

The Funny Pages - Thomas Nast: A Historic View

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by Pat Rogers

Editorial cartooning stretches back through the history of news reporting. Raising awareness of the importance of the art form may have been Thomas Nast (1840-1902). The historic editorial cartoonist is known for popularized the donkey and elephant images for the Democrat and Republican parties. He's also known for creating the Tammany tiger and fashioning the "modern" image of Santa Claus. Nast is considered to be the Father of American Caricature, a label bestowed by *Harper's Weekly* when they published his obituary.

In this time, Nast was also known as a harsh critic who wasn't afraid to draw what he thought. His cartoons critiqued slavery, supported the Union during the Civil War and exposed the criminal activities of New York City's political boss William Magear Tweed, which played a hand in Tweed's arrest overseas.

The following cartoons were exhibited at Hofstra University Museum's exhibition "Political Slant: Editorial Cartoons" held from Oct 1 to Dec 21, 2012.

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"Stranger Things" by Thomas Nast. Courtesy Hofstra University Museum.



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SECTARIAN BITTERNESS.

OUR COMMON SCHOOLS ARE AS THEY ARE AND AS THEY MAY BE.—(See Page 141.)

Thos. Nast.

"Common School" by Thomas Nast. Courtesy Hofstra University Museum.



"New Comet" by Thomas Nast. Courtesy Hofstra University Museum.

BASIC FACTS: **Thomas Nast (1840-1902) was hired at fifteen years old as a reportorial artist for *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper*. In 1859, he moved to the *New York Illustrated News*. In 1862, Nast's free lance work evolved into a position with *Harper's Weekly*. When drawing in the office (versus in the field on assignment), Nast he drew backwards on boxwood printing blocks with a soft pencil. His heavy use of cross-hatching provided tonality for the black and white drawings.

Richard Samuel West, owner of Periodyssey (a company specializing in old magazines based in Easthampton, MA) described Nast this way:

"Nast was a dogmatist, content to view the world as a struggle between good and evil. Consequently, his work was caustic and lecturing. The harshness of his heavy black line and the severity of his crosshatching mirrored his angry politics."

West also stated that Nast was *"the first journalist to make an issue of professional integrity."* He refused to draw cartoons he did not believe in...

**All of the above biographic information and quotes from Richard Samuel West are according to Ohio State University's Billy Ireland Cartoon Library and Museum. cartoons.osu.edu.

Nast's historic editorial cartoons were exhibited on Long Island in the group show **"Political Slant: Editorial Cartoons."** The exhibition was held at Hofstra University Museum from Oct 1 to Dec 21, 2012.

The Hofstra University Museum is located at 112 Hofstra University, Hempstead, NY 11549-1000. www.hofstra.edu.

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