

One Misdeed Evokes Another: How Political Cartoonists Used “Scandal Intertextuality” Against Presidential Candidate James G. Blaine

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Puck artists Joseph Keppler and Bernhard Gillam, and Harper’s Weekly cartoonist Thomas Nast, all shared a desire to discredit Republican candidate James Blaine by ascribing to him characteristics of scandal during the presidential campaign of 1884. This research explores how cartoonists differed in their approaches using the concept of “scandal intertextuality.”

In doing so, the article shows how these artists borrowed not only from previous scandals and debates about cultural norms of the time but also from each other.

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In midst of the rancorous 1884 presidential campaign, the British *Pall Mall Gazette* wrote that “ridicule does not kill in the United States.”¹ Observers after the canvass and historians in the twentieth century, however, often have credited political cartoonists for killing the last chance for Republican nominee James Blaine to reach the presidency. For more than a hundred years, “A Campaign of Caricature”² has been cited as a primary reason why Grover Cleveland reached the White House.

Blaine was dogged by charges of graft and corruption, most notably that he received improper benefits from railroad interests while he was in Congress during the 1870s. Charges that Blaine had an improper financial relationship with the railroads resurfaced during the 1884 campaign with discovery of a new set of “Mulligan Letters” penned by Blaine and saved by a clerk.³

Cartoonists both established and emerging were quick to pounce on Blaine’s foibles. Cartooning in the 1884 election, particularly *Puck*’s Tattooed Man series, has received some scholarly attention and has been referred to anecdotally in a number of cases as an example of the power of the political cartoon.⁴ However, the scholarship has been primarily of a descriptive nature, with little exploration of the cultural factors that made these cartoons seem so scandalous to the public.

The scholarship has also failed to more broadly explore the changing nature of cartooning during the period. Thomas Nast and *Harper’s Weekly* were institutions, coming to prominence during the turmoil of the Civil War and Reconstruction. *Harper’s*, the self-proclaimed “Journal of Civilization,” was a recognized and respected leader among American popular periodicals, a “gray lady” with an appeal to the educated and a penchant for examining public wrongdoing. The caustic Nast, with black-and-white simplicity, had become world famous as a slayer of corrupt

regimes, builder of myth, and father of American icons.

While remaining popular, Nast, and to a lesser degree *Harper’s Weekly*, were slowly becoming less relevant to American culture in 1884, due in part to an explosion of new choices in the media marketplace. The magazine industry, bolstered by increased consumerism and the growing field of advertising, had more than four times the number of publications than in 1865, including the emergence of consumer-oriented women’s publications such as *Ladies’ Home Journal*.⁵ Newspapers were experiencing enormous growth as well, the number of papers nearly tripling between 1870 and 1890.⁶ The content of newspapers was evolving also as the 1884 campaign began. The previous year, Joseph Pulitzer began his transformation of the moribund *New York World*, turning its columns over largely to crime, scandal, and human interest, the first steps toward what would become known as “Yellow Journalism” in the 1890s with William Randolph Hearst’s purchase of the *New York Journal*.

Another type of new magazine, the comic weekly, was becoming established as well, thanks mostly to *Puck*. Its rise was meteoric; a mere three years after its establishment in 1877 it was being heralded as “not only the foremost comic paper ever published in this country, but in many respects the equal of the best elsewhere.”⁷ By the early 1880s, *Puck* was sporting intricately complex cartoons on its front and back covers and two-page centerspread in vivid lithographic color, the hues garnering praise for their technical execution in some quarters and criticism for being lurid in others.⁸

The shifting nature of cartooning in 1884 gave potential voters new ways of viewing the campaign. James Lull and Stephen Hinerman propose that “scandal is always shaped and given force by the technological means through which information is transmitted to the public as

news.”⁹ Therefore, media are often central in how the public perceives and tries to make sense of scandal. Lull and Hinerman also argue that evolving media technology plays an integral role in scandal by making it harder for those accused of wrongdoing to shape the message; therefore “the media scandal born of the penny press is still with us today, but its form changes continuously as media technologies expand.”¹⁰

The media’s influence was certainly felt in the election of 1884, and cartoonists were at the forefront of setting the rancorous tone. Political cartoonists not only reflected the tone of written and oral debates over the alleged improprieties of the candidates but many times became part of those debates as citizens reacted to the pictorial barbs being slung. In the 1884 campaign, cartoonists and their publications shaped debates over scandal in significant ways, reflecting their differences in audience, printing technologies, and resources.

This study examined 47 cartoons from Thomas Nast or *Puck’s* Joseph Keppler and Bernhard Gillam that portrayed James Blaine during the 1884 campaign and discovered that artists borrowed not only from previous political scandals and debates about cultural norms of the time but also from each other. This article will explain how the *Puck* artists differed from Nast in their approaches by using the concept of “scandal intertextuality,” which acknowledges that current scandal often is understood through the prism of past scandal.¹¹

To understand how cartoonists might make use of “scandal intertextuality,” one must consider the resources they employ in their work on a regular basis. Martin Medhurst and Michael DeSousa identified four major sources cartoonists use for subject matter. These serve both as an “inventional storehouse”¹² of rhetorical material for artists to create drawings and a toolbox for the audience in interpreting cartoons.¹³

The essential inventional source comes from political commonplaces, which can include issues such as the economy or foreign affairs, or more general themes such as polling and voting. Political commonplaces are key to the art form; indeed, a cartoon cannot be “political” without at least a passing reference to these types of themes.¹⁴

A second source cartoonists draw upon are candidates’ personal character traits, including morals, age, and ability to lead. These traits must exist, to some degree, in the public consciousness before they can be employed by the artist as rhetorical devices. For example, cartoons portraying Bill Clinton as untruthful could work only because a significant section of the population previously perceived the former president as playing fast and loose with the facts.¹⁵

A third source derives from situational themes, or transient episodes that occur during a campaign and are relevant to the audience for a limited period of time, such as when a candidate makes a gaffe during a public speech.¹⁶ Timeliness is crucial for these references to be useful to the cartoonist; if too much time has passed since the episode, the reference will have passed from public consciousness.

A fourth source, and one that is of particular interest to this study, are literary and cultural allusions, references that draw from mythology, popular culture, literature or folklore. Cartoons employing allusions draw from the political commonplaces with which all citizens are familiar, but also depend highly upon the reader knowing what cultural reference is being employed and also the connotation it suggests.¹⁷ This study gives clear evidence that “scandal intertextuality” operated as a type of cultural allusion during the 1884 campaign, with cartoonists relying on reviled purveyors of scandal past to draw attention to alleged current wrongdoing.

Puck and the Tattooed Man series

Puck has long been credited with creative brilliance for conceiving the idea of the “Tattooed Man,” but the idea of covering a political figure with tattoos was not new for cartoonists. *Puck* founder Joseph Keppler had drawn a cartoon of a tattoo-covered Ulysses S. Grant for *Frank Leslie’s Budget of Fun* in 1875, and the German *Puck* used the theme in 1876, with Columbia’s body, representing the United States, embellished with the names of recent public scandals.¹⁸ But in 1884 the device was used with such skill that its resonance changed the campaign rhetoric in unforeseen ways, influencing not only the graphic arts but prose and verse as well.

