

The Cartoons of Thomas Nast

Grade Level: 6-12



Thomas Nast (1840-1902 "Any Thing For A Change", *Harper's Weekly*, September 16, 1876, TN2009.24

About the Artist

Thomas Nast (1840-1902) immigrated to America from Landau, Germany when he was five years old. With limited education and little artistic training, he joined the art staff of *Frank Leslie's Illustrated* as a teenager. In 1862, the artist joined *Harper's Weekly* as its war correspondent. He worked for the weekly until 1877, and again from 1895-1896. During his tenure, Nast created hundreds of cartoons, including the Democratic Donkey, Republican Elephant, Uncle Sam, Columbia, Tammany Tiger, and Santa Claus. Nast also created cartoons commenting on issues of the day.

Themes

- US History
- Political Corruption
- American Politics

Background Information

The 1876 Presidential Election was between Rutherford B. Hayes (Republican Candidate) and Samuel Tilden (Democratic Candidate).

Political cartoonist Thomas Nast was a staunch supporter of the Republican Party at the time, although he did not particularly like the Republican candidate, Hayes, and went so far as not to depict him in his political cartoons. However, Nast editorially attacked the Democratic candidate Tilden whom he viewed as corrupt due to Tilden's association with William "Boss" Tweed.

Boss Tweed (1823-1878) was an American politician in New York who defrauded the City of New York of millions of dollars from 1865-1871, emptied the treasury, and added millions of dollars to the public debt. Tweed led a group of corrupt politicians, known as the Tweed Ring, at Tammany Hall in New York City.

The Tweed Ring used their positions of power to enrich themselves. As head of the city's Commission of Public Works, Boss Tweed handed out lucrative contracts to his cronies, who then "kicked back" money to the Ring.

Tweed's corruption is what attracted Nast's attention. Nast created more than 140 cartoons targeting Boss Tweed. The vivid imagery Nast used to criticize Boss Tweed was so effective that Tweed is quoted as saying, "I don't care so much what the papers write about me—my constituents can't read, but damn it, they can see pictures."



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A Closer Look

Look closely at the political cartoon and write down or share all that you see.

What words are written? Look up any words you don't know.

Who is depicted?

How are they depicted?

What is happening in the cartoon?

Digging Deeper

Once you've had a chance to investigate the cartoon closely and have answered the above questions, you can begin to infer the context and content of the cartoon.

What do you think Nast is saying about Tilden's association with Tweed in this cartoon?

Is it fair to condemn a politician for their perceived associations with corrupt people? Why or why not?

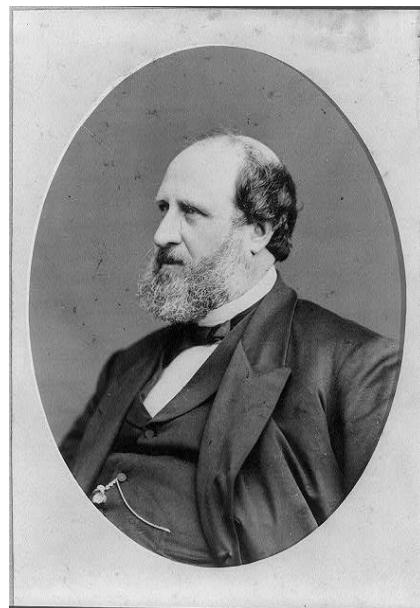
Read: The Downfall of Tweed

How can art lead to political change? Read "[The Political Cartoonist Who Helped Lead to 'Boss' Tweed's Downfall](#)" to learn how an artist's work led to the investigation of Boss Tweed and his ultimate downfall. **How can you use art to drive change in your communities?**



Samuel Tilden

Miss Lila L. Morse with kindest regards, Samuel I. Tilden". , 1874. Dec. 4. Photograph.
<https://www.loc.gov/item/2008679452/>.



William "Boss" Tweed

William Magear "Boss" Tweed, head and shoulders portrait, facing left. , . [No Date Recorded on Caption Card]
Photograph. https://www.loc.gov/item/2004672769/.



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"ANY THING FOR A CHANGE."

EXILE TWEED TO USUFRUCTUARY TILDEN. "Let us usufruct or change. That's the best thing you can do about it."

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Teachers' Notes: About the Cartoon

Boss Tweed stands up in the box holding a "prison or exile suit". Tilden looks back at Tweed and takes his brush of reform and tries to clean the "Tammany Mud" off his coat, which Nast labels "White-House Suit(?)".

Tilden tries to clean himself of his association with the exiled Boss Tweed.

The caption below reads "Exile Tweed to Usufructuary Tilden. "Let us Usufruct or change. That's the best thing you can do about it." Usufruct means "the legal right of using and enjoying the fruits or profits of something belonging to another", Merriam-Webster dictionary.

Nast is calling Tilden a crook.

About Macculloch Hall Historical Museum

Established in 1950 by W. Parsons Todd (1877-1976), Macculloch Hall Historical Museum preserves and interprets its historic house and gardens, an unparalleled collection of the work of political cartoonist Thomas Nast (1840-1902), fine and decorative arts collections, and Macculloch family archives, inspiring visitors to experience everyday American history where it happened. The museum's unique historic setting, its period rooms, and professional galleries excite and educate visitors of all ages, connecting present to past in a dynamic cultural environment. On site, online, and through outreach, MHHM serves local, state, national, and international communities.

Visit <https://maccullochhall.org/> to learn more.

Macculloch Hall Historical Museum receives annual general operating support from the W. Parsons Todd Foundation, the New Jersey Historical Commission, a division of the Department of State, the F.M. Kirby Foundation, the Mimi Washington Starrett Foundation, the New Jersey Economic Development Authority, and New Jersey Arts & Culture Renewal Fund of the Princeton Area Community Foundation and program support from The Astle-Alpaugh Family Foundation, the Garden Club of Morristown, and Bloomberg Connects.



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