

THE ROLE OF POLITICAL CARTOONISTS IN THE
STRUGGLE AGAINST SLAVERY AND ISOLATIONISM: HOW
THOMAS NAST AND DR. SEUSS INFLUENCED MILLIONS

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Introduction

“Join or Die” by Benjamin Franklin was one of the first political cartoons ever published. Drawn in 1754, it depicted a severed snake, with each part labeled one of the first 13 colonies except New England, showing colonial disunity in times of turmoil. Although the cartoon originally referred to the French and Indian War, it resurfaced at the start of the Revolutionary War to encourage the unity of the colonies for a common goal. In the two and a half centuries since “Join or Die”, the political cartoon has both grown and evolved as a form, in the process solidifying itself as a staple of American political commentary, both reflecting and shaping public opinion. The period from the Civil War to WWII was one marked by strong political factions and heated debate over differing visions of both the makeup and structure of

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America itself, and the role America would play in the world as it grew from an upstart colony to a major world power.

Before this period, political cartoonists – such as Edward Williams Clay and David Claypole Johnston – were limited in both production capacity and reach. Most cartoons were done on lithographic films, and published in short-lived periodicals or commissioned through political campaign orders. As such, political cartoons of the time largely reflected a focus on provincial issues. The period of the Civil War through World War II, however, brought more opportunities in the forms of satire magazines—*Harper's Weekly*, *Puck*, *Judge*, among many others—where cartoonists were paid regularly and well, and where they found a far-reaching influence due to the increased circulation of these magazines along with advancements in printing technology during the Gilded Age. At the same time, the strong political currents of the time, along with the figureheads who represented them, created an environment for which the polemical skills of cartoonists were ideally suited and – indeed – welcomed.

In this period, Thomas Nast and Theodore Seuss Geisel – better known as *Dr. Seuss* – both established themselves as perhaps the most influential political cartoonists in the country and, through their almost perfectly sequential careers, provide a sort of roadmap to the most prominent American political currents and debates of the time. Nast was born in 1840 and died in 1902, producing the majority of his work in the period from the Civil War through the 1890s. Through his cartoons, he garnered a massive audience as a champion first of the Union in the Civil War and then of Republicans in the Gilded Age. After the Gilded Age, Nast became a spokesman for Americans, in general, in the fight against Boss Tweed and Tammany Hall. Geisel, born two years after Nast's death, began drawing political cartoons in the 1930s, and his career as a political cartoonist is primarily marked by more than 400 cartoons illustrated at *PM* magazine during WWII. In these cartoons, he sought to rouse Americans from isolationism and demonize the nations of the Axis Powers. After WWII, Geisel wrote some of his most famous children's books, using the same

concepts of rhyming, inventive characters, and ideas that he first developed in his political cartoons. But while there may be an assumed frivolity with the medium of the political cartoon, both Nast and Geisel were thoughtful characters with strong convictions – reflected in their work – and their most prolific periods came during times in which their strong voices and polemical skills were able to find large purchase in their audience. Through this process, both men were able to provide a service to their nation during times of political turmoil.

Why did Dr. Seuss and Thomas Nast engage in the drawing of political cartoons? Who were the primary targets of their social critique? What popular opinions did they affirm and how did those contribute to the building of the idea of the US as a nation? Three shared attributes between the two men help to answer these questions: First, both men used their experiences growing up and their family backgrounds as sources for their political cartoons. Second, the ideologically charged and technologically opportune times in which each lived gave Thomas Nast and Dr. Seuss the opportunity to support and ruthlessly attack various factions. Third, each contributed to a longer-term process of forming a national identity based around American democratic ideals, and transcending regional and social differences that had endured from the founding of the Union.

The Influential Childhoods of Thomas Nast and Dr. Seuss

In tackling the most prominent issues of their day, both Nast and Geisel challenged America to live up to the ideals set out in its Constitution: Nast as an outspoken critic of slavery and the Jim Crow South, and Geisel as a critic of American isolationism in WWII, which he perceived as enabling the abuses of Hitler's authoritarian regime. Both men held strong convictions which were, in both cases, largely shaped by the circumstances of their childhoods.

In 1850, Thomas Nast immigrated to New York from Germany at the age of ten. While his German heritage did not figure prominently in his cartoons, the circumstances of his immigration

still shaped his outlook. Nast's father did not join their family in New York until four years later as he stayed behind to sympathize with the revolutionaries in Europe. His father's dedication to the cause gave Nast a lifelong passion for supporting liberal causes and middle-class values. Thomas Nast "was a devout Republican who defended emancipation, idolized Ulysses S. Grant, vilified corruption, which he contributed to Democrats, and tied together Roman Catholicism and Irish immigrants as threats to peace." Nast grew up near New York City's Five Points: at that time, the center of Irish-American culture. The disdain for Irish-Americans reflected in his cartoons is often attributed as having originated in his childhood, spent as an outsider – as a German immigrant – in a heavily Irish-American area, and scenes he witnessed in his childhood which left a significant mark on him. A baptized Catholic, Nast's distrust of Roman Catholicism also likely developed in his childhood, and he later converted to Protestantism.