*Swing out your flags and banners,
And ye, ye brass-bands, blare,
Step forth, ye big processions,
And let the torches glare;
And shout for Blaine and Logan,
And shout again: Hurrah!
Hurrah! Hurrah for the Tattooed Man,
And the Man with the Iron Jaw!*¹⁹

Puck’s graphic tattooing of James Blaine began in April 1884 with “The National Dime Museum,” (Figure 1)²⁰ which depicted presidential hopefuls and other prominent politicians as sideshow freaks. “The National Dime Museum” was a product of the enclave, *Puck’s* forerunner of the modern newsroom planning meeting. As such, it is impossible to determine who was responsible for the idea of Blaine becoming the Tattooed Man. Each *Puck* staff member who discussed the issue in later years had a different answer,²¹ and an acquaintance of one of the artists even suggested that an office boy came up with the idea.²²

In “The National Dime Museum,” Blaine made his first appearance as the “Tattooed Man,” but he was hardly the focus of the cartoon – he was positioned in the lower-right corner among a multitude of other notable politicians. More prominent in the foreground were figures such as President Chester Arthur, portrayed as a snake charmer, and Tammany Hall boss John Kelly, appearing as a card-dealing pig. Regardless, Blaine

supporters took great offense at the caricature while it brought great delight to many, the demand outpacing the thousands of extra copies that were printed.²³

The furor, and the glee, over the Tattooed Man series reached their most intense proportions as the Republicans gathered for their convention in early June. “Phryné Before the Chicago Tribunal,” (Figure



Figure 1: “The National Dime Museum – Will Run During the Presidential Campaign,” *Puck*, 16 April 1884, 104-105.



Figure 2: “Phryné Before the Chicago Tribunal,” *Puck*, 4 June 1884, 216-217.

2),²⁴ arguably the most scandalous of the Tattooed Man cartoons, was published the week of the Republican nominating convention. The parody was based on a famous Jean-Léon Gérôme oil painting, “Phryné before the Areopagus,” that caused a stir itself in the Paris Salon of 1861. The original painting depicted Phryné, a famous courtesan in Athens during the fourth century B.C., who was under trial for bathing nude during a religious festival. When her defender and lover, the renowned rhetorician Hyperides, saw the jury was likely going to find Phryné guilty, he tore off her garment to demonstrate her “goddess-like” beauty.²⁵ The stunned jury acquitted her.²⁶

Bernhard Gillam’s parody featured *New York Tribune* editor Whitelaw Reid, Blaine’s most staunch supporter in the press, tearing a robe off the tattooed candidate in front of a group of Republicans gathered to judge Blaine’s fitness for candidacy. Reid tells the alternately stunned, angered, or bemused members, “Now gentlemen, don’t make any mistake in your decision! Here’s Purity and Magnetism for you – can’t be beat!” –

the “magnetism” coming in the form of a magnetic bib placed over Blaine’s bare chest, a pointed jab at Blaine’s reputation for a “magnetic” personality.

The effect of the parody was immediate. Crude reproductions of “Phryné” were distributed at convention hotels in Chicago; those handing them out were beaten up and their papers seized.²⁷ Circulation

of *Puck* skyrocketed, and the image of the “Tattooed Man,” in the assessment of Blaine’s biographer, “became the picture of Blaine in the minds of masses of people who were incapable of examining his record.”²⁸

The nomination of James G. Blaine as the Republican presidential candidate did not dissuade *Puck* from continuing the “Tattooed Man” series; if anything, the magazine appeared more determined than ever to keep Blaine from winning the election. The “Tattooed Man” continued appearing in a number of popular culture contexts, including the growing interest in athletics in the post-Civil War period. The metaphor of politics as a race, identified by Medhurst and DeSousa as a popular device for political cartoonists in the 1980s, was also used in 1884. In Keppler’s “He Can’t Beat His Own Record,”²⁹ (Figure 3), Blaine is losing the race to his own tattooed reputation. A *Puck* editorial in the same issue mocked Blaine with the words, “They call it your record. Pant and puff and strain – you shall not beat it in the race.”³⁰ In a similar manner, Gillam extended the

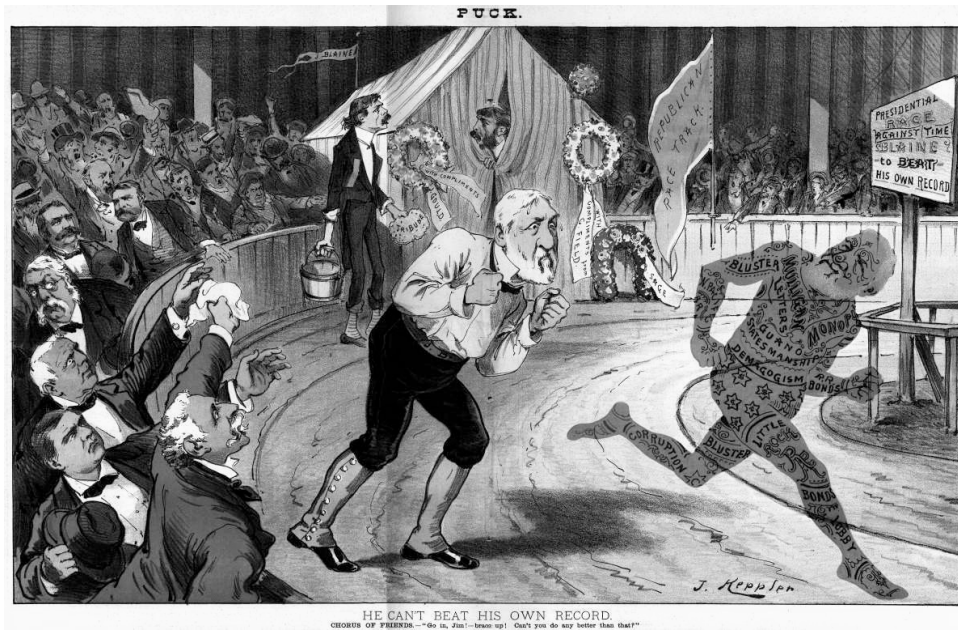


Figure 3: “He Can’t Beat His Own Record,” *Puck*, 30 July 1884, 344-345.

athletic metaphor to the increasingly popular spectator sport of boxing in “A Preliminary Set-To”³¹ (Figure 4). Making reference to a lackluster GOP performance in Ohio state elections in October despite campaigning in the state by Blaine, the cartoon portrays a battered “Tattooed Man” being held up by associate W.W. Phelps and Reid, while a fresh Cleveland jumps into the ring, Cleveland’s “New York” imprint on his shirt foreshadowing the importance of that state.

On first glance, Gillam seems to be making another simple sports metaphor in “The Political Courtney”³² (Figure 5), which builds on the high interest in rowing during the period. The cartoon makes reference to Blaine’s hectic campaign schedule and reports that his health was failing,³³ the fatigued GOP candidate being held up by Phelps, sponged by Reid and offered a possible remedy from a box of patent medicines by Republican campaign manager Stephen Elkins. Meanwhile, Cleveland waits calmly in his scull, accompanied by Mugwump Carl Schurz in front of the “Independent Boat House.”

