

# The Crimson White

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## Cartoon symposium highlights role of editorial cartoonists

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An arrogant and corrupt emperor walks through the streets, adorned in clothing two newly hired tailors have made especially for the occasion. The people stare in wonderment as he passes by, walking regally in procession. They are silent and dumbstruck. Finally, a brave child has the courage to yell, "He's not wearing any clothes!"

Most people are familiar with the children's story of "The Emperor's New Clothes," but few could compare the job they hold in adult life to the function

the child plays within that society. However, Scott Stantis, editorial cartoonist for The Birmingham News, can.

"My job is to be a provocateur," he said Tuesday night. "I need to engage you."

Stantis was a member of the "Cutting Edge Art: Inside the World of Political Cartoons" symposium Tuesday night at the Alabama Museum of Natural History. Joining him were, among others, Charles Brooks, former editorial cartoonist of The Birmingham News, and J.D. Crowe, editorial cartoonist of the Mobile Register.

Brooks agreed with Stantis' evaluation of his job

in conjunction with politics and elections.

"[I wanted to] get my ideas to the audience of who the best man is," Brooks said.

He said his goal is not to make his readers like him but to wake people up and make them think.

In this election year, Crowe said it his responsibility to spread his ideas throughout the newspaper community, but he said he is only "one brushstroke on the canvas of public opinion." And though he said he often uses humor to make his point, he said he takes his job seriously.

Stantis said one cartoon

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CW/ Jessica Maxwell

Scott Stantis, an editorial cartoonist for The Birmingham News, speaks Tuesday evening about political cartoons. "I've worked in places where politicians were stupid. I've worked in places where politicians were corrupt. Alabama has both," Stantis said. The symposium, which also featured Bob Blalock, editorial page editor of The Birmingham News, and J.D. Crowe, an editorial cartoonist for The Mobile Register, is part of an exhibit at the Alabama Museum of Natural History.

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## CARTOON

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can rarely change public opinion. His job, he said, is to grab the reader's attention and offer his thoughts about a given issue.

Janis Edwards, associate professor of communication studies and author of "Political Cartoons in the 1988 Presidential Campaign," said editorial cartoons serve another purpose in the community. Edwards said cartoonists reveal a great deal about the values of society because they have to appeal to the audience's base of common knowledge if they are to be successful. She said cartoons are "windows into a

culture" and a "creation of social memory."

She cited the example of masculinity in political cartoons. Edwards said society might not yet be willing to embrace a female chief executive. Though some might claim they would vote for a female presidential candidate, she said, editorial cartoons show "expectations of political leadership are masculine."

Other issues discussed by the panel included syndication and the importance of local as well as national topics.

"If you don't have the local voice you lose so much," said Bob Blalock, editorial page editor of The Birmingham News.

Stantis said though he is nationally syndicated, 60 percent of his editorials have local topics.

"My first instinct," he said, "is to see what engages me locally first."

Crowe said there is an average of two editorial cartoonists per state. Blalock said syndication is to blame for the low numbers. It is much cheaper to syndicate national cartoons than to hire a local cartoonist, he said.

The cartoon symposium coincided with an exhibit of editorial satire of the tobacco industry curated by Dr. Alan Blum, director of the UA Center for the Study of Tobacco and Society. The exhibit can be viewed in Smith Hall.

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