Uniting Mugwumps and the Masses:
The Role of *Puck* in Gilded Age Politics, 1880-1884

Daniel Henry Backer
McLean, Virginia

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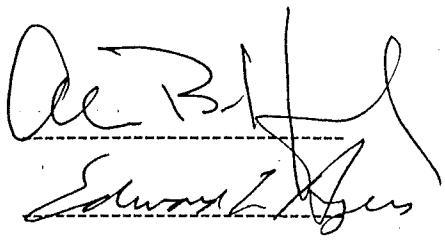

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The document you now hold in your hands is a feeble reproduction of an experiment in hypertext. In the waning years of the twentieth century, a crude network of computerized information centers formed a system called the Internet; one particular format of data retrieval combined text and digital images and was known as the World Wide Web. This particular project was designed for viewing through Netscape 2.0. It can be found at **http://xroads.virginia.edu/~MA96/PUCK/**

If you are able to locate this Website, you will soon realize it is a superior resource for the presentation of such a highly visual magazine as *Puck.*

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"Why can the United States not have a comic paper of its own?" enquired E.L. Godkin of *The Nation*, one of the most distinguished intellectual magazines of the Gilded Age. America claimed a host of popular and insightful raconteurs as its own, from Petroleum V. Nasby to Mark Twain; in addition, cartoonists like Thomas Nast had emerged to place visual humor on a plane of excellence equal to that of its text-based counterpart. In spite of this fertile deposit of literary and graphic satire, no American publication devoted solely to humor had been able to survive for more than a few months. Magazines with names like *The John-Donkey*, *Momus*, and *Mrs. Grundy* passed through history leaving little trace in the public memory. [1]

Godkin offered one possible reason for this phenomena, that "a country must supply a good many strong social contrasts for the professional joker to play upon"; believing his to be a homogeneous environment the editor reasoned that American political leaders and other prominent figures were too publicly accessible to be accorded the kind of reverence a British Lord might have, and thus the satirical potential in placing Americans in socially absurd situations diminished significantly. However, the most talented humorists of the era did not need to draw material from social contrasts alone. Godkin's observation that America reflected "an absence of class distinctions" and had undergone a "complete democratization of institutions" since the end of the Civil War illuminates the true bedrock of Gilded Age satire, as well as the source of discontent that

helped to fuel it. To claim a level society at any period of American history, much less one in which some men amassed legendary material fortunes while others toiled for twelve or more hours a day in squalid factories, would be spurious; nevertheless, something that citizens of all social castes did have in common was a familiarity with certain narratives, symbols, and activities which Lawrence W. Levine has described as elements of "shared culture". There is no doubt that physical distinctions existed in society, but on an imaginative level many people responded to Shakespeare as comfortably as they did to the circus. [2]

Similar to the democratic nature of entertainment, the government of the Gilded Age reflected an egalitarian-- though some would prefer the term uncritical-- style of operation. The institutions which had guided the country out of colonialism and through a great rebellion had deteriorated under the guidance of men who had the same rights and privileges as any other enfranchised male, but whose educational and ethical backgrounds did not match those of their antebellum predecessors. Gentlemen who contributed to magazines like *The Nation* or *The North American Review* perceived themselves, and not the 'spoilsmen', as the rightful inheritors of the supposedly sterling American tradition of statesmanship. The dismay over the corruption and inefficiency which had come to characterize government service in their exile prompted the '*Nation* men' to unite as a party of dissent which could play off of the desperately partisan Republican and Democratic organizations in order to select the candidate with the best ideas.

Unfortunately the Mugwumps, as these gentlemen came to be known, did not maximize their familiarity with the shared culture but rather unveiled their own inherently

anti-democratic disposition in their attempts to clean up government. Godkin accurately describes reform-minded men as having little understanding of the effectiveness of mainstream vehicles of dissemination due to "their own natural want of humor, and partly to their careful cultivation"; this cultivation misled them into thinking that they could raise public consciousness by publishing elaborate arguments in highbrow publications which had few readers outside of the educated aristocracy. Lacking popular support, the dispassionate, issue-oriented Mugwump agenda could not enjoy lasting victory in the nineteenth century; only an approach steeped in pop culture would successfully reach a body politic so captivated by spectacle and humor. In the late 1870s a liberal Austrian immigrant named Joseph Keppler combined Mugwump ideology and illustrated satire, creating at long last a popular medium for the expression of intellectual politics.

About the Hypertext

This hypertext is intended to provide you with as many ways "in" as possible. The Text-Based section is an analysis of cartooning as well as Gilded Age political culture; the individual essays can be read in a linear progression or independently of each other. "A Brief History of Cartoons" documents particular highlights in the development of the artistic as well as editorial nature of the genre; "Mainstream and Elite Political Culture" describes the political environment in the decades after the Civil War and also sketches the Mugwump perspective; the final section, "A Popular Medium", deals specifically with *Puck* and Joseph Keppler's efforts to convey Liberal viewpoints to the general public. This final essay in the Text-Based area offers links to most of the Image-Based features,

which engage with a variety of cartoons published between 1880 and 1884. The explorations of "Our National Dog Show" and "Inspecting the Democratic Curiosity Shop" are deconstructions of particular cartoons; "Caricature and the *Carte-de-Viste*" examines Keppler's and his assistants' artistic styles during the emergence of photography; "The Campaign Against Grant" is a selection of lithographs which appeared before the Republican convention of 1880. So browse at your discretion. Thank You and Enjoy. . . .

I) A Brief History of Political Cartoons

Political cartoons are for the most part composed of two elements: caricature, which parodies the individual, and allusion, which creates the situation or context into which the individual is placed. Caricature as a Western discipline goes back to Leonardo da Vinci's artistic explorations of "the ideal type of deformity"-- the grotesque-- which he used to better understand the concept of ideal beauty [1]. Over time the principles of form established in part by Leonardo had become so ingrained into the method of portraiture that artists like Agostino and Annibale Carracci rebelled against them. Intended to be lighthearted satires, their *caricaturas* were, in essence, "counter-art" [2]. The sketch of "A Captain of Pope Urban VIII" [fig. 1] is representative of the new genre in that it is a quick, impressionistic drawing that exaggerates prominent physical characteristics to humorous effect. At its best, it brings out the subject's inner self in a kind of physiognomical satire-- as the example presented here seems to be a comment on some facet of the Captain's masculinity. *Caricaturas* became popular with collectors, but they perceived the "fanciful exercises" as curiosities rather than viable artistic productions [3]. As a result, they were not displayed publicly, and so one of the earliest modes of established graphic satire remained in the parlor and drawing room.

While caricature originated around the Mediterranean, cartoons of a more editorial nature developed in a chillier climate. The Protestant Reformation began in Germany, and made extensive use of visual propaganda; the success of both Martin Luther's socio-religious reforms and the discipline of political cartooning depended on a level of

civilization neither too primitive nor too advanced. A merchant class had emerged to occupy positions of leadership within the growing villages and towns, which meant that a core of people existed who would respond to Luther's invectives and be economically capable of resisting the all-powerful Catholic Church. In regards to the physical requirements of graphic art, both woodcutting and metal engraving had become established trades, with many artists and draughtsmen sympathetic to the cause. Finally, the factor which probably influenced the rise of cartoons more than any other cultural condition was a high illiteracy rate. Luther recognized that the support of an increasingly more powerful middle class was crucial to the success of his reforms, but in order to lead a truly popular movement he would need the sheer weight of the peasantry's numbers. The distribution of simple broadsheet posters or illustrated pamphlets throughout population centers proved to be an effective strategy because the images would reach a large amount of people and enjoy the greatest possible amount of comprehension. [4]

An excellent example of Luther's use of visual protest is found in two woodcuts from the pamphlet "Passional Christi und Antichristi" [fig. 2], originally drawn by Lucas Cranach the Elder. These two images contrast the actions of Jesus with those of the Church hierarchy; the hegemony of religion at the time ensured that when someone drew a Biblical episode like that of Jesus driving the moneychangers out of the Temple, everyone would recognize it. The artist juxtaposed the first scene with a contemporary tableau that many people would also understand: the Pope writes indulgences while common folk pay their hard earned money in tribute. The two pictures clearly intend to raise public consciousness by illustrating the premise that changes must be made within the Church for

life to ever become more Christlike. "Passional Christi und Antichristi" also demonstrates the artist's use of the second element of political cartoons-- the context of a widely-recognized story or setting-- to get his point across.

As time went on, Germanic art assimilated the Italian *caricatura* and established the conventions practiced on a wide basis by cartoonists of the eighteenth century. The cartoon became a substantial medium of commentary which took serious issues and presented them in a manner which was not only funny, and therefore more socially acceptable, but also designed to affect the viewer's opinion. As Western culture diversified from its original religious foundation, new subjects became available for discussion and subsequent ridicule; as such the appeal and influence of cartoons on public life grew in proportion. Although there will never be empirical evidence which can relate the production of graphic satire to the course of history, the fact that the medium of visual protest has remained healthy since 1517 must be some indication of its position in the social order. [5]

Benjamin Franklin's "Join or Die" [fig. 3], which depicts a snake whose severed parts represent the Colonies, is acknowledged as the first political cartoon in America. The image had an explicitly political purpose from the start, as Franklin used it in support of his plan for an intercolonial association to deal with the Iroquois at the Albany Congress of 1754. It came to be published in "virtually every newspaper on the continent"; reasons for its widespread currency include its demagogic reference to an Indian threat as well as its basis in the popular superstition that a dead snake would come back to life if the pieces were placed next to each other [6]. Franklin's snake is significant

in the development of cartooning because it became an icon that could be displayed in differing variations throughout the existing visual media of the day-- like the "Don't Tread on Me" battle flag-- but would always be associated with the singular causes of colonial unity and the Revolutionary spirit. In the same way that Biblical stories are an element of shared culture, "Join or Die" became a symbol to which all Americans could respond. Even though the Albany Congress was a failure, Franklin's snake had established a connection between a drawing and a specific political idea in the American imagination.

