

RECONSTRUCTION IN POLITICAL CARTOONS: VARIED EXPERIENCES AND PERCEPTIONS

Designed by EmmaLee Kuhlmann

The period of America's history known as Reconstruction was a tumultuous experience for everyone who experienced it, even as they experienced it in different ways. Following the Civil War, from 1865-1877, the United States government established a set of programs and new legislation in an attempt to reorganize



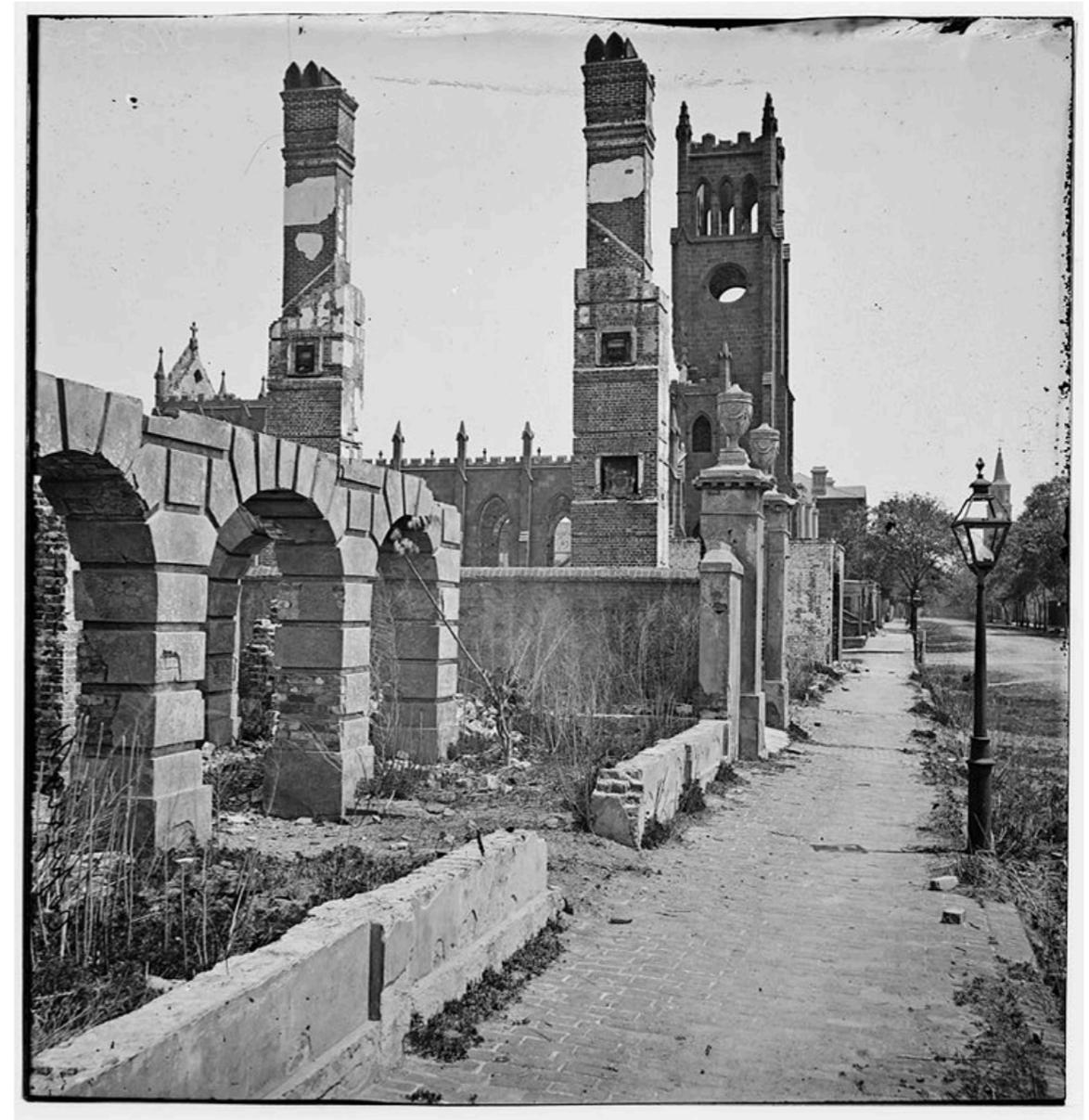
society and re-integrate the disillusioned and defeated southern states into the Union. Society, politics and the economy had all been affected by the war, especially in the South, where Southerner's way of life had been completely destroyed. By the end of the war, millions of slaves had been freed, upsetting the agricultural economy of the southern states. Not only had they been freed, but they had also been granted citizenship by the 14th Amendment. However, the amendment was not explicit in its provisions: it was unclear as to what African American citizenship would entail. Indeed, American society was in turmoil, attempting to rebuild following the war and re-establish what it meant to be American.

This internal conflict that was an integral part of Reconstruction was highly publicized. Newspapers across the country printed highly opinionated depictions of what Reconstruction policies meant to the readers in their cities. At this time, political cartoons were also highly utilized methods of satirizing political debate.

