

TEACHER GUIDE

1800 DOC. #5: "The Providential Detection" Cartoon

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

Have you ever seen an editorial cartoon that pokes fun at a candidate? When do you think such cartoons first appeared? Actually, there had been similar cartoons in England even before the American Revolution. The cartoon you will see next is one of the first to attack a presidential candidate in the United States.

> **Project** the document.

This cartoon entitled "The Providential Detection" was drawn by an unknown artist during the campaign of 1800. Jefferson had written of his appreciation for the values that drove the French Revolution - liberty, equality and fraternity. Many Federalists felt that his support of these ideals would make him incapable of independent leadership in a time when France was a world power.

"The Altar of Gallic Despotism" refers to French tyranny. The papers stoking the fire include ones labeled *Age of Reason*, J. J. Rousseau, and Voltaire, which all represent French philosophy. *Aurora* and *Chronicle* were Republican newspapers which supported Jefferson.

Around the altar lie sacks marked American Spoliations, Dutch Restitution, Sardinia, Flanders, Venice, Spain, and Plunder. The paper, "To Mazzei," dropping from Jefferson's right hand, refers to Jefferson's 1796 letter to an Italian journalist criticizing George Washington. The eye of God is commanding the American Eagle to snatch away the Constitution of the United States from Jefferson.

QUESTION

What are the messages conveyed by this cartoon? Give evidence.

SUGGESTED ANSWER

Jefferson wants to destroy the U.S. system of law.

EVIDENCE

Jefferson is shown attempting to burn the U.S. Constitution

SUGGESTED ANSWER

He is an agent of French revolutionary thought.

EVIDENCE

he is feeding the fires of "Gallic Despotism" with Republican newspapers and French philosophy

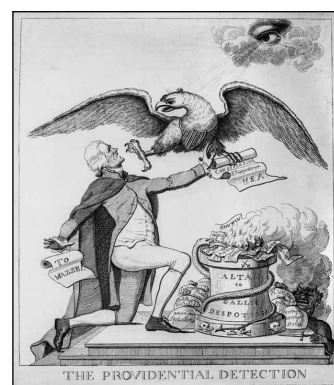
SUGGESTED ANSWER

God and the American people will stop him.

EVIDENCE

the eye of God and the American eagle catch him just in time

1800 DOC. #5



The Library Company of Philadelphia

"The Providential Detection" Cartoon

PowerPoint Slide

QUESTION **How does the cartoonist suggest that Jefferson is anti-Christian?**

SUGGESTED ANSWER He is shown kneeling before an altar to French radicalism. The altar is encircled by a snake with skull and crossbones at its base and a demon peeking out. The eye of God is looking down in judgment.

QUESTION **How does the cartoonist suggest that Jefferson is a traitor?**

SUGGESTED ANSWER Jefferson is burning the Constitution. He worships France. He is attacked by the American eagle, symbol of national pride. He has written a letter criticizing the father of the country.

SEE NOTE →

FURTHER QUESTIONS

How do editorial cartoons compare with talk radio programs for their effectiveness in shaping popular opinions about presidential candidates today?

Libel laws make it illegal to publish false claims that would damage someone’s business or cause them to suffer public ridicule. Should libel laws apply to editorial cartoons like this one? Why or why not?

ADDITIONAL INFO

The first cartoon in a newspaper in the American colonies was entitled “Join, or Die” and was drawn by Ben Franklin in 1754. It showed a snake cut into eight pieces and illustrated his plan to unite the colonies under a President General. The cartoons of the post-colonial years tended to be complex scenes filled with rich dialogue and imagery.

NOTE

Philip Mazzei was an Italian Republican who had lived for a time near Jefferson in Virginia. Jefferson had written him a letter in 1796 which was translated and published in a Florentine journal. The letter was critical of Washington and the Federalists, and was published in the Federal newspapers at the time, much to Jefferson’s dismay. Its publication ended Jefferson’s friendship with Washington. Jefferson declined to comment on the letter at the time of its release. It was brought up again during the election of 1800 by Federalist editors.

CONNECTIONS

(see thematic listing)

Cartoons
Foreign Policy