

The World of Thomas Nast

by Morton Keller

For almost a century and a half now, Thomas Nast's cartoons have had an important place in the American consciousness. Every schoolchild knows that he made the elephant and the donkey potent symbols in the ongoing clash over office between Republicans and Democrats, and made Santa Claus an equally potent symbol in the ongoing clash over presents between children and parents. Nast's Tweed Ring series is arguably the most powerful and influential work ever done by an American political cartoonist. And there is—or there should be—recognition of the power of his response to the issues of race and equality during the period of the Civil War and Reconstruction.

The defining events of modern America—two world wars, the Great Depression, the civil rights movement—evoked no equivalent response among this country's political cartoonists; though a case can be made that Herblock's assaults on Joseph McCarthy and Richard Nixon were in Nast's league. To find counterparts abroad, we must look to Honoré Daumier's treatment of Louis Philippe and his July Monarchy in France in the 1830s and the 1840s, or to British cartoonist David Low's response in the *Manchester Guardian* during the 1930s and 1940s on the approach and unfolding of the Second World War.

As Daumier once observed, "One must be of one's time." How did Nast fill that bill? What was the larger cultural, social, and political context of his most productive and powerful period, the 1860s and the 1870s? The central public facts of that time were, of course, the Civil War and Reconstruction; and Nast's reaction to those events, and to the closely related episode of the Tweed Ring, are at the core of his artistic achievement. But his response was also conditioned by the general cultural and political milieu in which he came of artistic age. We know a lot, and commentators have dwelt abundantly, on the world of images that Nast created. Now, as we observe the centenary of his death, it is fitting to take a look at the world—the social and cultural setting, the politics, the ideas—that created Thomas Nast.

We begin with the fact that Nast was, in the words of historian Thomas Bender, a “scrappy immigrant.” He was only six years old when he arrived in New York in 1846. His father seems to have shared the hunger for freedom that fed the revolutionary fervor of 1848 in Germany, as in much of Europe. This led the elder Nast first to send his family, and then four years later to come himself, to the country that was widely regarded as the best—indeed, the only—embodiment of nineteenth century liberal beliefs. Nast was very much part of an experience central to America’s conception of itself: a land of immigrants, of freedom and opportunity.

He inherited a family predisposition to popular culture. His father soon found employment in a theatre orchestra, and entered into New York’s flourishing (and German-dominated) musical life, and thus avoided the apprenticeship in sweatshop, mine, or factory that was the lot of most immigrants to America’s cities.

The timing of young Nast’s coming of age could not have been better. The 1850s were a boom time in the history of the nation, and of New York City. America’s national wealth increased by an estimated ninety percent between 1850 and 1857, and it was then that New York emerged not only as a great commercial and manufacturing city, but as the nation’s center for book, magazine, and newspaper publication.

By 1860 the city was responsible for thirty percent of America’s printing and publishing. It had one hundred four newspapers in 1857, unloading some seventy eight million copies a year on an acquiescent public. Most of these papers were weeklies, but the major dailies of the time—the *Tribune*, the *Sun*, the *Herald*, the *Times*, the *Evening Post*—had a combined daily circulation of almost a quarter of a million. Editors Horace Greeley of the *Tribune* and William Cullen Bryant of the *Post* were among New York’s leading citizens in 1850; and the major newspapers’ offices on Park Row were the most distinctive and prominent business buildings in the city.

New York’s monthly magazines were an even more imposing presence on the American cultural scene. There were fifty-four of them, with a combined circulation of 500,000, in 1849. Lower postal rates and a thickening railroad web assured their distribution through the North and West, a major factor in New York’s success in wresting from Boston leadership in the shaping of a national culture.

Fueling this wave of new journals was a recognizably modern audience—solid farmers in the countryside, a rapidly growing working and middle class in the towns and cities—keen to be educated (and titillated), receptive to reform causes if they were festooned with sufficient Victorian sentimentality. This core readership of mid-century America’s leading newspapers and magazines was what today we would call middle-brow: neither coarse nor rarified in its artistic literary, artistic, and political tastes; the core of mainstream public opinion. New York City’s size, diversity, and unique access both to the Old World across the Atlantic and the New World of the American interior, made it the natural breeding ground for an American middle class culture.

