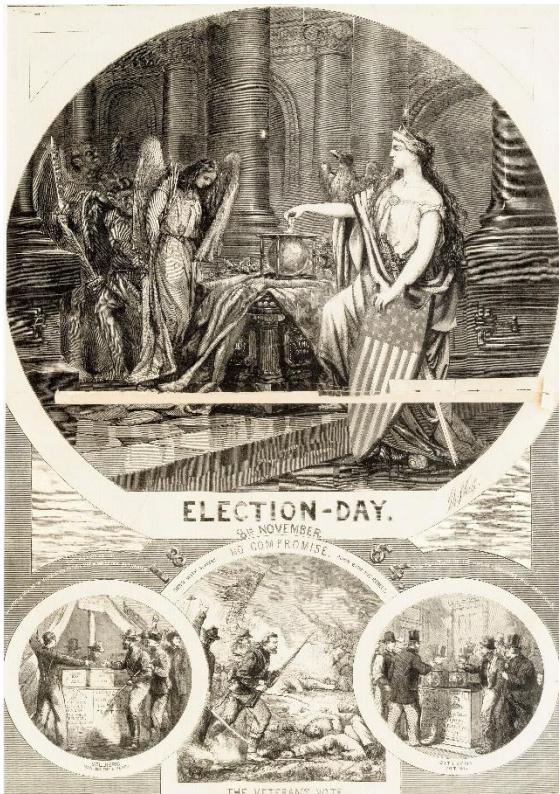


The Cartoons of Thomas Nast

Grade Level: 6-12



Thomas Nast (1840-1902) "Election Day", *Harper's Weekly*, November 12, 1864, TN2004.67

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
- Elections and Voting
- American Politics
- Civil War

Background Information

The 1864 Presidential Election was between Abraham Lincoln (Republican Candidate) and George McClellan (Democratic Candidate).

The winner of this election would have an impact on the outcome of the Civil War. Republicans supported a Union victory with the reunification of the country and a constitutional amendment to end slavery. Democrats supported peace, but not necessarily victory or reunification.

For the first time since the War of 1812, an election was held during a war, and many soldiers were eligible to vote. In order to allow soldiers to vote, absentee voting was permitted, and many Union camps had ballot boxes where soldiers could cast their votes. This was the first time on a large scale that absentee voting was permitted, and each state was responsible for carrying out its own practices. Election officials worked to make sure the election was fair and free from fraud.

Since the Southern states had seceded, the 1864 election was only between the Northern states. New states, Kansas, West Virginia, and Nevada, voted for the first time in this election.

Lincoln won the 1864 election with 55% of the popular vote and 212 electoral votes. With his victory, the Union would keep fighting for victory to reunify the nation and to abolish slavery.



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A Closer Look



Thomas Nast personified many ideas in human or humanoid forms. In the top image, the woman on the left is Columbia—the allegorical figure of the United States.

What other ideas are personified in the top image?

What do you think is happening in the image?

Who do you think Nast supported in the election? Lincoln or McClellan? Why?

Is this an effective political cartoon for the 1864 election? Why or why not?

Research: Columbia

Columbia was a powerful image that Nast used in his political cartoons. Columbia represented the ideals of democracy, equality, and moral justice in the United States. She was interpreted as a protector of the country and its national ideals. **Find other examples of Nast cartoons with Columbia.**

Who is she with? What is she doing?

Watch: The Election of 1864

In [The Election of 1864: The Civil War In 4 Minutes](#) video from the American Battlefield Trust, historian Gary Gallagher shares about the role of soldiers in the 1864 election.

How are soldiers depicted in the Nast cartoon?

Why do you think Nast included the soldiers in the political cartoon?



Read: [The History of Voting by Mail](#)

The Smithsonian National Postal Museum's exhibit *Voting by Mail* (Aug. 2024-Feb. 2025) details the history of voting by mail from 1864 to 2022.

How did voting by mail allow more citizens to vote?

Who historically was not allowed to vote or had barriers to voting?

Why is it important that all citizens be permitted to vote?

Draw A Political Cartoon

Nast used his artwork to drive political change. **Draw a political cartoon for an upcoming election to support a candidate.** The election can be at the local, state, or national level.



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Teachers' Notes: About the Cartoon

In this double folio image, Columbia stands proud in the large top vignette, casting her vote for the Union and Abraham Lincoln. The demons of "Southern Rebellion" and "Traitors North" hold the angel of peace captive.

The bottom three scenes show the soldiers still fighting in the war casting their votes for President Lincoln; in the central scene, the Veterans vote for "no compromise, down with slavery" and "down with the rebels." The final scene shows citizens voting.

This cartoon, though dated November 12, 1864 actually ran on November 2 – almost a full week before the November 8 election

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, MHMH 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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