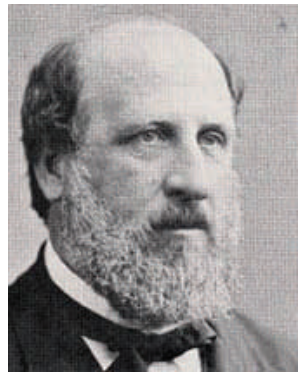


Boss Tweed, Tammany Hall and The Political Cartoons of Thomas Nast



To many late nineteenth century Americans, he personified **public corruption**. In the late 1860s, William M. Tweed was New York City's **political boss**. His headquarters, located on East 14th Street, was known as **Tammany Hall**. He wore a diamond, orchestrated elections, controlled the city's mayor, and rewarded political supporters. His primary source of funds came from the bribes and kickbacks that he demanded in exchange for city contracts. The most notorious example of his involvement in urban corruption was the construction of the New York County Courthouse, begun in 1861. Officially, the city wound up spending nearly \$13 million - roughly \$178 million in today's dollars - on a building that should have cost several times less. Its construction cost nearly twice as much as the purchase of Alaska in 1867.

Tammany Hall steadily gained strength by bringing newly arrived immigrants into its fold. **The Tweed Ring** was successful in part, because it was popular among many voters, especially the Irish immigrants who had flooded the city in search of a better livelihood. Tweed and his friends ensured that Irish-American supporters received jobs and other assistance from the city government and from companies doing business with the city. Because of the willingness of Tammany to provide them with food, clothing, and fuel in emergencies, and to aid those who conflicted with the law, these new Americans became devoted to the organization and were willing to overlook the fraudulent election practices, the graft, the corruption, and the other abuses that often characterized Tammany administrations.

In July 1871, two low-level city officials with a grudge against the Tweed Ring provided The New York Times with reams of documentation that detailed the corruption at the courthouse and other city projects. The newspaper published a string of articles. Those articles, coupled with the political cartoons of Thomas Nast in *Harper's Weekly*, created a national outcry, and soon Tweed and many of his cronies were facing criminal charges and political oblivion. Tweed died in prison in 1878.

Thomas Nast



Thomas Nast was a celebrity. In 1873, following his successful campaign against New York City's Tweed Ring, he was billed as "The Prince of Caricaturists" for a lecture tour that lasted seven months. Nast used his *Harper's Weekly* cartoons to crusade against New York City's political boss William Magear Tweed, and he devised the Tammany tiger for this crusade. He popularized the elephant to symbolize the Republican Party and the donkey as the symbol for the Democratic Party, and created the "modern" image of Santa Claus. Following his death on December 7, 1902, Thomas Nast's obituary in *Harper's Weekly* stated, "He has been called, perhaps not with accuracy, but with substantial justice, the Father of American Caricature."

Thomas Nast "invented" the image popularly recognized as Santa Claus. Nast first drew Santa Claus for the 1862 Christmas season *Harper's Weekly* cover and center-fold illustration to memorialize the family sacrifices of the Union during the early and, for the north, darkest days of the Civil War. Nast's Santa appeared as a kindly figure representing Christmas, the holiday celebrating the birth of Christ. His use of Santa Claus was melancholy, sad for the faltering Union war effort in which Nast so fervently believed, and sad for the separation of soldiers and families. When Nast created his image of Santa Claus he was drawing on his native German tradition of Saint Nicholas, a fourth century bishop known for his kindness and generosity. In the German Christian tradition December 6 was (and is) Saint Nicholas day, a festival day honoring Saint Nicholas and a day of gift giving. Nast combined this tradition of Saint Nicholas with other German folk traditions of elves to draw his Santa in 1862. The claim that Nast "invented" Santa Claus in 1862 is thus accurate, but the assertion overlooks the centuries-long antecedents to his invention. Santa Claus thrived thereafter in American culture both Christian and secular. During the Civil War, Christmas was a traditional festival celebration in the United States, although not yet a holiday. In Nast's time Christmas was not a day when offices or factories closed; but the development of Christmas as a holiday and the use of Santa Claus as a secular symbol of gift giving removed from its Christian antecedents occurred during Nast's lifetime. The modern American celebration of Christmas, with its commercialized gift exchanges, developed in cities, led by New York, after 1880. Nast's images of Santa Claus were so popular that they were collected and reprinted in a book published in 1890.

HARPER'S WEEKLY.

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SANTA CLAUS IN CAMP.—[See Page 6.]

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"WHAT ARE YOU LAUGHING AT? TO THE VICTOR BELONG THE SPOILS."

1 - Focus On Political Cartoons



In 1871, William "Boss" Tweed, the head of New York City's Tammany Hall political "machine", was arrested and convicted of stealing millions of dollars from the public treasury. Attacked in the press and public, Tweed feared one thing most -- Thomas Nast and his cartoons. These were not your Saturday morning cartoons. They were political cartoons that made fun of Tweed and exposed his crimes. And, as they say, a picture is worth a thousand words. They helped put Tweed in jail. In this activity, you will get the chance to **create a political cartoon of your own**.

2 - Choose A Subject

The first thing to do is to think about a subject you would like to cover in your political cartoon. It must be something about Boss Tweed or Tammany Hall corruption.



3 - Draw A Political Cartoon

There are different visual tools you can use. Caricature is one method. A caricature is a drawing of someone or something that uses exaggeration to make a point. For example, Nast exaggerated Tweed's weight to portray the man as greedy.

Symbols can also be helpful. There are two kinds: symbols that make a point about something and symbols that stand for something. A long nose -- like Pinocchio's -- is a good way to make a point about lying. In a cartoon about political parties, elephants and donkeys are often used to stand for Republicans and Democrats. But remember, a symbol only works if others easily understand it.

