
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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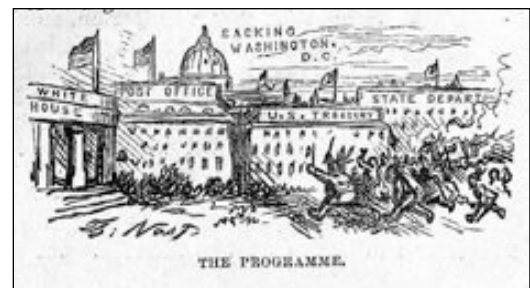
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After the Civil War, William Magear Tweed became the unquestioned political boss of New York City through a combination of bribery, threats, patronage, graft and illegal voting. His hand-picked governor, John T. Hoffman, ran New York State, and Tweed effectively controlled the state legislature. His next potential target was to “rule the general government” by having Hoffman win the presidency in 1872.

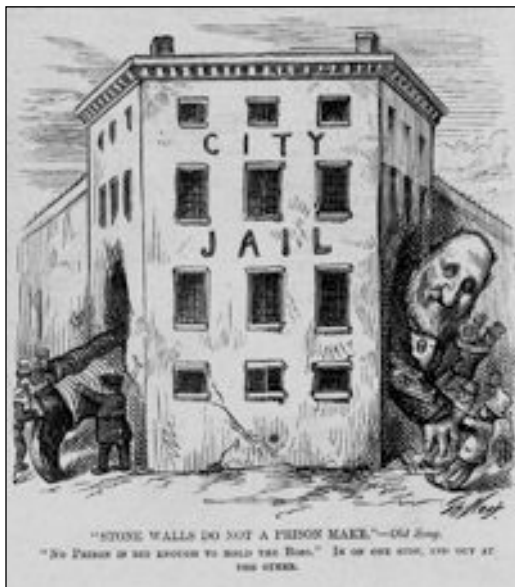
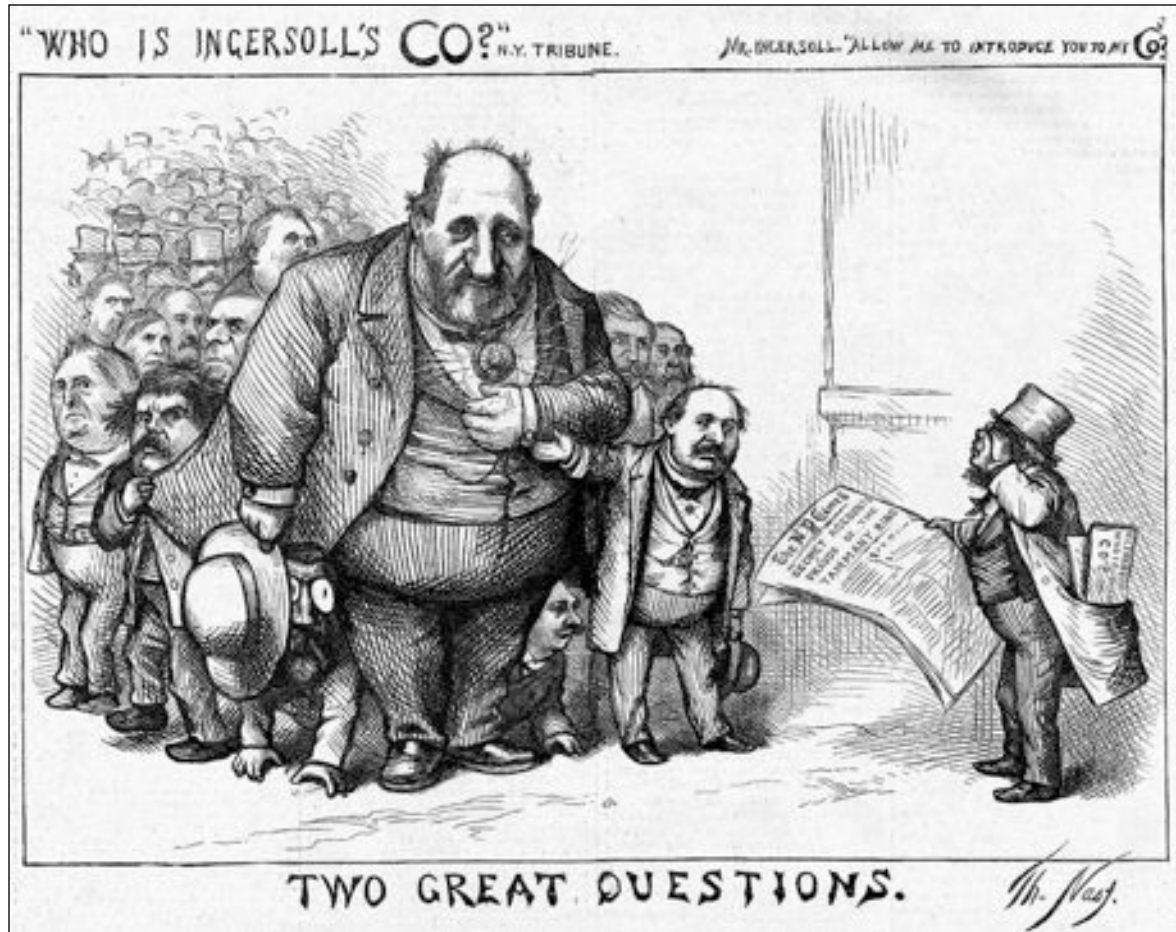


John Hoffman is in the shadow as George Washington weeps in the background.



2 Introduction

Along with Boss Tweed, New York's mayor, chief financial officer, head auditor, top police officials and most of its judges were active participants in his frauds. In addition, Tweed controlled or bought off almost all of the New York newspapers, so there appeared to be no effective way to combat him and his Tammany Hall Ring of thieves. They stole from \$30 million to \$200 million—possibly as much as \$4 billion in today's dollars.



Into the breach stepped Thomas Nast and his editor, George William Curtis, of *Harper's Weekly*. Nast, whose combination of creativity and execution as an American cartoonist has never been equaled, challenged the Ring as early as 1867. Finally, with significant help from the *New-York Times* after August 1870, Tweed and his Ring were soundly beaten in the November 1871 election. Six and a half years later, after escaping once from prison, Tweed died in jail.

Both Tweed's and Nast's lives peaked in this 1870-71 period and its immediate aftermath. Nast put **"What are you going to do about it?"** into Tweed's caricatured mouth, and then with the help of the *New-York Times*, did something about it. As Tweed allegedly himself said: **"Let's stop them damned pictures. I don't care so much what the papers write about me—my constituents can't read; but damn it, they can see pictures."**

The *New-York Times* made the same point with the proof of the pudding in hand. (March 20, 1872).

"His (Nast's) drawings are stuck upon the walls of the poorest dwellings and stored away in the portfolios of the wealthiest connoisseurs . . . Many people cannot read leading articles, others do not choose to read them, others do not understand them when they have read them. But you cannot help seeing Mr. Nast's pictures, and when you have seen them you cannot fail to understand them . . . An artist of this stamp . . . does more to affect public opinion than a score of writers."



Boss Tweed was a huge man—just under six feet tall and almost 300 pounds. Thomas Nast was a head shorter and probably weighed about half as much in 1871. Figuratively, indeed, David slew Goliath.

Primarily through Nast's cartoons, this book tells the story of how that happened. At their peak, they were seen by more than a million people, week after week after week. They enraged the voters sufficiently to "do something about it" against great odds. Enjoy the story, just as the audience of *Harper's Weekly* did 130-140 years ago.



November 8, 1873