

THE PALIMPSEST

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VOL. XLIX

ISSUED IN NOVEMBER 1968

No. 11

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Cartoons in Presidential Elections

Cartoons have played a dynamic role in crystallizing the thinking of Iowans. Although primarily a development of the 20th Century so far as Iowa newspapers are concerned, citizens of the Hawkeye State had ample opportunity to enjoy cartoons in the ever-popular *Harper's Weekly* and *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper*.

Abraham Lincoln was warmly praised and bitterly castigated throughout his presidency. The cartoons that appeared during the campaign of 1864 in *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper* could very well have been drawn for the campaigns of the 1960's. Thus, the presentation of an olive branch to Lincoln in 1864 might well have been a 1968 Hippie approaching President Lyndon B. Johnson for the same purpose.

The Republican Convention of 1880 convened in Chicago and nominated James A. Garfield and Chester A. Arthur. The Democrats met in Cincinnati and nominated Hancock and English. The Greenback Party met in Chicago and nominated

James B. Weaver of Iowa. Such campaign issues as reconstruction and corruption could still attract listeners, and the waving of the "bloody shirt" was not soon to be forgotten. The attitude of Cartoonist Thomas Nast toward James B. Weaver is shown in several cartoons—the rag doll clutched to the donkey's (Weaver's) breast and stuffed in the defeated and dejected Weaver's carpetbag affording Nast an excellent opportunity to use *A Midsummer Night's Dream* as the vehicle for his satire. The rag doll was the symbol of contempt of those opposing the issuance of more greenbacks.

In his sketch of Nast in the *Dictionary of American Biography*, Allan Nevins declares:

Throughout the seventies and until 1886 Nast remained one of the greatest influences in American journalism. While the policies of *Harper's Weekly* were dictated by G. W. Curtis and Fletcher Harper, Nast's pen was the most distinctive element in the journal. He made Greeley ludicrous in the campaign of 1872, mercilessly ridiculed the political hobgoblin of Grant's "Caesarism," defended Hayes against Tilden, and forsook the Republican party only when Blaine was nominated. The Tammany tiger, which he had popularized, was borrowed from the American Club emblem, but the Democratic donkey and Republican elephant were his own inventions, both becoming fixed in his pictures in 1874.

Perhaps the most graphic cartoon associated with the campaign of 1864 appeared in *Harper's Weekly* on September 3. It is labeled "Compromise with the South" and shows a Confederate sol-

dier shaking the hand of a Union soldier on crutches, whose right leg has been amputated above the knee. The right foot of the Confederate is firmly and disdainfully planted on a grave over which a stone has been planted with the inscription "In Memory of the Union Heroes Who Fell in a Useless War." Columbia kneels in sorrow, over the grave in 1864, as she very definitely would in 1968. *Harper's Weekly* dedicated the cartoon to the "Chicago Convention" that nominated McClellan. The analogy to Vietnam and 1968 need scarcely be mentioned.

In 1884 Thomas Nast lampooned James G. Blaine, who had been hailed as a "Plumed Knight" by Colonel Robert G. Ingersoll at the National Republican Convention in 1876. Ingersoll (1833-1899), a lawyer, lecturer, and writer, was famous as an opponent of Christian orthodoxy. According to Ingersoll: "Like an armed warrior, like a plumed knight, James G. Blaine marched down the halls of the American Congress and threw his shining lance full and fair against the brazen forehead of every defamer of this country and maligner of its honor." A youthful Iowa admirer of Blaine—Jonathan Prentiss Dolliver—may have cringed but he never lost his enthusiasm for the "Man from Maine."

Nast used Blaine's ponderous two-volume book, *Twenty Years of Congress 1861-1881*, as the signboard for his vitriolic attacks on Blaine, as-

sociating him with Tammany Hall and the ghost of the infamous Boss Tweed, who died in 1878. Such cartoons played no small part in Blaine's defeat for the presidency by Grover Cleveland in 1884. Apparently the editors of *Harper's Weekly* did not agree with the attacks levied by Thomas Nast on the Republican Party for Nast was cast adrift in 1886 and had rough sailing the remainder of his life.

During the 20th Century Iowa newspapers devoted an increasing amount of space to cartoons. This was particularly true during presidential campaigns. Thus, when a Third Party emerged, such as "Teddy" Roosevelt and his Progressive, or "Bull Moose" Party, cartoonists could fairly revel in the issues and personalities. The differences between Taft, Roosevelt, and Wilson in temperament and personality were readily apparent to contemporary cartoonists.