New York’s vitality and importance was fed as well by the fact that the city had a massive lower class and a significant upper class presence. The prevailing middlebrow tone of New York’s leading newspapers and magazines was influenced by currents flowing up from below: from the immigrant working class population that inhabited Walt Whitman’s poems, and provided grist for a growing middle class concern with crime and vice. New York had a substantial African American population, and an even larg-

er, anti-black Irish one, a forceful reminder that the issues of race and slavery were not concerns of the remote South alone.

Comparably important influences came from the higher levels of the cultural-intellectual food chain. During the 1830s and the 1840s, a close linkage developed between many New York writers and the radical Loco-foco wing of New York's Jacksonian Democrats. Their meeting ground was John L. O'Sullivan's grandly named *United States Magazine and Democratic Review*, which began in 1837. Andrew Jackson was the magazine's first subscriber; his successor as President, Martin Van Buren, secretly subsidized it. The major literary figures of the time—Whitman, Hawthorne, Bryant, Whittier, Thoreau, Longfellow—contributed to it. O'Sullivan, "a cosmopolitan of Irish heritage," combined political radicalism with a hearty American nationalism: a combination that is difficult to imagine today. He and his followers took the label Young America, an echo of Young Italy, the revolutionary society launched by Italian nationalist Giuseppe Mazzini in 1831. They saw themselves as the first distinctly post-American Revolution generation, dedicated to cleansing the Republic of the materialism and corruption—embodied in the Bank of the United States—that had developed since its origin.

But the idealism of O'Sullivan and the Young America group soured over time—as, indeed, did the idealism of the Jacksonian Democratic party. O'Sullivan wanted the United States to extend its benign, liberal sway over the entire western hemisphere. This was, he said in a phrase that soon entered the language, the nation's "manifest destiny." The union of writers and journalists with the Jacksonian Democratic party began to break up when manifest destiny got a workout in the Mexican War of the mid-1840s. Disillusionment spread as the Democrats came increasingly under the sway of pro-slavery Southerners and their Northern sympathizers. The reformist bent of many of New York's writers and artists found a new outlet in the rising antislavery movement of the late 1840s and the 1850s, and in its ultimate political embodiment, during the mid-1850s, in the new Republican Party.

This was the cultural and political milieu in which Thomas Nast came of age during the 1850s. Unlike hermetic, stuffy, insular Boston, highbrow and middlebrow culture readily mixed in polyglot, booming, bustling New York. Writers, poets, and journalists mingled closely in tight social networks, fueled by convivial bonding in watering holes such as Pfaff's Beer Cellar.

The mid-nineteenth century media world of New York was peopled by publishers, essayists, biographers, poets, novelists, short story writers, editors, journalists, and—not least in an age when the mass reproduction of photographs still lay in the future—magazine illustrators. These writers and artists were open to both the perceptions of the cultural elite and the life experiences of the city's masses. The result was a responsiveness to what large numbers of Americans cared about, and an ability to speak effectively to America's growing middlebrow audience.

Thomas Nast quickly fell in with this crowd, many of them fellow contributors to the journals for which he worked. Several such as Artemus Ward, Josh Billings, and Robert Henry Newell (Orpheus C. Kerr—office seeker) were humorists: creators of a rough-hewn, populist style of American comic writing that culminated in the work of Mark Twain. Nast published in the same magazines—*Comic Weekly*, *Phunny Phellow*—as they did. The vigor of his caricature drew in part on this tough-minded, take-no-prisoners genre.

Important, too, was Nast's connection with James Parton. The English-born Parton's 1855 book on Horace Greeley has been called the first serious biography of a living American. His other subjects, reflecting his politically radical bent, were Ben Butler, Voltaire, Aaron Burr, and Andrew Jackson. Parton was a highly visible figure in New York literary/journalistic circles from the 1840s to the 1860s. His aunt ran a salon of sorts attended by many New York journalists, writers, and artists, where books, painting, the theatre, and politics were discussed. Nast as an up-and-coming young illustrator in the 1850s regularly attended these soirées, and met and married a cousin of Parton's, Sarah Edwards. Parton stayed in close and frequent touch with Nast, and had a continuing influence on his political outlook.

Mid-nineteenth century America, and the New York publishing world, did not require extended schooling or credentialed professionalism as tickets of admission. Nast's artistic talent was evident at an early age; and after a few years of grammar school and a stint at New York's Academy of Design, the fifteen-year-old was hired in 1855 by Frank Leslie to work for his new magazine, to which Leslie gave the not overly modest name of *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper*. Leslie was an English-born journalist, a not uncommon occurrence in the mid-century New York magazine and newspaper scene. He learned the value of pictures and drawings as a staffer on the *Illustrated London News*. Then he got a feel for American taste by working on a couple of publications launched by that masterful purveyor to middlebrow America, P.T. Barnum.