The effect of cartoons after the Civil War can be found in an anecdote whose components have elevated it to the stature of myth. Much of the legend surrounding Thomas Nast's 1871 *Harper's Weekly* cartoons on the corrupt "Boss" Tweed does not hold up to rigorous scrutiny, but as Roger A. Fischer writes in a recent collection of essays,

> The Story of William "Marcy" Tweed and his *bete noir* Tom Nast is known to most students of American history, and familiar to every aficionado of the history of American political cartooning. . . This confrontation is credited by consensus with establishing once and forever a fledgling craft. . . as an enduring presence in American political culture. In its telling is exemplified those salient themes dear to the collective scholarship of the medium, such as it is-- the power of the giants of the genre to fuse creative caricature, clever situational transpositions, and honest indignation to arouse the populace and alter for the better the course of human events. [7]

The tale of Nast and Tweed is one of the most celebrated specimens of graphic social protest in American history, but a number of circumstances contributed to restrict Nast's impact to this his most famous battle. Undoubtedly the greatest popular artist of the Civil War, Lincoln is frequently quoted as saying Nast was his best recruiting sergeant, and his scenes of once-thriving southern cities like Richmond did much to convey the magnitude


N. E.
N. Y.
N. J.
N. C.
JOIN, or DIE.

of destruction to Northern audiences [8]; however, the fiery baptism of photography as documentary tool in the war has done much to overshadow his efforts. Furthermore, after he became the featured cartoonist at *Harper's* much of his art focused on the local New York scene, and once the Tweed Ring fell his own professional career began a slow process of deterioration. The primary shortcoming of Nast's work overall is that the quality of his satire never matched the quality of his art. Cartoons such as "Let Us Prey" [fig. 4] are typical of his work because they are "devastating in effect" [9], i.e. they overwhelmingly achieve the goal of ridiculing their subject, but as a measure of sophistication they are more akin to base insults than the kind of deft criticisms found in more subtle satire. In a veiled comparison of prominent Gilded Age cartoonists, Allan Nevins characterized Nast's satirical approach to assault with a club rather than a rapier [10]; although he conveyed his point to the viewer with unmistakable clarity and intensity, the very simplicity of this approach failed to endear him to the more discerning *Harper's* subscriber. Nast could raise the ire of those immigrants who sustained the Tweed machine, but the crudity of his art did not suit the more reserved middle and upper classes of society.

Joseph Keppler filled the vacuum left by Nast's popular decline to become the most commercially and critically acclaimed cartoonist of the Gilded Age. Born in Vienna in 1838, to a pastry maker forced to flee the country because of his participation in efforts to create a unified German nation, Joseph followed his father to America in 1867 and settled among the large German-speaking community in St. Louis. By the time he left his homeland at age twenty-nine, he had graduated from the Austrian Academy of Fine Arts,

appeared as featured actor at a Viennese theater, and in 1864-65 contributed to the popular illustrated humor magazine *Kikeriki!*. Shortly after his arrival Keppler "fell in with a distinguished crowd of journalists, writers, and artists"-- including a young reporter named Joseph Pulitzer-- from the German quarter who would engage in discussions about political events or literary and philosophical matters [11]. It is important to note these early experiences in Keppler's life in the United States, for they ensured that many of the liberal views he had grown up with would not wither after their transplantation into American soil. Thomas Nast came from Bavaria at a very young age, later married into a respectable New England family, and the maturation of his personal values during the Civil War made them inseparable from orthodox Republicanism; by contrast, Keppler emigrated after the war's end and never divested himself from his Austro-Germanic heritage. In short, he never became fully Americanized, and nor did he lose sight of the kind of idealistic social activism which had characterized many German intellectuals since Martin Luther.

While living in St. Louis, Keppler co-founded a handful of illustrated humor magazines-- *Die Vehme* in 1869, *Frank und Frei* in 1870, and both German and English versions of *Puck* in 1871. None lasted very long, the most successful being the eleven month run of German *Puck*. Despite these commercial failures, Keppler and his associates had established an important connection with the local populace. Printed almost entirely in German, their subject matter relied heavily on international affairs and German-ethnic comedy. Unlike Nast's coarse etchings, Keppler's cartoons reflected "a grace of artistic approach" derived from his exposure to popular Austro-German styles of the day [12].

As a result, his work struck a resounding chord with a community raised "on a heavy satiric dose" of illustrated humor in the Old Country [13]. The most educated and economically prosperous of non-native Americans, Germans constituted a powerful bloc of magazine buyers and, more importantly, voters; when Keppler brought *Puck* back in New York it would also be initially geared towards a Germanic audience.

During the same early years in which Keppler provided his countrymen with a beloved piece of their homeland, he came to understand their political perspective through the work of one of their outstanding compatriots. The most famous German immigrant of the nineteenth century was Carl Schurz, who had arrived in St. Louis to co-edit the *Westliche Post* only months before Keppler [14]. Schurz had distinguished himself as a dedicated liberal due to his role as a student leader in the failed unification of German states in 1848-49. Captured by Rhenish authorities in a conservative backlash, he escaped the country only to return and secure the freedom of his mentor Gottfreid Kinkel. Schurz gained additional fame in America as a supporter of Republican anti-slavery policies, and both politicians and the general public recognized his talent as an orator. He toured the South throughout the Reconstruction years, and reported to Congress on the deplorable state of racial relations as well as the corruption of the military governments in his official capacity as a Senator from Missouri. He continued his work as President Rutherford B. Hayes' Secretary of the Interior, and after this tenure he expressed his opinions as editor of the New York *Evening Post*. An object of both admiration and ridicule throughout his life, Schurz came to be one of the most well known reformers of his day; furthermore, his career fostered an impressive network of correspondents and acquaintances across

partisan lines, making his influence one of the most widespread in Gilded Age politics. [15]

As a representative of social reform, Carl Schurz is in many ways a descendant of Martin Luther: both men came from an intellectual background and attempted to incite popular movements in order to loosen the hold of a debased authority. Luther's use of visual imagery to further his agenda was an innovation which capitalized on inconsistent levels of education as well as the power of the common people to enforce social change through economic power and the sheer weight of their masses. Thomas Nast's crusade against Boss Tweed demonstrates that, even three hundred and fifty years later, forms of graphic protest continued to have an effect on the body politic; unfortunately, reformers with national aspirations like Carl Schurz relied on words and not pictures to convey issues to the general public. Until the arrival of Joseph Keppler, someone who both subscribed to Schurz's opinions and appreciated the specific role of art in national affairs, social movements in late nineteenth century America would not be as successful as those in Medieval Germany.

II) Mainstream and Elite Political Culture

If Carl Schurz's liberal independence was the predominant ideology of the Gilded Age, there would have been no need for a popular satirical magazine like *Puck*. However, the mainstream political scene was seedy, superficial, and doggedly partisan-- but folks loved it. "Despite the lack of issues," writes Morton Keller, "balloting-- and straight ticket voting-- in the 1870s and 1880s was at or near the highest level in American history" [1]. Policy had become subordinate to "the sumptuous display" of parades, bonfires, and pep rallies [2]. This extravagant and expensive culture depended upon an unethical system of patronage and spoils to remain vital, and consequently political corruption became one of defining traits of the era.

Although "the spoils system. . . had grown with democracy" and the extension of suffrage to all white men [3], the rapid and massive inflation of the federal government required to manage the country after the Civil War transformed political contests into a veritable gold rush for patronage. What was once the prize of a few hundred appointments to be doled out to loyal party boosters at the victor's discretion had mushroomed into a plunder of many thousands of positions, open to anyone with connections to the reigning party. In 1871 the number of civil service employees numbered 51,000, and by 1881 there were 100,000 individuals listed on the federal payroll [4]. With thousands of men clamoring for jobs as seemingly inconsequential as the postmaster of a remote Northwestern territory or a manager of an Indian reservation, the power of appointment was for the most part passed off to Senators and other regional

politicians [5]. This had the effect of weakening the Executive Branch while adding to Congress' muscle; election to the Senate meant that a clever organizational politician would have "access to the jobs and money dispensed by the federal government" like the New York custom house, which "employed thousands of staffers who in fact worked for the party" and by extension the local machine [6]. Regardless of its depravity, machine politics became ensconced in the cultural landscape because it existed in a symbiotic relationship with the masses: the machine exchanged entertainment and employment for votes and party fealty.

