Thomas Nast and French Art

BY ALBERT BOIME

AS A POLITICAL cartoonist, Thomas Nast wielded more influence than any other artist of the nineteenth century. He not only enthralled a vast audience with boldness and wit, but swayed it time and again to his personal position on the strength of his visual imagination. Both Lincoln and Grant acknowledged his effectiveness in their behalf, and as a crusading civil reformer he helped destroy the corrupt Tweed Ring that swindled New York City of millions of dollars. Indeed, his impact on American public life was formidable enough to profoundly affect the outcome of every presidential election during the period 1864 to 1884.

A measure of his power as a draftsman is shown by the number of symbols he forced other artists to accept: he invented or definitively fixed many of the graphic metaphors still used, including the Republican Elephant, the Democratic Donkey, the Tammany Tiger, Uncle Sam and Santa Claus.\(^1\) He was perhaps the earliest to employ the dollar sign in place of the letter “S” as a graphic evocation of greed and surplus wealth.\(^2\) Also the first cartoonist to have a sustained influence on the American public, Nast combined a deep understanding of party controversy, fierce idealism, and incisive style to create its most authentic channel of artistic expression. His crisp linear technique, sharp tonal contrasts and knack for monumental design literally laid the foundations for the rich era of American cartooning that emerged in the last quarter of the century.\(^3\)

Yet despite the fact that he elevated the art form to the level of such outstanding trans-Atlantic cartoonists as Leech, Tenniel, Daumier, Cham and Grandville, Nast’s work is generally studied from the perspective of its political, rather than artistic, implications.\(^4\) This is hardly surprising, since his cartoons trace major political developments in the aftermath of the Civil War, and are invaluable adjuncts to textbooks on American history. Nast, however, thought of himself primarily as an artist working in the “grand manner,” and did not make sharp dis-

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\(^1\) I am grateful to Dr. Hess, Director of the city archives of Landau in der Pfalz, for supplying me with valuable research materials from Nast’s birthplace, and to Dianne O’Neal of the Department of Prints, New York Public Library, and Suzanne Boorsch of the Metropolitan Museum of Art for their aid in locating important documents. I also wish to express gratitude to my friend Sol Lishinsky, himself an artist, who first made me aware of the richness of Nast’s art.

1. See A. B. Maurice, “Thomas Nast and his Cartoons,” The Bookman, 15, 1902, pp. 24–25; A. B. Paine, “Origin of American Cartoon Symbols,” Harper’s Weekly (herein referred to as HW), 52, 1908, pp. 11–12. While the animal symbols may have been used prior to Nast, it was he who established their popular form.


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tinctions between his caricatural activity and his less publicized monumental history painting. His cartoons are informed by a wealth of pictorial sources and reveal a dependence on a stock of famous images to amplify his ideas. Defying an epoch that associated caricatural illustration with superficiality, he labored to give substance to every endeavor. A study of his imagery and its sources may therefore illuminate the complicated problems facing nineteenth-century artists—problems otherwise undisclosed in less pliable media and subtler procedures.

Nast was born in Landau in der Pfalz on September 27, 1840. A Bavarian town near Alsace, Landau reflects a confused history of Franco-German influences. The French first captured the town during the Thirty Years’ War and again during the reign of Louis XIV, when Vauban, Louis’ brilliant military engineer, fortified it. After losing and regaining the town several times early in the next century, the French once again secured their position and this time remained for over one hundred years. Napoleon himself built bastions in Landau, but these became Bavarian outposts after the Congress of Vienna restored the city to the German Confederacy in 1815. Nast’s father was a musician attached to the Bavarian army garrisoned there, and the fact that Thomas’ birth took place in military barracks underscores the strategic location of Landau in the last century.

As a consequence of the town’s dual cultural heritage, Landau’s inhabitants expressed ambivalent political sympathies. Nast’s family was generally sympathetic to the French, and the elder Nast held convictions that fused French revolutionary ideals with those of the German liberal movement. While accounts of his political activity are vague, Joseph Nast found conditions sufficiently intolerable to warrant emigration to the United States. Again the reports are confusing as to how he achieved this goal, but it is most probable that he sent his family on ahead to America sometime during the period 1846–1847, and then worked his way to New York in the ensuing period. On the way to Le Havre the Nasts


6. A. Becker, Die Pfalz und die Pfälzer, Neustadt an der Weinstrasse, 1961, pp. 243 ff. This work was first published in 1858.


8. Becker, op. cit., p. 248. The author could write in the 1850s: “A certain independence of bearing is to be seen on the Landauer as a holdover from the years of free citizenship and life under the French Republic.” See also Paine, Th. Nast, op. cit., pp. 6–7.


10. Ibid.

11. Ibid. Nast evidently related to his biographers that while still in the army, his father took advantage of a projected musical tour of France in the mid 40s to engage on a French war vessel. He then deserted to an American ship—which had three years to cruise before returning to port—thereafter directing his family in 1846 to leave for New York where he intended to rejoin them. Recent German scholarship, however, has turned up fresh evidence to show that, after supplying a substitute in 1847, Joseph Nast was discharged to emigrate to America. It is then suggested that he and his family made the voyage together. (In Metzger, “Thomas Nast und die Jahre seiner Jugend,” July 1956, op. cit., pp. 7–8.) But since Nast recalled the reunion with his father in 1850, it is probable that the father’s adventures began after his release in 1847, and this would account for references to these events taking place in a revolutionary climate. Nast himself either embroidered the family legend or had a lapse of memory. See Paine, op. cit., pp. 12–13.

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stopped in Paris, a city that made a lasting impression on young Thomas. Years afterward, he would recall its odors, colorful costumes and the powerful effect of Notre Dame.\textsuperscript{12}

In the New World, Thomas’ passion for drawing showed itself precociously; against parental opposition he enrolled in an art school run by Theodor Kaufmann.\textsuperscript{13} Also a radical émigré from Germany, Kaufmann had studied with Cornelius and Kaulbach, and established a reputation as a history painter of abstruse philosophical ideas. Like Paul Chenavard, the French “forty-eighth,” Kaufmann conceived grandiose projects combining real and allegorical personifications.\textsuperscript{14} A costly fire forced him to take in pupils at 442 Broadway, the location of other well known painters like Alfred Fredericks and Robert Pratt.\textsuperscript{15} While Kaufmann’s influence on his pupil is generally dismissed, it explains in large measure Nast’s ambition to paint monumental pictorial cycles and to work chiefly in an allegorical mode.

