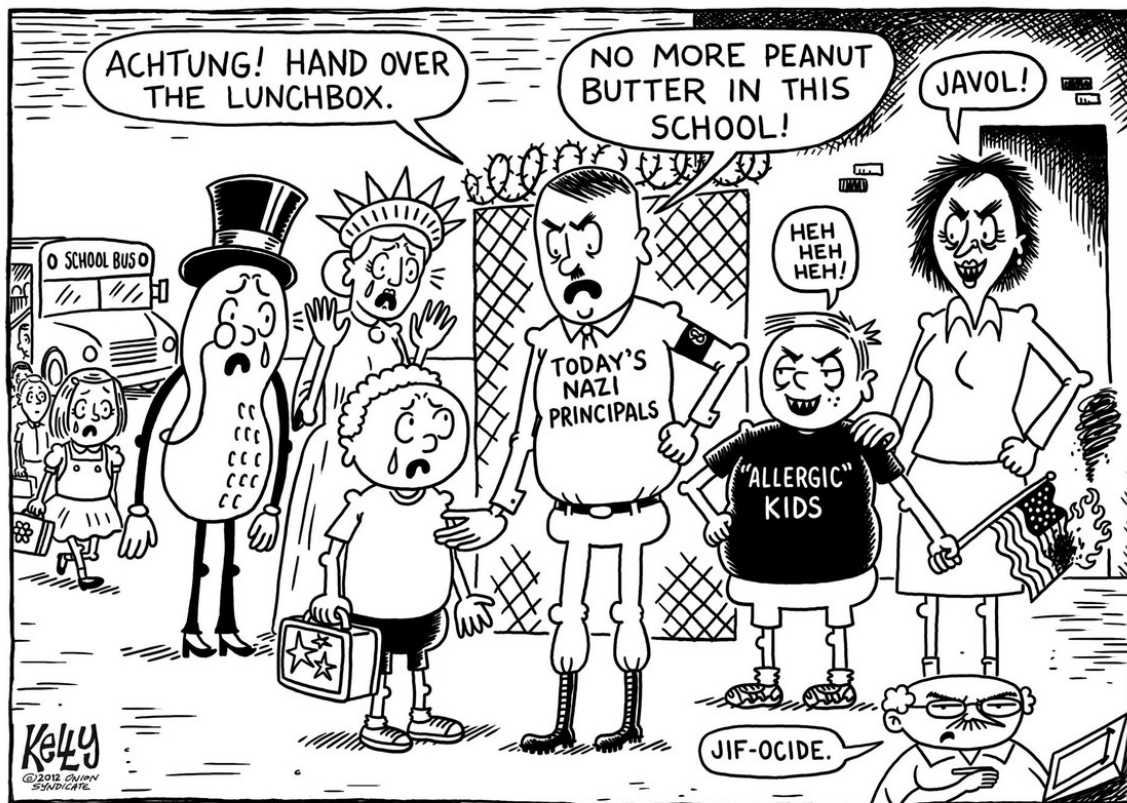


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"Final Skippy Solution" by Ward Sutton under the pseudonym "Kelly."

The Meta-Satirical Oniony Political Cartoon

Good satire is like an onion. It can be recursively analyzed to provide layer upon layer of hidden meaning; even the smallest piece of satire can be used by an author to allow the audience to assume and understand his or her position. Onions also are known for their acrid smell, thus it's understandable why the most popular American news satire organization is known as The Onion.

The Onion plays itself off as "America's Finest News Source" with a completely straight face, claiming it was founded in 1756 (actually founded in 1988), that its 24-hour television news network launched in 1892 (before televisions were essentially invented), and that it can be seen in 811 countries by over 9 billion people (there aren't that many countries or people). A phone call to The Onion's Chicago office will get the usual automated prompts for different departments, with the unusual addendum of "For content concerns, please refer to the First Amendment of the United States Constitution. For content correction, please note that we do not make mistakes" (Freedlander). The Onion maintains this facade well; nowhere on their website do they admit that their content is, in fact, satirical.

This context is important when attempting to analyze the editorial political cartoons featured in The Onion and drawn by Ward Sutton under the pseudonym "Kelly." Just like the text news articles the editorial cartoons read like actual absurd, fictional, but completely serious topical commentaries. Sutton uses this medium to satirize conservative cartoonists, conservatives in general, and the editorial political cartoon format.