During the next eight years, from 1912 to 1920, cartoonists found plenty of subject matter in the revolutions below the Mexican border, World War I, Women's Rights, the Temperance Crusade, the League of Nations, the rising and falling prices as they affected labor and industry, and the "Return to Normalcy" under President Warren G. Harding in the campaign of 1920. The decade of the 1920's that ended in the stock market crash in 1929 was replete with excitement on the home front and had its moments of intense drama as

Fascism and Communism reared their ugly heads on the horizon.

In the campaign of 1924, the dynamic Robert LaFollette waged an exciting campaign, losing out to the less colorful but obviously more stable Calvin Coolidge, in whom the electorate had faith. The campaign gained added attention because of the *Literary Digest* presidential straw vote, which had originated in 1920. The 1924 *Literary Digest* straw vote was accurate whereas Cartoonist Kirby of the *New York World* was completely in error in predicting the number of states that would vote for LaFollette.

In 1948 the ever-colorful Harry Truman waged an uphill campaign against Thomas Dewey, the Republican standard bearer. Two stronger than usual presidential aspirants added a third and fourth party—Strom Thurmond and his States Rights followers from the South and Henry A. Wallace of Iowa, who led a Progressive Party. Both men garnered over a million votes but this did not compare with either the "Bull Moose" vote of 1912 or the Progressive vote under LaFollette in 1924.

Americans showed a preference for "Ike" in the 1950's. A relative calm prevailed on the Home Front marred by only an occasional ripple across the seas. The campaign of 1960 ended in a dead heat between John F. Kennedy and Richard M. Nixon, the former winning by a slim plurality

when some tardy votes from the Chicago area clinched the presidency for the Democratic aspirant.

The assassination of JFK, the inauguration of LBJ and his "Great Society," the immersion of the United States in a costly winless war in Vietnam, and the steady shrinking in value of the dollar were signals of an impending about-face. Riots, rape, and robbery, when coupled with the wanton destruction of whole blocks of property in our larger cities, caused a gradual revulsion against those in power and the rise of a powerful "Third Party" at the start of the Presidential Campaign in 1968. It was the fourth time in the 20th Century that a "Third Party" had risen and shown sufficient power to cause voters to wonder whether Congress might be called upon to name the winner. Over the years Congress and the Electoral College have been the subject of many cartoons in Presidential Campaigns featuring Third Parties.

J. N. "Ding" Darling, who began his career as a cartoonist on the *Sioux City Journal* shortly after the turn of the 20th Century, has depicted the spirit and sometimes the lack of spirit, in the American political, economic, and social scene. His cartoons during the crucial campaign of 1920, when President Wilson found the Peace Treaty and his League of Nations in grave danger of rejection by a war-weary Nation, graphically portray the problems facing the Chief Executive. The

message of the cartoon, like the editorial or the news release, only too frequently fell on deaf ears.

The apathy of the voter in 1920, or in 1968, is reflected in the cartoon showing attendance "at the caucus" compared with the crowd gathered to watch a "human fly" climb a skyscraper. Almost any sports event today would keep many from a caucus. In 1968 it was estimated that approximately 22,000,000 eligible voters remained away from the polls, a shocking albeit typical number of absentees who failed to exercise their franchise at the ballot box.

The nominating speeches of 1920 would bear a striking resemblance to those of 1968. Democrats are always sure to refer to the party of Jefferson, Jackson, and Franklin Delano Roosevelt. Republicans, on the other hand, will never fail to exhort their listeners to follow the lead of Lincoln, "Teddy" Roosevelt, Hoover, or Eisenhower. On October 17, 1861, President Lincoln wrote Major Ramsey: "The lady bearer of this says that she has two sons who want to work. Set them at it if possible. Wanting to work is so rare a want that it should be encouraged."

Despite the wide disparity of their background and experience it can be said that all presidents, and presidential aspirants, have risen to this exalted position by dint of hard work. Personality, character, and experience are important, as well as the ability to express oneself both orally and

in writing. Some men have been overwhelming favorites. Others, equally great, have barely won the honor after a heated campaign—such as the Nixon-Kennedy contest of 1960 or the Nixon-Humphrey contest of 1968. Some have achieved the position through a split in the opposing party—such as Lincoln in 1860 and Wilson in 1912. Others have become presidents by accident—four through assassination of the incumbent (Lincoln, Garfield, McKinley, Kennedy) and four through the death of the president (William Henry Harrison, Zachary Taylor, Warren G. Harding, and F. D. Roosevelt.) Most of them have had long years of experience as State Legislators, as Governors, and beyond these frequently as Senators and Representatives in the United States Congress.

But, as "Ding" pointed out, following the election of an orphan from Iowa to the highest office in 1928, Presidents (and other notable men) did not achieve distinction "hanging around" the corner drug store. Unremitting toil lay at the background of every success.

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