Nast’s apprenticeship with Kaufmann also proved fortunate in the resulting contact with Fredericks, who took an active interest in Nast’s career.\textsuperscript{16} Under the older man’s supervision, Nast gained entrance to the National Academy of Design. Here he received orthodox academic training, working at first from the plaster cast, then graduating to the life class, which at that time was taught by Thomas Cummings.\textsuperscript{17} Nast numbered among his colleagues Samuel Colman, Eugene Benson, William John Hennessy and Walter Shirlaw, all future National academicians.\textsuperscript{18}

In his spare time Nast studied and copied old masters in New York galleries. Among these, he regularly attended the Bryan Gallery of Christian Art at 839 Broadway.\textsuperscript{19} Thomas J. Bryan, a wealthy eccentric, exhibited a collection composed of an odd assortment of several hundred old masters, many of which were erroneously attributed or frankly spurious.\textsuperscript{20} The gallery was the fulfillment of a

\textsuperscript{12} Paine, op. cit., p. 8. Here again, Landauers dispute the trip to Paris, concluding that practical difficulties would have prevented this route. But since in this case the event involves Nast’s own experiences, I find it hard to reject the American accounts. (Metzger, op. cit., pp. 8–9.)


\textsuperscript{14} See Explanation of Theo. Kaufmann’s Great Pictures, Illustrating the Development of Religious Liberty, New York, 1853. One painting in this cycle was entitled, Procession of the Goddess of Reason in Paris and Washington as Bearer of the Constitution of the United States by which Religious Liberty is Guaranteed. For his philosophical explanation, see pp. 5 ff.

\textsuperscript{15} Zucker, op. cit., pp. 17–18; Paine, op. cit., p. 16.

\textsuperscript{16} Fredericks (no dates), a landscape painter and illustrator, became an associate member of the National Academy. (Paine, loc. cit.)

\textsuperscript{17} Ibid. Cummings (1804–1894) was a founder of the National Academy. In 1865 he published the Historic Annals of the National Academy of Design. A drawing by Nast after the life model and signed “T. Nast 57,” may be found in the New York Public Library Annex, vol. III of the scrapbook collection. See Note 22 below.

\textsuperscript{18} Paine, op. cit., p. 17.

\textsuperscript{19} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{20} See J. E. Stillwell, “Thomas J. Bryan—The First Art Collector and Connoisseur in New York City,” The New-York Historical Society Quarterly Bulletin, 2, 1918, pp. 103–105; Catalogue of the Bryan Gallery of Christian Art From the Earliest Masters to the Present Time, New York, 1853. Here Nast might have found examples (or replicas) of the work of Titian, Velasquez, Rubens, Rembrandt, Ruysdael, Vernet (Horace), Hogarth and a host of others.
long-cherished dream nurtured during a lengthy stay in Paris, where he developed a taste for painting and accumulated his collection. A passionate idealist, Bryan hoped to stimulate an American renaissance by exposing the public to outstanding examples of the European tradition. Since his opening around 1853, he charged only a nominal fee and granted art students free admission. Nast, one of Bryan's few steady clients, became Bryan's protégé, serving him often as doorkeeper and sharing in the daily receipts. Nast copied pictures in his spare time, keeping a permanent easel at the gallery for that purpose. But with the exception of the opportunity afforded Nast, Bryan's scheme failed miserably. Eventually, he donated the collection to the New-York Historical Society where most of it has remained ever since.  

Nast's training—in many ways erratic—thus followed along strictly orthodox lines; throughout his life he considered himself a symbolic history painter in the traditional sense. His career as an editorial cartoonist sprang from a youthful zeal to demonstrate his commercial worth to doubting parents and to see his work in print.  

He began as a graphic journalist in the tradition poignantly exemplified by Eugene Willa in Dreiser's The "Genius." After mid-century, American artists tended to initiate their careers by illustrating for the burgeoning pictorial newspapers and magazines. They lacked the advantages of widespread government involvement with the arts as was the case in France or the rich resources of...


22. See the article "Nast" in the Boston Gazette, June 16, 1872. This clipping may be found in Volume I of the four-volume scrapbook collection of uncatalogued Nastiana in the New York Public Library Annex (herein referred to as NYPLA). These scrapbooks were compiled by the artist himself.

23. T. Dreiser, The "Genius," New York, 1913. While Dreiser's novel is set in the '80s, it recounts a tradition that had remained constant and that continued through the twentieth century.
the English Royal Academy, and therefore frequently worked as reportorial artists to gain public recognition and finance more ambitious enterprises. Winslow Homer and Nast worked simultaneously on Harper's Weekly during the Civil War, and it was essentially on the basis of their illustrations of the conflict that they launched their careers.24 Nast, however, imbued with his father's political idealism, found this work eminently suited to his temperament and transformed it into something more than a bread-and-butter job. In 1860 he accompanied Garibaldi on his march of liberation through Sicily and southern Italy, portraying for the New York Illustrated News, the Illustrated London News, and Le Monde Illustré one of the great adventures of romantic nationalism.25 Later, his concentration on social problems and demand for reform anticipated the muckracker protests and the socially-conscious pictorial reporters who united to form the Ash Can School and who contributed to publications like The Masses.26

Unlike most artists who worked in several modes, however, Nast did not divide his activities according to a hierarchical scale: to him political cartooning and history painting were related arts, and he practiced them together. He did an immense amount of research for all his efforts, attempting to record events and objects as clearly and accurately as possible. In the 1860s he executed a number of patriotic history paintings that were exhibited in the National Academy and elsewhere, including the March of the Seventh Regiment Down Broadway, April 19, 1861, Sherman's March Through Georgia and Lincoln Entering Richmond.27 Late in life he was still conceiving magisterial pictures, such as the scrupulous Peace in Union (Fig. 1) and the Immortal Light of Genius.28 The latter was an allegory showing the interior of Shakespeare's natal cottage and the spirits of Comedy and Tragedy descending with laurel wreaths to crown a bust of the dramatist.

His most ambitious early project was a series of thirty-three monumental paintings, each approximately nine feet wide by twelve feet high, which he called his Grand Caricaturama.29 These were exhibited first in December, 1867 and the


26. John Sloan of course did cartoons as art editor of The Masses, and engaged among others to do similar work William Glackens and George Bellows. For this later work of the Ash Can members see R. E. Shikes, The Indignant Eye, Boston, 1969, pp. 325 ff.; T. Craven, Cartoon Cavalcade, New York, 1943, p. 12. Lloyd Goodrich has informed me that Art Young and Reginald Marsh deeply admired Nast. Young's cross-hatching and compositional style may very well be traced to the earlier artist.