Around the 1850s, *Harper's Weekly* and *Leslie's* emerged and provided a serendipitous avenue for the young Nast, who had dropped out of school at fourteen, to pursue his true passion of art. At 15 years old, Nast began to work at *Leslie's* and was "exposed to a mass-circulation journalism whose distinctive qualities—the immediacy and privacy of news, the importance of the lurid and sensational, the uses of exposure and reform—significantly shaped his work." Being able to work at one of these magazines at an early age and during such a politically charged era allowed Nast to gain experience, perfect his drawing style, and get an early introduction to the magazines that would take off during the Civil War and be influential for many years thereafter. In 1859, Nast's first cartoon was published in *Harper's Weekly*, where he later became a staff illustrator in 1862, marking the beginning of Nast's long and influential career. The settings and events of Nast's childhood along with the experience he gained at *Harper's Weekly* informed many of his cartoons, especially during the Civil War and his attack on Boss Tweed.

For most of his childhood, Geisel – also of German heritage – lived a comfortable life. He was born in Springfield, Massa-

chusetts, then home to multiple manufacturing companies along with a thriving population of German immigrants. Geisel's father and grandfather owned a very successful brewery, but the fortunes of his prosperous family began to change as Geisel grew. "Before Ted reached his tenth birthday, the Geisel's suffered a dramatic change in status, from being representatives of Springfield's growing prosperity to targets of Anti-German sentiment." During World War I, Anti-German sentiment among Americans became increasingly widespread, and the hostility Geisel experienced – verbal and physical threats, such as "Kill the Kaiser" – left an indelible mark on him. The scholar Donald Pease contends that Geisel experienced a traumatic event in his life where he was brought off stage after President Roosevelt did not have enough medals to give to the kids that had sold the most war bonds, which affected Geisel so significantly that he developed a case of stage fright. Then, in 1920 at the start of prohibition, the Geisel family brewery business was destroyed and they lost their primary source of income. Like Nast, Geisel began to illustrate at a relatively young age. Geisel's work began when he went to Dartmouth college and became the editor in chief of their humor magazine, *Jack-O-Lantern*. However, he was caught drinking in his dorm, and was fired from the magazine, but continued to submit work under the name "Seuss".

After graduating college, Geisel continued illustrating cartoons for magazines such as *Life*, *Vanity Fair*, and *Judge* as well as working for Standard Oil, making cartoons advertising the Flit, a spray pump insecticide which became a household name, in large part due to Geisel's cartoons. All of this gained him significant experience in the cartoon making world. But it wasn't until the beginning of World War II when Geisel truly began to make a name for himself in the cartooning industry. In all of these cases, his comic art served a therapeutic function, enabling Geisel to deal with the traumatic events from his childhood. "Liberation from what traumatized him inspired the invention of characters who could act out and thereby work through what remained of his memories of the shame and humiliation that came from prohibition and nativist's xenophobic stereotypes." Similar to Nast,

Seuss's trauma as a child informed his World War II cartoons and even his children's books.

Thomas Nast and Dr. Seuss Go to War

The careers of Thomas Nast and Dr. Seuss were made possible by the development of the mass circulation of newspapers, which gave them both platforms to express their critiques. Each aimed to define a unified national, political community. Both cartoonists hailed democracy –roughly defined as popular involvement, protection of individual rights, and equality. Both cartoonists attacked the abuses that they saw in the world around them, but each arrived there in a different way. On the one hand, Nast, at first, merely focused on the struggles of the American people during the Civil War. But as the war developed, he foresaw the realization of a unified America based on the principles of democracy. On the other hand, Dr. Seuss deplored the conflation among American nativists of Germanness and Nazism, but then turned to promote the idea of American democracy.

Dr. Seuss and Thomas Nast both lived in periods of history where newspaper circulation was at its peak due to technological advancement. Before 1833, newspapers did not appeal to large, diverse groups of people. Instead, each newspaper catered toward a specific group of people, mostly those who had property and were of the professional class or those interested in business or politics. In addition, newspapers, which cost 6 cents, were too expensive for the working class to afford. After 1833, however, media popularity shifted to penny newspapers, such as the *New York Sun*. Penny newspapers were affordable and contained enjoyable content. As a result, they gained significantly more circulation than political commentary newspapers, first, due to their affordability and their ability to cater to much greater audiences. Innovations in newspaper printing technology allowed publishers to “achieve high circulation and increase revenue while maintaining relatively low costs.”. For Thomas Nast, *Harper's Weekly* was one of the best newspapers to be working at as a political cartoonist during this period: “the *Weekly* was distinguished for the quality and quantity

of its illustrations at a time when the laborious process of woodcut engravings made pictures expensive and journalistically cumbersome.” This was a significant competitive advantage for *Harper’s Weekly* compared to other newspapers of the period, undergirding its success and widespread circulation, and significantly benefiting Nast and his career in political cartoons, unlike many of his predecessors whose reaches were much more limited. Seuss also had this level of opportunity with his political cartoons, but with the invention of television in the 20th century, newspapers had more competition. Starting in the 1950s, television and newspapers had to compete for the national medium. So, along with illustrating political cartoons, Seuss took the opportunity of television that many other cartoonists didn’t have and used it to his advantage. Overall, Thomas Nast and Dr. Seuss were both able to take advantage of the technological opportunities they were given.