In this lesson, students will examine various political cartoons and other images from around the United States printed during Reconstruction. They will be asked questions of each image which will help them perform close reading skills and help them come to a conclusion about how the different types of American citizens experienced Reconstruction.

Essential Questions:

- How did Americans across the country experience the period of Reconstruction differently?
- How did their experience influence their perceptions of Reconstruction policies and the government and society of the United States following the Civil War?
- In what ways are political cartoons useful in exploring how people understood Reconstruction?
- Are political cartoons a good primary source?



Broad Street Charleston South Carolina 1865; [Link Here](#)



Click images to
enlarge

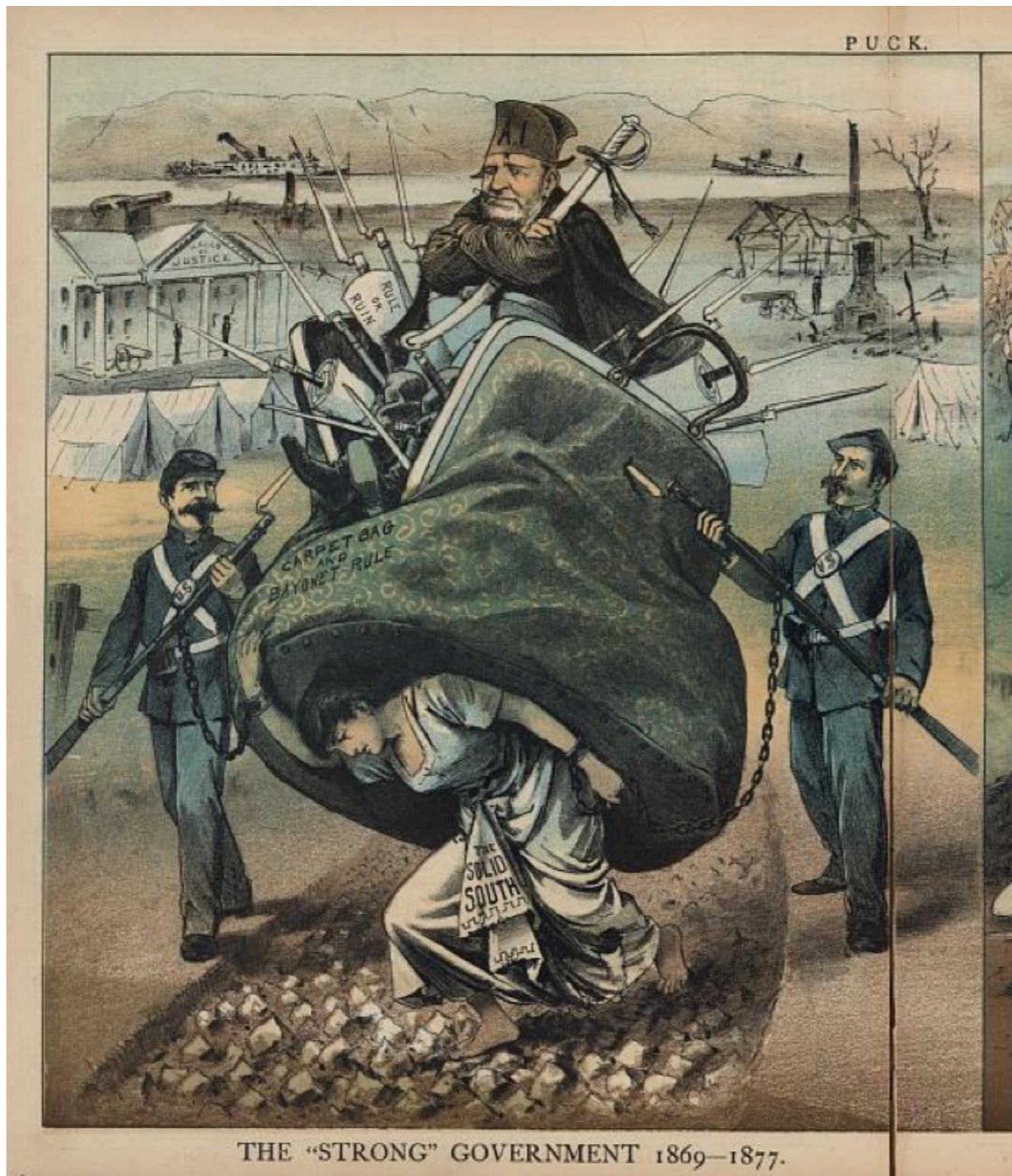


Image 1

Title: The "Strong" government 1869-1877

Creator: Wales, James Albert, 1852-1886, artist
Date Created/Published: 1880. Printed in Puck
(New York City)

[Link Here](#)



Summary: Cartoon shows woman, "the Solid South", carrying Ulysses S. Grant in a carpet bag marked "carpet bag and bayonet rule"

The Carpetbag Metaphor



*Scroll down
to learn
more.*

During Reconstruction, many Northerners moved to the South to assist the poor, African American communities, especially as teachers in schools supported by the

Questions to think About:

Q: Who are the characters in the image? How are the characters depicted?

