, The Mitchell Wolfson, Jr. Collection, XX1990.2335



Book spread, **“Behind the News,”** from *Comrade Gulliver: An Illustrated Account of Travel into that Strange Country the United States of America*, 1935

Hugo Gellert (American, b. Hungary, 1892–1985), author & illustrator  
G. P. Putnam's Sons, New York City, publisher

Hugo Gellert, a proud member of the Communist Party of the United States, published this caricature of Hearst as an apelike figure shortly after the blockbuster release of *King Kong*. Gellert criticized Hearst as a rich man willing to lie about the Soviet Union to protect his own interests. In reality, however, Hearst was publishing true accounts of starvation among Ukrainian peasants, caused by the Communist regime's policies.

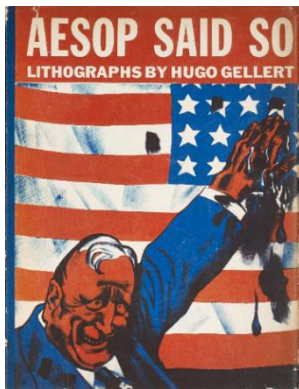
The Wolfsonian-FIU, Gift of Francis Xavier Luca and Clara Helena Palacio Luca, XC2009.10.4



Magazine cover, “**Louella Parsons—Hearst’s Hollywood Stooge,**” *New Theatre*, August 1935  
William Gropper (American, 1897–1977), illustrator  
New York City

An unflattering portrait of Hearst, created from headlines and typeface, adorns the cover of an issue of *New Theatre* magazine. Louella Parsons, Hearst’s gossip columnist, and actor Marion Davies, his mistress, sit puppet-like on his lap.

The Wolfsonian–FIU, The Mitchell Wolfson, Jr. Collection,  
XC2019.08.1.24



Book, ***Aesop Said So***, 1936  
Hugo Gellert (American, b. Hungary, 1892–1985), illustrator  
Covici Friede Publishers, New York City, publisher

Pairing stories of the ancient Greek slave Aesop with his own lithographic illustrations, Hugo Gellert reinterpreted the ancient fables through a modern lens. Hearst appears on the book’s cover, sullyng the American flag with his ink-stained hands.

The Wolfsonian–FIU, The Mitchell Wolfson, Jr. Collection, 83.2.812

Film clips, ***Citizen Kane***, 1941

Orson Welles (American, 1915–1985), director  
RKO Pictures

While critics caricatured Hearst throughout his career, it was Orson Welles’s movie *Citizen Kane* that most damaged his reputation. The film traces the rise and fall of Charles Foster Kane, a press baron who shaped American domestic and foreign policy only to have the public, his friends, and lovers turn against him. Many scenes paralleled Hearst’s life, from using his newspaper to provoke war with Spain and promoting his mistress’s career to building a castle and stocking it with art treasures. Hearst went to great lengths to suppress *Citizen Kane*, but his financial difficulties prevented him from destroying a classic of American cinema.