Labels can help as well. For example, if you wanted to do a cartoon about high prices, you could show someone with empty pockets hanging out of their pants. A label on that person that says "American consumer" could help make things clearer for the viewer. Also, you can add a line or two at the bottom to explain the cartoon if it needs explaining. And like regular comics, you can have characters in political cartoon speak or think, using word bubbles.

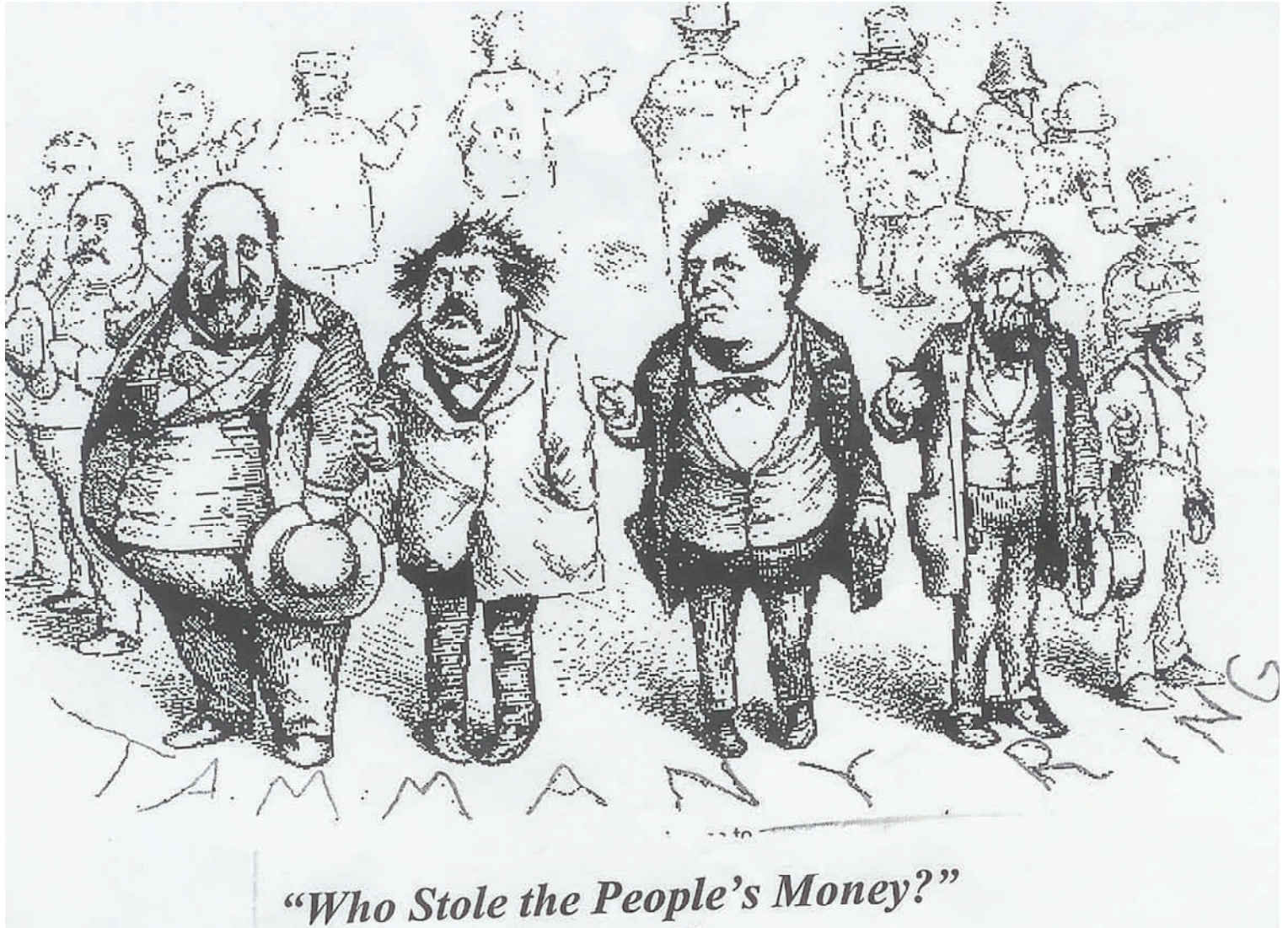
Second, political cartoons don't have to be funny. In fact, they shouldn't be funny if you are portraying a sad or serious subject, like hunger or drug abuse. Some of the most effective political cartoons don't make people laugh, they make them think.

And finally, keep things simple. While cartoons from a hundred or more years ago had lots of characters in them and lots of things going on, modern cartoons do not. The best political cartoons are the simplest ones, with as few people, events, and things in them as possible.

Homework Rubric

	1	2	3	4	5
Content	You cartoon does not relate to the topic. It had no title and was impossible to interpret.	You cartoon does not relate to the topic. It had a title and was hard to interpret.	You cartoon relates to the topic. It had no title and was hard to interpret.	You cartoon is on topic. It has a title and is possible to interpret.	You cartoon is on topic. It has a title and is easy to understand.
Followed instructions and artistic effort	Followed none of the instructions. Shows little effort.	Followed some of the instructions. Shows little effort.	Followed some of the instructions. Shows some effort.	Followed all of the instructions. Shows good effort.	Followed all of the instructions. Shows great effort.

Homework Interpreting Political Cartoons



Directions: Explain in your own words how this political cartoon relates to the article you read about Boss Tweed and Tammany Hall