The title, however, reveals another level of meaning and a further implication

of dishonesty. Charles Courtney was unbeaten as an amateur sculler, but his professional career was filled with scandal. Courtney took on Canadian champion Edward Hanlan in a highly publicized and controversial best-of-three series of races in 1879, Hanlan winning the first race under suspicious circumstances. On the morning of the

second race,

Courtney’s scull was discovered sawed in half, and he refused to race with a substitute boat, leading to more charges that the contest was under the influence of gamblers. In the third meeting, Courtney, trailing Hanlan badly, dropped out claiming illness from the heat.³⁴ In 1883, Courtney claimed that he and Hanlan had agreed to split the first two races, but when Hanlan reneged before the second race, Courtney sawed his own boat in half to protect friends who had bet on him.³⁵ Many observers, weary of Courtney’s continual shenanigans, refused to believe his latest version of what had happened. By July 1884, most professionals in the sport boycotted Courtney “because he has done so much to disgrace professional sculling.”³⁶

“The Political Courtney” is a subtle example of Lull and Hinerman call “scandal intertextuality,” the process of scandals informing each other.³⁷ As in the case of Courtney, cartoonists in 1884 often made these connections with figures and scandals that had little to do with the Republican candidate. In addition to the general connotation of dishonesty, the reference and the pose of Blaine connect

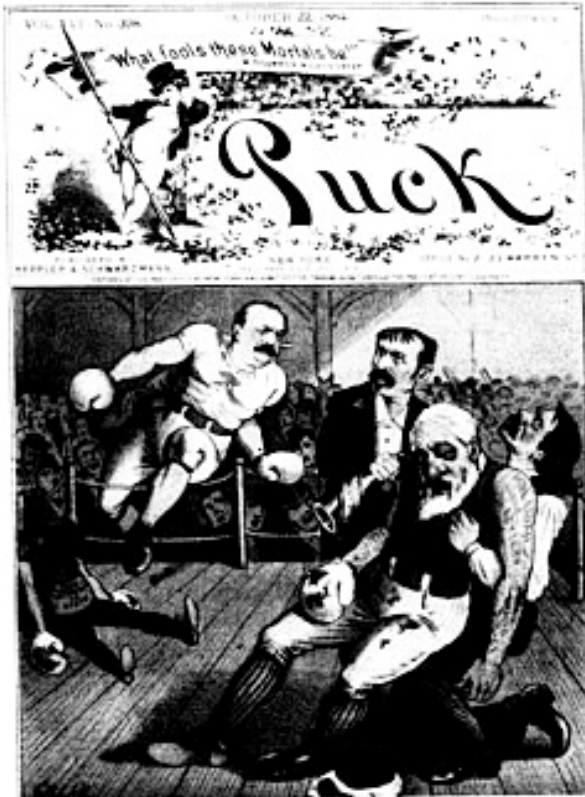


Figure 4: "A Preliminary Set-To," *Puck*, 22 October 1884, 113.

Courtney's convenient illness to Blaine's reported sunstroke when he was facing congressional investigation in the Little Rock and Fort Smith Railroad scandal.³⁸

The men surrounding Blaine and trying to revive him, however, represent a more apparent means of scandal intertextuality – current despised or discredited figures in the political realm are portrayed as being closely allied with the Republican candidate. Fanning Blaine is notorious Wall Street speculator Jay Gould, the head of Western Union. Former Secretary of the Navy George Robeson, who was accused of influence peddling during the Grant administration, stands behind Phelps.

This form of guilt by association was used extensively by cartoonists in the 1884 campaign, and not just at *Puck*, as this research will demonstrate. A staunch past Republican supporter was returning to the

fray, this time using scandal intertextuality to skewer the party's nominee.

The last hurrah: Attacks from Thomas Nast

In the 1880s, the image was perceived as being equal, if not greater, in importance than text in persuading the American populace, thanks in part to the brilliance of Thomas Nast. The late Boss Tweed, the notorious New York City political ringleader, had said years earlier that the written attacks on him were nothing compared to the impact of "those damn pictures" that Nast was drawing in *Harper's Weekly*.³⁹ Despite Nast's fame and success, he was considered at the ebb of his career by 1884. The success of *Puck* thrust its star staffers into the limelight, as many observers felt "Mr. Nast has been thrown into the shade by such artists as Keppler, Gillam and (Frederick) Opper. He has had his day."⁴⁰ Contributing to Nast's lackluster output was an increasingly difficult relationship with his employer. In part, Nast's displeasure stemmed from *Harper's* shift toward more family-oriented content and less emphasis on political reform.⁴¹ Feeling flush financially and increasingly at odds with *Harper's Weekly* over the editorial direction of the magazine and perceived meddling into his cartoons, Nast left *Harper's* in March 1883 and spent much of that year traveling to Europe and Canada.⁴² Despite the perceived decline of Nast's skills, many *Harper's* readers clamored for his return, and their wishes were granted in March of 1884.

The nomination of Blaine seemed to invigorate Nast, as he put aside his feuds with *Harper's Weekly* management and took aim at the nominee. The beginning of Nast's attack on Blaine during the 1884 campaign has been marked by "Too Heavy to Carry" (Figure 6),⁴³ which was drawn shortly after the GOP convention and showed a magnet dubbed "Magnetic Blaine" breaking the back of the Republican elephant. Nast's attacks on Blaine's



Figure 5: "The Political Courtney," *Puck*, 10 September 1884, 24-25.

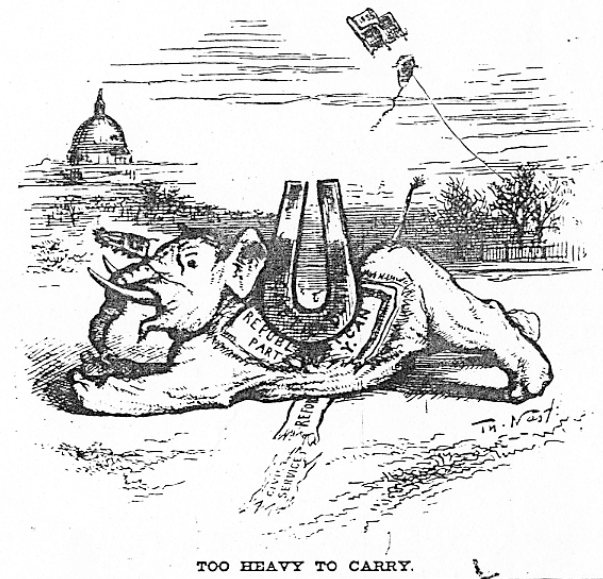


Figure 6. "Too Heavy to Carry." *Harper's Weekly*. 14 June 1884, 388.

character began well before the convention, however, with "Blaine Leans Toward Logan" (Figure 7).⁴⁴ John Logan, bound with taffy labeled "Blaine's True Strategy,"

is precariously near a ledge, with Blaine pushing him toward it. It referred to rumors that Blaine's reported support of Logan's candidacy was part of a deal to assure Blaine the secretary of state's job if Logan won the election; Nast suggested that Blaine would undermine the arrangement if Logan took office.⁴⁵

In terms of rhetorical disposition, or the graphic manner in which the artist puts ideas into an order that can be understood,⁴⁶ "Blaine Leans Toward Logan" reflects a use of contradiction, a device Nast used heavily throughout the campaign. Nast often played upon instances where Blaine seemingly changed his story over time, or where his actions and his words were incongruous. In "The Self-Convicted Knight" (Figure 8),⁴⁷ Nast used two images of Blaine to remind readers of how the candidate's story about the Mulligan Letters, a damaging set of correspondence between Blaine and railroad executives, allegedly changed over



Figure 7. "Blaine Leans Toward Logan." *Harper's Weekly*, 15 March 1884, 180.

time. A portrayal of Blaine begging on his knees stemmed from reports of his confrontation with the clerk who had saved the letters and released some of them to Congress and the press. Blaine allegedly gave the clerk a tearful request to see the letters one more time before absconding with them. An upright portrayal of Blaine reflected his current argument that there was nothing unscrupulous about the letters in the first place.