29. Goodrich, op. cit., pp. 7 ff. Copies of the original catalogues for the exhibitions of the Grand Caricaturama may be found in NYPLA, vol. I.
catalogue describes them as “Grand Historical Paintings.” In reality, it was an allegorical cycle rendered in a comic mode involving actual events in American history. While Kaufmann’s influence is felt here, Nast differs from his master in his essentially cartoon-like approach. In one sense, he relates to the English caricaturist-painters Hogarth, Mortimer and even Blake, who practiced a kind of satirical history painting, but his unusually broad handling and strong tonal contrasts approximate more closely the work of Daumier. It is unlikely that Nast knew Daumier’s paintings, but what is important is that as painters they could permit themselves the same freedom of style they manifested in their cartoons. Long before the advent of pop art they promoted the cartoon to the status of monumental easel painting and accommodated traditional painting to the exigencies of the cartoon, thereby inaugurating a new vision within the conventional framework. Nast’s profound horror of superficiality, however, ultimately pervaded all his activities, and he wound up treating political cartoons as miniature history paintings.

James Jackson Jarves was first to point out the intrinsic aesthetic merit of Nast’s illustrations, and in his *Art-Idea* he assigned the young artist to a special place:

Judging from the wood-cuts in Harper’s Weekly of compositions relating to the various stages of the [Civil] war, Nast is an artist of uncommon abilities. He has composed designs, or rather given hints of his ability to do so, of allegorical, symbolical or illustrative character far more worthy to be transferred in paint to the wall spaces of our public buildings than anything that has yet been placed on them. Although hastily got up for a temporary purpose, they evince originality of conception, freedom of manner, lofty appreciation of national ideas and action, and a large artistic instinct.

Jarves, with typically uncanny insight, looked beyond narrow categories to examine Nast’s productions from a lofty vantage point.

In the same generous spirit, Jarves advocated an eclectic outlook for his countrymen to emancipate them from an “impracticable” desire to establish an “American” style. He reasoned that Americans are a composite people, and that their progress depended on free choice and adaptations rather than on any innate superiority of mind over other nations:

It remains, then, for us to be as eclectic in our art as in the rest of our civilization. To get artistic riches by virtue of assimilated examples, knowledge and ideas, drawn from all sources, and made national and homogeneous by a solidarity of our own, is our right pathway to consummate art.

Just as he refused to recognize the superiority of one cultural form over another, so he rejected the notion that there are superior “national” expressions. He welcomed the influence of French and German art on American artists, and could even write that “the qualities of French art are those most needed here . . . while its motives and character generally are congenial to our tastes and ideas.”

Nast, who had no strong indigenous cartoon tradition to draw upon, and whose

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31. Ibid., p. 198.
32. Ibid., p. 218.
own cultural heritage reflected ambivalent sympathies, would have found these notions appealing. They justified a free association with the art of all people as a means to discover one’s own personality and ultimately to achieve a “national” style. Moreover, the qualitative equivalency of modes and eclectic outlook eliminated the onus of working in a so-called “superficial” genre, and allowed for an international groundwork. Nast demonstrates a need to relate to the academic tradition and reveals an intimate familiarity with world art. He displays pictorial effects of a marvellous variety derived from a solid knowledge of Dutch landscape, German and French romantic art, French academicism and realism, as well as the work of the brilliant English and French draftsmen of the day including Leech, Tenniel, Doré and Daumier. 33

It is generally claimed that his style derived from the English illustrators, but it is not recognized that he turned regularly for inspiration to the French draftsmen and painters. 34 In the late ‘50s, Nast did a series of illustrations for the novel Gil Blas, which was directly affected by Jean Gigoux’s vignettes for the French and American editions of the 1830s. 35 Later, Gustave Doré provided Nast with a powerful stimulus: Doré’s vigorous cross-hatching and closely-packed lines of the Rabelais illustrations, the dramatic lighting of the work for the Divine Comedy and the Bible, and his habitual projection of illustration in monumental conceptions had undoubted effect on Nast’s development. Nast collected Doré’s work, and probably knew the artist personally through Harper’s firm. 36 In addition, the

33. One writer, after observing Nast’s “Biedermeier Gemütlichkeit,” claimed that it was the “undiluted strain of German tendency and sentiment flowing along the influence of other nationalities that made Nast so strong an influence in our political caricature.” E. L. Cary, “Thomas Nast, Caricaturist at Play,” The New York Times, July 9, 1933, Sunday Feature Section. Nast’s “Die Wacht am Potomac” (HW, 15, Jan. 14, 1871, p. 36) recalls Friedrich’s moonscapes, while his allegorical figures of death suggest links with Rethel, who also did political satires. Curiously, Rethel’s father was an Alsatian who settled in Aachen. For other examples of his connection with European art, see Paine, op. cit., p. 91, for a Ruben-like landscape; p. 90 for a composition based on Delacroix’s Liberty Leading the People; HW, 15, Aug. 19, 1871, p. 777 for a composition anticipating Renoir’s Boating Party, and a sketch of Sept. 30, 1871, p. 908 recalling the young impressionists. See below for the French caricaturists.


two bore a striking physical resemblance to each other, and Nast became so closely identified with the Frenchman that critics often referred to him as the “American Doré.”

The remarkable caricatural contribution made by French draftsmen during the Franco-Prussian war and the Commune furnished Nast with a rich storehouse of material. Harper’s front-line coverage kept the channels of communication open between the United States and France, and its foreign correspondents shipped quantities of printed documents back to America all through this period. These events coincided chronologically with the peak of Nast’s assault on the Tweed ring, a group of corrupt municipal officials under the Tammany “Boss,” William Marcy Tweed. This group gained virtual control of New York City and milked the treasury of millions while running up a huge public debt. Not surprisingly, Nast identified Tweed with Napoleon III, another despot whom he despised; one example shows Tweed as Napoleon III giving Governor Hoffman as the Prince Imperial his “Baptism of Fire” with the shells of “reform” bursting around them. Another striking case of this identification represents one of Nast’s most inspired graphic attacks on the ring. A Group of Vultures Waiting for the Storm to Blow Over—Let us Prey (Fig. 2). The cartoon, published in Harper’s Weekly on September 23, 1871 and destined to become a standard textbook illustration, derives essentially from the caricatural tradition satirizing the Napoleonic Eagle as a vultureine of prey. The caricaturists of the Franco-Prussian War and the Commune carried on this tradition: one vivid example is Le Vautour (Fig. 3) from a suite of satires on the imperial family and the court entitled La ménagerie impériale. The image of Louis Napoleon as a vulture perched on a ravaged female nude symbolizing “France” provided the immediate inspiration for Nast.s

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37. *The World*, May 8, 1970; “Gustave Doré,” *The New York Times*, May 23, 1870; “Thomas Nast,” *Evening Press*, May 31, 1869, all in NYPLA, vol. I. Nast was reminded so often of their physical resemblance that he had photos taken in 1868 to compare likenesses. The two photos may be found in the Nast biographical material in the New York Public Library Print Room, Thomas Nast, Cartoonist and Illustrator, vol. I. The comparison is breathtaking! But Nast and Doré (who was credited with being “the first draughtsman of his epoch”) had more in common than technique and physiognomy. Doré was an Alsatian from Strasbourg, precociously gifted and torn between his love for painting and his love for illustration, except in his late years when he turned almost exclusively to painting. Both artists, moreover, were pronounced egomaniacs.