After the death of Lincoln, Ulysses S. Grant was thrust into the role of Republican figurehead. "Unconditional Surrender" retained a vise-like hold on the people's imagination, for "he embodied the central event in their lives, the Civil War" [7]; as such, he became many things to many men, usually without justification. The pragmatic populist had even captured the hopes of Liberals like Carl Schurz, for he had made vague statements regarding civil service reform during his campaign; *The Nation* predicted that "efficiency and morality" would be restored to a government newly freed of "party charlatans" [8]. Once the new president took office, however, he defied these expectations by surrounding himself with old Army buddies. When many of these trusted advisors resigned in the wake of scandal, inveterate spoilsmen like Roscoe Conkling, Simon Cameron, and Benjamin Butler took their place [9]. These men sought to manipulate Grant by using his official power and vast popular following to augment their personal fortunes as well as the power of their regional machines.

After four years many reform-minded individuals could no longer tolerate the

General's occupation of the White House. Carl Schurz had "spent months of hard work organizing opposition" to the incumbent administration and led the first substantial protest against the corrupted hegemony in "that chimera of 1872", the Liberal Republican Convention [10]. Unfortunately the group he had attracted to the Cincinnati assembly hall stood for such a diverse and often conflicting set of issues that they ended up nominating New York *Tribune* editor Horace Greeley. Not only did many reformers find him an unacceptable candidate from an ideological perspective, but the diminutive and eccentric bookworm "was widely regarded as intrinsically unfit for the presidency" [11]. The candidate became the victim of "a sustained and coruscating attack" from Thomas Nast and other hard-core GOP boosters, as can be seen in the detail from "Satan, Don't Get Thee Behind Me!" [fig. 5][12]; this and other statements against Greeley became even less tasteful when he died only a few weeks after his overwhelming defeat by Grant and his Stalwart supporters.

In spite of the Liberal Republican fiasco, a precedent had been set at Cincinnati: those dissatisfied with the status quo in government and disillusioned with the capabilities of both major political parties had organized on a national level. Although the motley crew of 1872 united solely on the basis of their low opinion of the current system, the party of dissent would refine its platform over the next decade to present a cohesive ideological coalition. By the presidential election of 1884 they would be at their height of their power, and ensure Grover Cleveland's victory over James G. Blaine; unfortunately, even this triumph faded quickly as another Republican war-horse, General Benjamin Harrison, would defeat Cleveland in 1888. The Mugwumps, as the Liberals came to be

known, are often perceived as a group of people deserving of approbation because they opposed the governance of patronage and corruption; in their own day, however, they failed to be enduring players in national affairs. Given the fact that organizational politics depended on the masses for survival, it would seem that the Mugwumps' lack of success lay in their inability to wrest public opinion away from the spoilsmen. An examination of their personal backgrounds, as well as their political strategy, indicates that this was in fact the case.

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So who were these Mugwumps? Gerald W. McFarland points out that the name itself was not associated with the men it came to describe until they bolted the Republican Convention of 1884. Charles A. Dana of the New York *Sun* dug up the Algonquin word, meaning "great men"-- "thus implying that the bolters were rather too proud of themselves" [13]. The aristocratic nature of the Mugwumps as a social entity will become evident later on, but should be noted here because it emphasizes a major source of their political impotence right from the start. In contrast to this somewhat pejorative term, John G. Sproat has come up with a less concretely historical nickname which the Mugwumps themselves would have surely found to be more agreeable: the "Best Men" [14]. These were "men of breeding and intelligence, of taste and substance" [15]; for the most part they belonged to an emerging professional class of lawyers, bankers scholars, and other scientific or literary types. Primarily natives of New York and New England, the majority sprang from old established families to whom wealth and prestige were concomitant inheritances.

The Best Men were all of a roughly similar age, and had pledged similar ideological allegiances throughout their lives. Before the war they joined the original Republican Party, but their dispassionate and inherently conservative nature inclined them to be "free-soilers rather than abolitionists" [16]. These formative years shaped the perspectives of many gentlemen who would identify with the Mugwump label; from the words of Sumner on the Senate floor to Lincoln on the fields of Gettysburg, "the power of words and ideas" became central to their mindset [17]. The impact of these antebellum figures, as well as ethical and philosophical ties to the heroes of the Revolutionary period, led them to believe that politics was "the serious responsibility of unselfish patriots" [18]. There could not be greater disparity between these views and those of their contemporary political leaders.

The most progressive cause that the Mugwumps championed was that of civil service reform. While their support of this issue has often been interpreted as a heroic stand against the ethical morass of the day, some critics have found more than a few personal impulses behind their supposedly altruistic efforts. Ari Hoogenboom has pointed out that the Mugwumps constituted a demographic group which had historically controlled public life, but had been displaced by both the system of patronage attributed to Andrew Jackson's regime as well as the local machines that grew out of it. Taking a line from one of the ultimate Gilded Age opportunists, Benjamin Butler, the cause of civil service reform presented itself as a classic case of the "outs" versus the "ins", in which a rational and morally elevated political platform acted as a cloak to conceal a simple drive to reclaim power. [19]

While their motivations did include personal interests, intellect and education comprised the Mugwumps' most accurate common denominator. They were the Best Men because they trained at the University, and continued to exercise their minds well beyond their school days. For instance, the leadership of the New York Civil Service Reform League was "exceptionally well educated", generally possessing a Harvard diploma and not infrequently an advanced degree as well [20]; McFarland's composite biography of the 1884 New York City Mugwumps indicates 78% had been to college, as compared to 46% of registered Republicans [21]. The desire of the Best Men to be "in" thus seems to originate in their erudition: weighing their intellectual achievement against mediocre West Point cadet Grant and other ruling politicians, the Mugwumps convinced themselves that they alone possessed the qualifications for leadership.

Unfortunately, this intellectual achievement prompted them to fight their unlettered leaders with the least appropriate tools conceivable under the circumstances. The simple fact of life-long immersions in the humanities meant that the Mugwumps were comfortable with writing and reading complex essays and editorials; as a result they placed these rhetorical vehicles at the vanguard of their assault on the political system. Although some "dutiful readers ploughed through the heavy prose" of these articles [22], it is unlikely that the less cultivated middle- or working-class mind would understand them to any degree sufficient for persuasion. The majority of voters responded to bluster and spectacle, yet the Best Men gave them lengthy treatises on tariff reform. Thus for all of their "cold, shrewd objectivity", the Mugwumps' attempts at capturing "that sovereign Public Opinion" were trapped inside their own university-oriented world [23].

The really disappointing thing about this mental prison is that, as evidenced by their social and personal activities, none of the Mugwumps really wanted to leave. Most belonged to the Union League Club and other such selective organizations which reduced their contact with the common folk to its barest minimum. Simply put, these clubs were out-and-out elitist sanctuaries; gentlemen could go there to spend free time away from public restaurants or taverns, those distasteful rooms "where they rubbed elbows with 'all sorts'" [24]. Men with more cerebral pretensions took a cue from the early groups to form societies like the Century Club in 1847, the American Social Science Association in 1865, and the various Civil Service Reform Leagues that popped up in the early 1880s. Typical formal activities at a literary club included prepared lectures or speeches; the Reform Leagues also convened meetings in which sparse attendees reviewed progress reports and future plans. On other occasions, paying members could drop by to read through the various magazines or newspapers, browse through whatever hardcover library might be available, or check the latest financial reports from the ubiquitous stock ticker. Regardless of the specific nature of their distractions, there is no doubt that a disdain of the general public motivated the formation of social and literary clubs.

In addition to their scholarly articles and exclusive societies, another clue to the Mugwumps' aristocratic and textual orientation can be found in the thousands of letters and other documents circulated amongst themselves. The most recent edition of *The Letters of Henry Adams* (1982) runs to six volumes, E.L. Godkin's *Life and Letters* (1907) consists of two volumes. *The Reminiscences of Carl Schurz* (1907) is three volumes long. No comprehensive collection of George W. Curtis' letters have been

published, but his *Orations and Addresses* is three volumes whose individual speeches average thirty pages apiece. The massive amount of written material is a testament to the insular nature of an erudite coterie: the Mugwumps related best to each other when they were writing or reading, and when they were not doing so they had trouble relating to anyone.

All of this intellectual business done behind closed doors indicates that the Mugwumps "possessed neither the inclination to 'get down' among the masses of voters nor the proper equipment for reaching them" [25]. Although many of these educated gentlemen complained bitterly about the state of America's political culture hardly any of the precious few who tried could get in touch with the people, get elected, and thus foster the reformist agenda. Sproat writes that the average Liberal "recoiled from the disagreeable everyday activities of a political system that became more complex and seemingly more unmanageable every year" [26]; the entrenchment of machine politics dictated that anyone who wanted change would have to work within the *de facto* rules of pageantry and patronage, not around them as most Mugwumps wished to do. As a consequence many of the Best Men conceded defeat and parroted the rationalizations of Henry Adams, who felt that his self-appointed role as a "political gadfly" was "the only role possible for an independent intellectual unwilling to compromise his principles" [27]; this lofty position seems to have had greatest utility in that it protected gentlemen like Adams from having to 'rub shoulders' with the common man.