Contradiction is more implied in Nast's cartoons concerning the prohibition issue, on which Blaine seemed to be waffling. Blaine proclaimed the issue was a local one, but drew fire for avoiding a vote on a prohibition amendment in his home state, Maine. "At His Old Tricks Again Out West" (Figure 9)⁴⁸ shows Blaine waving his hands over a glass of water on one side of the table and a glass of beer on the other, as Prohibition candidate John St. John observes stage right. The caption, "I will now, in confidence, take in 50,000,000 people," suggests Blaine is sending different messages to different audiences: anti-liquor to the Western states and tolerance of alcohol to immigrants in the East.

The prohibition cartoon also gives readers a reminder of Blaine's alleged scandalous behavior through the recurring device of the carpetbag, this time reading "20 Years of Slight of Hand By Blaine." The device takes aim at Blaine's literary career as well, "20 Years" mocking his voluminous history of Congress. The device appears in many of the Nast cartoons, "20 Years" being the only type that remains the same throughout. In a cartoon showing Blaine with William Evarts (Figure 10),⁴⁹ who gave a speech supporting Blaine in the face of criticism about his nomination, the bag reads "20 Years For Himself By Blaine ('The Great American Statesman')." In another Nast



Figure 8. "The Self-Convicted Knight." *Harper's Weekly*, 18 October 1884, 679.



Figure 9. "At His Old Tricks Again Out West." *Harper's Weekly*, 4 October 1884, 654.

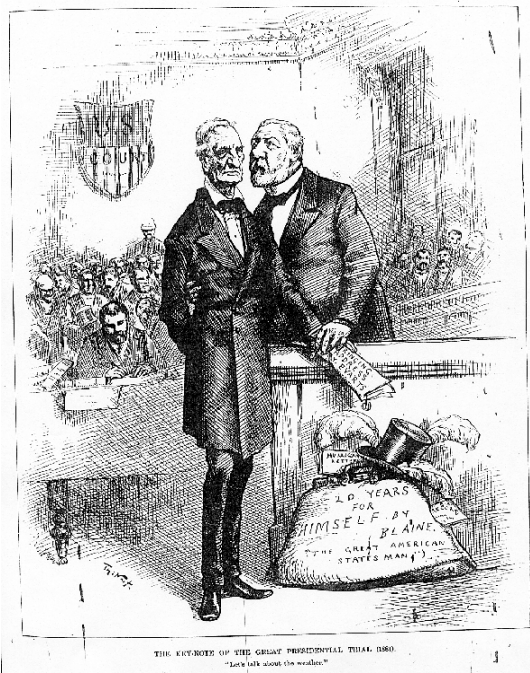


Figure 10. "The Key-Note of the Great Presidential Trial (1884)." *Harper's Weekly*, 2 August 1884, 493.

cartoon, Blaine tries to rake all of his scandals into a bag emblazoned with "No Dead-Head For 20 Years. That's Blaine" (Figure 11).⁵⁰ Blaine's past alleged ethical lapses are generally referred to by the carpetbag, serving to influence the reader's interpretation of his actions concerning the primary issue being addressed in each particular cartoon. As with the anti-Blaine cartoons in *Puck*, Nast used scandal intertextuality not only between alleged Blaine misdeeds past and present but with previous scandals and scoundrels, many having no direct relationship to the candidate.

A prime example is Nast reaching back to his glory days and associating Blaine with a scoundrel who was not even alive: Boss Tweed. "Above Petty Personal Issues" (Figure 12) mocks an assertion by the *Tribune* that certain issues should not be considered by voters. In the caption, Blaine says, "The mere personality of a candidate for President is of small consequence," while a ghostly Tweed, in the background, replies, "I ought to have run for the Presidency."⁵¹ "Grave Regrets" (Figure 13) follows a similar theme, the jailed Tweed lamenting, "If I hadn't been *too previous* [emphasis included] . . . what a brilliant, intense American statesman I might have been."⁵² The *Chicago Times* took a cue from the cartoons and chimed in that "[Tweed] had all the dishonest qualifications essential in a Republican candidate, and a dash and boldness that are sadly wanting in the present leader of the party."⁵³

Nast more subtly linked Blaine to Tweed in "Very Democratic" (Figure 14),⁵⁴ the title itself implying that the GOP candidate shared much in common with past prominent figures of the other major party. The cartoon again takes a swipe at Blaine's recently published two-volume history of Congress, portraying the candidate leaning on two books including the "Record Against Blaine" and "Letters and Articles Against Blaine." The caption has a defiant Blaine saying, "Well – what

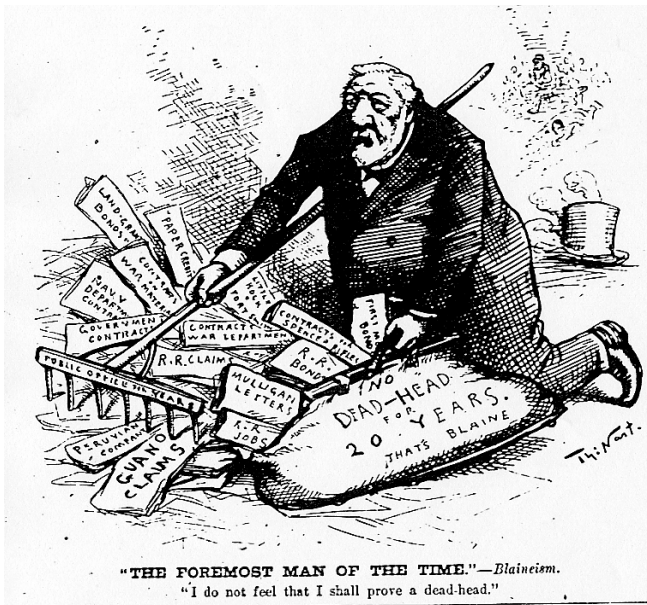


Figure 11. "The Foremost Man of the Time."—Blaineism." *Harper's Weekly*, 16 August 1884, 542.



The Spectator or Turner. "If I had's been so generous and had only belonged to the Republican party, and had been a big enough man to reject nomination, what a brilliant, talented American statesman I might have been!"
 T. G. B. "And besides, I had the Star Route Defender, Don Inoué, christen me the *Practical Kevlar*, and have the *Yankee* Lord I've elected me through thick and thin."