Q: How is the North presented? How is the South presented? Which seems stronger?

Q: What point is the artist trying to make about the relationship between the North and the South during Reconstruction?

Image 2

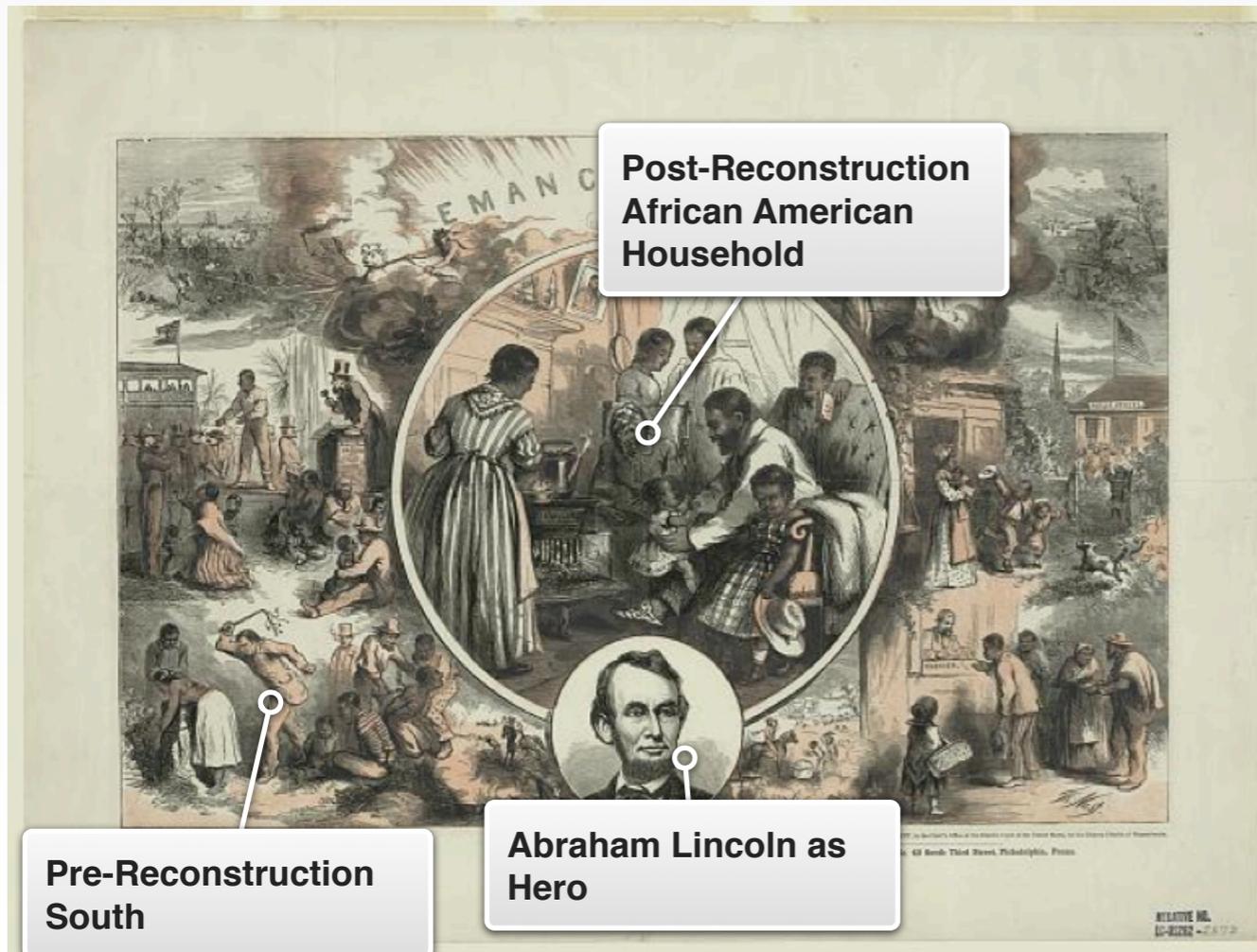
Title: Emancipation

Creator: Th. Nast ; King & Baird, printers, 607 Sansom Street, Philadelphia.

Date Created/ Published: ca 1865

[Link Here](#)

INTERACTIVE 1.1 Thomas Nast's Depiction of Emancipation



Summary: **Thomas Nast's** celebration of the emancipation of Southern slaves with the end of the Civil War. Nast envisions a somewhat optimistic picture of the future of free blacks in the United States. The central scene shows the interior of a freedman's home with the family gathered around a "Union" wood stove. The father bounces his small child on his knee while his wife and others look on. On the wall near the mantel hang a picture of Abraham Lincoln and a banjo. Below this scene is an oval portrait of Lincoln and above it, Thomas Crawford's statue of "Freedom." On either side of the central



Questions to think about:

Q: How does the imagery change from his presentations of life *before* Reconstruction and *after*? What is the message that the artist is trying to make about Reconstruction? Does he see the period of Reconstruction as ultimately positive or negative?