The cartoons that Nast drew during and about the American Civil War helped launch his career as a political commentator. Nast began drawing Civil War cartoons for the purpose of rallying thousands of people for the Union. At first, Nast created drawings of wartime events along with other *Harper’s Weekly* artists, which became popular because it was the closest approximation of the actual war that many Americans were fighting and appealed to the sentiment of what many people were going through at the time. With the invention of telegraph, soldiers could file reports of battles and news about the war, which significantly benefitted Nast and his Civil War illustrations.

Christmas Eve by Thomas Nast was published in Harper’s Weekly on January 3rd, 1863. It depicts a wife and her military husband, “separated but thinking of and praying for one another.” The wife is at home, praying out of her window, while the husband is on the battlefield, but still thinking of his wife. The melancholy images below depict an army marching through rows of graves and a sinking ship. Along with this being the cartoon in which Nast created the first modern rendition of Santa Claus, this cartoon shows “the challenges endured by the nation” in the wake of the unsuccessful attack on Fredericksburg, Virginia.” Nast sought

to perpetuate outrage among Americans through depicting the hardships of the Civil War such as the separation of families. Nast eventually moved on to more “imaginative statements on the grim and terrible nature of the war itself.” These became very popular, showing the need to see the war beyond the literal sense.

The War in the Border States by Thomas Nast was published by Harper’s Weekly on January 17th, 1863. In this cartoon Nast depicts the struggles of families living in the border states. The image on the left depicts starving women and children begging and a soldier giving his rations to a hungry woman. The image on the right depicts a woman and her children crying over the body of a dead man. The background of the picture is one of desolate and destroyed land. Again, Nast portrays the struggles of families, such as economic struggles, to maintain indignation among Americans. Taken together, the two cartoons center the war’s consequences – in terms of both its human impact, and its devastation – rather than attacking those characteristics and institutions of the South, such as slavery, to which Nast was personally opposed.

The Civil War reflected the ways in which the American North and South had developed along increasingly different lines. The North was characterized by a more diverse economy based on industrial development and free labor, larger cities undergoing rapid urbanization, significant amounts of immigration, and a Republican majority. The South was characterized by a more agricultural economy undergirded by slave labor, more rural territory, very few immigrants, and a Democratic majority. Given Nast’s firm convictions – as an advocate of abolition and opponent of racial segregation – it is unsurprising that Nast was firmly on the side of the Union. To justify the length and the cost of the Civil War, the goal for the North developed into something much bigger than it was before: “a struggle over the perpetuation of Negro slavery, a confrontation of opposing views on the nature of government and society in America.” Here, Nast began to preach unity and equality to the American people, develop the values of the North, and attack southern ideals throughout the Civil War. Nast was able to captivate such a large audience because while he did portray

the war as a tragedy, he used the goal of emancipation as a way to unify the north under democratic values. His commentary on the cause of Emancipation and a series of allegorical celebrations of national holidays caught—and heightened—the mix of patriotism, religiosity, and elevated moral purpose that gave important elements of Northern opinion the will to see the war through its bloody, weary end.

The Emancipation of the Negro—The Past and the Future by Thomas Nast was published by Harper's Weekly on January 24th, 1863. It depicts the celebration of the promises made by the Emancipation Proclamation; an executive order made by Abraham Lincoln in 1863 saying that "all enslaved persons in Confederate territory were declared to be forever free." In the picture, the middle circle depicts a peaceful African American family around a "Union" stove. Right below it is a baby breaking the chains of a slave. To the left is the past of slavery, showing slave owners beating their slaves, and to the right is what could be the future if the Union wins the war, showing equality among all people. Through this cartoon, Nast portrays optimism for the future of free African Americans in the United States to the American people, strengthening their rationalization for fighting the Civil War. Nast portrays what he believes should be the future of the United States: a place of unity and equality. Thomas Nast garnered significant support from the North because he took their incipient values and brought them into sharper focus through his illustrations. His cartoons both reflected and contributed to an increasingly unified Northern outlook, as public opinion cohered around the reasons for and goals of fighting the Civil War.

Between the Civil War and the Gilded Age, Nast illustrated cartoons about the aftermath of the Civil War and the future of the nation. *Uncle Sam's Thanksgiving Dinner* by Thomas Nast was published by Harper's Weekly on November 20th, 1869. This cartoon encapsulates Nast's vision of America after the Civil War. There are many different people depicted at the table: Uncle Sam at the head, Colombia, personifying America's values, and an array of different races and religions waiting to begin the feast. Despite

their differences, the people dine at the table as equals, engaged in lively conversation in a scene free of discord and marked by the humanity Nast imbues in the characters present. In the bottom corners, the sentiments “Come One Come All” and “Free and Equal” reinforce the parallel between the meal’s inclusivity and America’s founding ideals. In wake of the Civil War and amid competing visions of the country’s path forward after such turmoil, Nast portrays – in this cartoon – his vision of the democratic ideal of the United States.

