Comment:
I am one of two historians at the U.S. Food and Drug Administration. Our Centennial is coming up in 2006. We wanted to put out a book of political cartoons throughout the years - since we have cartoons dating back to the turn of the century. Up until 1923, we are fine -- copyrights have expired. But it is simply impossible, even with paid legal talent, to make it cost efficient to track down all the artists and copyright holders of the hundreds of cartoons that we would like to use in the book. So the project, which would have explained our agency's work to the public in an easily accessible, humorous, and often profound way, had to be abandoned, even though the book itself wouldn't have been copyrighted, nor could the agency or anyone in it have made a cent of profit from the book's sale. It would have been in the public domain.