43. Victoria and Albert Museum, op. cit., Nos. 4–5. The caricaturist was Paul Hadol (1835–1875).
portrayal of Tweed, except that now the prostrate victim is a clothed male representing "New York."

Some of the dramatic effects of Nast's cartoon emanate from the work of Daumier, an artist surely known to Nast, although no direct connection between them has been established. Daumier's elaboration upon Philipon's pear-shaped Louis-Philippe seems to lie behind the pot-bellied Tweed, and the two cartoonists share a similar concern for social struggle and a hatred for political bullies. Nast's lightning effect in Group of Vultures recalls Daumier's motif in the famous Page d'histoire (Fig. 4), where the Imperial Eagle-Vulture is shown crushed beneath a copy of Hugo's Les Chatiments and a bolt of lightning dramatically snaps through the somber sky toward the fallen bird. The relationship is further reinforced by Nast's suggestion that the huge boulder struck by lightning is about to crush the gang. Conclusive evidence, however, that Nast knew Daumier's idea is shown by his illustration in Harper's of March 25, 1876—It Struck (In Blowing Over)—where the original motif is reproduced almost in its entirety (Fig. 4a). Two other Daumier cartoons, La France-Prométhée et l'aigle vautour and the much earlier Deux grands ducs ... à la bataille de Balaclava, depicting two vulture birds on a rocky hill watching a military slaughter below, may also have influenced the Group of Vultures composition.

Nast thus reveals a debt to French draftsmen, but among contemporary artists he was chiefly interested in the French academic, painters who treated history with dramatic realism. To Americans of that period in general the works of the French academicians represented the last link to a hallowed but vanishing tradition, and as a history painter himself Nast identified with this academic class. Meissonier, for example, inspired Nast's composition of Wilkes Booth the Second, a graphic projection of a rumored assassination plot against Grant in 1868 (Fig. 6). Nast fused a caricature of Horatio Seymour, Grant's opponent in the 1868 presidential election, with the crouching figure in Meissonier's The Assassins (Fig. 5), and exploited the seventeenth-century costumes to make allusion to Booth's thespian career. Nast could thus penetrate even further than Meissonier into the sinister character of hired thugs—buffoons transformed by circumstances into the harbingers of deep tragedy.

Jean-Léon Gérôme, perhaps the most celebrated of the French academicians in America, enjoyed a following among Nast's circle and Nast personally admired

44. Daumier's reputation and Nast's familiarity with his rivals would have made this contact inevitable. Frank Bellew, another HW cartoonist and friend of Nast, had worked with Gavarni for a time in London, and he too might have been a channel of contact. See The Anglo-American Times, Jan. 3, 1874 in NYPLA, vol. I. A later article found among Nast's clippings refers not only to Nast and Daumier but to the tradition of Louis Napoleon as a vulture as well. Its author was also a well-known caricaturist. See F. Beard, "Caricature," The Manhattan, 3, Jan.—June 1884, pp. 135, 140 in NYPLA, vol. III.
49. HW, 12, Nov. 7, 1868. Nast evidently admired the artist; a photograph of Meissonier was found among his collected documents. See Catalogue of the Library, op. cit., p. 59, No. 551.
50. Meissonier's work was known as Les Bravi prior to its purchase by Lord Hertford at the Duc de Morny's sale in 1865.
Fig. 4. HONORÉ DAUMIER: Page d'Histoire, 1870, lithograph. From Le Charivari, Nov. 16, 1870.

Fig. 4a. THOMAS NAST: It Struck (In Blowing Over), wood engraving. From HW, March 25, 1876.

Fig. 5. ERNEST MEISSONIER: The Assassins, 1852, oil on panel, 15 by 113/8 inches. The Wallace Collection, London.

Fig. 6. THOMAS NAST: Wilkes Booth the Second, 1868. wood engraving. From HW, Nov. 7, 1868.
him and collected reproductions of his work. Gérôme's popular *Death of Caesar* (Fig. 7) provided Nast with the nucleus of two important cartoons, one of which was a venomous satire of Andrew Johnson's termination of the presidency in 1869, *The Political Death of the Bogus Caesar* (Fig. 8). This is an almost identical copy of Gérôme's picture, except that Nast cropped the original composition slightly and added contemporary physiognomies. The result is a monumental cartoon of compelling grandeur, emphasizing even more sharply than the Gérôme the capriciousness of political associations. Nast evidently felt that the two were complementary, because he hung reproductions of the original and the replica

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52. *HW*, 13, March 13, 1869, p. 164. While Nast knew this work in reproduction, he may also have known one of the original versions in the collection of John Jacob Astor and J. T. Johnston. It was a very popular work in America. See Weir, loc. cit., J. F. Weir's letter to Julian, June 13, 1874.
Fig. 9. THOMAS NAST: *Et Tu, Brute?—Then Fall, Caesar*, 1872, wood engraving. From HW, Jan. 27, 1872.

Fig. 10. THOMAS NAST: *The Tammany Tiger Loose. What are You Going to do About it?*, 1871, wood engraving. From HW, Nov. 11, 1871.

Fig. 11. JEAN-LEON GÉRÔME: *Ave Caesar imperator, moritur te saluant*, Salon of 1859, oil on canvas, 36 3/8 by 57 1/4 inches. Yale University Art Gallery.
side by side in his home. Indeed, he was so fond of the French master’s picture that he took off on it again in an attack on the Tammany gang in 1872, where Tweed is shown as Caesar being stabbed by Governor Hoffman as Brutus (Fig. 9). This time he reversed Gérôme’s composition and employed only its central section, thus making the two protagonists foreground referents for a deeply plunging perspective. Nast’s own genius may be observed in his skillful alignment of the heads of Hoffman and Tweed with a dominant orthogonal—creating an impeccably coordinated design.