Q: What other elements does the artist use to make a point about Reconstruction? What are the points that the artist makes about Reconstruction?

Q: Which portion of this cartoon do you find most effective? Why?

[Click on the text boxes to zoom in on a scene.](#)

More on Thomas Nast: The Father of American Political Car- toons

Biographical Information

"Thomas Nast (1840-1902), perhaps the most important American political cartoonist of all time, is best known for his invention and development of popular symbols like the Republican Elephant, Democratic Donkey, a fat, jolly Santa Claus and a lean, goatee-wearing Uncle Sam.

"Nast's most important forum was Harper's Weekly, the leading illustrated American periodical of the last half of the nineteenth century. HarpWeek has identified the 2200-plus cartoons that Nast drew for Harper's Weekly—the first in 1859, the last in 1896, and the rest mainly between 1862 and 1886. They were instrumental in winning four presidential elections—for Abraham Lincoln in 1864, for Ulysses S. Grant in 1868 and 1872, and for Grover Cleveland in 1884."

Biographical Information From:
<http://www.thomasnast.com>



Title: Thomas Nast

Created / Published 1896.

Summary: Portrait, bust, facing left.

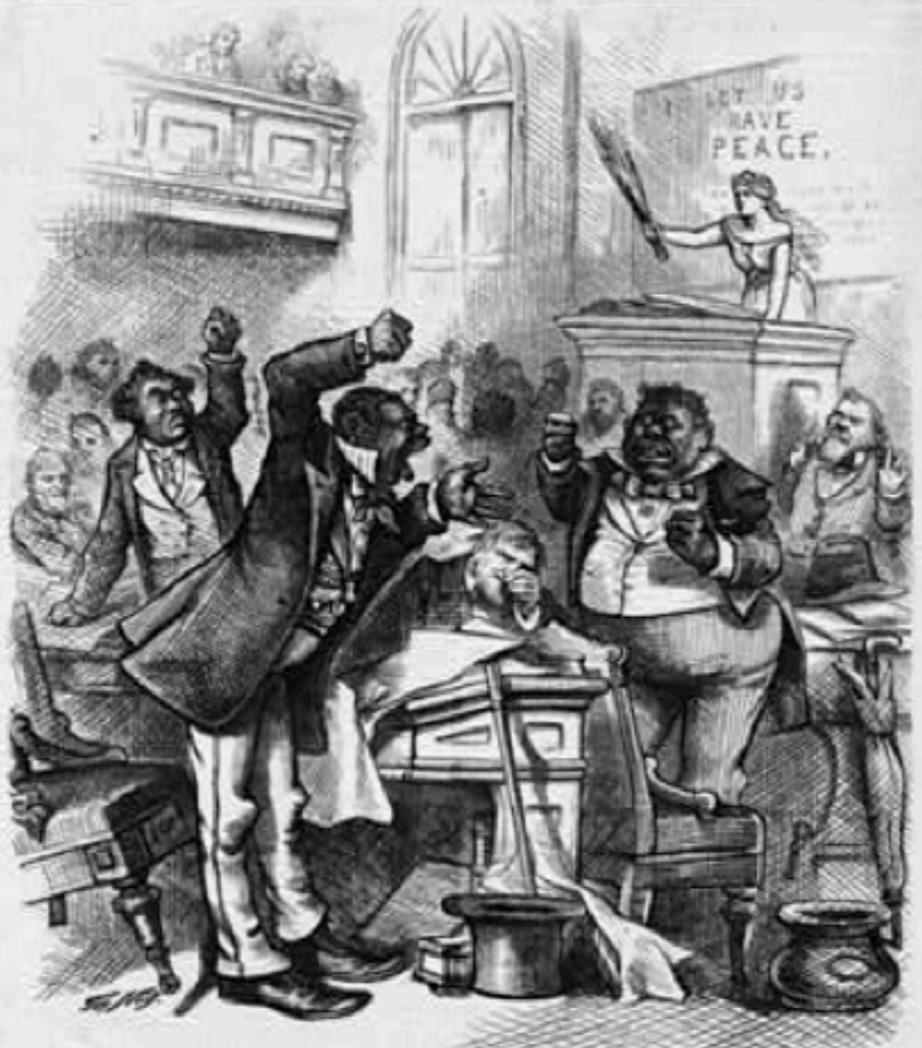
[Link Here](#)



HARPER'S WEEKLY

A JOURNAL OF CIVILIZATION

Vol. XVIII—No. 104. NEW YORK, SATURDAY, MARCH 14, 1874. ("THE SUNDAY")



COLORED RULE IN A RECONSTRUCTED STATE.—(See Post 187.)
THE NEGROES CALL EACH OTHER THIEVES, LIARS, KISSERS AND CHEATERS.
REMARKS: "You are taking the best White." "I got dozens just here in this year and had better take 'em now."

Image 3

Title: Colored rule in a reconstructed state

Creator: Nast, Thomas, 1840-1902, artist

Created / Published 1874.

