
DOOMED BY CARTOON



How Cartoonist Thomas Nast and *The New-York Times*
Brought down Boss Tweed and His Ring of Thieves

JOHN ADLER
with Draper Hill



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Hardcover ISBN: 978-1-60037-443-2.

Published by:

Morgan James Publishing, LLC
1225 Franklin Ave. Ste 325
Garden City, NY 11530-1693
Toll Free 800-485-4943
www.MorganJamesPublishing.com



MORGAN · JAMES
THE ENTREPRENEURIAL PUBLISHER™
www.morganjamespublishing.com

Cover & Interior Design by:

Greg Weber
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Draper Hill

This book could not have been written without the input and knowledge of Draper Hill. Ever since he graduated from Harvard fifty years ago, Draper has been engrossed by the life and cartoons of Thomas Nast. He has visited more than twenty libraries and museums that owned parts of Nast's collection, which was widely dispersed after Nast's death in 1902. His private collection includes unique Nast prints and publications, as well as contemporary publications related to the topics which Nast caricatured. Literally, Draper probably has forgotten more about Thomas Nast than anyone else in the world knows.

Unfortunately, Draper's professional career as a political cartoonist for the *Quincy (MA) Patriot Ledger*, the *Worcester Telegram*, the *Memphis Commercial Appeal* and the *Detroit News* kept him too busy to write the books on Nast that were in his plans. However, Draper has published numerous scholarly writings, including a biography of English cartoonist James Gillray. In 1990, he was awarded the Thomas Nast Prize by the city of Landau, Germany—Nast's birthplace

It would have been a significant loss to historians for Draper's deep knowledge and insights about Thomas Nast to escape publication. Consequently, beginning in 1995 and continuing periodically through 2001, I commissioned Draper to prepare several different projects on Nast.

We started by taking the approximately 2,250 cartoons and illustrations that Nast drew for *Harper's Weekly*—almost all between 1862 and 1886—and trying to identify the 450 different characters that Nast drew in his cartoons. I also had the assistance of the late Roger Fischer, a history professor at the University of Minnesota, Duluth, in this identification project. We ended up identifying 440 of the 450 characters.

Then Draper undertook three specific projects for me over seven years, including: Nast's 100 best cartoons (in Draper's judgment); his campaign against Boss Tweed; and his 1872 campaign against Horace Greeley.

Draper's completed projects contained many wonderful insights and details probably unknown to anyone else. However, to put them into a fast-moving, reasonably complete, logically sequenced book—in the way I thought the story should be told—required significant editing, almost total reorganization, quite a bit more research, and the selection of many additional cartoons and cartoon extracts.



Caricature by George Fisher

John Adler

I am an accidental amateur historian, who never took a history course during my time at Dartmouth, from which I graduated sixty years ago. My business career was primarily as a management consultant and entrepreneur.

Forty years ago, I started a marketing business which broke new ground in measuring the effectiveness of television advertising and testing new products. By 1972, I had conducted several hundred meaningful advertising tests, and became interested in the history of American advertising. One day, I answered a *New York Times* ad for the sale of some duplicate annual volumes of *Harper's Weekly*—America's de facto "newspaper of record" from 1857 to 1912—and soon found myself the owner of a complete set of 56 volumes.

Twenty years later, as a retirement hobby, I decided to have all 2,912 issues of *Harper's Weekly* manually indexed. That included 173,000 ads, but it was the 10,000 cartoons and 65,000 illustrations by artists like Winslow Homer and Frederic Remington, that really captured my interest.

Thomas Nast's 2,250 cartoons and illustrations stood out in particular. In addition to retaining Draper Hill to flesh out the stories behind the cartoons, I commissioned original articles from more than a dozen college professors, who had expertise in some important areas relating to Nast—eg., political scandals; nineteenth century journalism; Shakespeare; and even the connections between Nast and Vincent Van Gogh and, separately, Edgar Degas.

My company, HarpWeek LLC, manually indexed, scanned and retyped all 73,000 pages of *Harper's Weekly* and created a proprietary digital database, which was licensed to academic institutions and public libraries. For this, and another database called *Lincoln and the Civil War.com*, I was awarded the 2003 E-Lincoln prize.

As a public service, we created and mounted 30 historical, literary and educational websites, many of which are available free at www.harpweek.com. Several hundred Nast cartoons are included on them. One website: "Cartoonist Thomas Nast vs. Candidate Horace Greeley: The Election of 1872" is predicated on Draper Hill's commissioned project. It was edited and prepared by HarpWeek historian Robert C. Kennedy under my direction. Another site is "Nast and Shakespeare", which Rob also created.

For this book, about 60% of the interpretive content, as well as the narrative, came from Draper Hill's commissioned writings. Rob Kennedy helped sequence that material and also added some meaningful interpretation and commentary of his own.

Using Draper's content as a core, along with Rob Kennedy's contributions, I have written the book I envisioned thirteen years ago when I first retained Draper and hired Rob. I have made heavy use of my own library, which contains several dozen books and articles about Tweed, Nast and their era; studied hundreds of Nast's cartoons; and read biographies of many of the important characters in them. Where appropriate, references to specific sources have been incorporated into the text, rather than being footnoted at the end of the book.

vi **Author's Note: How This Book Came About**

Other authors have written good books about Tweed, beginning with Denis Lynch in 1927 and going through Kenneth Ackerman in 2005. (See Bibliography.) In 1977, Leo Hershkowitz took a well documented "Another Look" at "Tweed's New York," and stressed a more positive side of Boss Tweed's regime—championing the immigrants, developing Central Park, establishing hospitals and schools, widening Broadway, etc.—while blaming greedy contractors as much or more than Tweed and his Ring for the rampant graft.

Where "Doomed by Cartoon" differs from previous books is its focus on looking at circumstances and events as Nast visualized them in his cartoons, almost like a serialized but intermittent comic book covering 1866 through 1878. It has been organized to tell the Nast vs. Tweed story so that ordinary readers with an interest in politics, history and/or cartoons—or just in a uniquely caricatured political adventure story—will enjoy it. I hope that includes you.

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