Curiously, it was also Gérôme who inspired Nast’s most effective political cartoon, The Tammany Tiger Loose—What are You Going to do About it? (Fig. 10), a work which mythologized the Tammany emblem. In this case, Nast relied on Gérôme’s famous Circus Maximus scene exhibited in 1859, the Ave Caesar imperator, morituri te salutant (Fig. 11), making use of the sweeping panoramic backdrop and several specific details like the scattered corpses and the imperial porch where Nast ingeniously substituted the Tweed gang for Gérôme’s emperor and entourage. Nast relished identifying Tweed with famous tyrants, and Gérôme’s reconstructions of antiquity were literally made to order for his allegorical frame of mind. Ironically, some of Gérôme’s New York patrons would have numbered among Tweed’s supporters, including “robber barons” like John Jacob Astor who owned a version of Gérôme’s Caesar.

The Franco-Prussian War affected Nast deeply because of his concern with social struggle and his Franco-Prussian heritage. Fortunately, his American citizenship provided some relief; it enabled him to transcend his cultural origins by furnishing a point of view from which to deal critically with both sides. He particularly loathed Louis Napoleon for his treatment of Garibaldi and support of the Confederacy, and attacked him savagely in his cartoons of the period. One of the most brilliant of these is Dead Men’s Clothes Soon Wear Out (Fig. 12), an adaptation of Paul Delaroche’s Napoleon at Fontainebleau (Fig. 13). Delaroche’s tragic image of defeat and failure already had a melodramatic character, but Nast developed this still further by transforming it into a Napoleon III plunged into despair and clad in the tattered remnants of his uncle’s uniform. The final effect is as if Napoleon I—in a kind of Dorian Gray metaphor—had sat in place since his abdication in 1814, his body putrefying and his uniform deteriorating. Nast exploited Delaroche’s picture again to ridicule the other side: this time King Wilhelm of Germany is depicted standing next to the painting in its original form complete with Delaroche’s signature (the original version happened to be in Leipzig) (Fig. 14). The King poses in an ostentatious gesture, casting a knowing glance

54. HW, 16, Jan. 27, 1872, p. 76. Hoffman, Governor of New York, wished to absolve himself of all connection with the Tweed ring scandal and tried to attribute all corruption in New York City to Tweed.
55. HW, 15, Nov. 11, 1871, pp. 1056–1057; Paine, op. cit., pp. 154, 156. Nast got the tiger idea from the symbol of the Big Six Fire Company, of which Tweed had been foreman, and the symbol was conferred upon Tammany Hall at the time of Tweed’s accession to power.
56. For Astor’s tacit support of Tweed see Franklin, op. cit., p. 83; Paine, op. cit., p. 144.
57. Paine, op. cit., pp. 147–148. Also Note 41 above.
58. HW, 14, Sept. 10, 1870, p. 388. A replica of Delaroche’s original version in Leipzig was reproduced in Goupil’s publication of J. Goddé and H. Delaborde, Oeuvre de Paul Delaroche, Paris, 1850, No. 46. The original was painted in 1845, the present version a year later. Nast used it a third time to caricature McKinley in 1892. See Paine, op. cit., p. 540.
at the image of the despondent Napoleon while his shadow falls across the painting. The caption reads *Thrown Completely into the Shade.*

Nast is not only reluctant to conceal his debt to Gérôme and Delaroche, but deliberately makes explicit reference to them in his cartoons. We may conclude from this that he relied on their popularity to enhance his point. The academic works he quoted were familiar to his audience through the dissemination of Goupil’s photogravure reproductions, which made paintings of artists like Meissonier, Gérôme and Delaroche easily available in the United States. Harper’s *Weekly* itself reproduced pictures by French academicians and its readers were kept informed of artistic currents on the Continent. Nast not only used such work as a point of departure but also parodied it in his political commentaries. By so doing, he imparted to his work a degree of double-entendre almost wholly overlooked in the literature. He satirized both his topical subject and the academic painting that served as its compositional matrix. Like many draftsmen of the period, he maintained a journalistic “morgue” of academic pictures as reference materials for ideas and difficult compositions, but he went one step further: he ar-

59. Goupil’s New York branch was at 366 Broadway and specialized in the work of the academicians. Nast owned a large collection of Goupil reproductions, including works by Gérôme and Jules Breton, but it dates from a later period. See *Catalogue of the Library*, loc. cit. Goupil was Gérôme’s father-in-law, and naturally did much to popularize his son-in-law through reproductions.


61. Nast also did an unpublished parody of Cabanel’s *The Florentine Poet*. See Paine, op. cit., p. 363. Nast of course was not unique in this respect: Daumier had satirized David’s *The
rayed political cartoons in academic vestures and gave academic paintings the appearance of political cartoons. A frustrated history painter, Nast incorporated and burlesqued the work of well-known rivals, thus guaranteeing himself an aura of “academic” respectability. This tension with “high” art is often experienced in Nast’s cartoons even when the original source remains unknown and is expressed as part of the general effect.

Nast’s practices also serve to unveil an aspect of academic art not generally recognized: namely, that the borderline between political cartooning and nineteenth-century neo-classicism is a fluid one. Both share two salient characteristics: clarity through emphasis on drawing and strong outlines, and the allegorical depiction of simple ethical themes whose import for the present is unmistakable. Cartoons have often been traced to medieval blockbooks and moralizing prints, and the political cartoon, more than any other cartoon medium, has kept this tradition intact. Gombrich further pointed out to what extent cartoons disclose the dominant role of the mythological imagination in our political thought. The allegorical personifications of Good and Evil (under whatever guise) and a host of other symbolic devices become the real substance of political persuasion, and therefore easily translated into the cartoonist’s metaphors. It is in this sense that political cartooning relates to neo and academic classicism, which similarly convey in allegorical terms propagandistic material and themes of uncorrupted virtues. The deeds or misdeeds of the historical past are exploited in the name of the present. Caricaturist-painters like the English Mortimer and Blake (Hogarth too, for his moralizing tendencies) demonstrate the interchangeability of the two forms, but Nast could also claim descent from the arch neoclassicist himself, Jacques-Louis David. David’s Oath of the Horatii, Death of Socrates and the Sabine Women, with their ethical and topical allusions, are no less related to Nast’s cartoons than David’s own political satires or sketches like that of Marie Antoinette on the way to the guillotine.

