

Thomas Nast's Political Cartoons Lesson Plan

Central Historical Question:

How did Northern attitudes towards freed African Americans change during Reconstruction?

Materials:

- Transparency of political cartoon from recent newspaper (ideally, the message of this cartoon will be easily accessible to students)**
- Copies of two Nast Cartoons and Guiding Questions
- Transparencies of two Nast Cartoons

**[Note: Teacher must supply this resource.]

Plan of Instruction:

1. Show contemporary political cartoon on overhead. Ask students to answer two question in their notebooks:
 - a) What is the cartoon's message?
 - b) What does the cartoon tell you about America (or the world) today?

2. Ask students: What would someone need to know about modern life in America (or the world) in order to understand this cartoon?

Write student answers on board. Some possible answers:

Explain to students:

- They understand this cartoon because they bring an understanding of today's context to the cartoon.
- In 100 years, if someone finds this cartoon, they might not understand it.
- A political cartoon can also teach us about the context of the time.
- *What do we think the author is trying to say with this cartoon?*

3. Transition: *There were political cartoons during Reconstruction, too. One very famous political cartoonist was a man named Thomas Nast. He drew cartoons for Harper's Weekly, a magazine from the North. Today we're going to look at two of his cartoons from Reconstruction.*
4. Put students in pairs and hand out the Nast Cartoons and Guiding Questions. Have students complete the sourcing questions and review as a class.
5. Have students complete the rest of the worksheet.

6. Review student answers.
 7. Wrap-up point: *Though Nast supported the franchise for freedmen, he seems to have mixed feelings about African Americans participating in government. Though we don't know whether all Northerners shared his views, we know that negative feelings about Reconstruction were exacerbated by rumors of corruption.*
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Citations:

Thomas Nast, Cartoon, *Harper's Weekly*, August 5, 1865.

Thomas Nast, Cartoon, *Harper's Weekly*, March 14, 1874.

Cartoon #1

1865

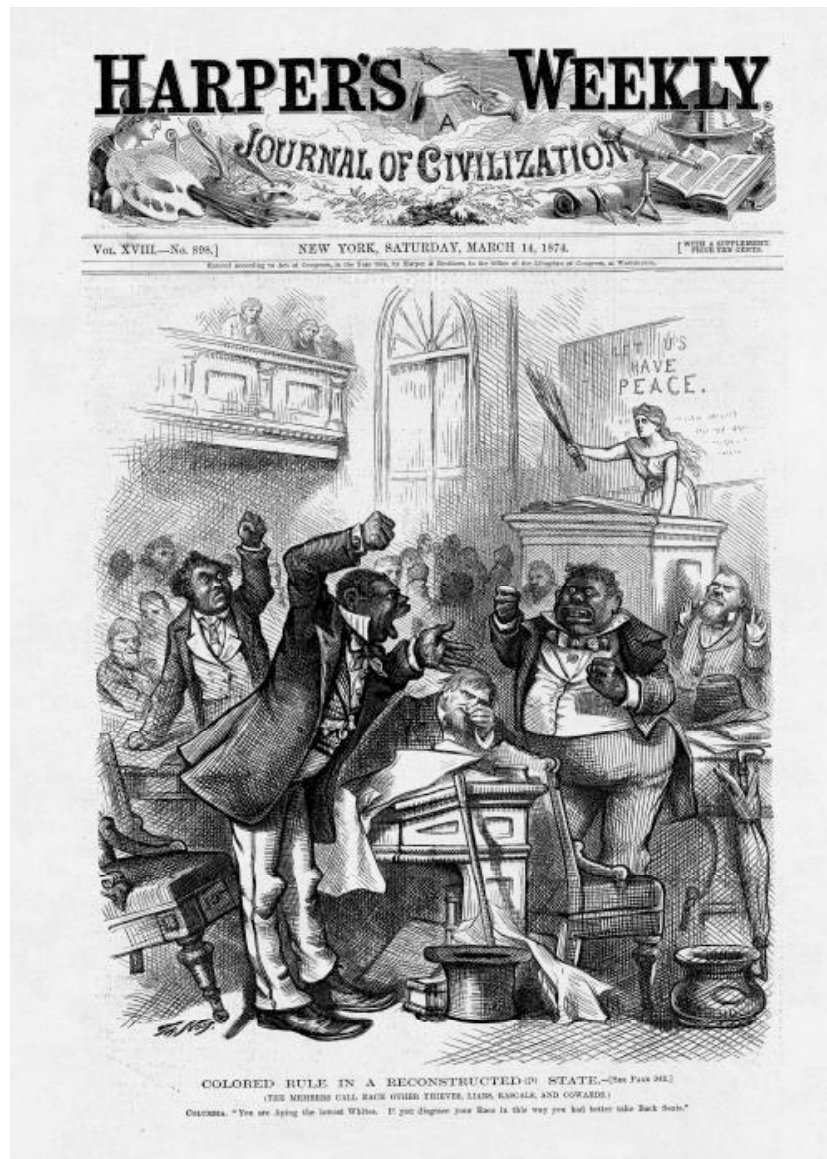


Caption: FRANCHISE. AND NOT THIS MAN?

Source: Thomas Nast was a political cartoonist who drew for a New York magazine called Harper's Weekly. He supported the North's side during the Civil War. This cartoon was published in 1865.

Cartoon #2

1874



Name _____

Sourcing Questions

Answer these questions BEFORE you look at the cartoons.

1. Who drew these cartoons?
2. What magazine were his cartoons published in? What do you know about this magazine?
3. Think back to the differences between Andrew Johnson and the Radical Republicans. Do you predict this cartoonist would be in favor of Radical Reconstruction? Why or why not?

CARTOON #1

Important background knowledge:

Franchise=right to vote

White woman=Columbia=symbol of America

4. When was this cartoon drawn? Was this a short or long time after the end of the Civil War?
5. Describe the African American man in this cartoon. Why do you think he's on crutches?
6. What is Columbia (white woman) asking for?
7. What is the message of this cartoon? Based on the cartoon, would you say Thomas Nast supported or opposed equal rights for freedmen?

CARTOON #2

Important background knowledge:

Many African Americans were elected to state governments during Reconstruction.

By 1874, many Northerners were critical of corruption in government in Republican administrations.

White woman=Columbia=symbol of America

8. Describe the African Americans in this cartoon. Is this a positive or a negative image? Explain.

9. What is Columbia trying to do?

10. What is the message of this cartoon? How does it differ from the message of Cartoon #1?

Corroboration

Compare the two cartoons.

11. In what ways are these cartoons similar?

12. In what ways are these cartoons different?

13. Why might the cartoons have different messages?

Contextualization

14. What do these cartoons tell us about the how some people in the North felt about freedmen during Reconstruction? How did these attitudes change over the course of Reconstruction?