Seven decades later, Geisel would also come into his own as both an artist and political commentator during a pivotal war-time period for the United States. But whereas the most looming question of national identity in Nast’s period was that of slavery, the equivalent question in Geisel’s time was the role the United States would assume in the world as an emerging world superpower. In the years since America’s involvement in WWI – in part due to the secondary effects of the war on the American economy and people, among other reasons – strong isolationist currents had taken hold in certain parts of the American political sphere. As Adolf Hitler first came to power and then invaded Poland – causing Great Britain and France to declare war on Germany – debate raged over whether the United States would involve itself in the conflict. Although Geisel’s German heritage had caused him considerable personal torment in his childhood, it had fomented in him strong convictions against discrimination in general. He deplored both Hitler’s vision of a national identity defined around race as well as Hitler’s authoritarian abuses. And so, after Hitler invaded Paris in 1940, Dr. Seuss took “command of the stereotype to which American nativists had reduced him and his family.” In 1941, Seuss dropped everything else he was doing at the time and began to draw WWII political cartoons. Seuss took particular concern with the United States’ initial position of isolationism, reluctant to involve itself in armed opposition to Hitler. “In late January 1941, he expressed his frustration by sending a sketch of Mussolini’s chief propagandist, Virginio Gayda, to the independent New York newspaper *PM*, where both the cartoon and his letter were printed on 30 January.” This was the beginning of Dr.

Seuss's political cartooning career at *PM*, where he drew over 400 WWII political cartoons.

Dr. Seuss's first cartoon at *PM*, *Virginio Gayda Says*, was published in *PM Magazine* on January 30th, 1941. The cartoon depicts Virginio Gayda, Mussolini's chief propagandist, hanging on a hook over a typewriter that he is rapidly writing on. The typewriter is overworked and beat up, suggesting the vast amount of propaganda Virginio Gayda writes. The first words typed are "Virginio Gayda says." When Seuss sent this cartoon to *PM*, he wrote a note to go along with it. It said this:

Dear Editor: If you were to ask me, which you haven't, whom I consider the world's most outstanding writer of fantasy, I would, of course, answer: "I am." My second choice, however, is Virginio Gayda. The only difference is that the writings of Mr. Gayda give me a pain in the neck. This morning, the pain became too acute, and I had to do something about it.

Dr. Seuss was angry that the United States wasn't doing anything to counter the propaganda. From the beginning, Dr. Seuss had been skeptical of the isolationist approach that the US was taking to World War II. He opposed American popular opinion, appealing to national unity in the fight against the Axis powers. Dr. Seuss wanted Americans to get involved in the war and portrayed it through the attack of anyone who disagreed with him or sided with the Axis powers. Dr. Seuss's personal opinions significantly influenced his cartoons, and unlike Thomas Nast, his cartoons were always based on his opinions first and America's opinions second.

Seuss officially joined *PM* after they published more of his cartoons. He joined the magazine because its investments freed it from obligations to advertisers and he wanted to join a magazine with cartoonists that he respected such as Max Lerner and I.F Stone. . Max Lerner was an American educator, author, and columnist who was a spokesman for liberal political and economic views. I. F Stone was radical journalist known for a popular newsletter called *I. F Stone's Weekly*, but he also worked for *PM* as a reporter.

In 1941, 80 percent of Americans wanted to stay out of the war with Germany, so Seuss dedicated his *PM* cartoons to "over-

coming his readers isolationism” not only by denouncing Nazi Germany and Fascist Italy, but also by portraying the recklessness of the America First movement and American fascists like Father Coughlin, Senator Nye, and people who sympathized with Germany such as Charles Lindbergh.

Still Cooking with Goebbels Gas by Dr. Seuss was published in PM Magazine on February 9th, 1942. In this cartoon, Seuss depicts Father Coughlin making a stew called “The Same Old Down-With-England-And-Roosevelt Stew.” The stove is being powered by gas containers that have a Nazi Swastika on each one, suggesting that Coughlin was simply ingesting and then parroting an Americanized version of Nazi propaganda. Charles Coughlin supported Hitler and Mussolini through the political overtones and the blatant antisemitic views of the religious services that he broadcasted. Father Coughlin is a significant example of a person opposed by Dr. Seuss in his initial cartoons due to his anti-isolationist beliefs. Through cartoons like these, Dr. Seuss was able to break the hold that isolationism had on many Americans and promote unity against people like Father Coughlin, groups like the America First movement, and the Axis Powers. In these years, Dr. Seuss’ cartoons depicted the anger – felt by many Americans – at the US’ staked position of non-involvement, reflecting his deft skill – like Nast’s – for distilling heated public debates into an easily-digestible and, crucially, funny, format. In this period, it was this skill which allowed him to both cement himself as a respected and popular political cartoonist and meaningfully influence the public debate.

On December 7th, 1941, Seuss’ message was given a new gravity and – indeed – urgency, when 353 Japanese aircraft attacked the US naval base at Pearl Harbor. After Pearl Harbor, public support for America’s involvement in the war grew rapidly, and American public opinion soon aligned with the very message Seuss’ cartoons had been preaching for years. As the US joined the Allied Powers in the war, Seuss’ cartoons lambasting the Axis Powers increased significantly. His artwork during this period reflected the fear – bordering on paranoia – that gripped the US as the – until then – seemingly distant war reached American soil.