Figure 13. "Grave Regrets." *Harper's Weekly*, 27 September 1884, 627.

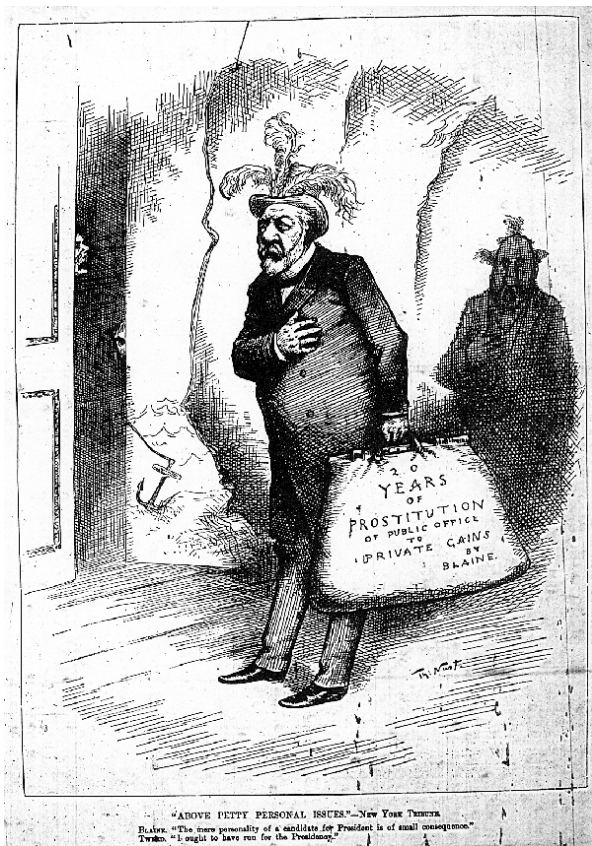


Figure 12. "Above Petty Personal Issues." *Harper's Weekly*, 1 November 1884, 722.

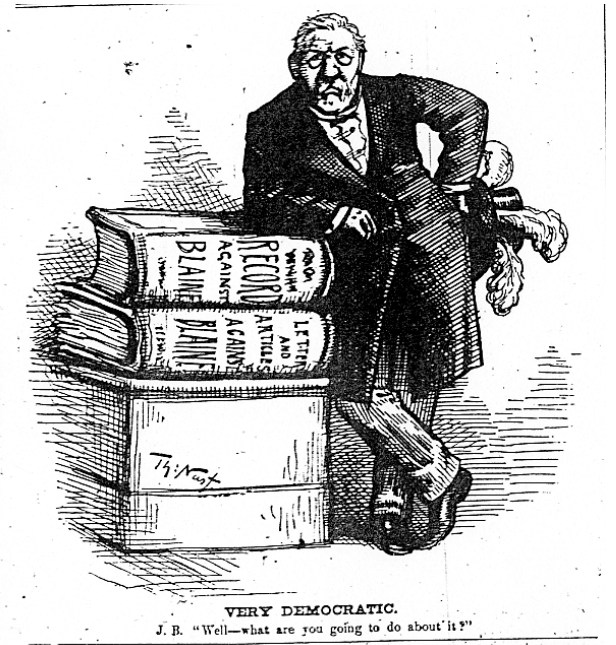


Figure 14. "Very Democratic." *Harper's Weekly*, 28 June 1884, 420.



Figure 15: “Blaine Will Be Vindicated in November,” *Puck*, 24 September 1884, 56-57.

are you going to do about it?” the exact words Nast made a mantra in his campaign against Tweed in the 1870s. The cartoon suggests a similar arrogance and wanton flaunting of the rules that were so apparent in Nast’s portrayals of Tweed.

Even more interesting is that the cartoon scandal intertextuality between Blaine and Tweed was played out in publications other than *Harper’s Weekly*. Both Tweed and the “What Are You Going To Do About It?” query was co-opted by Nast’s former co-worker Gillam in one of *Puck*’s better-known “Tattooed Man” cartoons. “Blaine Will Be Vindicated In November” (Figure 15),⁵⁵ another rebuttal to a *Tribune* assertion, attacks Blaine’s public morality on many levels. Reid addresses Blaine, his pose undermined by the tattoos on his legs and the famous anti-Tweed motto on his pedestal, while a sorrowful Tweed appears in the background. The sign Tweed carries, “Why Wasn’t I Vindicated? I Cast My Anchor to Windward Too!!” refers both to the *Tribune* prediction and an infamous sentence in the

Mulligan Letters. Blaine’s most damaging letter to railroad executives is represented on two pieces of paper near the pedestal with “Burn This.” Gillam makes another nod toward Nast by parroting the mocking of Blaine’s book – two volumes near the pedestal are entitled “20 Years No Deadhead” and “20 Years Casting My Anchor To

Windward.”

“Blaine Will Be Vindicated In November” goes well beyond merely implicating Blaine with Tweed. A prison in the background, labeled “The Home of Some Men Who Have Made Themselves Useful in Various Channels,” makes another direct reference to the Mulligan Letters and suggests where Blaine should be residing, in the opinion of *Puck*. The men on the left are introduced in the caption as “Chorus Of Non-Magnetic Swindlers,” interested in clearing their charges as well. These men of financial impropriety – some convicted, others merely charged in the court of public opinion – hold signs with Mulligan Letter excerpts such as “I Would Sacrifice A Great Deal To Get A Settlement,” in defense of their own actions and asking for vindication, in effect trying to write their own alibi, just as Blaine had attempted in the most damaging Mulligan Letter. The “non-magnetic swindlers” reflect an often-used technique by *Puck*, tying Blaine’s scandals to a host of figures publicly accused of wrongdoing as well.

**From many to few:
Connecting Blaine to scoundrels**

Puck artists tended to cast a wider net than Nast in associating Blaine with public scoundrels. Part of the reason stems from stylistic differences dictated by the different media. Nast's cartoons generally had less space to get their message across and were woodcuts in black and white, reasons all for an economy of line and characters. In contrast, *Puck's* primary cartoons took a full page or an entire double-truck and were produced in lively color, giving their artists room and spirit for a multitude of characters. In fact, much of the audience's enjoyment of a primary *Puck* cartoon came in trying to determine who all the figures were.⁵⁶

An example of how *Puck* used a large group of figures to imply scandalous behavior by Blaine is Gillam's "His Boasted Magnetism – And The Kind of Metal It Attracts,"⁵⁷ (Figure 16) which made light of Blaine's storied personality, showing the "Magnetic Man" attracting a multitude of such reviled figures as Robeson and robber baron Cyrus Field. Keppler took a similar approach in "The Writing on the Wall,"⁵⁸ (Figure 17) a parody of the biblical Feast of Belshazzar.⁵⁹ The cartoon heralded the defection of usually pro-GOP periodicals such as *Harper's Weekly*, with Blaine and Reid trembling at the sight of the words "Republican Revolt" when they appear on the wall, the two men having only a copy of Reid's *Tribune* to protect them. The members of the dinner party include

a number of the figures in "His Boasted Magnetism," but also *Chicago Tribune* editor Joseph Medill, who at the time was corresponding with Blaine about the potential damaging effect *Puck* was having on the German vote.⁶⁰

Puck did not always have to depict entire bodies in order to make clear the connotation that Blaine was associated with a host of questionable characters. "A Big Job"⁶¹ (Figure 18) portrayed Reid as a shoeshine boy on a train loaded with distasteful political and business figures. Aside from the obvious connotations about Reid's qualifications as a journalist, the cartoon charges the *Tribune* with supporting a host of scandalous figures. Many of the characters in cartoons such as "His Boasted Magnetism" are present, each represented by a pair of boots covered with mud, the dirt labeled with his most infamous scandal. Blaine, behind the curtain, reaches out to drop his boots covered with "Little Rock Dirt." Inside one of Logan's boots is a "Whip for Runaway Niggers," referencing Logan's support of Illinois legislation in the 1850s that would



Figure 16: "His Boasted Magnetism and the Kind of Metal It Attracts," *Puck*, 25 June 1884, 264-265.