Summary: Cartoon showing members of the South Carolina Legislature in argument in the House, with Columbia rebuking them.

[Link Here](#)

Questions to think about:

Q: Who are the characters in this image? How are the characters presented?

Q: What point is the artist (Thomas Nast) trying to make about Reconstruction in this image?

Q: How does this image compare to the previous cartoon created by Thomas Nast? What does this tell you about his perceptions of Reconstruction?



Image 4

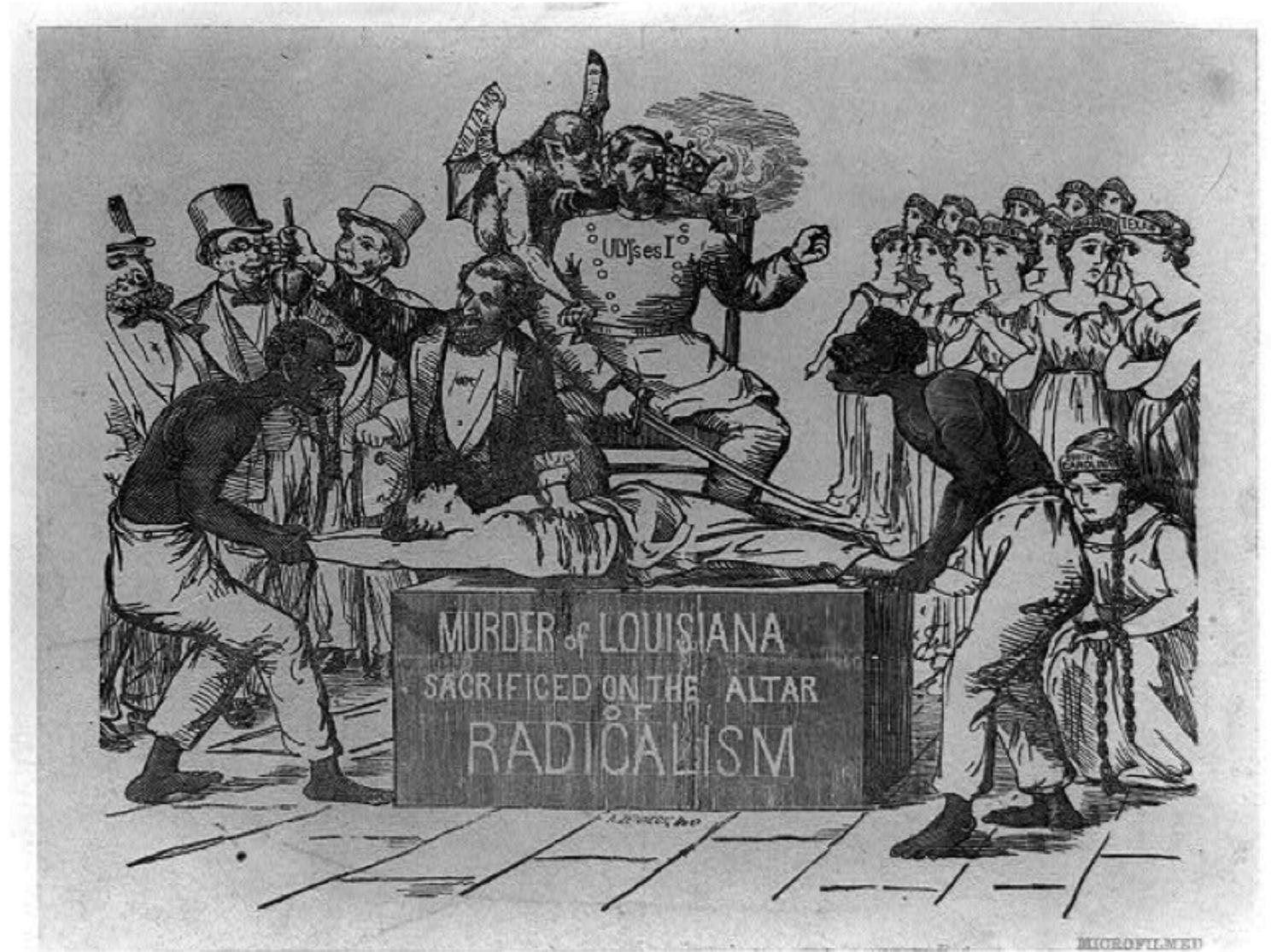
Title: Murder of Louisiana sacrificed on the altar of radicalism

Creator: A. Zenneck

Date Created/Published: 1871.

[Link Here](#)

Summary: President Ulysses S. Grant and Congress turned a blind eye to the disputed 1872 election of carpetbagger William P. Kellogg as governor of Louisiana. In this scene Kellogg holds up the heart which he has just extracted from the body of the female figure of Louisiana, who is held stretched across an altar by two freedmen. Enthroned behind the altar sits Grant, holding a sword. His attorney general, George H. Williams, the winged demon perched behind him, directs his hand. At left three other leering officials watch the operation, while at right women representing various states look on in obvious distress. South Carolina, kneeling closest to the altar, is in chains.