In *Waiting for the Signal from Home*, published in PM Magazine on February 13th, 1942, Dr. Seuss uses Japanese Americans as a scapegoat for the worries and vulnerability of the US after the attack on Pearl Harbor. The cartoon depicts a smiling parade of Japanese Americans, stretching into the horizon (labeled to denote the various states making up the US' west coast), lining up in front of a shack to cheerily collect sticks of TNT. The shack is labeled "Honorable 5th Column": a term denoting a cell of residents within a country who are secretly supportive of a foreign enemy or engaged in active treason. The title, which includes the word "home", implies that – for Japanese Americans living in the US - their home is Japan and not the US. As Gwen Tarbox writes: "Seuss created highly stereotypical renditions of the Japanese in his political cartoons; clearly, he participated in the Pearl Harbor hysteria." Indeed, cartoons such as *Waiting for the Signal from Home* both reflected and played up this hysteria, usually relying on cheap stereotypes such as pig noses, slanted eyes, and sneering grins. Dr. Seuss later expressed his regret for such cartoons, however, re-examining his views and writing *Horton Hears a Who* – often understood as an allegory for the American post-war occupation of Japan – as well as dedicating the book to a Japanese friend of his.

While much of Dr. Seuss' work during WWII was centered around his fierce opposition to the Axis Powers, he also directed his criticism inward, at the injustices he perceived in American society. Due to the discrimination he experienced as a child in WWI, Dr. Seuss took strong stances on the discrimination African-Americans and Jewish Americans experienced in the US during WWII.

On April 14th, 1942, Seuss' cartoon *I'll Run Democracy's War. You Stay in your Jim Crow Tanks* appeared in PM Magazine. It depicts a military tank on which a monopoly man-esque figure – labeled "Discriminating Employer" – sneers triumphantly, waving an American flag, with two smaller tanks in tow, chained up to his: one labeled "Jewish Labor", the other labeled "Negro Labor." While much debate centered around the war abroad, Seuss highlighted issues at home, such as the employment discrimination that harmed African-Americans and Jewish Americans during WWII.

In this cartoon, Seuss illustrates that minorities such as African Americans and Jewish Americans didn't get enough employment during World War II. Again, a smaller division of groups was created during WWII in the US: "Discriminating Employers" and minorities. Such cartoons demonstrate Dr. Seuss' evolution over time. He was not merely parroting popular viewpoints within the broader political conversation, but shaping that conversation, using his reach to influence America for the benefit of all, as he saw it.

In 1943, Seuss volunteered to join the military, where he was put in a division titled Fort Fox, or the Information and Education Division. In this period, technological development had reached television. Switching from illustrations to animation and television, Seuss developed an animated cartoon called *Private SNAFU*, that was created to guide the behavior of the troops and preserve their health and safety. The stereotypes Dr. Seuss used in his political cartoons can also be seen here. An episode of *Private SNAFU* called "Spies" was created by Dr. Seuss and Warner Brothers in August 1943. In this snapshot of the episode, Seuss depicts a Japanese spy hiding in a baby carriage in order to learn the military secrets only known by Private Snafu. Like in his cartoons, the Japanese are depicted with slanted eyes and sneering grins. Even in the cartoon that is supposed to be informing American soldiers, the Japanese are attacked and depicted as the enemy with the goal of creating unity among soldiers under a common goal of defeating the Axis Powers.

Throughout World War II, Dr. Seuss had tremendous influence, both on the American people and on soldiers fighting in World War II. Due to his natural curiosity towards and understanding of the most prominent political issues of the time, as well as his skill as both as artists and messenger, Dr. Seuss was able to meld his own opinions with the public debate, striking the public imagination and creating artwork that was influential to countless Americans. In this way, even as Thomas Nast and Dr. Seuss produced the majority of their work over a half-century apart, facing different issues and working within different publishing realities, the similarities between the two abound. They both created po-

litical cartoons during periods in which major questions loomed over the direction the US would take, and the national identity it would assume. And yet, as two strongly opinionated men with clear convictions, their outlooks were both firmly rooted in American ideals, and their work both reflected and led the public psyche.

Radical Reconstruction and Children's Books

After the wars of their eras, both Thomas Nast and Dr. Seuss continued to illustrate. While Nast continued with cartoons and Dr. Seuss moved on to children's books, each's work in their post-war period reflected the same vigor and desire to influence public opinion.

The period after the Civil War, known as the Gilded Age, was a time of rapid economic growth and a massive influx of immigrants. Political cartoons thrived in the years of the Gilded Age due to "new technologies of mass circulation but also because of the intensity—even viciousness—of partisan debate." In the Gilded Age, political cartoons and satire in general were not considered "serious journalism" by publishers of newspapers and magazines, so *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper*, *Harper's Weekly*, *Puck*, *Judge*, and *The New York Daily Graphic* were created to fill the void. Along with Thomas Nast, the major cartoonists of this period included *Puck* creator Joseph Keppler (supported the Democratic Party, sound money, and low tariffs) and *Puck* cartoonists Frederick Opper and Bernhard Gillam. Gilded Age cartoons represented the White, Protestant, and middle-class majority and dealt with "issues of gender, religion, and ethnicity, as well as struggles over material resources in an increasingly stratified economy."