Figure 17: "The Writing on the Wall," *Puck*, 18 June 1884, 248-249.



Figure 18: "A Big Job," *Puck*, 16 July 1884, 320.

prosecute runaway slaves and potentially sell them at auction.⁶²

The possible negative outcome of these alleged associations among Blaine and other scoundrels was made somewhat more specific in "The Honor of the Country in Danger"⁶³ (Figure 19). The cartoon was published the same day as Blaine's disastrous meeting with clergy, where a preacher infamously called Democrats the party of "Rum, Romanism and

Rebellion," and the Delmonico's dinner, where Blaine dined with reviled industrialists of the Gilded Age. The Gillam cartoon included Greenback-Labor candidate Ben Butler in a clown suit reaching in his pocket for a "Bargain With Blaine," charging that Butler's candidacy was a sham to take votes away from Cleveland. In fact, the GOP funneled \$5,000 a week into the campaign, hoping Butler's appeal to the Irish and the working class would pull votes away from Cleveland in urban areas.⁶⁴ Behind Blaine are Stephen W. Dorsey, acquitted in the Star Route scandal involving inappropriate assignment of postal routes a few years earlier, and Gould, holding a paper reading "Four Supreme Court Judges To Be Appointed By The Next President," a suggestion that Blaine would select pro-monopoly judges. A scornful Washington and Lincoln watch over the presidential throne, a sign above it asking whether the first hundred years of the government that begun with Washington in the "sacred chair" would "end in disgrace" with Blaine occupying it.



Figure 19. "The Honor of the Country in Danger." *Puck* 29 October 1884, 136-137.

While *Puck* tended to link Blaine with numerous figures of scandal, Nast largely focused on Tweed or Gould, one of the most reviled robber barons. The emphasis on Gould, in large part, stemmed from yet another piece of correspondence unearthed during the campaign, this time an 1880 letter by Senator George Edmunds urging Republicans not to nominate Blaine because of his close ties to Gould.⁶⁵ Edmunds' charge that whenever senators tried to curtail Gould's power, "James G. Blaine has invariably started up from behind Gould's breastworks, musket in hand," is graphically portrayed in Nast's cartoon "The Issue Of Protection to

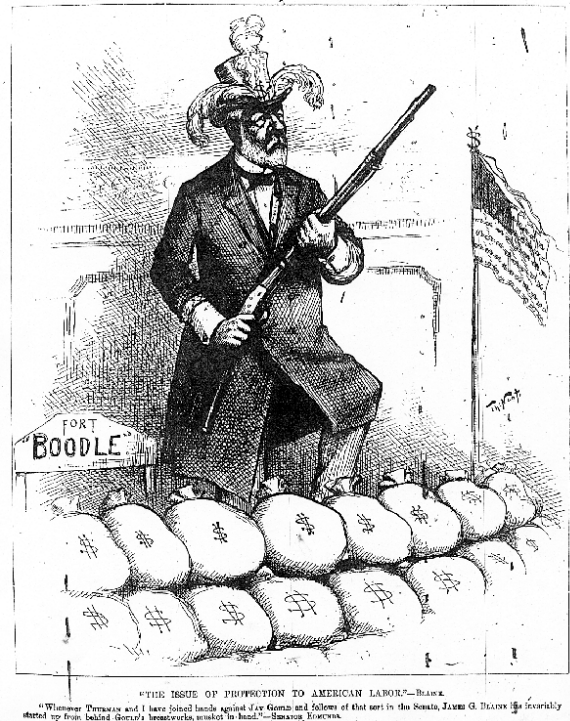


Figure 20. "The Issue Of Protection to American Labor." *Harper's Weekly*. 20 September 1884, 611.

American Labor" (Figure 20),⁶⁶ Blaine watching the perimeter of "Fort Boodle."

As in *Puck's* "The Honor of the Country in Danger," Nast at times portrayed Gould lurking behind the scenes, letting Blaine do the dirty work on issues such as the tariff. Blaine presented the tariff as a way to protect American workers; his opponents charged that it only protected rich industrialists such as Gould. Such depictions also included suggestions that Butler was conspiring with both Blaine and Gould. The theme appears twice in the final issue of *Harper's Weekly* before election day. "Highway Politics" (Figure 21)⁶⁷ shows Blaine and Butler mugging a working man for his vote while Gould observes from a safe distance. "The Blaine Tariff Fraud" (Figure 22)⁶⁸ depicts Blaine removing his Butler mask as Gould cowers behind him, hand in Blaine's back pocket, as the angry working men cry, "Duped, by gosh!"

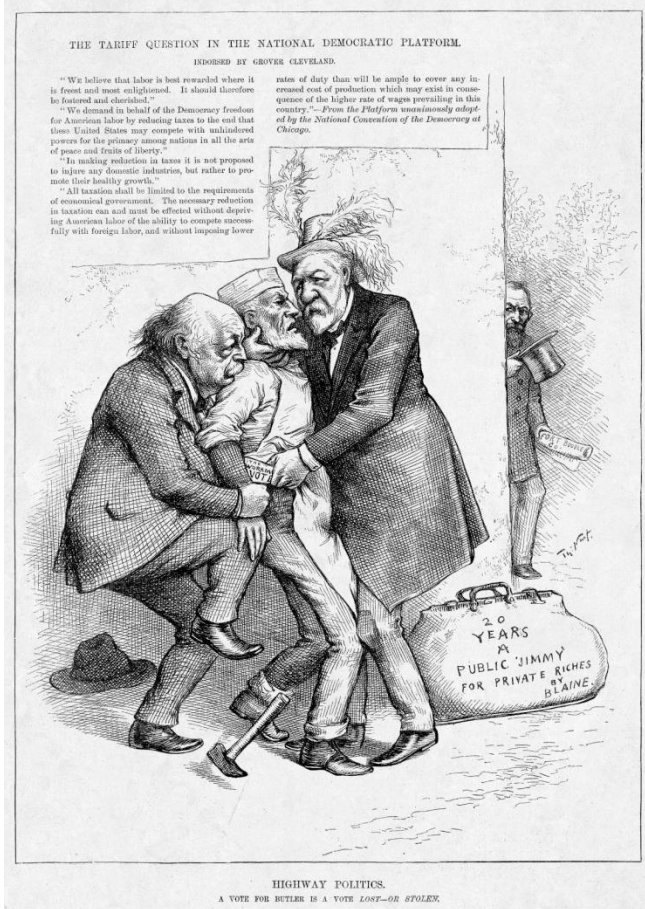


Figure 21. "Highway Politics." *Harper's Weekly*, 1 November 1884, 726.

