

Emancipation and Denigration

Thomas Nast Pictures Black America

Audio Script

Written by Nina Platt '10

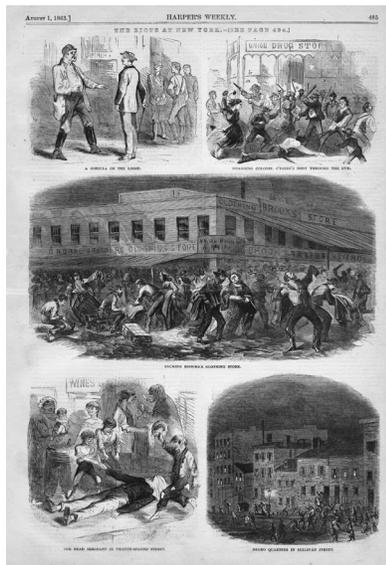
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The Emancipation of the Negroes, January 1863—The Past and the Future *Harper's Weekly*; January 24, 1863

This complicated cartoon is a collection of scenes about slaves' lives in the past and the future. On the left, slaves are being sold by Uncle Sam, and are beaten and abused. On the right, families celebrate their freedom. One family receives their first paycheck and a mother sends her children to the public school. The tender central image is of a prosperous multi-generational black family, and represents the ultimate goal for African-Americans' struggles—that former slaves would have the same opportunities as white families, and that they would be able to support themselves after years of supporting others. This cartoon is reminiscent of Medieval and Renaissance triptychs with its three-part construction and clear distinction between hell, on the left, and heaven, on the right.



The Riots at New York *Harper's Weekly*; August 1, 1863

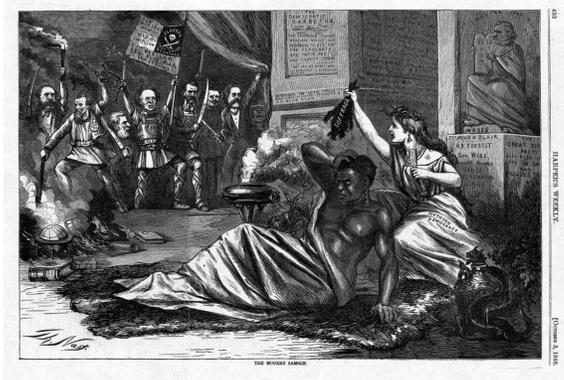
The draft riots were a series of uprisings protesting Congress' instatement of the Civil War draft. They were also one of the few events that Nast observed and sketched directly. Watching the bloody violence and the protest, mostly by Irish immigrants, cemented Nast's liberal political views and devotion to human rights. The building in the background may be an orphanage for black children that burned during the riots, an event that particularly troubled Nast.



Pardon and Franchise

Harper's Weekly, August 5, 1865

This double image questions the way African-American war heroes were treated compared to their white contemporaries. On the left, in *Pardon*, white politicians practically worship Columbia, with Andrew Johnson bowing down to ask for her approval. In *Pardon*, Columbia is weighty, larger than life, and bored, compared to the right hand image, *Franchise*, where she is engaged, passionate, and the same size as the black war hero she points towards, encouraging others to respect him. Though black soldiers made a huge impact fighting for the Union in the civil war, they were not given as much respect as Robert E. Lee and his white counterparts, even though white soldiers often spent less time actually fighting than the African-American soldiers.



The Modern Samson

Harper's Weekly, October 3, 1868

In March of 1867, the congress ratified the first Reconstruction act and the fourteen Confederate states were forced to comply with the legislation. One of the stipulations of the act was black male suffrage. Though giving black males the right to vote was unpopular among southerners, all but three states complied. The resistance of many politicians to grant this right is the subject of this image, which Nast based upon the Old Testament story of the Israelite hero, Samson. Samson had superhuman strength because he obeyed all of God's rules, he abstained from alcohol, did not eat unclean meat, and never cut his hair. Samson's lover, Delilah, cut his hair in his sleep, causing Samson to lose his strength, which lead to his capture by the Philistines. Nast depicts an African-American Samson, and a white Delilah who is the personification of Southern Democracy. Delilah cuts Samson's hair, in this case stripping the freed slave of his rights. This image is one of very few in which Nast portrays women in a negative light. A group of Democratic politicians and Ku Klux Klan members, including presidential candidate Horatio Seymour, protest the end of slavery and the Fourteenth Amendment. The statue of Moses

bears a striking resemblance to Andrew Johnson, who was considered the Moses of black Americans, even though he vetoed giving suffrage to African-American men. In this case, instead of the Ten Commandments, Johnson holds a tablet that says, “veto,” emphasizing his hypocrisy.



Uncle Sam's Thanksgiving Dinner *Harper's Weekly*, November 20, 1869

This image reflects Nast's hope for the future, that all Americans will one day celebrate democracy and equal rights together. On the dinner table, the centerpiece reads “universal suffrage.” Nast hoped that once there was universal suffrage there would be self-governance, freedom, and equality. In the foreground, a Chinese mother tends to her child, while her husband chats with Columbia, the personification of American democracy, and an African-American man. At the head of the table Uncle Sam carves the turkey. Nast popularized Uncle Sam, who often stands in contrast to Columbia and highlights the negative qualities of American government. In this case Uncle Sam is the host and is responsible for this democratic celebration. In the background are three portraits of Lincoln, Washington, and Grant, whom Nast saw as the three leaders whose reforms would lead to this state of equality.