The Gilded Age was a period in which political cartoons had very significant societal and political influence. *Narcissus* by Bernhard Gillam was (September 17th, 1884) was the most famous cartoon ever published at *Puck*. The cartoon depicts James Blain, the opponent of Grover Cleveland in the election of 1884, as a man with tattoos representing key works referring to his many controversial scandals. It also portrays him as Narcissus, a man from Greek mythology said to have died of starvation from star-

ing at his own reflection. “In this caricature Gillam, a Republican himself, challenges Blaine to recognize the public’s negative opinion of him...Only then can Blaine repair his image and prevent the death of his presidential ambitions, as alluded to in the tombstones pictured in the corner of the caricature,”. Gillam is attributed by Grover Cleveland as having a massive effect on why he won the election of 1884.

In the immediate aftermath of the Civil War, the period known as Radical Reconstruction was marked by starkly-opposed visions of the US’ path forward. The North-South divide remained as many political elements in the South that had existed pre-Civil War sought to reimpose their dominance over Southern political structures: a vision that – predictably – clashed with the North, a political alliance that was connected through religious, economic, and ethnic ties and their ideas of nationalism, liberalism, and economic development. They also strongly believed that the post-war nation should re-envision existing political structures. The division between the Democrats and the Republicans remained vast through the Gilded Age. Nast’s cartoons in this period continued many of the same criticisms he had long held of the South and, by extension, the Democratic party. Nast’s cartoons spoke heavily to Northern public opinion because they “transcended the ordinary political concerns of place and power”. Because of this, they were quickly realized and distributed by the Union Republican Party.

One of the first of Nast’s cartoons that caught the attention of the Union Republican party was *Compromise with the South*, published in *Harper’s Weekly* on September 3rd, 1864. In this cartoon, Nast mocks the people who participated in the Democratic National Convention in Chicago in 1864, which was created because people were afraid that the North, at that point, would not decisively win over the South. The foreground of the cartoon shows a Union soldier shaking the hand of the President of the Confederacy, Jefferson Davis, while Columbia, the symbol of the US, cries at their feet. The background depicts an African American family being returned to slavery. In the top left corner is an upside-down American flag, representing the betrayal of

America's stated values. Such cartoons were positively received by the Union Republican Party:

The triumph of Radical Reconstruction depended on more than the insufficiencies of the President and his [*sic*] ambition of the Republican politicians. Northern emotions stirred by the grinding years of war could readily be put to rest. The memory of so much death and suffering needed the balm of a substantial assurance that the cost had been worthwhile, that the ideals fought for would be translated into reality.

Through his political cartoons, Nast was able to give this assurance to the people. Starting in 1864, Nast turned his attention toward presidential elections. Nast focused less on the candidates and more on what the parties stood for, their opposing political interests, and their opposed governmental and societal ideologies of the war. In April of 1865, Andrew Johnson became the president, and the Republicans thought that he "would impose a hard and unforgiving peace settlement upon the South." Instead, he pursued a policy of reconciliation that was generous to the southern leadership. Nast was completely against this as a supporter for the North and the Republicans, so he attacked Johnson and his cabinet members in his cartoons.

Ampitheatrum Johnsonianum by Thomas Nast was published in Harper's Weekly on March 30th, 1867. In this cartoon, he depicts the 1866 killing of Black citizens in New Orleans, called the New Orleans Massacre. Nast portrays Andrew Johnson as Roman Emperor, "watching impassively as Christian martyrs are slaughtered in the arena,". Wreaths that say "Memphis" and "New Orleans" are hung up on either side of Johnson as reminders of the race riot in Memphis. Also in the cartoon are members of Johnson's cabinet such as William Seward and Edwin Stanton and his military officers such as George Armstrong Custer. The crowd in the back, with some very distinguishable faces, are the Reconstruction supporters that could not stop Johnson's policies. Through his cartoons, Nast created a unity among the North and Republicans against the South and Democrats, portraying them as the enemy more than the other half of the US.

Nast, it appeared, was to be as important a force in postwar public opinion as he had been during the war... The artist had helped to rally popular sentiment to the cause of the Union in wartime; now he contributed in equal measure to political victory over those forces that threatened the postwar Republican hegemony.

After the Civil War, Nast still had massive effects on society, the politics of the Gilded Age, and Radical Reconstruction. Because Nast supported one political side and attacked the other, his political influence during this period directly affected the politics of this period. But, Thomas Nast also had tremendous influence on other parts of society during the Gilded Age. Because of the tremendous debt that the US was put in because of the Civil War, the US used paper money to pay back that debt. This was a new policy that both the American public and Nast did not agree with.

Milk Tickets for Babies by Thomas Nast was published in Harper's Weekly in 1876. In the cartoon, Nast lambasts paper currency by labeling the items depicted purely according to the artist's whim. For example, a piece of paper hung on the wall reads, "This is a cow, by act of the artist." and an engraving on a wall pointing towards a doll reads "This is not a rag but a real baby, by act of Congress." Nast attacks the idea of symbols that stand for something else, especially paper money. "The cartoon suggests how the American economy was becoming more virtual in the Gilded Age." Disagreeing with the changing state of the US, Nast used his influence to illustrate his opinion and the popular opinion against paper money. Nast again illustrates something that is agreed on by many Americans, which built unity and nationalism in the US.