Nast cut his artistic teeth by illustrating stories that catered to the desire for titillation and entertainment evident in the new middlebrow American audience. His assignments during his years at *Leslie's*, and then at the *New York Illustrated News*, included fires and floods, a prize fight in Canada, and the notorious 1858 Heenan-Sayers fight in England. This was one of the earliest worldwide media events, a phenomenon made possible by the telegraph, the Atlantic cable, and the steamship.

Another characteristic feature of the new urban media was the journalistic exposé of police corruption, the sale of bad milk from diseased cows, the misery of life in New York's tenements. *Leslie's* ran these stories; and Nast illustrated them.

His German '48er heritage, the liberal, antislavery journalistic world of New York City, the new kinds of reportage serving a new middle class readership: all of this readied Nast to respond with passion and commitment, and a sure sense of how to reach the hearts and minds of his audience, when he was confronted by the great causes of the 1860s and the 1870s. A precursor was Guiseppe Garibaldi's conquest of Italy in the late 1850s, on the eve of the Civil War. *Leslie's* sent Nast to cover this dramatic episode in the midcentury marriage of liberalism and nationalism. Nast's identification with Garibaldi's crusade was personal and passionate, in effect a preliminary to those far more compelling causes—saving the Union, ending slavery, creating a postwar nation based on equality and liberty, facing the corruption of the Tweed Ring—into which he, his art, and his country would soon be pitched headlong.

For many American writers and intellectuals, the outbreak of the Civil War was a time to set aside the Emersonian individualism—the distaste for institutions, government, and politics—that so many of them had shared during the prewar decades. Emerson himself became an official visitor to West Point; Walt Whitman turned to wartime service as a hospital nurse.

A revealing measure of the impact of the crusade against slavery and secession was its effect on E.L. Godkin, founder and editor of the *Nation* after the Civil War and one of the most influential political journalists of the late nineteenth century. Godkin migrated to New York in 1856 at the age of twenty-five. He had had a reasonably successful journalistic career in England, covering the Crimean War and identifying with Louis Kossuth and the cause of Hungarian independence (as did Lincoln and Whitman), much as Nast had with Garibaldi.

Godkin was full of social, political, and intellectual ambition. He turned first to the law. He had read Tocqueville, who noted that this was the high road to power in America. But in the late 1850s, law took second place to the great debate over slavery and the Union. Godkin arrived in the midst of the 1856 presidential campaign, and later recalled: “[I]n a few days I became aware that themes were under popular discussion which had never been so discussed—the rights and wrongs of slavery, the equality of man, the provisions of a written Constitution, the position of leading public men on questions which were half moral and only half political or legal.” He concluded that “the reign of men has gone by and the era of principles begun.” Godkin abandoned the law for high journalism in both English and American journals, and was quickly welcomed into New York and Boston literary-intellectual circles. He became an editorial consultant to the *New York Times*, and married the granddaughter of Connecticut Senator Samuel Foote.

There would come to be, as we will see, instructive contrasts between Nast and Godkin, reflecting the difference between high- and middlebrow journalism in mid-nineteenth century America. But the compelling power of the dual causes of Freedom and Union initially overwhelmed these differences, and produced a kind of cultural popular front during the Civil War.

Nast returned to New York from covering Garibaldi in February 1861. When the Civil War broke out in April, he attracted much notice with a painting of the New York National Guard’s Seventh Regiment marching down Broadway to depart for the front. In the summer of 1862 he became a regular contributor to *Harper’s Weekly*, would remain so for twenty-five years (until 1886), producing about 2,200 cartoons for that magazine. It was there that, in the words of his relative-by-marriage James Parton, he emerged as “a patriot artist, burning with the enthusiasm of the time.”

Harper’s Weekly, which called itself “A Journal of Civilization,” was edited by George W. Curtis. It was a product of the new magazine journalism of the 1850s. *Putnam’s Weekly*, its precursor, was the most important American magazine during those years. *Putnam’s* had prided itself on its urbane style: cosmopolitan New York as opposed to genteel and parochial Boston, but it went under in the panic-depression year of 1857, the same year that *Harper’s* (and its more highbrow Boston counterpart *The Atlantic Monthly*) came into being. *Harper’s* was distinctly middle class, as befitted its New York location. The clearest expression of that orientation was its dependence on illustrations, which, when combined with its antislavery Republican orientation, made it the ideal medium for Nast.