Conclusion

While *Puck* and *Harper's Weekly* differed greatly in their style, audience and approach, they both effectively contextualized Blaine's scandals in a way that resonated with the voting public. Thomas Nast, on the national political stage for the last time, connected the GOP nominee with two of the most powerful symbols of corruption in the post-Civil War era, Jay Gould and Boss Tweed. His simple black-and-white imagery proved that economy could still be an effective tool in political satire. The upstart *Puck* also connected Blaine with other scoundrels but tended to do so in mass, reflecting the publication's resources of space and color. In common, these cartoonists drew upon past icons of impropriety to make clear the

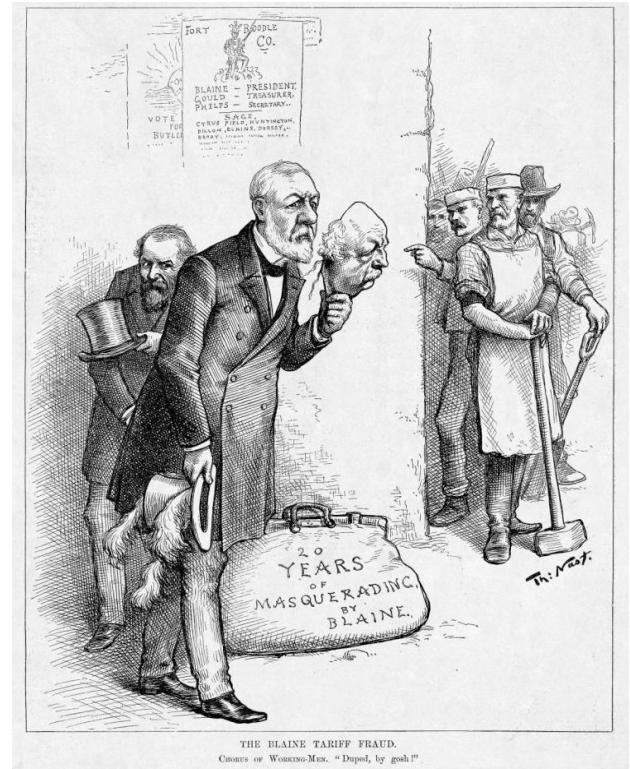


Figure 22. "The Blaine Tariff Fraud." *Harper's Weekly*, 1 November 1884, 715.

current moral shortcomings of Blaine, a case of these artists using "scandal intertextuality" as a cultural allusion to create their rhetorical messages.

A comparison of anti-Blaine cartoons by Keppler, Gillam and Nast shows clearly how the form of the medium impacted cartoonists' ability to pull together these "inventive resources." Nast, often restricted to one panel and always without the device of color, generally made his arguments by relying on the cultural allusions of Tweed or Gould as crook, and paired them with situational themes to amplify attacks on Blaine. Nast seized upon fleeting episodes in the campaign, such as the release of a letter alleging that Blaine was a cohort of the reviled Gould, as examples of the GOP candidate's lack of fitness for office.

While *Puck* artists made great use of brief campaign episodes as well, the magazine's primary cartoons tended to pull

all of the inventional resource categories together, taking advantage of the new medium's characteristics of space and color. A prime example is "The Political Courtney," which showed a fatigued Blaine being fanned by supporters at a boating race. The *Puck* cartoon took the political commonplace of "campaign as race," placed it within the situational theme of a reported Blaine illness, made the cultural allusion generally to the popular sport of rowing and more particularly to the scandalous sculler Charles Courtney, and tied it all to Blaine's alleged lack of moral character, as evidenced not only by the tattoos on his body but by the questionable company he keeps on the dock.

These examples illustrate just how different cartooning in the new comic weekly was in comparison with that of Nast. In a culture that was becoming more fractious, the comic weeklies could toss out many more referential hooks to the audience, making it more likely that a reader would bite on at least some part of a major cartoon. Cartoonists in the tradition

of Nast relied on very few references, leaving open the possibility that a reader could be left out of a cartoon's joke completely if he or she were not familiar with the specific episode around which the artist built the graphic argument.

This study also suggests that cartoonists influenced each other during the 1884 presidential campaign. As most strongly indicated by a comparison of anti-Blaine cartoons, publications such as *Puck* and *Harper's Weekly* informed and influenced each other in a process of "scandal intertextuality." As Nast reached back to his peak of influence, invoking the memory of New York's late Boss Tweed in order to give Blaine the taint of scandal, *Puck* joined in, not only portraying Tweed as Nast did, but invoking key phrases from *Harper's Weekly* that accompanied Nast attacks of years earlier. While Nast's cartoons certainly had an impact, "the shafts of *Puck*, in particular, appeared to have a perfectly maddening predilection for the tendon Achilles."

Notes

¹ *Pall Mall Gazette*, 30 August 1884, 5.

² *New York Times*, 31 August 1884, 7.

³ In the most damaging correspondence, Blaine asked a business associate to write a letter vindicating the legislator's actions and enclosed a draft of how the letter should read. The correspondence infamously closed, "Burn this letter." David Saville Muzzey, *James G. Blaine, A Political Idol of Other Days*, American Political Leaders Series (New York: Dodd Mead & Company, 1934), 303.

⁴ Most scholarship on political cartooning in the 1884 campaign has focused on attacks against Blaine, particularly the "Tattooed Man" series in *Puck*, which portrayed Blaine as a Tattooed Man in a Dime Museum. See, e.g., Samuel J. Thomas, "The Tattooed Man Caricatures and the Presidential Campaign of 1884," *Journal of American Culture* 10, no. 4 (1987): 1-20; Everette E. Dennis and Christopher Allen, "*Puck*, the Comic Weekly," *Journalism History* 6, no. 1 (1979): 2-7, 13; Richard Samuel West, *Satire on Stone: The Political Cartoons of Joseph Keppler* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1988); Richard Samuel West, "Laboring to Save Fools, The Presidential Contest of 1884 As Seen in the Pages of *Puck* and *Judge*," *Target* (Winter 1983): 14-20; Samuel A. Tower, *Cartoons and Lampoons: The Art of Political Satire* (New York: Julian Messner, 1982), 140-43; William Murrell and Whitney Museum of American Art, *A History of American Graphic Humor* (New York: Whitney Museum of American Art, 1938), 74-83; and Paul Somers, *Editorial Cartooning and Caricature: A Reference Guide*, American Popular Culture Series, (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1998), 9-11.

⁵ Jean Folkerts and Dwight L. Teeter, Jr., *Voices of a Nation: A History of Mass Media in the United States*, 3^d edition (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 1998), 246.

⁶ Folkerts and Teeter, 251.

⁷ *New York Daily Tribune*, 27 May 1880, 4.

⁸ *Puck*'s innovations in lithographic color printing became so renowned that thousands lined up at the 1893 World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago to see a demonstration of the process and meet the innovator, Joseph Keppler. West, *Satire on Stone*, 2. For other observers of the period, the technique produced cartoons that were sensational and "lurid as a country-circus bill." *Chicago Daily News*, 22 February 1894, 4.