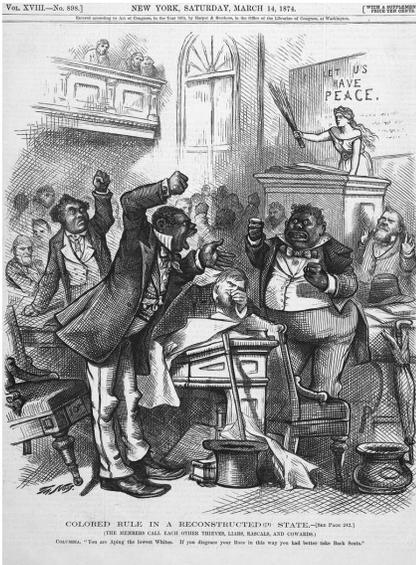
Decoration-Day, May 30, 1871 *Harper's Weekly*, June 10, 1871

Though *Decoration-Day* is a simple image, it summarizes Nast's passionate views on society and race. Three children, two white and one black, make decorations for what is now Memorial Day. In the background is a quintessential American town where men shake hands and celebrate the holiday. There is a suggestion of industry beyond the lake, but the grassy knoll in the foreground balances it. The decorated gravestone of a fallen Civil War soldier behind the children reads, “Rest in Peace,” signifying the end of the Civil War and slavery, the fruits of which allow the children to play so peacefully

together. Nast drew exactly what he believed, that racial bifurcations were a product of slavery, and that without them blacks and whites would live together in harmony.

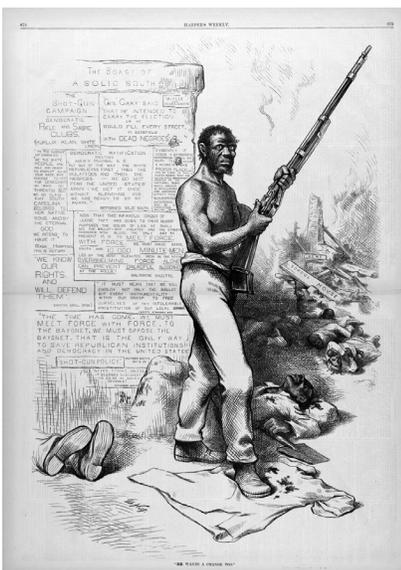
Colored Rule in a Reconstructed (?) State *Harper's Weekly*; March 14, 1874

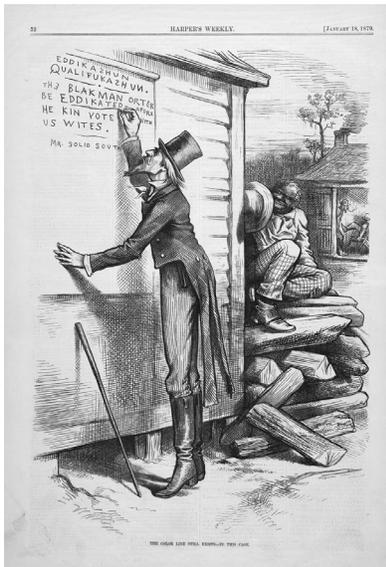
Colored Rule in a Reconstructed State may be Nast's only cartoon that has something negative to say about the freed Blacks. While three black state representatives aggressively argue, Columbia pleads, "let us have peace." This cartoon is a reference to the few black politicians who won seats in state senates, but as a product of their bickering did little to help the population they represented. Though Nast constantly defended the African-American community, in this cartoon he chose to depict the representatives in the same pejorative, mocking style that his racist contemporaries used to ridicule blacks. This was particularly effective because many white Americans did not think that newly freed slaves were capable of serving in the government. By using the typical racist style, Nast encouraged the African-American members of the government to rise above insignificant conflicts and prove that they were full members of American society.



"He Wants a Change Too" *Harper's Weekly*, October 28, 1876

An angry, wild-eyed, recently emancipated young slave stands among dead bodies and stomps on a bloodstained Ku Klux Klan robe. He stands in front of a wall of writings encouraging blacks to defend themselves in order to get the rights they deserve. The violence of the image reminds a white audience that the black community will not stand mistreatment forever, and that one day they may be fed up enough to violently rebel.





The Color Line Still Exists—in This Case *Harper's Weekly*, January 18, 1879

A Southern Gentleman dressed like Uncle Sam spells out the phrase, in poor diction and spelling, “The black man is ordered to be educated before he can vote with us whites.” This image speaks to the prevalence of Jim Crow, the term for segregation laws created after Reconstruction and before the Civil Rights movement. The name Jim Crow actually comes from a minstrel show by Thomas Dartmouth Rice, but was imitated throughout the country. Jim Crow laws made it difficult for blacks to vote and separated the races in parks, movie theaters, and restaurants. This image is slightly ironic because Nast was a notoriously poor speller.