His most notable wartime work was not political cartoons but evocative wash drawings, suffused with mid-nineteenth century Romantic sentimentality, conveying the pathos of the war to a *Harper’s* readership hungry for expressions of their own strong feelings. (See figs. 1 and 2.)

But as the war dragged on, and the cause of the Union became increasingly entwined with emancipation and equal citizenship, Harper's—and Nast—grew more politics-and-policy-minded. (See figs. 3, 4, and 5.)

Nast became a national force during this testing time of American nationhood. Grant is supposed to have said, when asked who was the foremost figure in civic life to have emerged in the course of the War: “I think, Thomas Nast. He did as much as any one man to preserve the Union and bring the war to an end.” His work conveyed both the pathos and the meaning of the War to a large middle class Northern audience, and struck a chord with them that words—other than those of Abraham Lincoln—were not better able to do.

Nast like millions of other Americans was deeply shaken by the dramatic, symbolism-drenched sequence of Lee's surrender at Appomattox on Palm Sunday and the assassination of Abraham Lincoln on Good Friday. (See figs. 6, and 7.) Before his death Lincoln increasingly identified the Union cause with emancipation and, by implication, African American citizenship. Now, with the union saved and the slaves freed, the situation of the Freedmen and the character of Southern reconstruction took center stage—for the nation, and for Nast.

The relationship of Reconstruction to the Civil War rested crucially on the fact that the end of the war did not see the South fully accept the meaning of its defeat, as would be the case with Germany and Japan after World War Two. Instead the white South successfully denied the social and economic implications of the end of slavery. It was assisted in this by the rapidly diminishing will on the part of the North to impose that larger meaning on the defeated section: a relationship not unlike that between Germany and the Allies after World War One.

Many factors contributed to the failure of emancipation to lead to equal rights and full citizenship for the Freedmen. In the largest sense, the explanation lies in the fact that the main currents of Western thought were moving not in the direction of racial equality, but the reverse: towards a racism, an assumption of black inferiority, that was validated in both popular and high culture.

Against these deep currents of thought and attitude, the spur to equality furnished by the war and emancipation quickly faded. Among the first to give up the cause were not Republican politicians, who welcomed African American votes, or middle class defenders of the party faith such as Nast, but the journalistic-intellectual elite. Godkin, Curtis, and other genteel reformers quickly concluded that the formal end of slavery was all that the Freedmen needed, and that the unreadiness of the ex-slaves to take an active place in the Southern body politic was self-evident. It was as though their fight for the abolition of slavery and the preservation of the Union had drained them of the commitment to take on the new cause of equal citizenship for the Freedmen. Certainly they were more ready to subscribe to the new scientific racism taking hold in higher intellectual circles of Europe and America. The major issues facing postwar America, this journalistic-intellectual elite came to believe, were the corruption (and the power) of party bosses and machines, and the threat that immigration, labor, and corporate capitalism posed to American society.

Nast came of political age not in the prewar antislavery crusade, but in the crucible of the War. Saving the Union, freeing the slaves, supporting Lincoln's Republicans

against a Democratic party that was bitterly anti-black and, at best, lukewarm on fighting the Confederacy: these were his defining issues. Emancipation and the compelling vision of a postwar Great Republic, in which all races and ethnic groups would share in an equal American citizenship, had a strong, self-evident appeal for him.

Nast remained committed to this larger, deeper meaning of the War longer than did most of his more intellectual contemporaries. He reacted with passion against white Southern violence against the Freedmen, Indians denied the vote, and Chinese immigrants facing exclusion. (See figs. 8, 9, 10, and 11.)

Why did Nast adhere to these views? Again, one must look to his middlebrow placement in the American cultural spectrum. A German immigrant's child, imbued with the values of freedom and equality, Nast was better able than his cultural superiors to resist the racism that so rapidly eroded their concern for the situation of the Freedmen, once slavery had ended.