Questions to think about:

Q: Who are the characters in the image? How are the characters presented? Why might the artist have chosen these characters?

Q: What point is the creator trying to make about Reconstruction, especially its effects on the South?

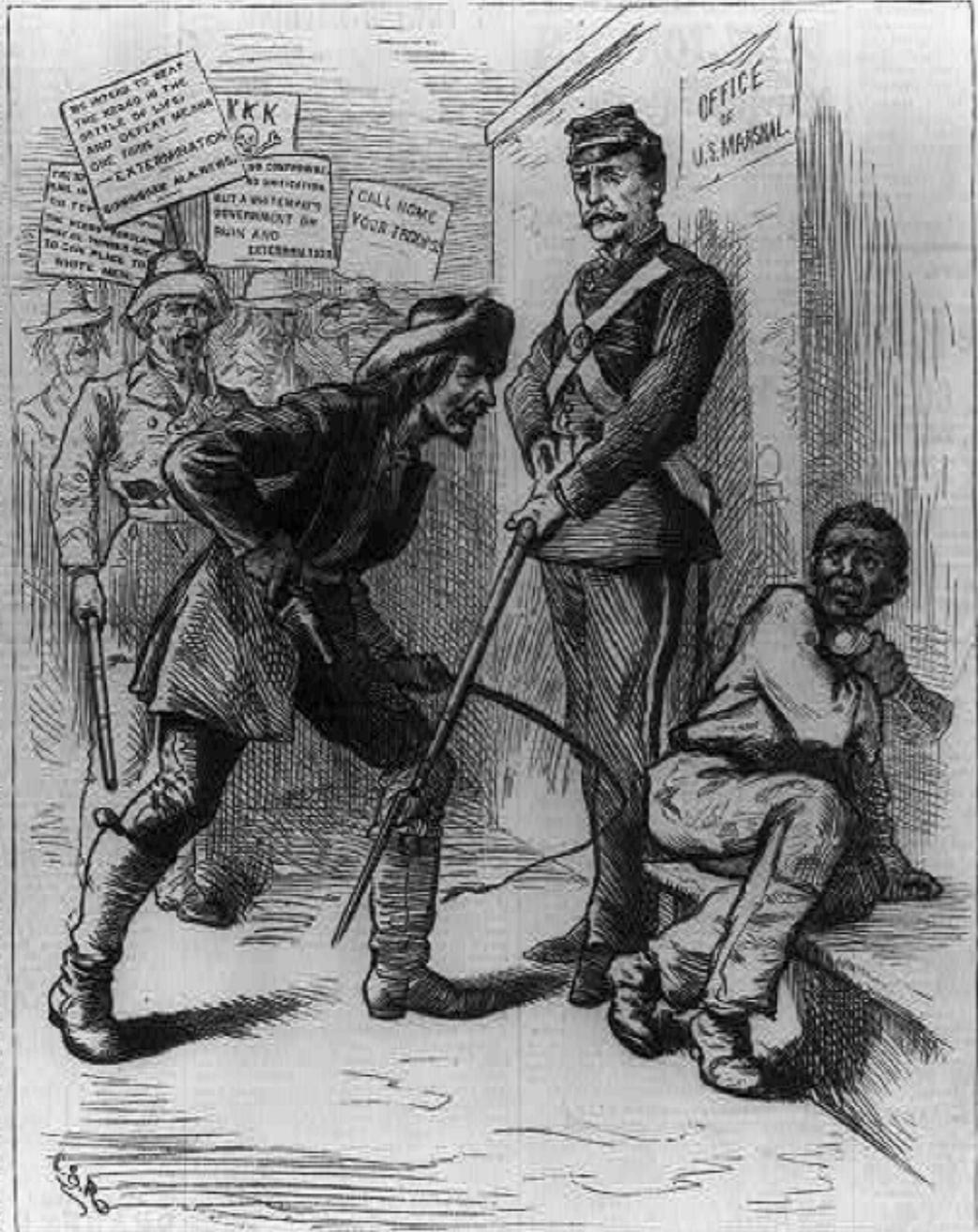


... of the State had
... Nation had risen from
... that worked cheerfully;
... nation, and religion were
... in a high rank of civi-
... abandoned Louisiana or

... they voted their own
... which was signed by
... "leading" men of the
... own free-will—and
... over more rampant
... telegraph company, so

... for answer was
... Nothing but the
... has made New Orleans
... a mass of bloodshed.
... peace to Mississippi,
... a perfect union of the

... from the distressed
... the fear of its
... innocency of life
... Orleans no
... mechanic—



SHALL WE CALL HOME OUR TROOPS?

"We intend to beat the Negro in the battle of life, and defeat means one thing—EXTERMINATION."—Birmingham (Alabama) News.

White Leaguers had
... that low cunning
... They procured
... of Vicksburg, it
... for various

... murderers of
... the North in
... against the
... But Governor
... of the terrible

... toward the
... that can
... Their press
... who, no
... are per-

... that the
... escape from
... Reports
... that whole
... a



Image 6

Title: A proper family re-union

Date Created/Published: 1865, Cincinnati, Ohio

Created by Burgoo Zac.