⁹ James Lull and Stephen Hinerman, "The Search for Scandal," in *Media Scandals: Morality and Desire in the Popular Culture Marketplace* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), 7.

¹⁰ Lull and Hinerman, "The Search for Scandal," 7-8.

¹¹ Lull and Hinerman, "The Search for Scandal," 17.

¹² Martin J. Medhurst and Michael A. DeSousa, "Political Cartoons as Rhetorical Form: A Taxonomy of Graphic Discourse," *Communication Monographs* 48, no. 3 (1981): 204.

¹³ Medhurst and DeSousa, "Political Cartoons as Rhetorical Form," 205.

¹⁴ Medhurst and DeSousa, "Political Cartoons as Rhetorical Form," 200.

¹⁵ Medhurst and DeSousa, "Political Cartoons as Rhetorical Form," 201.

¹⁶ Medhurst and DeSousa, "Political Cartoons as Rhetorical Form," 202.

¹⁷ Medhurst and DeSousa, "Political Cartoons as Rhetorical Form," 201; and Michael A. DeSousa and Martin J. Medhurst, "Political Cartoons and American Culture: Significant Symbols of Campaign 1980," *Studies in Visual Communication* 8 no. 1 (1982): 86.

¹⁸ West, *Satire on Stone*, 96, 280; and Frank Weitenkampf, *American Graphic Art* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1924), 236.

¹⁹ *Puck*, 18 June 1884, 242. "Iron Jaw" refers to the propensity of GOP vice-presidential candidate John Logan for butchering the English language.

²⁰ *Puck*, 16 April 1884, 104-105.

²¹ West, *Satire on Stone*, 280.

²² William J. Arkell, *Old Friends and Some Acquaintances* (Los Angeles: By the author, 1927), 74-5.

²³ West, *Satire on Stone*, 280. The *New York Dispatch* reported that supporters of President Arthur and presidential candidate George Edmunds of Vermont ordered 100,000 copies of *Puck*. *New York Daily Tribune*, 16 May 1884, 4.

²⁴ *Puck*, 4 June 1884, 216-17.

²⁵ Joachim Heusinger von Waldegg, "Jean-Léon Gérôme's 'Phryné vor den Richtern,'" *Jahrbuch Der Hamburger Kunstsammlungen* 17 (1972), 123-124.

²⁶ The reason for her acquittal has been explained at least two ways. Thomas says it was because the jury was overwhelmed by her beauty. Thomas, "The Tattooed Man Caricatures," 4. Other accounts say it was because jurors superstitiously feared the wealthy Phryné. *HarpWeek*. <<http://elections.harpweek.com/1Cartoons/cartoon-1884-Medium.asp?UniqueID=2&Year=1884>> accessed 8 November 2001.

²⁷ Mark W. Summers, *Rum, Romanism, and Rebellion: The Making of a President 1884* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2000), 136. Despite the furor, *Puck* founder and chief cartoonist Joseph Keppler attended the convention, apparently not recognized by the delegates. *Ibid*.

²⁸ Muzzey, 277.

²⁹ *Puck*, 30 July 1884, 344-345.

³⁰ *Puck*, 30 July 1884, 338.

³¹ *Puck*, 22 October 1884, 113.

³² *Puck*, 10 September 1884, 24-25.

³³ The reports included an article in the *New York World* about a prominent physician who claimed to have recently met Blaine and from simple observation determined the candidate had Bright's disease and would not live out his term. *New York World*, 24 September 1884, 5.

³⁴ Thomas C. Mendenhall, *A Short History of American Rowing* (Boston: Charles River Books, 1943) 13-14.

³⁵ *New York Times*, 9 August 1883, 4.

³⁶ *New York Times*, 13 July 1884, 3.

³⁷ Lull and Hinerman, "The Search for Scandal," 17.

³⁸ Blaine suffered a heat stroke on June 11, 1876 that delayed the congressional proceedings, and he was selected to fill the unexpired term of Senator Justin S. Morrill on July 10, effectively ending the House inquiry into the scandal. Muzzey. *James G. Blaine, A Political Idol of Other Days*, 99-100, 115.

³⁹ Much of Tweed's concern with Nast's cartoons centered on the fact much of his working class, immigrant constituency could not read, but they had little trouble deciphering visual attacks. Tower, *Cartoons and Lampoons*, 121. The saliency of Nast's images not only crossed cultural boundaries but geopolitical ones as well. In 1875, Tweed escaped from jail and fled to Spain; he was arrested by customs officials there who recognized him from Nast's cartoons. Somers, *Editorial Cartooning and Caricature: A Reference Guide*, 7.

⁴⁰ *New York World*, 14 June 1884, 4.

⁴¹ J. Chal Vinson, *Thomas Nast, Political Cartoonist* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 1967), 35.

⁴² Albert Bigelow Paine, *Th. Nast, His Period and His Pictures* (New York, London: The Macmillan Company; Macmillan & Co. Ltd., 1904), 464-469.

⁴³ *Harper's Weekly*, 14 June 1884, 388.

⁴⁴ *Harper's Weekly*, 15 March 1884, 180.

⁴⁵ *HarpWeek* <<http://elections.harpweek.com/1Cartoons/cartoon-1884-Medium.asp?UniqueID=3&Year=1884>> accessed March 7, 2002.

⁴⁶ Medhurst and DeSousa, "Political Cartoons as Rhetorical Form," 205-206.

⁴⁷ *Harper's Weekly*, 18 October 1884, 679.

⁴⁸ *Harper's Weekly*, 4 October 1884, 654.

⁴⁹ *Harper's Weekly*, 2 August 1884, 493.

⁵⁰ *Harper's Weekly*, 16 August 1884, 542.

⁵¹ *Harper's Weekly*, 1 November 1884, 722.

⁵² *Harper's Weekly*, 27 September 1884, 627.

⁵³ *New York World*, 15 October 1884, 4.

⁵⁴ *Harper's Weekly*, 28 June 1884, 420.

⁵⁵ *Puck*, 24 September 1884, 56-57.

⁵⁶ Roger A. Fischer, "Nast, Keppler and the Mass Market," *Inks* 4 no. 2 (May 1997), 29.

⁵⁷ *Puck*, 25 June 1884, 264-265.

⁵⁸ *Puck*, 18 June 1884, 248-249.

⁵⁹ In the biblical story, the king of Babylon sees a message of doom after sacrilegious use of sacred objects, and he is killed the same night. Thomas, "The Tattooed Man Caricatures," 6.

⁶⁰ Joseph Medill to James G. Blaine, 13 June 1884, Blaine Family Papers, microfilm, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

⁶¹ *Puck*, 16 July 1884, 320.

⁶² Thomas, "The Tattooed Man Caricatures," 8.

⁶³ *Puck*, 29 October 1884, 136-137.

⁶⁴ Summers, *Rum, Romanism and Rebellion*, 224, 227.

⁶⁵ *New York World*, 18 October 1884, 5.

⁶⁶ *Harper's Weekly*, 20 September 1884, 611.

⁶⁷ *Harper's Weekly*, 1 November 1884, 726.

⁶⁸ *Harper's Weekly*, 1 November 1884, 715.