

**TEACHER GUIDE**

# 1900 DOC. #3: McKinley and Millionaire Advisor Cartoon

**BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

William McKinley was criticized for being controlled by the wealthy interests that supported his campaign. This would become a major issue for politicians throughout the modern era. Modern political cartooning, begun with the works of Thomas Nast in the 1860s, continues to this day as a means to criticize those in power.

> **Project** the document.

This cartoon by George Luks first appeared in the Democratic magazine, *The Verdict* on March 13, 1899. The figure on the right is McKinley. The figure on the left represents Mark Hanna, McKinley’s campaign manager. Hanna had made his fortune in the iron, coal, and shipping industries before becoming the primary organizer and fundraiser for McKinley. In the 1900 race Hanna raised two and a half million dollars for the Republicans, five times the total that the Democrats managed to raise.

The portrait behind is of Henry Clay who had said in an 1850 speech, “I’d rather be right than be president.” Hanna had been widely quoted in the press for saying that, in his opinion, Henry Clay was an “ass” for making that statement. He told McKinley, “It’s better to be president than to be right.”

QUESTION

**What are the primary messages in this political cartoon, and how are they communicated?**

SUGGESTED ANSWER

McKinley is controlled by his wealthy campaign manager and the interests he represents.

EVIDENCE

McKinley is quiet and listening passively while Hanna speaks; Hanna’s wealth is represented by the dollar signs on his thumb and earlobe, the flashy jewelry, and his fancy clothes

SUGGESTED ANSWER

Hanna and McKinley are unethical and willing to do anything to ensure McKinley’s election.

EVIDENCE

Henry Clay’s statement is one of moral righteousness compared to Hanna’s countering statement “It’s better to be president than to be right”; Clay’s image casts a dubious look at Hanna

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**PowerPoint Slide**

**ADDITIONAL INFO**

This cartoon ran at a time when other cartoonists were using similar themes. William Randolph Hearst's *New York Evening Journal* put out a cartoon series entitled "Willie and His Papa" portraying McKinley (Willie) as Mark Hanna's (Papa's) little boy. The cartoonist, George Luks, eventually became well known as one of the leaders of the "Ashcan" school of realist painting.

**CONNECTIONS**

(see thematic listing)

**Cartoons**  
**Class/Labor**