But his outlook was defined at least as much by the politics of Reconstruction as by a commitment to equal citizenship and racial equality. The Democrats, and Lincoln's pro-Union vice president (and now successor) Andrew Johnson, who sought to ally with his old party, were uninhibited in their Negrophobia. Hostility to black civil equality, and the rapid restoration of the South to the control of the ex-Confederate whites, became the cornerstones of the Johnson-Democratic alliance.

Nast, and the bulk of the Republican party, responded to this challenge in a manner shaped by their Civil War experience. The politics of Reconstruction became in effect the continuation of the War by other means. Johnson and the Democrats threatened to betray the sacred causes of Union and Freedom; and Nast reacted accordingly. Grant was supposed to have commented on Nast's role in his 1868 election to the Presidency much as he had to the cartoonist's contribution to the war effort: "Two things elected me: the sword of Sheridan [whose troops enforced black voting in the South] and the pencil of Nast." (See figs. 12, 13, 14, and 15)

Nast's views were shared by the humorist David Ross Locke, with whom he began to collaborate in 1867. Locke's great satiric creation, appearing in newspapers throughout the North, was the letters of Petroleum Vesuvius Nasby, an archetypal Copperhead Democrat: anti-Union, Negrophobic, "illiterate, hypocritical, cowardly, loafing, lying, dissolute"—a word picture closely resembling Nast's portrayals of postwar Democrats. Locke hoped that "in our renewed and purified Republic" all laws discriminating against blacks would be repealed. His writing and Nast's cartoons had much in common: a self-taught, native talent wedded to a passionate style of expression.

In 1872 Nast illustrated two of Locke's books, including one for which Charles Sumner wrote the introduction. Sumner said of the Nasby letters, "They have an historic character from the part they performed in the war with slavery, and in advancing reconstruction. ...each letter was like a speech, or one of those songs which stir the people"—or, he might have added, like one of Thomas Nast's cartoons.

Nast's views on the politics of Reconstruction are essential to understanding his most powerful and best-remembered crusade: his campaign against the Tweed Ring. It came in the wake of his support of the Republican resistance to Andrew Johnson and the struggle for Radical Reconstruction. Tweed's Tammany embodied many of the

ideas and interests that Nast most strongly opposed: the pro-Southern, anti-black attitude of Democrats in general and New York Democrats in particular; and the prominence of Irish Catholics in Tweed's Tammany.

It may be asked why Nast's sympathy for blacks, Indians, and Chinese did not extend to the Irish and Catholicism. Mid-nineteenth century liberals—and Nast certainly was one of them—regarded the Catholic church as the fount of anti-modernism and fanaticism. (See fig. 16.) This attitude was reinforced by the commitment of many Irish-Americans to the Democratic party, hostility to abolition, and Negrophobia. The intertwining of his hostility to the Church, the Irish, and the Tweed Ring suggest that for him this was another chapter in the ongoing struggle to preserve the American Union, and Lincoln's new birth of freedom, from its enemies. In this sense the Confederates, the anti-Reconstruction, pro-Johnson Democrats, and the Tweed Ring and the Catholic church were parts of a collective whole. It stirred in Nast the peak of his distinctive mix of artistic inventiveness and political passion. (See figs. 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, and 22.)

These drawings spoke to the political and social concerns of the core urban constituency of wartime and postwar Republicanism: Protestant farmers, professional and businessmen, shopkeepers, artisans. *Harper's Weekly's* circulation rose from 100,000 to 300,000. Editor George W. Curtis was as one with Nast in the fight against Tweed; E.L. Godkin's *Nation* thought that Nast's Tweed drawings had lifted political cartoons "to a pitch of excellence never before attained in this country and has secured for them an influence on opinion such as they never came near having in any country."

The campaign against Tweed was the last hurrah of the wartime/Reconstruction Republican alliance of middlebrow and highbrow opinion. The shared set of beliefs that linked Nast, Locke, Sumner, Curtis, and Godkin with one another, and—for a while—with much of the Republican party, was not destined to last. Just as the Young America writers of the 1830s broke up over the issues of expansion and antislavery, so did the Civil War-Reconstruction Republican coalition come apart as new issues, and new attitudes, took center stage in American public life.

It was in the election of 1872 that the erosion of the wartime-postwar alliance became evident. In that year the Liberal Republican party emerged as an anti-Grant break-away group, and *New York Tribune* editor Horace Greeley became the presidential candidate on both the Liberal Republican and Democratic tickets.