Later nineteenth-century classicism moves even closer to cartooning, and in-

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63. Political cartooning has been defined as an offshoot of romanticism, and it is possible perhaps to distinguish a “romantic” and a “neoclassic” style of cartooning. But even in the work of Daumier, where soft shadings give a painterly feel, line is still fundamental, topicality is couched in allegory, and the rational-ethical idea, as in all political cartoons, is the overriding goal of the artist. See Gombrich, “Imagery and Art in the Romantic Period,” in op. cit., pp. 120 ff.
64. Neoclassicism also keeps this aspect of the Christian tradition intact: see R. Rosenblum, Transformations in Late Eighteenth-Century Art, Princeton, 1967, pp. 79 ff., 95 ff.
67. Ibid., pp. 218 ff. Erdman not only points to Blake’s debt to cartoonist Gillray but also to his familiarity with the broad English caricatural tradition. Ibid., p. 38 and Note 30. Of all artists, Blake is least susceptible to traditional stylistic labeling or even such vocational tags as “artist” and “cartoonist.” Rosenblum, op. cit., pp. 157–158.
deed, to all forms of popular art, including the serial novel, the melodrama and ultimately the film. Rosenblum suggests that popular historical films owe their ultimate origin to "the late eighteenth-century's combination of an easily communicable emotion and a search for the appurtenances of historical truth"—a penetrating insight applicable also to the modern political cartoon whose own origin dates from that period. But the simplicity of style and pretentious scope inherent in the popular media—based as they are on unyielding primitive fantasies of good and evil—only partly explain the relationship of subsequent classicist works to vulgarized art forms. An added ingredient is the look of expertise derived from refined methods of scholarly research and an increasingly abundant documentation. Artists like Gérôme, Cabanel and Boulanger could confidently assert their historical reconstructions, where even poetic liberties are taken with tongue-in-cheek mockery of documented fact. Indeed, they deliberately exploited anachronism to convey the idea that all epochs are the same and that the past may be identified in terms of the present. Well-versed in history and archaeology, and liberated from the awe for classical antiquity of their predecessors, they felt as free to play with the past as Cecil B. DeMille, who undoubtedly learned much from the French academicians. Like them, he could justify the dramatization of the historical narrative by couching it in moralistic terms. Accordingly, their didactic intent and willful caprice reek so strongly of contemporary psychology that all claims to historicity are subverted. But perhaps this is the latent fantasy behind the historicistic method: we wish it to function like H. G. Wells' time-machine, capable of transporting us to former cultures while guaranteeing our advanced knowledge and superior vantage point. Gérôme's satirical Two Augurs, who laugh together over their believers' gullibility, Mark Twain's A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court, and Cecil B. DeMille's original Ten Commandments and Sign of the Cross are specious attempts to exploit history to teach a lesson, and the result is a kind of unconscious parody of their original intent.

Just as Nast clothed Johnson and Tweed with Caesar's garments, so Gérôme, Twain and DeMille juggle with contemporary people who wear period costume (and just as uncomfortably, one might add). If Nast deliberately worked out a history painting fantasy while the others were unconsciously satisfying time-

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69. Rosenblum, op. cit., p. 49.
70. Gombrich, op. cit., p. 123.
73. For an illustration and narrative concerning this picture see Viardot, op. cit., non-paginated plate section. The author reads into it anticlerical sentiments.
74. The same effect accrues to Twain's "serious" historical novel, Personal Recollections of Joan of Arc. See W. D. Howells, My Mark Twain, Baton Rouge, 1967, p. 135. Nast and Twain were intimate friends, and Nast's biographer, Albert Bigelow Paine, wrote the first major monograph on Twain, and later edited his correspondence, notebooks and unpublished autobiography. Twain even contributed to the "Nast Almanac," a humorous magazine of the months published by the cartoonist. See Paine, Nast, op. cit., pp. 202, 263, 367-368, 511-513.
machine historicism, this does not alter the ultimate incongruity their images share. They relate to Nast, moreover, in their strict sense of morality, simplistic ethical scheme and highly disciplined style. All were self-appointed protectors of morality and reason: it may be said that Nast and Twain glorified Grant as David aggrandized Napoleon, and that Nast opposed Tweed in the same crusading spirit Twain manifested against imperialism and Gérôme against the impressionists.

Nast's urgent need to identify with academicians may seem paradoxical today, in an age that counts among its great artists the caricaturists Käthe Kollwitz, Alfred Kubin, George Grosz and Saul Steinberg, and painters like Klee and Picasso, whose styles are often indistinguishable from caricature. This new status of caricature and cartooning is also reflected in the style and content of pop art and in the increasing number of exhibitions given over to the subject. Coincidentally, however, this revolution began abroad during Nast's epoch, when a number of artists, needing to go beyond both academic classicism and a dissolute naturalism, turned to caricatural forms for new solutions. Unlike Nast, they deliberately set out to break with tradition, but like him they modified conventional art forms in the direction of caricature and retained a link to academicism through a distinct linear emphasis. (Even conservative artists like Puvis de Chavannes often practiced caricature as a relief from their normal routine.) In the closing decades of the last century, independents from all countries including van Gogh (who admired Nast and collected at least 16 of his cartoons), Gauguin, Seurat, Toulouse-Lautrec, Rousseau, Munch, Ensor, Hodler, Klinger and Stuck75 developed a caricatural sensibility to express a fresh vision of the world. Their profound influence on modern painting demonstrates that caricature deserves thorough study as to how it affected the elements of twentieth-century art.

Among the French artists of the period whose debt to caricature is well established is Edgar Degas.76 Degas waited in eager anticipation of each new edition of Le Charivari for its Daumier cartoons. He collected the prints of Daumier, Gavarni, and the eighteenth-century caricaturist Rowlandson, and he followed the progress of contemporary British cartoonists like Charles Keene and his friend Carlo Pellegrini, whose work appeared in Vanity Fair under the signature "Ape."77 Degas, whose own productions often border on caricature, looked to gifted comic artists for such qualities as physical distortion and exaggeration, unorthodox poses, unpredictable settings, bold silhouetting, and the cropping of the human figure for pungent effects.

Not unexpectedly, Degas became attracted to Nast, and while there is no documentary support of this relationship, the visual evidence is incontestable. Degas probably encountered Nast's work for the first time when he visited his relatives in the United States in 1872,78 but he may have been already familiar with it.