The Mugwumps were fed up with the decades of government fueled by dirty money and controlled by uncultivated opportunists; however, the reformers' haughty

aristocratic nature prevented them from attacking the spoilsmen at the source of their power-- the people. Although the Mugwumps engaged with the dominant political system, they fatally restricted this engagement to complex matters of policy that did nothing to sway the opinions of a public which voted with their hearts and not their minds. The Mugwumps needed a forum to convey their ideas in an appealing fashion, one that would not be dismissed by the general populace as yet another pretentious and verbose attempt to get back "in". *Puck* would be this medium.

III) A Popular Medium

In the early years of its New York-based operation, *Puck* as a business enterprise depended almost entirely upon its appeal to the German community. Within a few years, however, it had become established as the first commercially viable illustrated humor magazine in America; by 1880 it boasted a circulation of eighty-five thousand [1]. The cartoons featured by artistic director Joseph Keppler and his publishing partner Adolph Schwartzmann expressed a liberal orientation occasioned by their German origins, and corresponded to that of the gentlemen reformers. David E. E. Sloane writes that *Puck* "tapped the great middle-class readership of America" and also attracted "upper and some lower class readers as well" [2]; in this fashion the magazine functioned as a link between elite intellect and popular imagination, transmitting the Mugwump ideology to the large body of voters who did not respond to the complex textual arguments of highbrow publications like *The Nation*. Whether they knew it or not, the Best Men had a weapon to compete with the barbecues and torchlight parades of mainstream partisan politics.

To be sure, *Puck* depended on all strata of the population, in that the political inspiration came from the intellectual aristocrats while the general public put ten cents down each week to keep the magazine in print. Price is by no means irrelevant in considering its impact on cartoon culture: with *Harper's* one would have to pay thirty-five cents for a regular illustrated newspaper that incidentally featured a couple of black-and-white Thomas Nast woodcuts; by contrast, *Puck* offered three full-color lithographs each week, on the front and back covers as well as a two page center spread.

Editor Henry C. Bunner filled the remaining twelve pages with his own light fiction and verse as well as an endless supply of jokes, puns, and pen-and-ink drawings, creating, "in short, a good value for a dime" [3].

The cover price was not the only aspect of the magazine geared towards a large middle and working class. Keppler capitalized on the latest printing methods available so that his cartoons would appear "even more eye-catching than ever" to a public whose everyday world "reveled in color" [4]. The artist's experimentation with various types of chromolithographs bordered on obsession, but the work seems to have paid off: the ease in both drawing and printing made lithography "an ideal technique to distribute popular art forms" [5]. The attention of a large and loyal group of buyers ensured *Puck*'s dominance in political satire through the end of the century.

"An Unexpected Blow" [fig. 6] reflects both an understanding of the masses who bought the magazine, as well as a willingness to entertain them-- two qualities which the Best Men severely lacked. Considering the different components of the image, one can see that gusts of "Public Opinion" wind keep the "U.S. Grant" kite in the air, but also threaten to knock over the "Republican Party" chimney built with bricks labelled as the political machines of various states. To make matters worse, the kite is about to be struck by a bolt of lightning faintly captioned as the "Independent Press". Keppler surely saw himself as a non-partisan journalist, as his magazine would not actively promote a particular presidential candidate until after Grover Cleveland's victory in 1884 [6]; the press as lightning accurately characterizes the destructive potential of both entities. Representing the public opinion as wind is an equally astute observation, since opinions

are somewhat abstract, intangible things that can shift rapidly and unexpectedly. Inasmuch as public opinion is a major factor in political contests, it is also essentially a force of nature which can exercise tremendous power. Keppler demonstrates through this cartoon that, like the wind, the public has a certain fickle quality that can both sustain the career of a hero-president as well as destroy the constructions of spoilsmen like Roscoe Conkling and Don Cameron.

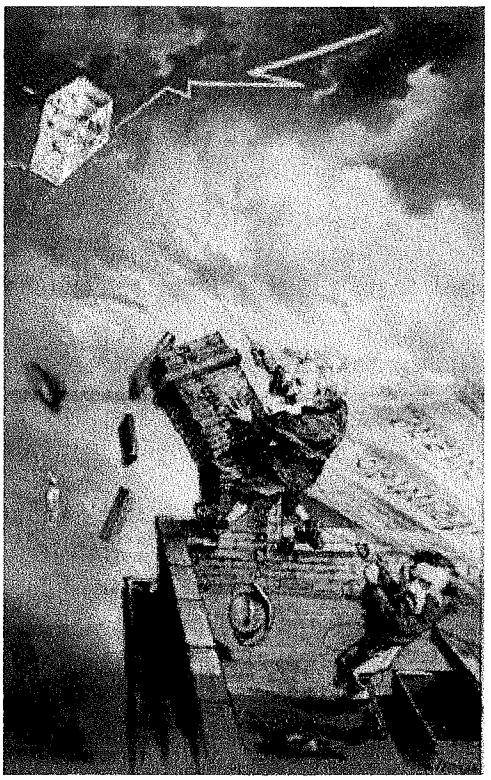
Fischer writes that the success of a political cartoon rests in its ability "to influence public opinion through its use of *widely and instantly understood* symbols, slogans, referents, and allusions" (my italics) [7]; a sampling of the lithographs from 1880 to 1884 indicates that there was a broad shared culture for Keppler and company to work with. "People cannot parody what is not familiar" to the audience [8], and so *Puck*'s best cartoons incorporated popular amusements which emerged after the Civil War as well as universally-recognized themes from the Bible, Shakespeare, and other "classic" sources. This approach is of course not new; "Passional Christi und Antichristi" presents an instance of the artist basing his image in that first and foremost member of the public culture-- the Bible-- as early as the sixteenth century. Realizing that any cartoons not soundly based in shared culture would fare no better with the people than *The North American Review*, Keppler and his artists illustrated their editorial opinions with well-known narratives and activities.

In addition to the over-arching story which governed the picture, the typical *Puck* cartoon contained many other smaller embellishments; because they serve to ridicule individual public figures or specific issues, they seem to originate in the *caricatura*.

Keppler was one of the principal caricaturists of the century, but his approach is far more realistic than the Italian, which, as "A Captain of Pope Urban VII" demonstrated earlier, is less concerned with fidelity to the subject's actual appearance. The attention to realism in his subjects' faces indicates an awareness of the growing power of photographs in the political arena as well as the culture in general; furthermore Keppler's molding of expressions which interacted with the degree of levity evoked by the cartoon's setting--like James A. Garfield smiling coquettishly as he prepares to marry Uncle Sam-- provided another source of humor. [Go to the "Caricature and the *Carte-de-Viste*" to learn more about the relationship between caricature and photography in *Puck*.]

Building off of the person-oriented caricature, other small details in *Puck* usually regarded the transformation of certain objects into symbolic counterparts. Some of the cartoons look as if the main characters are about to be crowded out of the frame by the various and sundry symbols piled up around them; while this can be seen as a distraction from the image's overall message, closer examinations show that the clutter has concrete associations which lend rhetorical support to the editorial slant of the cartoon. The scene Keppler drew for "Inspecting the Democratic Curiosity Shop" is one such example.

Since *Puck* concentrated on political activity, its artists tried to reflect facets of that environment's general atmosphere and distort them in such a way as to illuminate particular criticisms. For many years sports had been one of the favorite cartoon metaphors for politics; Keppler and company wisely followed this current. The detail from "The Political Handicap" [fig. 7] is such an example, as its parody lies in the comparison of equestrian ability and effectiveness on the campaign trail. The image



juxtaposes 1880 Republican presidential nominee James A. Garfield's confidence in the saddle with the indecisive Democrats, who had been unable to elect one of their own since James Buchanan in 1856.

Another trait of the political arena that held a great deal of weight with the masses was its emphasis on masculinity. One scholar of the era concisely describes the nature of gender identity in this regard:

> Late nineteenth century election campaigns were public spectacles that ended for one side in triumph, for the other in humiliation. Men described these contests through metaphors of warfare and, almost as frequently, cock fighting and boxing. Victory validated manhood. . . [9]

Spoilsmen like Roscoe Conkling proclaimed themselves as the men of politics; the women were invariably the polite intellectuals, publicly insulted with epithets like "political hermaphrodites", "eunuchs", "man-milliners", and "miss-Nancys". Geoffrey Blodgett wryly observes that, due to the name-calling of Stalwart politicians, the public perceived the liberals as "the gelded men of the Gilded Age" [10].

Obviously wanting to tap into all the metaphors created by successful public men, *Puck* indulged heavily in this interpretation of political contests. The dapper Conkling was a perennial target: in "The Only Baby" [fig. 8], by Keppler's first assistant artist James A. Wales, the New York Senator can be seen with Pennsylvania spoilsman Don Cameron as nursemaids. The matronly indulgence of these two plain-jane nannies is a funny enough picture in itself, but the image is also a commentary on the relationships between prominent Republican presidential contenders and the powerful GOP managers. Roscoe and Don ignore James G. Blaine, John Sherman, and others who sought the 1880

nomination because of their infatuation with baby Ulysses; in addition, the cartoon implies that as long as they keep on feeding the baby his "3rd Term Pap" he will come to recognize their authority over him. The message about the internal affairs of the Republican Party is thus conveyed to the viewer in a familiar gender-bending context.

