

## **Political Cartoonist Berryman: Fusing Fashion and Politics**

To say that Clifford K. Berryman was an accomplished 20<sup>th</sup> century political cartoonist would be somewhat of an understatement. Known as one of DC's renowned graphic political commentators, he was once told by President Harry Truman, "You are a Washington Institution comparable to the Monument." In honor of DC Fashion Week, we take a closer look at three of Berryman's cartoons from the [U.S. Senate Collection](#) that utilized fads and fashion of the time to make creative political statements.

Berryman first moved to Washington, DC at the age of 17 to work at the U.S. Patent Office, using his self-taught talents to draw patent illustrations. In 1891, he left the Patent office to become a cartoonist's understudy for the Washington Post, and within five years, he rose to the top as chief cartoonist. He held this position until 1907 when he became the front-page cartoonist for the Washington Evening Star, where he drew political cartoons until he died in 1949 at the age of 80.

It is estimated that Berryman produced over 15,000 cartoons throughout his life time. For nearly half a century, he drew every Presidential administration from Grover Cleveland to Harry Truman, satirizing both Republicans and Democrats alike. Because he never used outlandish caricatures to depict these political figures, it earned him great respect for staying true to the portrayal of his subjects. He was formally recognized for his work in 1944 when he won the Pulitzer Prize for editorial cartooning, and his collection is featured here at the Archives in a [special online exhibit](#).

His cartoons, however, were not strictly limited to politics. They covered other topics such as Presidential and congressional elections, both World Wars, DC weather—and, of course, fashion. Political cartoons are ultimately a commentary on current events, personalities, and societal norms. By referencing various fashion trends at the time, Berryman made his drawings more relatable to the reader. For example, in his 1909 cartoon over the bill that was introduced to limit women's hat diameters, he satirizes the ridiculous nature of women's headwear during the

Edwardian era. Some even women took to wearing hats adorned with masses of feathers, artificial flowers, and even stuffed birds! [<http://research.archives.gov/description/6010794> (*News Note: A Bill Has Been Introduced in the Illinois Legislature Limiting Women's Hats to a Diameter of Eighteen Inches, 04/24/1909; At this time, a fashion was for women to wear giant hats with a lot of accessories on them. In this cartoon, Clifford Berryman shows women in the front blocking all of the men's view behind them. One man wants the police officer to tell the women to take their hats off. A bill was introduced in the Illinois Legislature which wanted to limit women's hats to a diameter of eighteen inches.*)]

In others, he drew attention to political trends using references to 1920's fashion. He dresses recurring cartoon character Miss Democracy, the personified voice of the American people, in classic flapper's garb to reflect the shifting national mood of the time.

[<http://research.archives.gov/description/6011767> (*Democracy At It's Best, 11/08/1922, National Archives Identifier: 6011767; The Republican Party's majorities in the U.S. Senate and the House of Representatives were reduced sharply in the 1922 elections. Similarly the Democrats scored gains in state elections. Cartoonist Clifford Berryman highlights the election events with his familiar character, Miss Democracy, dressed as a flapper, the high style of 1922. She comments to her mirror: "Flappers may be going out of style but I'm feeling much younger this morning." This comment refers to the vigorously contested elections, a strength of the democratic system.*)]

Similarly, Berryman addressed the topic of the Federal Income Tax, ratified in 1913, by comparing the prospect of tax return cuts to the popular bob hair cut that characterized women's fashion in the 1920's. [<http://research.archives.gov/description/6011891> (*Untitled, 07/02/1925; National Archives Identifier: 6011891; The latest women's fashion was short hair, called a "bob." Cartoonist Clifford Berryman's familiar caricature, Mr. John Q. Public, looks at a fashion poster and comments: "Now if Uncle Sam would just bob the income tax return, Oh, Boy!"*)]

Who knew that fashion could be so political?