75. See O. J. Bierbaum, *Stuck*, Bielefeld and Leipzig, 1908, pp. 7 ff. Stuck, who later taught Klee and Kandinsky at the Munich Kunstakademie, began his career doing cartoons for the *Fliegende Blätter*.
78. Degas' family on his mother's side (who was a native of New Orleans) was well established in New Orleans. His brothers René and Achille had also settled in the Southern city. For the literature on Degas' trip to the United States, see T. Bolton, "Edgar Degas in the United States, 1872–1873," *The Arts*, 17, March 1931, pp. 387 ff.; J. Rewald, "Degas and his
through *Le Monde illustré* or his contact with Pellegrini. Both Pellegrini and Nast joined Garibaldi for the siege of Capua, and the two probably met at that time through their common interests.79 The English, moreover, responded very favorably to Nast’s work of the early 1870s, and in 1872 *Vanity Fair* commissioned him to execute caricatures of outstanding American statesmen.80 This commission received a good deal of publicity in America.81 Prior to the publication of the caricatures, one newspaper observed that “Mr. Nast will have to withstand a formidable comparison with ‘Ape,’” while after publication another criticized his caricature of Horace Greeley as inferior to “Ape.”82 In any event, Degas would have learned of Nast when he stopped briefly in New York en route to New Orleans in the autumn of 1872, or during his long stay in the Southern city. At that moment Nast was being celebrated nationwide for his triumphant victory over the Tweed Ring.83

In the South, moreover, Nast enjoyed a special form of notoriety: there his heroic virtues counted for less than his “malignant” influence.84 Nast and his employer *Harper’s Weekly* were partisans of Radical Republicanism, and launched a broad front against the Democrats’ Negrophobia and the KKK’s anti-Negro violence, insisting on the black man’s voting rights and civil rights legislation to enforce them.85 Even prior to Reconstruction, Nast and *Harper’s* had pilloried the South during the Civil War to such an extent that in New Orleans *Harper’s* was identified as a form of obscene literature.86 During Reconstruction, Louisiana, as the stronghold of the Ku Klux Klan, came consistently under *Har-

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82. *Daily Gazette* (Cincinnati), n.d. [1872]; *Daily Chronicle* (Washington), July 29, 1872; “The Caricature Campaign,” loc. cit., which observed that “Mr. Greeley’s face, which, to a man like Pellegrini would be a fortune, is very poorly handled.” (*NYPLA*, vol. I.)

83. *Daily Leader* (Cleveland), Aug. 19, 1871, *NYPLA*, vol. I, stating that Nast “has made the face of Tweed and Hall and Connolly as familiar to the people of St. Louis and New Orleans as they are to the habitués of the New York City Hall.” But the surest sign of his notoriety at this time is his own scrapbook collection filled with hundreds of clippings from the period 1871–1872, attesting as well to an international reputation.

84. Thompson, Jr., op. cit., 23, 31. Nast’s famous “Compromise with the South,” an attack on the Democratic Convention of 1864, was used as a Republican campaign document and circulated in the millions. For a sampling of the vitriolic comments of Southern newspapers on Nast and Harper’s, see *Saturday Morning* (Memphis, Tenn.), Oct. 10, 1868; *Memphis Appeal*, April 13, 1870; *Aurora Herald* (Illinois), Aug. 10, 1872, quoting an Alabama newspaper; “A Journal of Civilization,” *The Republican* (St. Louis), Oct. 7, 1860, notes that for years, “the South and the Southern people are pelted with Mr. Nast’s mud, and insulted and outraged by him and his masters in every conceivable and inconceivable fashion.” (*NYPLA*, vol. I.)


per's attack, as did New Orleans, which in July 1866 witnessed one of the bloodiest race riots in Southern history. In 1867 Nast attacked President Johnson's complacent role in that affair in a famous cartoon entitled Amphitheaterum Johnsonianum, showing the President as Nero calmly watching the "massacre of the innocents," a reference to the New Orleans' riot. He repeated this assault in a monumental painting for the Grand Caricaturama, The Massacre at New Orleans, depicting Johnson hiding in a building while the riot is in progress. Nast's reputation in New Orleans was considerably heightened during the time of Degas' visit, when the minority Republican newspapers praised him for helping defeat Horace Greeley in the 1872 election. The white majority in New Orleans had pinned their hopes on Greeley to defeat Grant and abolish Reconstruction.

The French colony in New Orleans would have had their own reasons for agonizing over Nast's work and Harper's Weekly. Another painting by Nast for the Grand Caricaturama strikes at the primacy of "King Cotton," showing an allegorical king served by black slaves while Britannia and Napoleon III prostrate themselves before him. This was a reminder of the French government's dependence on Southern cotton and its support of the Confederacy. Degas' relatives themselves were wealthy cotton brokers and exporters of cotton firmly committed to the Southern cause. His uncle, Michel Musson, had joined a group of brokers who published a manifesto advising cotton planters to withhold produce from New Orleans to encourage French intervention in the Civil War. As a result, Major General Butler—the Union officer charged with occupation of New Orleans after its capture—taxed Musson's firm 500 dollars to help relieve the city's starving populace. Butler—still known in New Orleans as "the beast"—treated the French particularly harsh and forced many of them to flee.

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90. "The Nast Cartoons," in the Weekly National Republican (New Orleans), Nov. 7, 1872, attributed Greeley's defeat "largely" to Nast; the New Orleans Republican of Jan. 9, 1873 published this curious two-liner: "Any man may become a great gymnast, but there can be only one "Tom Nast."


95. Southwood, loc. cit. John Watt & Co., along with the others, "was assessed to relieve the starving poor by the United States." A descriptive bit of the reaction of cotton brokers to this tax remarkably fits the likeness of Degas' uncle: "Sleek old gentleman, whose stomachs are extended with turtle, and who sport ivory-headed canes, and wear on their noses two-eyed glasses rimmed with gold." See Southwood, op. cit., p. 95; portrait of Musson in our Fig. 15.

96. Southwood, op. cit., pp. 187 ff., Correspondence between the French Consul in New Orleans and Butler; Rewald, op. cit., pp. 108-109. Some of Degas' relatives were among those fleeing to France.
cruelty was well known in the North, but he nevertheless enjoyed unqualified admiration and support among Nast’s circle. Indeed, the only total “whitewash” of Butler’s behavior in New Orleans was written by a member of Nast’s family and illustrated with a specially designed frontispiece by Nast. A runaway bestseller, the book went through over fifteen editions in its first year alone.

The participation of the French colony in the Southern struggle—to say nothing of its peculiar fear of the blacks—was not the only reason for its probable sensitiveness to Harper’s and Nast. Harper’s maintained strong business and editorial contacts in New Orleans and despite the animosity it had a large Southern readership. This was due to Harper’s front-line coverage and graphic correspondents who provided the kind of firsthand reporting inaccessible in local Southern newspapers. At the time of the Franco-Prussian War and the Commune, Harper’s furnished the country’s best international coverage through its on-the-spot reporters and illustrators. Harper’s sympathized deeply with the French cause, and even solicited funds to aid the French under siege. Anxious about their

97. J. Parton, General Butler in New Orleans, New York, 1864. Nast’s frontispiece is signed “Th. Nast 8/63.” James Parton was a cousin of Nast’s wife; in the Catalogue of the Library, op. cit., p. 8, No. 39, a presentation copy of the book is recorded with an inscription “to Thomas and Sarah Nast.” Parton, whose book still causes ripples, also wrote a work on caricature in which he praised Nast. See his Caricature and other Comic Art, New York, 1877, pp. 326 ff. For the relationship of Nast to his cousin and Butler, see Paine, op. cit., pp. 30, 134, 264 ff., 90. In later years, Nast took a dim view of Butler the politician.