A more typical use of this humor in *Puck* can be seen in the detail from "The Cinderella of the Republican Party and Her Haughty Sisters" [fig. 9]. The supercilious air that likens Grant and Conkling to the wicked debutantes of fairytale is a perfect appropriation of the Stalwarts' own favorite weapon, and one which due to its simplicity would enjoy immediate public comprehension. Concentrating on these two figures, details within the detail can be found which specifically refer to the duo's shady behavior. The sash of Grant's dress is a representation of the "Complimentary Ticket Around the World" which he used after his second presidential term; the feathers in his tiara carry the labels of "War Record" and "Party Fidelity", implying that his records of military service and partisanship constituted the only 'feathers in his cap' responsible for his success. The medallion which fronts the gaudy headdress sports the number "306", which is the highest amount of votes he would receive at the 1880 convention. Conkling's hat is inscribed with numerous references to his "Greatest Effort"; apparently he would start off every oration with this immodest characterization. These elements of the cartoon probe deeper than the shared metaphor of cross-dressing humor, and illuminate the liberal reformers' opinion that Grant and Conkling lacked both the qualifications and honesty required to lead the country.

Going beyond the personal ridicule of trans-sexuality, Keppler combined the two

backgrounds of sports and gender in "The Contest of Beauty". As the cartoon demonstrates, the men are voting solely on the basis of their attraction to the entrants; that the ballots are being placed in a box marked "First Prize = Presidency" is an emphasis on the high stakes involved in a matter taken so frivolously by the voters. The idea of a beauty contest is interesting because it can be seen (only in the context of the unenlightened historical period under discussion, of course) as a sport for women; in the same way that boxers relied on the supposedly inherent masculine talent of athletic prowess, women used their inborn aesthetic qualities to win whatever competition they might be engaged in. This cartoon is an exemplar of Keppler's notion that, regardless of gender orientation, politics in his day and age was a spectator sport that differed only slightly from other forms of amusement: it required no mental participation from the people, provided that they reward whoever entertained them the best. In addition to reflecting the mainstream culture, it illuminates by opposition the problem that the Mugwumps had in successfully bringing substantial, thought-requiring matters before the people. *Puck*'s challenge was not only to be the best entertainer, but in the process make viewers confront the issues in some way.

The artists also drew material from other new diversions that cropped up in urban areas. Settings such as dog shows locate the viewer in peculiar but not unknown territory, and make criticisms of both the characters pictured within it as well as the prevailing conception of public affairs as fun and not "the serious responsibility of unselfish patriots" [11]. Besides the moral about the undue levity of contemporary politics, such a large amount of personally-directed satire is packed into the cartoon that at

least a few of Keppler's reformist statements would get through to the average viewer. [Go to "Our National Dog Show" to examine these details further.] In 1884 *Puck* artist Bernhard Gilliam would exploit to the fullest this method of placing critiques of professional politicians in a publicly accessible setting with "The National Dime Museum", which played off P.T. Barnum's American Museum by displaying a diverse assembly of political freaks-- among them James G. Blaine as the tattooed man. By taking these elements of shared culture and giving them a "spin" in the direction of liberal reform, Keppler and company disseminated Mugwump ideology in a way that the aloof intellectuals may have never even dreamed of.

The famous series of tattooed man cartoons which featured 1884 Republican nominee James G. Blaine with the names of different scandals printed over his body has been explored by many scholars, including Fischer, West, and Samuel J. Thomas; an equally good series by Keppler founded on the premise of 1888 GOP candidate Benjamin Harrison shrinking into his grandfather William Henry Harrison's cavernous beaverskin hat has also been well chronicled. Although not united by the kind of narrative continuity of these two anti-Republican campaigns, the series of cartoons which lampooned Ulysses S. Grant as he aspired to a third term presidential nomination in 1880 present a compelling set of images which incorporate vivid and easily-understood situational contexts as well as Mugwump ideology to make their point about "Unconditional Surrender"'s unsuitability for the presidency. Continue on to "The Campaign Against Grant" to learn more. . .

In Conclusion

The decades of the nineteenth century after the Civil War offer many treasures for the student of American civilization. During this period political culture emerged as a distinct set of symbols, slogans, and practices; this and the increase in forms of public amusement oriented the political environment in the direction of spectacle and humor. After years of the political culture's exploitation by uncouth partisans a group of highly educated gentlemen organized themselves in an attempt to restore efficiency, honesty, and dignity to government administration. Unfortunately the Mugwumps confined their attempts at raising public consciousness to erudite or highly technical essays which were simply incompatible with a less educated middle or lower class mind. The establishment of Joseph Keppler's magazine *Puck*, whose cartoons drew artistic guidance from German and Italian archetypes and received ideological inspiration from Mugwump opinion, marked a significant moment in which the ideas of an intellectual elite could be successfully relayed to the masses. Using the medium of illustrated humor, *Puck* ridiculed the prominent figures of the day and engaged in fascinating commentary about the relationships between political activity and popular culture. This comparison points to Keppler and company's understanding of politics as America's true national pastime, a concept that still lingers with us today. Furthermore, the commercial success of the magazine as well as the triumph of certain liberal missions such as the prevention of General Grant's third presidential term remain a testament to the efficacy of Keppler's work. *Puck* celebrated its four hundredth issue with a lithograph which summarizes the perspective of the magazine, its artistic director, and the Mugwumps he believed in: "Men May Come and Men May Go, but the Work of Reform Goes on Forever!"

"Our National Dog Show"
June 16, 1880

The caricature of public men as different breeds of canine affords plenty of humor in itself: they are all of a similar non-human species, but they have each been endowed with peculiar personal traits by nature of their specific pedigrees. Puck holds his entry while standing next to sturdy reform-oriented mastiffs Grover Cleveland and Seth Low, as the canine contestants pose on the semicircular stand. The middle level of the stand displays the clownish minister Samuel J. Talmadge as a "Toby Dog", philandering Reverend Henry Ward Beecher as a poodle, and Grant's corrupt Navy Secretary George Robeson as, of all things, a "Water Dog". On the upper tier are Carl Schurz, appropriately as a dachshund; Congressman Franklin Edson receives the awful pun of "House-Dog"; Boss Tweed's successor John Kelly is likened to a "Tammany Tarrier" (sic). The lowest part of the stands contains "Hybrid Hayes", a reference to the former president's moderate and decidedly unpartisan politics; Grant's Attorney-General George Hoar is labelled as a "Hoarhound", which puns off a kind of candy-- not to mention *whore-hound* and all its connotations; finally, Benjamin Butler's verminous nature is represented as a "Tewksbury Ratter". Much of the lower right corner of the cartoon is taken up by contestants "from Stalwart Kennels": Grant begs with a dish in his mouth, while Logan and Cameron proudly point their snouts in the air; Conkling is caricatured as a greyhound, the favorite breed of dog racers and other betting men.

In the right foreground specimens from the "Lap Dog Monopoly Breed" perch on

a plush red pillow under the protection of Chester A. Arthur. The implication that robber barons Jay Gould and Cornelius Vanderbilt live the lives of pampered house pets is a dig at the extravagant lifestyle of these ruthless businessmen. Although the Mugwumps were a relatively wealthy group of people they despised these kind of financial and industrial giants, for they neither had the education nor the breeding requisite for the high social position their wealth enabled them to occupy. In addition, the monopolistic practices of the robber barons ran contrary to the Mugwumps' *lassiez-faire* economic philosophy, which preferred as much competition as possible to keep the market energetic and healthy.

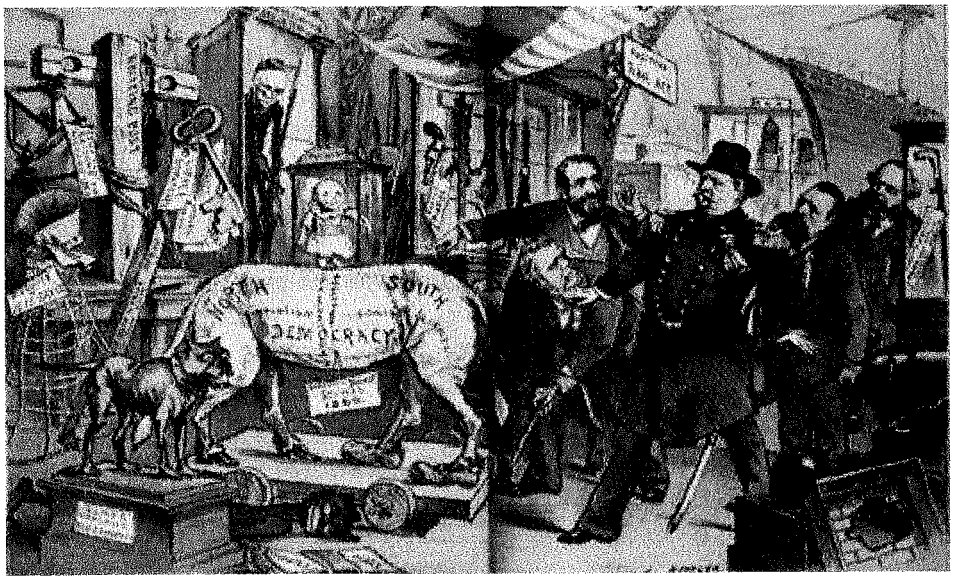
Besides these individual barbs, the upper right side of the cartoon satirizes the system of partisan journalism which marked Gilded Age newspapers. The editors of various party organs are accurately caricatured as rolled-up copies of their own publications; almost every successful publication in New York is included in this group, such as Whitelaw Reid of the *Tribune*, Charles A. Dana of the *Sun*, James Gordon Bennett, Jr., of the *Herald*, and George W. Curtis of *Harper's Weekly*. Their appearance in this scene, whose overall motif is one of voting for the best contestant (whether a dog or a political candidate), is a testament to their role in conveying opinions to the public and therefore exercising great influence over the popular decision-making process. However, the true humor from this part of the image lies in the fact that the entrants they scrutinize are Democratic Party losers from the two previous presidential elections, Samuel J. Tilden and Winfield Hancock Scott. In this context the editors, despite their position as shapers of public opinion, are seen as being hopelessly behind the times. Keppler exercises his independence from dual perspectives by making fun of all the