In the cartoon "Final Skippy Solution," Sutton focuses on the backlash of some parents against peanut butter bans in some elementary schools. In these schools, peanut butter is banned for some or all grades because students with potentially life-threatening peanut allergies can be inadvertently exposed to the food (Dutton). Sutton's cartoon on first

inspection appears to be in opposition to the bans, comparing the principal of the school to Hitler and the school to a concentration camp. However, the satirical nature of content on The Onion makes it obvious this is not an adequate analysis. Indeed, Sutton uses this cartoon to satirize the reactions of those who oppose the peanut butter bans. He does this through the absurd comparison of an elementary school to a Nazi concentration camp through use of overt Nazi references, the portrayal of the allergic child and his mother as anti-American, and the reactions of the normal characters in the scene. Sutton uses this satire to point out how some parents overreact to a small issue and attempt to describe it as a fundamental civil liberty crisis.

In "Final Skippy Solution" there is a gross amount of Nazi references. The title of the graphic itself is a play on words of the Final Solution, Hitler's plan to cleanse the world of Jews in World War II, and Skippy brand peanut butter. In the bottom-right corner Sutton draws his fictional character "Kelly," who describes the situation with a scowl as "Jif-ocide," another play on words with genocide and Jif brand peanut butter. The principal taking the lunchbox from the child has Hitler's well-known moustache and haircut and is wearing a Nazi armband with a peanut with a circle and diagonal cross. A barbed wire fence can be seen running around the school, making the school like a concentration camp. The principal, who has "Today's Nazi principals" written on his chest, also uses the German "Achtung!" to make a child give up his lunchbox.

All of this completely absurd Nazi references are used by Sutton to show how ridiculous the reactions of some parents are who ignore the practical safety reasons to ban peanut butter and instead view the principals as cold, unfeeling pedagogical dictators. That the Nazi principals are "today's," implies that Sutton may also be poking fun at curmudgeons who romanticize the past and think a peanut butter ban is a "sign of the times" so to speak. Of

course, if the current times call for protecting young children from being exposed to foods that are dangerous to them, then there's not much to romanticize about the past.

Sutton also portrays the allergic child and his mother as anti-American to satirize how some parents who overreact to the peanut butter bans don't attempt to look at the issue from the point of view of the allergic child and his or her parents. The allergic boy is holding an American flag that is burning, a standard and cliché symbol of someone who is against America and generally American values. His shirt says "allergic" between quotation marks, implying that his allergy is potentially illegitimate or not nearly as important as he and his mother would make it seem to be. He is saying "Heh heh heh!" with a troublesome look on his face and his mother is saying "Javol!" Javol is a misspelling of "jawohl," German for "it's good." The German further reinforces the Nazi references while also implying that the family is foreign and is looking to erode American values. Sutton uses this to satirize the belief of some conservatives that the peanut butter bans are infringing on basic civil liberties. He also may use this to subtly satirize the ideal of American exceptionalism, since not even an extreme xenophobe would believe that Germans are trying to come into the US to keep peanut butter away from American children. Some conservatives may feel that these sorts of "silly" bans erode American civil liberties slowly, which Sutton calls patently absurd by associating it with his also absurd Nazi-peanut-butter fabrication.

Finally, in nearly all of Sutton's satirical comics he portrays the "victims" of whatever incident is going on as innocent and usually with a single tear running down their face. He uses Lady Liberty in well over half of his cartoons, also shedding a single tear either in joy or sadness. In this cartoon he includes Mr. Peanut as well, who rather unnecessarily reinforces the peanut motif. These examples are a gentle satire of common elements in editorial cartoons. Lady Liberty represents cliché elements, while Mr. Peanut represents how editorial

cartoonists will frequently fill their cartoons with elements that reinforce the same ideas to the point where it dumbs down the message in the cartoon. Sutton shows this by overusing these elements considerably more than most cartoonists to make it obvious.

The "Final Skippy Solution" may appear to be a simple if overenthusiastic cartoon decrying the loss of liberty due to peanut butter bans in elementary school, it contains a deep and interesting satire of editorial cartoons. Sutton uses his over-the-top, absurd elements and style to point out the folly of many voices in the national conversation on peanut butter bans and provide his view on the topic. Sutton provides food for thought with his amusing Onion cartoon series, as "Final Skippy Solution" shows.

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