[Link Here](#)



Summary: A biting cartoon showing Confederate president Jefferson Davis in league with both the devil and Revolutionary War traitor Benedict Arnold. Arnold and Davis stir a cauldron of "Treason Toddy," a brew into which the devil drops miniature black slaves. The devil holds a pitchfork and gloats, "I feel proud of my American sons--Benedict and Jeff." Davis, dressed in a bonnet, shawl, and dress (see "The Chas-ed "Old Lady" of the C.S.A.," no. 1865-11), explains to his fellow traitor, "Well, Arnold, the C.S.A. [Confederate States of America] are "done gone" so I have come home." Arnold greets him, "Welcome, Davis! Thou shalt be warmly received by thy father." At the cauldron base, marked "1865," lie two skulls, marked "Libby" and "Andersonville,"--no doubt intended to represent Union victims of the two notorious Confederate prisons Libby and Andersonville. Copperheads writhe on the ground. Near Davis's feet are a bag of "Stolen Gold" and a valise marked with his initials and "C.S.A. 1865."

Questions to think about:

Q: Who are the characters in the image?

How are they depicted? Why might the artist have chosen these characters?

Q: What point is the artist trying to make about Reconstruction?



Image 7

Title: Northern coat of arms

Date Created/Published: 1864.

Probably drawn by Joseph E. Baker, Boston.

[Link Here](#)

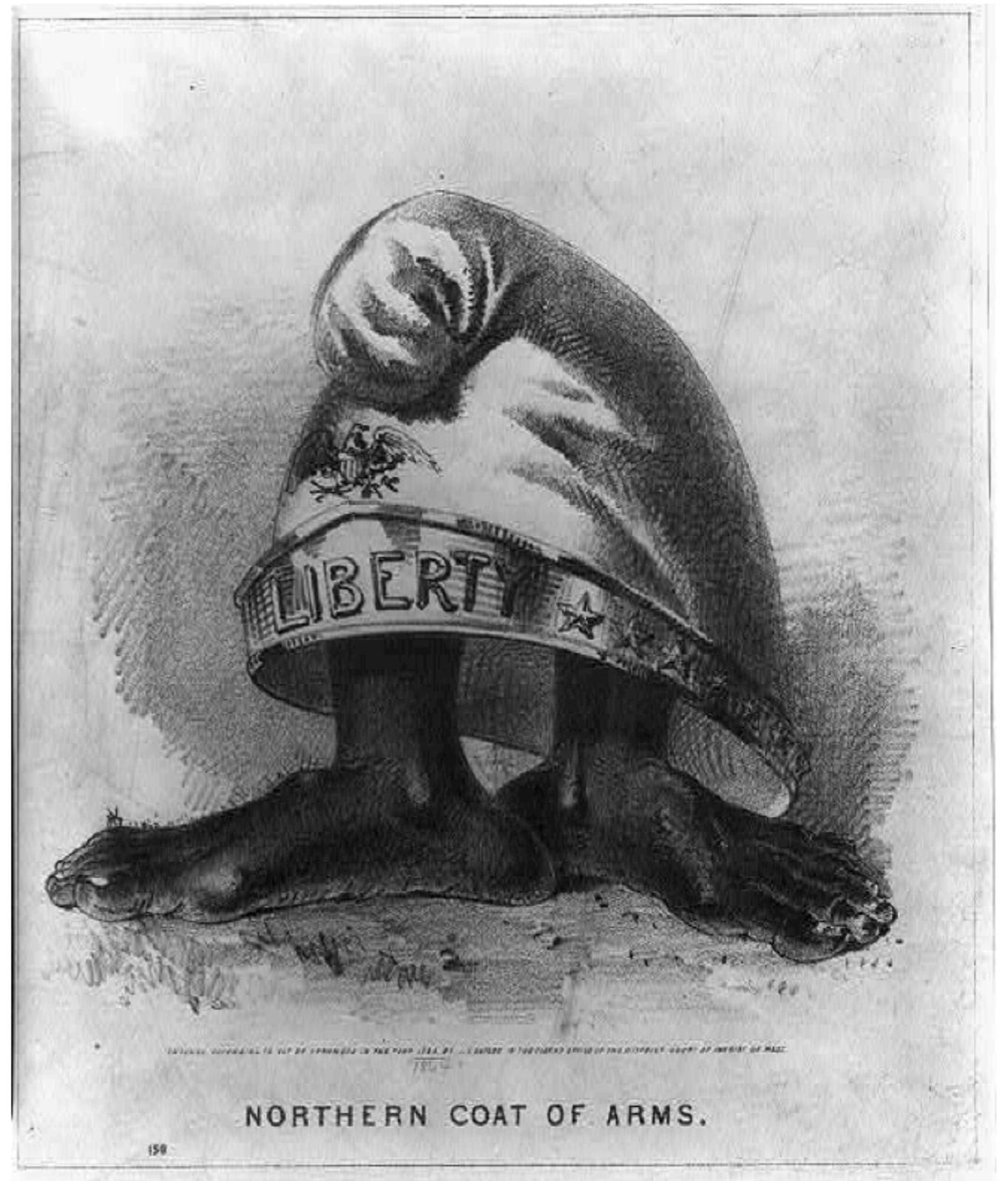
Summary: A Northern-produced satire, expressing strongly anti-abolitionist sentiments. A large pair of bare feet, obviously those of a black man, protrude from beneath a Phrygian cap adorned with the word "Liberty," several stars, and an eagle with arrows and olive branch from the seal of the United States.