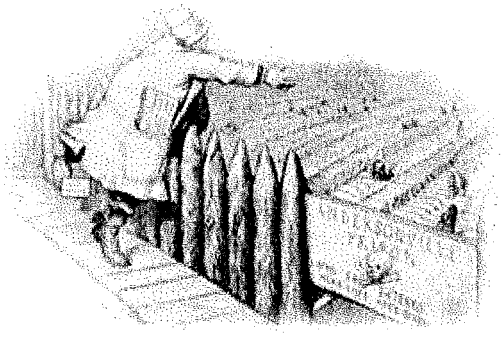
prominent figure in contemporary public affairs, regardless of party affiliation; this stance mirrors the freedom that Mugwumps highlighted in their patronage of objective intellectual journals and third-party politics.

"Inspecting the Democratic Curiosity Shop"
September 1, 1880

Although the immediate reaction is to tune out most of the clutter which surrounds primary characters General Winfield Hancock Scott, Democratic Party Chairman W.H. Barnum, and Senators Hill, Lamar, and Hampton, a close examination of the overall composition of the cartoon shows that it is actually a well-organized editorial about that other political organization of Gilded Age, the Democratic Party. The image plays off of two general themes, to which the multitude of objects serve as symbolic evidence. The most immediate political context is that Scott, an unremarkable and non-political Union general, had been lured into the position of representing the Democrats in the 1880 presidential election. Building from this foundation, the intimate history of the party is incarnated as a curiosity shop whose knick-knacks are on display for Scott's inspection. The Democratic Party, which for many years after the Civil War carried the stigma of secession, is likened in this manner to a minor commercial phenomena as well as a novel by Charles Dickens, one particular author whose "influence was strong" across class lines [1].

The curiosity shop is a tailor-made setting for a political cartoon, because the shop makes a business of showcasing items which-- as in cartooning-- are linked to deeper stories or issues. Each of the objects found throughout the Democratic Curiosity Shop are associated with different elements of Southern/Democratic culture; if general categories were constructed for them, one group would pertain to slavery and another to the Confederacy as a political and military system. (There are also a handful of


DEMOCRACY



stereotypical cracks at the South as a regional culture, like the stuffed alligator and the banjo in the upper-center area of the image.)

Several pieces relating to slavery and race are collected in the lower left corner of the cartoon; some of these 'curios' are either a poor attempt at sarcasm or an indication that the artist was as limited in his worldview as most other passively white supremacist gentlemen of his era. Moving clockwise we see a Whipping Post, a Lamp Post Gallows for "Niggers", a Slave Tracking Bloodhound, and a Sambo-ish body which is curiously labelled Torpedo. On close inspection, "Niggers" is printed in quotation marks, and so it could indicate the artist's understanding of the word's pejorative nature. However, unless Keppler is trying to convey the idea that the average white Southerner put such little value in his slaves that he would use them as cheap weaponry, the "Torpedo" is beyond me. Hanging from the ceiling of the shop is a sign with the words Fugitive Slave Act; since it has no other visual reference the sign would appear to be an unimaginative attempt to pull out of the closet as many pro-slavery skeletons as possible. In spite of the questionable taste of his satire in this case, Keppler is emphasizing the victimization inherent in the slave system and associating its brutality with those who followed its political incarnation.

The second group of symbols is particularly interesting if one takes into account that the artist did not live in America prior to 1867; the cartoon reflects a knowledge of sectional conflict from as far back as the Kansas-Nebraska Act of 1856. Starting clockwise from the lower right corner a cannonball mounted on a pedestal is the infamous First Shot Fired at Sumter, and a punctured section of masonry is labelled as the Hole

Made By Same. Next up is Preston Brooks' Cane that Struck Sumner in the Capitol after the Massachusetts Senator's vitriolic "Crime Against Kansas" speech. In the upper right corner is the Confederate warship Alabama, a British-built vessel which had terrorized commercial ships crossing the Atlantic during the war. The "Alabama Claims" were a set of grievances the United States lodged with England demanding compensation for their aiding to the Confederacy; the international scope of this incident may be the reason for Keppler's familiarity with its occurrence. Similarly, the assault of Charles Sumner and the battle at Fort Sumter made headlines throughout Europe. Inside of glass cases are K.K.K robes, a variety of torture implements, and a derringer marked as Booth's Pistol, all of which require little explanation for a domestic or foreign reader. The ring of keys symbolizing the Cipher Dispatches is one of the few allusions to post-war Democratic politics; this series of communiques implicated New York governor and 1876 presidential contender Samuel J. Tilden in election fraud and other related transgressions. Leaning against the aforementioned lamp post is a Rail Ridden by Union Men Down South, and the remains of a hoop skirt marked Disguise of Jefferson Davis, which reminds viewers of the Confederate president's ill-conceived escape from Union soldiers. The last item referring to rebel politics is the pile of Repudiated Bonds, with which the Southern states tried to save their economy during Reconstruction.

Two pieces in the shop may point to one source of Keppler's knowledge of the South. In a glass case is an Andersonville Skeleton; just in front of it is a Rag Baby which symbolizes to the former Confederate states' need for "soft money", or currency not rigidly based on a gold standard. The Andersonville prison in Georgia is one of the more

gruesome footnotes to the history of the Civil War, and as such it may have retained a particular macabre hold on the public imagination and been introduced to the artist in this fashion. However, it is also equally plausible that Andersonville came to Keppler's attention via the one artistic entity serious scholars as well as myself have regularly defined him against: Thomas Nast. In the 1872 anti-Liberal Republican cartoon "Let Us Clasp Hands over the Bloody Chasm" [fig. 10] Horace Greeley is depicted as someone who would be willing to forgive even the grossest of Confederate atrocities in order to get elected. The Rag Baby is even better proof that Keppler got his history from cartoons, as Nast created the Baby and featured it in numerous lampoons of Democratic economic principles, including "The Haunted House" [fig. 11]. Though perhaps not as potent, this symbol is much like the "Join or Die" snake because they have each been associated with the same ideas over substantial periods of time. Furthermore, the Rag Baby presents an illuminating object lesson in the genre's self-referential tendencies: the public's imaginative cosmos contains not only literary settings like Dickens' *The Old Curiosity Shop* or more concrete historical metaphors like Jefferson Davis' dress, but also images from successful cartoons of the very-recent past.

The final item in the shop constructs a specific critique of Democratic politics, and also can be interpreted as a droll allegory of American political history. The horizontal stitching on the one end of this stuffed beast is labelled "Inflation" while that on the other is labelled "States' Rights"; the vertical stitching is "Secession Sympathy". The idea seems to be that secession sympathy holds together Northern Democrats who advocated soft money and Southern Democrats who adhered to anti-federalist legacies. On another

level, though, the Democratic Donkey, Stuffed 1860 could be a reference to small-d democrats and the notion that they all died when the Civil War began. The original balance of power in America was between the mercantilist federals from New England and the agrarian Southerners who looked to the libertarian principles of Jefferson and Calhoun for ideological guidance. One of the animal's rumps is labelled as North, and the other as South: America is thus a double-assed donkey, an artificial creation which raises a rather amusing paradox when its ability to walk forward is questioned.

The evidence assembled against the Democratic Party is designed both to emphasize the inhumanity of white Southerners-- in their treatment of Northern Caucasians as well as Negroes-- and also demonstrate their economic and legal incompetence. In this manner the disordered paraphernalia of the curiosity shop becomes as well-organized assault on the Democratic Party, and the cartoon moves beyond the simple irony of a Union general representing the party of slavery and secession to a razor sharp satire Jonathan Swift would probably be well pleased with.

Caricature and the *Carte-de-Viste*

The rise of photography in the nineteenth century had a great deal of impact on the cartoons in *Puck*, and probably dictated their realistic style of caricature as much as any other artistic factor. "The photograph was part and parcel of a middle class culture" that attended public galleries and also collected small mass-produced photos, known as *cartes-de-viste*, of political leaders and other celebrities [1]. The inexpensive *carte-de-viste* had a particularly important role in political campaigns, as they and other trinkets promoting candidates "served to familiarize millions of Americans with. . . the faces and popular images of men who did battle for the White House" [2]. The widespread recognizance of public men places them-- inasmuch as they are represented by their photographs-- in the arena of shared culture to which almost all voters could respond; in this manner the kind of realistic caricatures drawn by Keppler and other *Puck* artists solidified the links between the cartoons and the world outside it.