The appearance of the Liberal Republicans is usually attributed to a reaction by reformers to corruption in the Grant administration (though in fact the major revelations of corruption came during Grant's second term). But by itself that is not enough to explain why Greeley, arguably the most influential voice of early antislavery Republicanism and the fight against the slave oligarchy of the South, would leave the party he had done so much to create and accept the nomination of a Democratic party tainted by pro-Southernism and Negrophobia. Nor does it explain why so many other editors, reformers, and Republican leaders in the fight against slavery and secession supported him.

One source was the growing frustration of journalists and men of letters with the fact that public life, which before and during the war had been defined in great part by their words and thoughts, was now coming ever more firmly into the hands of party

bosses, party machines, and soldiers-turned-politicians. There arose what one historian has called a war between journalists and politicians “that the politicians, or at least politics, won.” It was no accident that the prime mover behind the creation of the Liberal Republican party and Greeley’s candidacy was a “Quadrilateral” of newspaper editors: Samuel Bowles of the *Springfield Republican*, Murat Halstead of the *Cincinnati Commercial*, Horace White of the *Chicago Tribune*, and Henry Watterson of the *Louisville Courier-Journal*. A contemporary observed that “[i]t was less a theory of politics than a theory of journalism” that powered the Liberal Republican movement.

It was, therefore, highly appropriate that Horace Greeley, the greatest newspaper editor of his time, should be the Liberal Republican candidate. For similar reasons, some of the Founding Fathers of the Republican party—Sumner, Carl Schurz, Lyman Trumbull—supported Greeley. Their ostensible reasons were quarrels with the Grant administration over foreign policy and patronage. At base, though, their switch, like that of the editors, was a response to the fact that defining and shaping public policy had come into the hands of a new political generation.

For loyal Republicans such as Nast, the Liberal Republican movement was close to blasphemy. In his eyes, Grant was the greatest man of the age after Lincoln. The dissidents entered the category of damned souls previously reserved for Southern slaveholders, Democrats, and the Tweed Ring. He was not alone in this. Mark Twain and biographer James Parton, Nast’s relative by marriage, were hardly blind to the excesses of the Gilded Age; but they too supported Grant, for reasons similar to those that swayed Nast. After the election, Twain told him: “Nast, you more than any other man have won a prodigious victory for Grant—I mean, for Civilization and Progress.”

Harper’s editor George W. Curtis was at the heart of the journalist-genteel reformer alliance that was the backbone of the Liberal Republican movement. Not surprisingly, tensions between Curtis and Nast mounted. Their differences were not only a matter of ideology, but of social-cultural milieu, and even of journalistic style. Nast observed of Curtis, “When he attacks a man with his pen it seems as if he were apologizing for the act. I try to hit the enemy between the eyes and knock him down.”

Nast was still influential enough—and sufficiently backed by *Harper’s Weekly* publisher Fletcher Harper—to go his own way in the 1872 campaign. He treated Greeley with harshness comparable to his portrayals of Andrew Johnson and William Magear Tweed: for Greeley, too, in his view had betrayed the meaning of the Civil War. He saw in Greeley and the Liberal Republicans a misguided naïveté, prone to manipulation by the Irish-Copperhead Democracy. (See figs. 23, 24, 25, 26, and 27.)

But Nast could not indefinitely resist the changes in American political culture that were moving intellectuals, cultural journalists, and political reformers away from the causes of the War and Reconstruction, and toward a political stance that dwelt on the dangers of political corruption, that feared strikes and radicalism, that was indifferent to African American civil rights.

As the Republican Party became increasingly defined not by the grand principles of Union and freedom but the machinations of machine politicians, Nast gradually assumed a more critical attitude. He took Grant to task for reappointing spoilsman Alexander R. Shepherd, who as head of Washington’s Common Council undertook Tweedlike city improvements at great cost to the government and great profit to favored contractors. (See fig. 28.) And in commenting on corruption charges involving

Secretary of War William W. Belknap, he turned to the vulture image that he had used so effectively against the Tweed Ring only five years before.

It was now that Nast invented that large but clumsy and unassertive beast, the Republican elephant, as a symbol of his party. He did so in the 1874 Congressional campaign, when Democrats and former Liberal Republicans charged that Grant planned to seek a third term as President. This “Caesarism” charge helped lead the GOP to destruction as, for the first time since the Civil War, the Democrats won control of the House of Representatives. (See fig. 29.)