100. See especially “The Tragedy in France.” HW, 15, Feb. 4, 1871, p. 98, and the maps of the siege in the same issue; “Suffering France,” Feb. 28, 1871, p. 163, asking for contributions to aid France; July 8, 1871, pp. 628–629, atrocity illustrations showing the summary executions of suspected communards.
Fig. 17. THOMAS NAST: Clasping Hands Over the Bloodless (Sar)Chasm, detail, 1872, wood engraving. From HW, Nov. 23, 1872.

Fig. 18. THOMAS NAST: The Youngest Introducing the Oldest, 1868, wood engraving. From HW, July 18, 1868.

relatives abroad, the French in New Orleans would have found extensive details in Harper’s about the Paris Siege and the bitter period of the Commune—as well as Nast’s venomous attacks on their fallen idol, Napoleon III. 102

Degas’ seminal painting of his New Orleans visit, The Cotton Office in New Orleans (Fig. 15), owes a conspicuous debt to Nast’s illustrations for Harper’s. 103 Among these, the most important is Nast’s Going Through the Form of Universal Suffrage (Fig. 16) of November 11, 1871, depicting innocent voters dropping their ballots into a wastebasket while the Tweed gang loaf cynically behind the table. 104 The Cotton Office represents Degas’ attempt to capture the informality of American comportment and the casual atmosphere of a busy commercial enterprise. Nast must have fascinated him in this respect, since no one surpassed the cartoonist in catching the physical gestures and informal bearing of his countrymen. Nast’s figures of the New York mayor, who leans nonchalantly against the wall with one leg crossed over the other, and Tweed, who supports himself by leaning heavily on the table with both arms, provided Degas with the poses of Achille de Gas and an unidentified client examining merchandise at the far left in the Cotton Office. Both pairs wear identical headgear, a tall silk hat and a derby. 105 Slight variations in the figures are less important than their shared look of idle casualness, and the fact that they occupy analogous positions in their respective formats. Although Degas reversed the perspective scheme and set his figures in a different plane, Achille and Mayor Hall stand at the extreme edge of the picture with their respective counterparts flanking them just inside the com-

102. In 1872, René, Degas’ brother who had been residing in New Orleans since 1865, returned to France anxious to see his family in the aftermath of the War and Commune. It was he who persuaded Edgar to return with him to New Orleans later that year. See Rewald, op. cit., p. 112.

103. The work is signed at the lower left, “Degas Nlle Orleans 1873,” and depicts the interior of his uncle’s commercial surroundings. Many of his relatives and employees of the firm are portrayed.

104. HW, 15, Nov. 11, 1871, p. 1060; Murrell, op. cit., p. 50.

105. In a preliminary sketch the client wears a top hat; see Rewald, op. cit., p. 119.
position. The diagonal of the figures parallels the wall receding toward the opposite end of the interior. Another link between the two works is the partitioned-off cubicle behind the figures, where a seated man is shown cut off, save for head and shoulders, by the figure leaning on the table who faces in the opposite direction.

Various other details may be compared: the similar location and period style of the low-back office chair in the left foreground of both pictures, the bystanders in the background, and the curious affinity between the sprawling position of Degas' brother René reading the newspaper and the careless abandon of Nast's guard. Even the affected casualness in the rendering of René's trousers recalls Nast, who ingeniously stylized the contours of trousers (Fig. 17). This is especially evident in Nast's drawing of the American ambassador to China seated at the far right in *The Youngest Introducing the Oldest* (Fig. 18).106

The treatment of orthogonals and abrupt cropping of figures in *Cotton Office* and *Universal Suffrage* also reveal similarities. While Degas achieves a momentary aspect by suddenly segmenting the upper wall planes by the picture plane, Nast arrives at a similar result by gradually fading out the wall surfaces before they reach the edge of the picture. Nast is intent on retaining the integrity of his foreground plane, but his abrupt segmentation of the standing guard by the column at the left may be likened to the seemingly accidental cropping of Degas' uncle in the foreground of *Cotton Office*. There is a further parallel between Nast's framing column and what appears to be a jamb and shutter at the extreme left in Degas' picture.

Still another Nast cartoon supplied Degas with local color for *Cotton Office*, the *Put Yourself in his Place* of March 4, 1871 (Fig. 19).107 The relationship between the lefthand portion of Degas' picture and the cartoon is particularly striking: figures pouring over account books with desks in disarray, high stools and messy wastebaskets, all serve to create similar environments. Yet it is not so much the presence of these details as their internal relationships that suggest a more than coincidental resemblance. The high stool stands next to a low-back office chair facing toward the left, which in turn faces a table whose style is the same in both cases. Even the wastebasket is analogously situated in the two pictures, and it is noteworthy—despite the fact that Degas shows us only the top—that they are made of the same wicker material and braided in large loops at the rim.

While Degas' picture is in some respects a family portrait, he did not paint it on the spot in his uncle's office.108 Variations in the final work from preliminary studies demonstrate that the picture was the product of a studio synthesis. He altered details of costume and furniture in order to meet his compositional and aesthetic needs. During the final phases of execution he scouted about for pictorial references to provide his work with authentic atmosphere and the indigenous physical attitudes that Nast translated so powerfully into graphic terms. Yet nothing so aptly discloses the complexities of nineteenth-century art than this relationship between a French pioneer of modern painting and a cartoonist who helped shape the symbolic vocabulary of the American political tradition.

106. *HW*, 12, July 18, 1868, p. 460. The figure in question is Anson Burlingame, special Ambassador to China, who made a world tour with a retinue of Chinese officials to improve U.S. and world relations with the country. See Paine, op. cit., p. 131.
Nast's career thus reveals unanticipated links with French artists and represents a nexus in the development of contemporary art. Not only does it indicate the extraordinary interchangeability of various art forms on an international scale in the last century, but points to the prominent role of caricature in the development of the modern sensibility. In testifying to an inexhaustible repertoire of reference sources exploited by artists, it further suggests the unlimited potentialities of art historical research. Actually, artists often proceed along the lines of art historians, a fact generally overlooked in the analysis of the motivations governing artistic borrowings. Nast deserves credit for proclaiming his sources and thereby clarifying the essential twofold nature of an artist's derivations: on the one hand they represent his basic reference tools, and on the other, they signify part of a vast "kitty" to which each artist contributes for the benefit of all the rest, and through which artists can reach out to one another beyond time and beyond space.