However, the nineteenth century ways of thinking about a person's representation in a photograph introduces another aspect of Keppler and company's caricatures, and how they interacted with popular imagination. Galleries such as Matthew Brady's specialized in displaying the realistic likenesses of public figures in the conviction that the images "could provide moral edification" to the viewers; the notion "that outer physical features could be clues to inner character" thus seems to be the inverse of classic Italian *caricatura* which strives to illuminate inner qualities through distortion, and not duplication, of the subject's appearance [3]. In contrast to the ethical lessons presented by the photograph,

Keppler's work placed the caricatured subject in costumes or situations which presented an alternative and decidedly less respectable set of clues about inner character.

The physiognomical associations applied to portrait photographs is an indication of the public's awareness of "'image', of social self-representation" [4]; when political operatives distributed their candidate's *carte-de-viste* among the crowd they were distributing a tool deliberately engineered to convey whatever personal qualities the candidate wished to emphasize to the viewer. Keppler's caricatures are an example of self-image being stolen from its owner and transformed in ways that consequently warp the photo's original message. Due to the currency of photographs and the associations they carried, the artist could exploit the mass production of this form of campaign paraphernalia to great success.

The Campaign Against Grant

Whether or not Ulysses S. Grant would capture the Republican Party's presidential nomination and run for an unprecedented third term became a hot topic in the press throughout the campaign season of 1880. He still had a great deal of support from the people, and would be one of the principal contenders at the GOP convention in June. Liberal gentlemen, however, were horrified at the thought of Grant's successful return to the White House. As a voice in the popular media, Joseph Keppler initiated a relentless attack on "Unconditional Surrender" and his legion of Stalwarts in order to prevent this potential disaster.

The cartoons presented here reflect significant aspects of Grant's political existence: to the people he was a potent figurehead who "blended the hero with the common man", symbolizing the ethos of the Civil War and the triumph of Republican values [1]. The spoilsmen who advised him had a different view; to them he was a brute force that would crush their rivals and open up a fountain of patronage. *Puck* exposed these roles by invoking them in the contexts of popular diversions and quasi-historical parables, which attempted to reduce Grant's stature in the public opinion and eliminate his chances of winning the nomination.

"Puck Wants a Strong Man at the Head of Government-- But Not *This* Kind" February 4, 1880

When Grant's Stalwart promoters ridiculed the soft-spoken but extremely honest

President Hayes in the final months of his term, Keppler contrasted the current regime to a recent one characterized by a large amount of muscle. "Puck Wants a Strong Man at the Head of Government-- But Not *This* Kind" is a skillful composite of caricatures which dredges up the Grant administration's entire rap sheet for all to see.

The "Strong Man" showcases his acrobatic ability as he suspends the group of tumblers from a "Navy Ring" and a "Whiskey Ring", both of which were conspiracies involving Navy Secretary George Robeson (center) and Grant's personal assistant Orville Babcock (lower right). The other circus performers include Alexander Sheppard (middle left), a prominent member of the Washington D.C. political machine; Thomas Murphy (lower left), who as Collector of the Port of New York was at the center of one of the historically largest and most egregious sources of corruption in the nation; William Belknap (middle left), the Secretary of War impeached for scandalous dealings with owners of Indian posts; and finally George Williams (lower center), the Attorney-General who "paid household bills from departmental funds and had committed other derelictions" while in office [2]. In spite of the athletic vigor depicted in this scene, it is associated with criminal activity instead of fitness for government service. Henry C. Bunner's editorial comments which accompanied the cartoon state that, while Washington, Jackson, and Lincoln displayed great fortitude in office, "a dungheap is also strong-- in its own way".

The scandals alluded to in this cartoon, as well as a generally disgraceful second term as president, forced Grant to take a three year trip around the world. When he returned to warm and friendly receptions these embarrassments had for the most part faded from the collective memory. With a new campaign brewing, Keppler realized that it

would be "important to recall the scandals" to the voters [3]. In this manner the image pillories the political opponent and conveys the liberal sentiment that forceful men and administrations are not the 'best men' for office.

"The Political 'Army of Salvation'"
March 31, 1880

On March 10th Commissioner George Railton Scott and seven women arrived in New York City from England to commence the Salvation Army's crusade in America. They quickly embarked on a campaign to redeem American souls by leading parades, singing hymns, and making similar public spectacles; Keppler used them as a background for this cartoon, appearing three weeks after their debut. The idea that both organizations, Stalwart Republicanism and the Salvation Army, exhibited a peculiar blend of military and religious zealotry is an insightful observation which serves to ridicule partisanship in all its incarnations.

The first element of the picture that should be noted is the artist's attention to the physical details. Besides the correct gender proportion, the dark costumes, derby hats, and the flag are all exact reproductions of the Army's original appearance [4]. This affords the opportunity for some cross-dressing humor, as George Robeson, John A. Logan, and others play the female Christian Soldiers; Roscoe Conkling is accurately shown to be the leader of the operation, and seemingly the loudest voice in the choir. Such a precise likeness of the Salvation Army strengthens the bond between it and the Stalwarts in a visual sense; by linking the two, the low opinion the public initially had of

the Army will hopefully transfer to its political twin.

The depiction of Grant as the "Savior of His Country" is obviously intended as a satirical comparison to Jesus; however the General's elevation to this deific stature points to an important part of his public image. His service in the Federal Army placed him "in the cloudy Valhalla of myth" [5], where the people worshipped him with unrestrained sentiment. Since Lincoln was dead Grant became the focus of all the re-affirmations of Republican values, and so his disciples fetishized his image in order to further the campaign. This deliberate use of Grant as totem further emphasizes the spoilsmen's manipulation of him, bringing out the Stalwarts' devious nature. As confirmed by Conkling's hat, the evangelistic mission and GOP politics are represented by Keppler as shady pretenses for personal gain.

"The Worship of the Golden Calf"
April 21, 1880

Keppler frequently used scenes from the Bible to convey his opinions about political candidates; as the most widely- and thoroughly-known set of narratives in the entire Western world, the Book was a gold mine to cartoonists trying to connect with their audiences' imagination. This picture recalls the story of the Jews' worship of a pagan idol in the absence of Moses; the Stalwarts' lack of vision is thus ridiculed because they are shown to be unable to evolve past obsolete religions-- as symbolized by golden calf Grant. Furthermore, the heathens carry on their celebrations in defiance of a sacred law being delivered by Puck as he descends *a la* Moses from Mount Sinai. In this manner

the Stalwarts are likened to Biblical rabble, whose indecent behavior requires a Commandment, THOU SHALT NOT COVET A THIRD TERM, in order to keep them in line.

This cartoon is another example of Grant as a symbol of Stalwart/Republican values, and is probably the most direct in its simultaneous association with depravity. Like "Passional Christi und Antichristi", this image requires little or no interpretation because its literary reference is so pervasive, and the morals attached to it are so clear; in fact, the artist hardly needs to make any distortions to the original scene in order to make his editorial comments known. As stated elsewhere, the Bible is the earliest and most dominant element of shared public culture, which can be invoked in any popular medium and be understood by all. Playing off of such universal themes is the essence of cartooning's power to unite social groups, and its direction against the Stalwarts in this cartoon is a use the Mugwumps would thoroughly enjoy.

"The Modern Wandering Jew"
May 19, 1880

A literary character based on Scripture illuminates another aspect of Grant's relationship to his Stalwart managers. The cartoon compares his world tour to the legend of Ahasuerus, who fell under a curse because he repudiated Jesus on the road to Calvary. Both Grant and the Wandering Jew had to adopt nomadic existences as penance for past wrongdoing: one had to leave the country so its citizens would forget about his political foibles, while the other was forced to walk the earth until Judgement Day. In this manner

the General's extended leave of absence appears to be a punishment enforced by an omnipotent being; the forces that command him are represented by the faces of Conkling and other spoilsmen in the clouds overhead.

Once again Keppler exposes Grant as a puppet in the hands of individuals far more devious than himself; he is a tool who must drop out of sight for awhile so that his masters can get more mileage out of him at a future date. This characterization actually reflects a measure of sympathy, as the implication is that he has no control over his destiny. In fact, the harried expression on Grant's face as he glances at the thunderheads looming over his shoulder may even indicate fear of the men who use him as a means to their own selfish ends.

The foreground of the image contains a number of gravestones, which bear the names of great presidents and attest to their only having served for two terms. These morbid reminders are invocations of men who (with the possible exception of Andrew Jackson) the Best Men would look to as the paragons of statesmanship. Their juxtaposition with the man who to them personified political ineptitude expresses the Mugwump ideal of a meritocracy in terms familiar to the general public.

Drawing from such well-known sources as American national religion and Christian narrative, "The Modern Wandering Jew" places current events in a perspective that emphasizes the need to keep General Grant out of office. A bit of verse which accompanied the cartoon summarizes many of these statements:

A fated wanderer, his way he wends,
Driven here and there by many selfish friends,

Where'er he goes, sign of a people's wrath,
The Curse of the Third Term still haunts his path.