Next, Nast began his crusade against Boss Tweed and Tammany Hall, the rulers of New York City from 1866 to 1871. Throughout his entire career, Nast had the biggest impact on society, politics, and the American people in this period. The Ring was everything Nast was against:

Tweed, then, was Thomas Nast's political antichrist for an interlocking set of reasons. As a Protestant, Nast was frightened by the Irish-Catholic tone of the Ring. As a Republican he was affronted by the power of this Democratic organization. As one deeply committed to a

politics of morality and social purpose, he was appalled by a political organization given over to nothing but its own perpetuation.

Boss Tweed was the perfect enemy for all of Nast's beliefs predisposed in him as a child, so Nast set out to expose Boss Tweed and Tammany Hall for the criminals he perceived them to be through his political cartoons. However, similar to Dr. Seuss in World War II, the American people were not able to see the political corruption in Tammany Hall at first. Through his cartoons, Nast convinced the American people to collectively change their opinions and united them through one common goal: To destroy Boss Tweed and Tammany Hall. Throughout this era, Nast promoted nationalism and unity between Americans because of the fight against a greater enemy. At first, Nast's cartoons were more general statements on Tammany Hall, their commitment to political evil, and the negative power that was exercised by Boss Tweed and his colleagues.

The Power Behind the Throne. He Cannot Call His Soul His Own by Thomas Nast was published in Harper's Weekly on October 29th, 1870. It depicts Oakley Hall sitting on the Tammany Throne after his re-election as mayor, portrayed as a king, with his crown and his scepter. Behind him, however, is Boss Tweed looking over his shoulder, hiding in the shadows. In this cartoon, Nast aims to show what were, in his mind, the real power dynamics of Tammany Hall. While Hall may have been the public figure, Boss Tweed was really the one pulling all of the strings. At this point, Nast had to show the American people the corruption and selfishness of Tammany Hall. But, after employees of the Ring who didn't agree with what it had turned into brought forward hard evidence of fraud and contract padding, Nast was able to cement "the prototype of the corrupt Boss in the American political imagination."

The Tammany Tiger Loose—'What are you going to do about it?' by Thomas Nast was published in Harper's Weekly on November 11th, 1871. In this cartoon, Thomas Nast depicts "Boss Tweed, as a Roman Emperor, looking down on an arena where the Tammany Tiger stands over the symbolic images of republican government, justice, and commerce—all defeated and destroyed by the power of the Tammany political machine." "Republican government,

justice, and commerce” are represented by people, all killed by the tiger, which represents unchecked political power. During this period, Nast’s cartoons gained so much traction and attention that his circulation tripled and he was being offered bribes to stop publishing his cartoons. Nast was able to create unity among Americans against Tammany Hall because his cartoons exposed the corruption of Boss Tweed and Tammany Hall to the American people. All throughout the downfall of Boss Tweed—from the next election running heavily against him, to the trials of Tweed and his accomplices, to Tweed’s mistrial and then his sentencing to 12 years in prison—Nast never stopped his onslaught until Tweed was caught in Spain while on the run. Interestingly enough, he was recognized from one of Thomas Nast’s cartoons.

Princip-als, Not Men—A Lawyer Pleading for His ‘Client’ by Thomas Nast was published in Harper’s Weekly on August 7th, 1875. It depicts David Field, Boss Tweed’s lawyer, clutching a bag of money that says “\$6,000,000 stolen from New York” with Tweed’s head poking out from behind. The title of the book next to Field reads “How to Avoid Justice.” There is a sword that points over Field’s head towards a coat of arms with a dollar sign and the word “Excelsior.” This cartoon was in response to Field’s appeal of Tweed’s sentence of 12 years, somehow getting it down to one year. The relentlessness of Thomas Nast’s cartoons gained him a lot more circulation during this period and this, coupled with the impressive size of his previous audience, meant that Nast was able to have enough of an impact on Americans and inspire unity into enough of them that he was able to influence the collapse of a political structure—just through political cartoons.

On the other hand, Dr. Seuss influenced the American public in a different way after World War II: children’s books. In 1949, Dr. Seuss spoke at a writer’s conference at which he articulated his desire to write children’s books that were not tales “fostered by adult sentimentality.” He talked in this conference about how children’s books at that time either had no moral lessons and focused on hero’s or they were on the other extreme like Aesop’s Fables.

Geisel described the best children's stories as those that addressed what he thought were children's seven basic needs: love, security, belonging, achievement, knowledge, change, aesthetics... Children's ability to reimagine the rules by which people lived convinced Geisel that writing children's books might transform the cognitive structures behind political parties and social formations.

Dr. Seuss wanted to create children's books that empowered the children who read them to make their own decisions, which he believed would open them up to many new possibilities. Through his children's books, Dr. Seuss wanted to teach and guide children in the right directions to not make the mistakes or face the trauma that he did in his childhood. In this way, Dr. Seuss in turn unified Americans through instilling in them the basic morals that all Americans agree on and through which they can relate to each other.