The intensity of Nast’s commitment to the Republican party further declined in the 1880 election, when the GOP’s presidential candidate was scandal-tarred James A. Garfield, while the Democrats nominated Civil War general Winfield Scott Hancock. Nast declined to support Garfield, and treated the defeated Hancock with a sympathy new to his portrayal of Democrats. (See fig. 30.)

Nast continued to respond with some of his old fire to violence against Southern blacks, and to sympathize with the plight of Native Americans Indian and Chinese immigrants. (See figs. 31, and 32.) But these were insecurely held views, as the Civil War era commitment to equal American citizenship gave way to racist doubts. Indians on the warpath were to be met by a strengthened army, not by the reductions in military spending championed by ex-Copperhead Democrats. Racist stereotyping of blacks began to appear: comparable to those of the Irish—though in contrast with the presumably more highly civilized Chinese. (See figs. 33, 34, and 35.)

Nast came to echo reformers such as Curtis and Godkin not only in matters of race, but on economic and class issues. Financially secure himself, and solidly grounded in mid-nineteenth century Liberalism, he had little use for paper money inflation and less for radicalism; an attitude reinforced by events such as the 1887 Haymarket explosion in Chicago, when an anarchist bomb killed several policemen. (See figs. 36, 37, 38, and 39.)

By 1884 Thomas Nast’s political transformation was all but complete. Along with Curtis and Godkin, he supported Democratic candidate Grover Cleveland, who championed civil service reform, against machine Republican candidate James G. Blaine. Nast agreed that a politics of substance and meaning had been supplanted by the rule of the “practical politician,” bamboozling gullible black and Irish voters alike. (See fig. 40.)

As if to underscore this end-of-an-era atmosphere, Grant died in 1885. And a year later the *Nast-Harper’s Weekly* connection came to an end. (See fig. 41.)

Thereafter Nast tried a variety of artistic ventures, including his own magazine, but none was successful. In style as well as substance, he had little to say to a new audience. The world that had meaning for him was that of the Civil War and Reconstruction. When that time passed, so did the force and fire of his art.

In 1902 Secretary of State John Hay—who had been Lincoln’s secretary, and knew full well what Nast’s cartoons had meant, offered him the post of American consul in Guayaquil, Ecuador. This was no patronage plum: within five months after his arrival, Nast was dead of yellow fever.

What Nast had to say about politics and public policy in the 1860s and early 1870s would not resonate again in American politics until the 1960s and since. This centennial observance of Nast's death should remember him, in all his passion and conviction, as one of the most compelling and evocative voices in America's time of greatest trial. A reporter observed when he retired in the mid-1890s: "The pressure of the great issues of the war raised up a Lincoln, a Grant and a Nast. Lincoln broad in love, firm in purpose; Grant brave and unyielding; Nast an inspired artist to encourage the hearts of the rulers and the soldiers of the people."

Faced with the challenges of the Civil War and Reconstruction, he drew on his resources as an immigrant child and the rich literary-journalistic-artistic life of 1850s New York, and responded with a richness of caricature and an evocative power that still resonates with viewers a century and a half removed (though in many respects not so far removed at all) from Nast's world.

Nast was essentially a patriot and a moralist, said his biographer Albert Paine. I think that is essentially right.

Figure List

Figure 1 “The War in the West,” *Harper’s Weekly*, January 17, 1863, pages 40-41.

Figure 2 “The Result of War—Virginia in 1863,” *Harper’s Weekly*, July 18, 1863, pages 456-457.

Figure 3 “The Emancipation of the Negroes, January, 1863—The Past and the Future,” *Harper’s Weekly*, January 24, 1863, pages 56-57.

Figure 4 “The Chicago Platform,” *Harper’s Weekly*, October 15, 1864, pages 664-665.

Figure 5 “Thanksgiving—Day, November 24, 1864,” *Harper’s Weekly*, December 3, 1864, pages 776-777.

Figure 6 “Palm Sunday,” *Harper’s Weekly*, May 20, 1865, pages 312-313.

Figure 7 “Victory and Death,” *Harper’s Weekly*, June 10, 1865, pages 360-361.

Figure 8 “Uncle Sam’s Thanksgiving Dinner,” *Harper’s Weekly*, November 20, 1869, page 745.

Figure 9 “Patience on a Monument,” *Harper’s Weekly*, October 10, 1868, page 648.