Questions to think about

Q: What kinds of imagery are being used in this image? What themes does the artist use?

Q: What point is the artist trying to make about Reconstruction?

Q: Read the image summary. What does this tell you about the image and/or author? What does this tell you about the artist's perception of Reconstruction?



Reflection

In the initial stages of developing this lesson, I had the idea that I might want to focus primarily on political cartoons for this lesson. There are so many available from this time period, and so many with such vivid imagery that allow students to engage in analysis with very little background knowledge. As I began to collect documents for this lesson, I was a bit worried that I did not have enough content, and that I might need to include other types of documents. However, because Reconstruction is such a large topic, and because there are so many different lenses through which it can be understood, I found that it was easier to stick with the medium of political cartoons, and engage with them more deeply. In this way, students get the opportunity to engage with the controversy of how to rebuild after a terrible and destructive war that changed multiple aspects of society.

In secondary history classes, topics such as Reconstruction are rarely discussed; if they are, very little time is spent uncovering the controversy and complexity of the time period. However, Reconstruction is a period in America's history that began the current stream of history. By understanding the period following the Civil War, students can begin to see how America's history has shaped its present. For instance, certain racial policies enacted during Reconstruction played a major role in Americans' later perceptions of race and racial constructs. It isn't an easy time period to untangle, certainly another reason why it rarely is at the secondary level. However, giving students primary sources to discuss and explore give them an effective entry point into the time period and the topics surrounding some difficult issues of Reconstruction.

At the end of this particular lesson, numerous different activities could be assigned. In the creation of this lesson, I wanted to leave the final product/assignment open because there are so many creative ways to assess understanding of the cartoons and the ideas and values they present. When I discussed possible options for closing assignments for this lesson, various suggestions were given. My favorite assignment idea was to have students create their own political cartoon using similar themes and imagery from the cartoons that they explored in the lesson. This could be done either about Reconstruction issues or even current events. This would allow students to make connections across topics and time periods.

Title Page Image:

Title: Atlanta Roundhouse Ruins

Creator: George N. Barnard

Date: 1866

Summary: Illustration showing the destroyed Atlanta roundhouse, with steam engines and train cars in place but with collapsed stone walls.

[Link Here](#)

[Click Here](#) to learn more about the creator of this lesson.

Other Sources Used in this Lesson:

- [Scroll Up or Down](#), created by Lloyd Humphreys from the Noun Project
- [Click](#), created by Spencer Loveless from the Noun Project



FROM EXPLORING
HISTORY: VOL III

Available free at [iTunes](#)

This eBook is a collaborative project of Peter Pappas and his Fall 2015 Social Studies Methods Class [School of Education](#) ~ University of Portland, Portland Ore.

Graduate and undergraduate level pre-service teachers were assigned the task of developing an engaging research question, researching supportive documents and curating them into a DBQ suitable for middle or high school students.

For more on this class, visit the course blog [EdMethods](#)
For more on this book project and work flow tap [here](#).

Chapters in chronological order

1. *Finding Egyptian Needles in Western Haystacks*
by Heidi Kershner
2. *Pompeii* by Caleb Wilson
3. *Samurai: Sources of Warrior Identity in Medieval Japan*
by Ben Heebner
4. *The Declaration of Independence* by David Deis
5. *Reconstruction in Political Cartoons*
by EmmaLee Kuhlmann
6. *Regulation Through the Years*
by Chenoa Musillo Olson / Sarah Wieking
7. *Battle of the Somme* by John Hunt

8. *The Lynching of Leo Frank* by Jeff Smith
9. *The Waco Horror* by Alekz Wray
10. *The Harlem Renaissance* by Monica Portugal
11. *A Date of Infamy* by Mollie Carter
12. *Anti-Vietnam War Imagery* by Felicia Teba
13. *Examining the Ongoing Evolution of American Government* by Eric Cole

Peter Pappas, editor

School of Education ~ University of Portland

His popular blog, [Copy/Paste](#) features downloads of his instructional resources, projects and publications. Follow him at [Twitter @edteck](#). His other multi-touch eBooks are available at [here](#). For an example of one of his eBook design training workshops tap [here](#).

CC BY-NC 3.0 Peter Pappas and his students, 2015

The authors take copyright infringement seriously. If any copyright holder has been inadvertently or unintentionally overlooked, the publisher will be pleased to remove the said material from this book at the very first opportunity.

Cover image: Door knocker

Amsterdam NL Photograph by Peter Pappas