"To the Chicago Convention"
May 26, 1880

In addition to his role as the GOP figurehead, Grant's immense popular following characterized him as a seemingly inexorable force which would overcome any competition it encountered; his appearance as a locomotive in "To the Chicago Convention" is a reflection of this idea. The viewer can clearly see that the engine, the inanimate force that pulls the weight of the entire train, is personified as the General while the engineers and switchmen-- who control how fast and where the engine actually goes-- are played by the spoilsmen. The sheer brute strength of this Republican iron horse combined with the shrewd operations of Conkling and his cronies manages to pull a passenger car filled with politicos who hope to profit from four more years of Stalwart rule.

The cartoon also contains references to other Republican presidential hopefuls, but makes it clear that their chances of pulling ahead of Grant's train are slim at best. Senators John Sherman and James G. Blaine can be seen in the upper right corner whipping their horses on in a frantic attempt to win the race; however, the "Third Term Machine" is so efficient and powerful that it leaves the opposition behind. This is not merely a further comment on Grant's symbolic strength but also an implication that any attempt to gain office not propelled by a robust and well-oiled political organization had no chance of victory in the contemporary society.

While the train to Chicago is technically superior to its horse-drawn rivals, it is also

a reckless and unthinking force that bowls over everything in its path. Keppler demonstrates this idea by depicting a victim of this brutish passage, a Lady Columbia-ish woman labelled "Republican Party". With the addition of this casualty the cartoon focuses on the idea that the Stalwarts' selfish lust for power has caused fatal damage to the party. This fragmentation is evident through the representation of three major factions of current or past Republicans: the Stalwart train, Blaine's "Half-Breed" buggy, and apostate liberals Carl Schurz and George W. Curtis who stand mourning over the victim. This interpretation of the cartoon as a death-knell for the GOP is not a perfect prophecy, but it is true that the rift between the supporters of Grant and Blaine did much to usher in the nomination of dark horse James A. Garfield.

"The Appomattox of the Third Termers"
June 16, 1880

The final cartoon of *Puck*'s anti-Grant campaign is one of the most acid commentaries ever to flow from Keppler's lithocrayon. In this scene the artist took the General's greatest and, as legend would have it, most gracious triumph and thrust it into the present day political situation with devastating symmetry. Instead of General Lee capitulating to the Union victor, it is "Unconditional Surrender" himself who plays the part of the loser. Behind him the various lieutenants of the Stalwart army lay down their weapons in submission; of particularly ironic interest is Grand Army of the Republic president John A. Logan. The winners of this political battle celebrate from their positions around "Fort Alliance" whose ideology is clarified to be "Anti-Third-Term". This group is

clearly Mugwump in its composition, as its leaders are Schurz and Curtis, and Keppler's symbolic appearance as Puck clearly aligns him on the liberal side of the battle.

If Grant can be considered to be one of the central icons of Gilded Age politics because he represented the triumph of Republicanism in the Civil War, then it stands to reason that one of the war's the most poignant episodes in which he played a leading role would occupy an equally prominent position in the public's imagination. By recalling this scene to the people Keppler not only directed a stinging barb at their hero but also chronicles the end of Stalwart political dominance.

End Notes

Introduction

[1] E.L. Godkin, "The Comic-Paper Question," *Reflections and Comments, 1865-1895.* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1895) 29-39; *The John-Donkey* ran from January to October 1848, *Momus* from April to July 1860, *Mrs. Grundy* from July to September 1865. *American Humor Magazines and Comic Periodicals*, 1987.
[2] Lawrence W. Levine, *Highbrow/Lowbrow: The Emergence of Cultural Hierarchy in America.* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1988) 1-22.

I) A Brief History of Cartoons

[1] Werner Hoffman, *Caricature from Leonardo to Picasso.* (New York: Crown Publishers, 1957) 16.
[2] Hoffman, 25.
[3] Hoffman, 15.
[4] Ralph E. Shikes, *The Indignant Eye: The Artist as Social Critic in Prints and Drawings from the Fifteenth Century to Picasso.* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1969) 13-17.
[5] Shikes, 10.
[6] Stephen Hess and Milton Kaplan, *The Ungentlemanly Art: A History of American Political Cartoons.* (New York: MacMillan, 1975) 52.
[7] Roger A. Fischer, *Them Damned Pictures: Explorations in American Cartoon Art.* (North Haven CT: Archon Books) 1996. The mythic nature of the Nast's anti-Tweed cartoons is thoroughly analyzed in the first chapter of this book.
[8] Hess 93-94; Morton Keller, *The Art and Politics of Thomas Nast.* (London: Oxford UP, 1968) 12-13.
[9] Allan Nevins and Frank Weitenkampf, *A Century of Political Cartoons: Caricature in the United States from 1800 to 1900.* (New York: Charles Scribners' Sons, 1944) 118.
[10] Nevins, 134.
[11] Richard Samuel West, "Laughing in German: A Short History of *Puck, Illustrirtes Humoristisches Wochenblatt* (1876-1898)." Inks (1996): 17.
[12] Nevins, 134.
[13] Richard Samuel West, *Satire on Stone: The Political Cartoons of Joseph Keppler.* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1988) 9.
[14] West, *Satire on Stone*, 8.
[15] Joseph Schaffer, *Carl Schurz: Militant Liberal.* (Evansville, WI: Antes Press, 1930).

II) Mainstream and Elite Political Culture

[1] Morton Keller, *Affairs of State: Public Life in Late Nineteenth Century America.* (Cambridge: Belknap of Harvard UP, 1977) 242.
[2] H.Wayne Morgan, "Toward National Unity," *The Gilded Age*. ed. H. Wayne Morgan. (Syracuse: Syracuse UP, 1970) 3.

[3] Ari Hoogenboom, *Outlawing the Spoils: A History of the Civil Service Reform Movement, 1865-1883*. (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1961) 4.
[4] Keller, *Affairs*, 245.
[5] Hoogenboom, 5.
[6] Keller, *Affairs*, 256.
[7] Keller, *Affairs*, 267.
[8] Hoogenboom, 50-51.
[9] Keller, *Affairs*, 261.
[10] Hoogenboom, 111; John G. Sproat, *The Best Men: Liberal Reformers in the Gilded Age*. (New York: Oxford UP, 1968) 261.
[11] Hoogenboom, 114.
[12] Morton Keller, *The Art and Politics of Thomas Nast*. (London: Oxford UP, 1968) 71.
[13] Gerald W. McFarland, *Mugwumps, Morals & Politics, 1884-1920*. (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1975) 11.
[14] Sproat, vii.
[15] Sproat, 7.
[16] Hoogenboom, 193.
[17] Keller, *Affairs*, 269.
[18] Sproat, 47.
[19] Hoogenboom, ix.
[20] Hoogenboom, 192.
[21] McFarland, 184.
[22] Robert R. Roberts, "Popular Culture and Public Taste," *The Gilded Age*, 282.
[23] Sproat, 67; Keller, *Affairs*, 271.
[24] Mary Cable, Top Drawer: *High Society from the Gilded Age to the Roaring Twenties*. (New York: Atheneum Press, 1984) 52.
[25] Sproat, 277.
[26] Sproat, 47.
[27] Walter E. Burdick, Jr., "Elite in Transition: From Alienation to Manipulation," diss., Northern Illinois University, 1969. (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, 1974) 44.

Part III) A Popular Medium
[1] The German community's support of *Puck* v2.1 is described in West, "Laughing in German"; Circulation rates are listed in Sloane, *American Humor Magazines and Comic Periodicals*, 226.
[2] Sloane, xv.
[3] West, "Laughing in German," 20.
[4] West, *Satire on Stone*, 73; Roberts, 277.
[5] Thomas C. Blaisdell, et al. *The American Presidency in Political Cartoons 1776-1976*. (Berkeley: University Art Museum Press, 1976) 14.
[6] Frank Luther Mott, *A History of American Magazines, 1865-1885*. (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1938) 259.

[7] Fischer, 122.
[8] Levine, 4.
[9] Rebecca Edwards, "Gender in American Politics, 1880-1900," diss, University of Virginia, 1995, 21.
[10] Geoffrey Blodgett, "Reform Thought and the Genteel Tradition." *The Gilded Age*, 56.
[11] Sproat, 47.

"Inspecting the Democratic Curiosity Shop"
[1] Roberts, 276.

Caricature and the Carte-de-Viste
[1] Miles Orvell, *The Real Thing: Imitation and Authenticity in American Culture, 1880-1940*. (Chapel Hill:University of North Carolina Press, 1989) 75.
[2] Roger A. Fischer, *Tippecanoe and Trinkets Too: The Material Culture of American Presidentail Campaigns, 1828-1984*. (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1988) 302.
[3] Barbara McCandless, "The Portrait Studio and the Celebrity," *Photography in Nineteenth-Century America*. ed. Martha A. Sandweiss. (Fort Worth: Amon Carter Museum, 1991) 49, 55.
[4] Alan Trachtenberg, "Photography: Emergence of a Keyword," *Photography in Nineteenth-Century America*, 26.

The Campaign Against Grant
[1] Dixon Wecter, *The Hero in America: A Chronicle of Hero-Worship*. (New York: Charles Scribners' Sons, 1941) 323.
[2] Nevins, 128.
[3] Nevins, 128.
[4] Edward H. McKinley, *Marching to Glory: The History of the Salvation Army in the United States of America, 1880-1980*. (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1980) 11-13.
[5] Wecter, 330.

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