Yertle the Turtle is a children's book written by Dr. Seuss and published by Random House on April 12th, 1958. It follows Yertle, a tyrannical turtle who forces all of his subjects to stack on top of one another, claiming that "he rules all that he sees." Yertle continues to ignore the complaints of the turtles at the bottom of the stack, until eventually one turtle, named Mack, burps, which sends Yertle's tower crumbling down. The book is generally understood as an allegory for Hitler and authoritarian regimes in general. Children are likely to gain a lesson about freedom and equality without even knowing what the book was based off of. "All turtles are free. As turtles, and, maybe, all creatures should be." Seuss was able to speak on ideas related to WWII, but from a different angle in which he instills understandable values into his readers. In this way, he influenced and united many generations just through his children's books.

When Dr. Seuss wrote children's books, he let go of the mentality that had fueled his wartime cartoons. Throughout Dr. Seuss's political cartooning career, he expressed his opinions in his political cartoons by attacking many different movements, and at times playing into American prejudices and fears. In his children's books, it seems Dr. Seuss sought to atone for any regrets

he had about his earlier cartoons. Even though Dr. Seuss drew on his experience from *PM* for his children's books, he used many of them to apologize for his mistakes from his career in political cartoons through preaching values such as equality and diversity.

Horton Hears a Who is a children's book written by Dr. Seuss and published by Random House on August 12th, 1954. It follows an elephant who finds a speck of dust which contains a whole world, called Who-Ville, that he can hear but not see. He decides to transport Who-Ville to safety, but he runs into obstacles in the form of his friends who don't believe that Who-Ville is real. A line from the book, "A person's a person, no matter how small," speaks against prejudice. The main character, Horton, represents a person who is sticking up for those whose rights are not recognized. Again, the book is teaching kids very valuable lessons and implanting the basic values that they will hold in the future, while at the same giving a discrete apology to the people he discriminated against in his political cartoons.

In their postwar careers, Thomas Nast and Dr. Seuss used their platforms that they gained from the wars to continue to influence American popular opinion and unite Americans through commonalities whether it was a goal or childhood values. Through using and learning from their childhoods, their strong opinions led them through the post-war Americas that they lived in.

The End of Two Eras

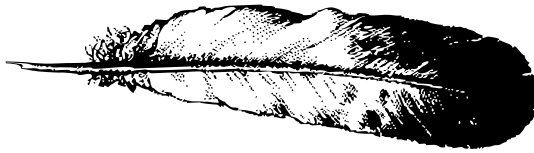
After the fall of Boss Tweed, the era of Thomas Nast's political cartoons began to decline. The transformation of American society after the Civil war created a shift in party politics, along with immigrants and women becoming more active participants in both American political and economic life. People began to seek entertainment and amusement in their magazines along with information about current events. There was also a shift in management at *Harper's Weekly*. After Fletcher Harper died in 1877, George Curtis became the editor under Joseph Harper Jr. Under the previous editor and creator of *Harper's Weekly*, Fletcher Harper, Nast enjoyed significant creative freedom with his cartoons, but

because newspapers needed to adapt to the changing culture, Curtis's vision for the magazine was based around appealing to as large an audience as possible. Curtis and Nast clashed on many occasions because Nast "refused to draw cartoons he did not believe in and Curtis did not want to publish cartoons that contradicted *Harper's Weekly* editorial positions." Then, there was a change from engraved woodblocks to photochemical reproduction for printing around 1880 which resulted in Nast's cartoons not having the same feel as they once did. Advancements in technology such as photography and continued development of printing lessened the advantage that *Harper's Weekly* had over many other newspapers, who were now able to illustrate in their magazine, destroying *Harper's Weekly's* uniqueness compared to other magazines. In addition, Nast's ideas for cartoons and commentary were declining. Nast left *Harper's Weekly* in 1886 and tried to freelance for a small time along with trying to create his own magazine called *Nast's Weekly*, which failed after six months. After retiring from political cartoons, Nast accepted Theodore Roosevelt's offer to serve as consul general to Ecuador, caught Yellow Fever, and died from it on December 17th, 1902. Nast's legacy lives on in many of the cartoonists that came after him, including Dr. Seuss, and his impact on the history of political cartoons was one of the greatest.

Dr. Seuss never stopped writing until the end of his life. He received a special Pulitzer Prize for his dedication to the entertainment of America's children. By the early 21st century, his books had sold over 600 million copies worldwide. His last book, "Oh, the Places You'll Go!", was published a year before his death in California in 1991. Dr. Seuss's legacy lives on in the millions of people who have read his books, but even before that, Dr. Seuss made a very significant impact on the World War II era because of his influential political cartoons. Throughout his life, he impacted many people, from Americans and troops in WWII, to children all across the world, even in the current period.

Through following their own opinions, appealing to major societal and political groups of different periods, and repeatedly fostering nationalism within the American people, the effect that

Thomas Nast and Dr. Seuss had on the history of political cartoons will be one that is never forgotten. It will always be remembered in the values and ideas of the American people. Tom Tomorrow, a very well-known editorial cartoonist today, once said that “I try to keep a balance between the wordiness and the humor... The commentary is what keeps it fresh and interesting to me... as I surely would if I were drawing a comic strip poking gentle fun at the foibles that make us all human.” This was the importance of Thomas Nast’s and Dr. Seuss’s cartoons. Both cartoonists had tremendous impacts on important historical events throughout history. They were able to use the power that they gained and change public opinion for the better, just by drawing a picture.



Endnotes

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