

TEACHER GUIDE

1868 DOC. #2: “White Man’s Government” Nast Cartoon

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

While most cartoons are drawn to make people laugh, some cartoons are drawn to make people think. The political cartoonist must address big issues through small illustrations with few words. The most famous editorial cartoonist of the 19th century and the father of modern political cartooning was Thomas Nast.

The 1868 presidential campaign revolved around the issues of Reconstruction. Grant and the Republicans supported the Radical Reconstruction Plan. This included the “Reconstruction Acts” that called for establishing federal control over Southern states to protect the citizenship rights of African Americans. Seymour and the Democrats ran on a platform opposing Reconstruction.

> **Project** the document.

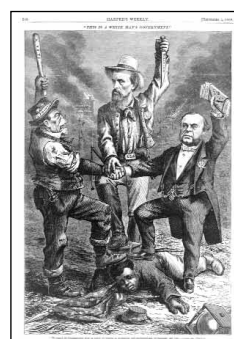
This cartoon by Thomas Nast was first printed in *Harper’s Weekly* on September 5, 1868. The standing characters in the image are meant to portray (left to right): a lower class Irish Catholic from the rough Five Points neighborhood in New York City; Nathan Bedford Forrest, a former slave trader who helped to found the Ku Klux Klan; and Horatio Seymour, Democratic presidential candidate and New York Governor. The figure on the bottom portrays an African American Union soldier who has had the ballot box knocked out of his hands.

QUESTION | **What are the messages the cartoonist is trying to convey? Give your evidence.**

SUGGESTED ANSWER | Nast’s message is that powerful interests – Irish Catholics, former Confederates, wealthy capitalists, and the Democratic Party – are working together to take voting rights away from African American veterans.

EVIDENCE | three hands joined over the fallen body of an African American soldier with three boots on his back; the African American is reaching for the ballot but is prevented from attaining it

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Nast Cartoon**

PowerPoint Slide

SEE NOTE →

QUESTION Does the cartoonist approve or disapprove of the efforts to prevent African Americans from voting? How do you know?

SUGGESTED ANSWER The cartoonist disapproves.

EVIDENCE the flag is on the ground; the African-American figure is drawn to evoke sympathy while the others are shown as evil; buildings are on fire in the background suggesting danger and ruin

QUESTION What tools or weapons are being used to deprive African Americans of their civil rights? Give evidence for your answer.

SUGGESTED ANSWER The standing figures are withholding access to the vote, threatening violence, and using money to deprive African Americans of their civil rights.

EVIDENCE the figure on the left holds “a vote” above and away; the middle figure threatens with a dagger and the words “The Lost Cause,” which could either refer to the Confederacy or to the civil rights of freed slaves; the figure to the right holds a billfold of money with the word “capital”

QUESTION Does this cartoon support Grant or Seymour and why?

SUGGESTED ANSWER It supports Grant.

EVIDENCE Grant was in favor of voting rights for African Americans; Seymour is represented as greedy and in league with bad and dangerous people

FURTHER QUESTIONS

Can you think of modern cartoonists whose work makes you think deeply about the world? What makes them effective?

Are there ways that certain groups of people are kept from voting today? If so, what groups and how are they kept from voting?

NOTE

Conflict between Irish immigrants and African Americans exploded in New York City during the draft riots of 1863. Irish workers were angry at African Americans who had been used as strike-breakers in a longshoreman’s strike. They blamed African Americans for the war and for threatening their position in the labor force.

ADDITIONAL INFO

“This Is A White Man’s Government” was the slogan of a Democratic campaign that openly appealed to racist fears. Vice-presidential candidate Francis Blair said that only whites were capable of self-government. He said that inter-marriage between African Americans and whites would upset the “accumulated improvement of the centuries” (Cornog 117).

In Southern states where African Americans were a majority or nearly equal in number to whites, the Klan, and other paramilitary organizations initiated a terror campaign against freedmen and Republicans. The KKK worked to reinstall the power of the planter class and the Southern Democratic Party by “policing” elections to exclude African Americans from participating in the political process. The Klan was powerful enough that its founder, Nathan Forrest, attended the Democratic convention.

CONNECTIONS

(see thematic listing)

- Attack**
- Cartoons**
- Fear**
- Race**
- Target Audience**