Figure 10 “‘Move On!’ Has the Native American no rights that the naturalized American is bound to respect,” *Harper’s Weekly*, April 22, 1871, page 361.

Figure 11 “‘The Chinese Question.’ Columbia. —‘Hands off, gentlemen! America means fair play for all men.’” *Harper’s Weekly*, February 18, 1871, page 149.

Figure 12 “Pardon. Franchise. Columbia. —‘Shall I trust these men, and not this man?’” *Harper’s Weekly*, August 5, 1865, pages 488-489.

Figure 13 “Amphitheatrum Johnsonianum—Massacre of the Innocents at New Orleans, July 30, 1866.” *Harper’s Weekly*, March 30, 1867, pages 200-201.

Figure 14 “Andrew Johnson’s Reconstruction, And How It Works.” *Harper’s Weekly*, September 1, 1866, pages 552-553.

Figure 15 “‘This Is a White Man’s Government.’ We regard the Reconstruction Acts (so called) of Congress as usurpations, and unconstitutional, revolutionary, and void.’—*Democratic Platform*.” *Harper’s Weekly*, September 5, 1868, page 568.

Figure 16 “The American River Ganges. The Priests and the Children.” *Harper’s Weekly*, September 30, 1871, page 916.

Figure 17 “Two Great Questions,” *Harper’s Weekly*, August 19, 1871, page 764.

Figure 18 “A Group of Vultures Waiting for the Storm to ‘Blow Over’-‘Let Us Prey.” *Harper’s Weekly*, September 23, 1871, page 889.

Figure 19 “‘Too Thin!’” *Harper’s Weekly*, September 30, 1871, cover.

Figure 20 “The ‘Brains.’ The Boss. -‘Well, what are you going to do about it?’” *Harper’s Weekly*, October 21, 1871, page 992.

Figure 21 “The Tammany Tiger Loose- ‘What Are You Going to Do About It?’” *Harper’s Weekly*, November 11, 1871, pages 1056-1057.

Figure 22 “What Are You Laughing At? To the Victor Belong The Spoils.” *Harper’s Weekly*, November 25, 1871, cover.

Figure 23 “‘Old Honesty’ ‘If he does still think that all the vilest classes (*blacklegs, pugilists, keepers of dens, criminals, shoulder-bitters, rowdies, burglars, etc., etc.*), all the scum and dregs of the community, are drawn to the Democratic party by ‘a sympathetic chord,’ he disgraces himself in asking for Democratic suffrages.”—*New York World*, June 6, 1872. *Harper’s Weekly*, July 20, 1872, page 573.

Figure 24 “Let Us Clasp Hands over the Bloody Chasm.’- Horace Greeley.” *Harper’s Weekly*, September 21, 1872, page 732.

Figure 25 “It Is Only a Truce To Regain Power (“Playing Possum”).’ H.G. ‘Clasp hands over the Bloody Chasm.’ C.S. ‘Freely accept the hand that is offered, and reach forth thine own in friendly grasp.” *Harper’s Weekly*, August 24, 1872, page 652.

Figure 26 “The Whited Sepulchre. Covering the monument of infamy with his white hat and coat.” *Harper’s Weekly*, September 7, 1872, page 692.

Figure 27 “Clasping Hands over the Bleedless (Sar)c(h)asm.” *Harper’s Weekly*, November 23, 1872, page 912-913.

Figure 28 “Don’t Let Us Have any More of This Nonsense. It Is a good Trait To Stand by One’s friends; but-” *Harper’s Weekly*, July 18, 1874, cover.

Figure 29 “It Struck(in Blowing Over).-Picking Even the Poor Soldier’s Bones To feather Their Nest.” *Harper’s Weekly*, March 25, 1876, page 248-249.

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Figure 33 “Every Dog (No Distinction of Color) Has His Day.” “Red Gentleman to Yellow Gentleman. ‘Pale face ‘friad you crowd him out, as he did me.” *Harper’s Weekly*, February 8, 1879, page 101.

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Figure 38 “The Emancipator of Labor and the Honest Working People.” *Harper’s Weekly*, February 7, 1874, page 121.

Figure 39 “Dynamite and Panic in the Air!” *Harper’s Weekly*, September 4, 1886, page 564.

Figure 40 “The Greatest of American Intimidators north and South. Practical Politician. ‘Vote as I dictate!’” *Harper’s Weekly*, November 7, 1885, page 725.

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