

Read and complete the gaps with the words from the box.

SYMBOLS - SATIRISTS - CAMPAIGN - SURNAME - ELECTION

Every _____ cycle, illustrations of donkeys and elephants show up in political cartoons, _____ buttons, Internet memes, and some truly alarming fashion choices. How could it be otherwise? The two beasts -- the former representing the Democratic Party; the latter, the Republican Party -- are mainstays of America's visual culture, as recognizable as Santa Claus or Uncle Sam.

Yet most Americans would be surprised to learn that both political _____ (as well as Santa Claus and Uncle Sam) were popularized, and given their modern forms, by the same maverick cartoonist.

His name was Thomas Nast, and over the course of his tenure at Harper's Weekly, from 1862 to 1886, he became America's first great political cartoonist -- and one of its harshest _____. In the intricately detailed wood engravings for which he's best remembered, he tackled the Civil War, the follies of Reconstruction, immigration, and -- most famously -- the Tammany Hall political machine. Some have suggested that the word "nasty" derives from the artist's _____, and while this is almost certainly not true, one glance at his cartoons might convince you that it is.

Continue reading and choose the correct option.

Historians **have asserted/asserted** that Nast, who **grow up/grew up** in New York City in the 1840s and '50s, **was/were** ferociously bullied as a child. Indeed, the two themes that **run/runs** through his career are his sneering disdain for bullies of all shapes and sizes, and his compassion for their victims.

At Harper's, he **moves/moved** back and forth between these two poles. In one famous cartoon, "Worse Than Slavery" (1874), a defenseless black family cowers before a grinning Klansman; in another -- a blistering parody of the KKK's alliance with New York's political machine, captioned "They Are Swallowing Each Other" -- there **is/are** no victims, only two bloated, bug-eyed men depicted as ouroboroi.

Nowadays, "editorial cartoons" might bring to mind spare, deliberately simplistic images -- the kind you can process in half a second while reading the news. By contrast, Nast's dense, meticulously labeled cartoons **was/were** news: not just images but arguments, meant to be analyzed and discussed point-by-point.

Read the rest of the article, look for and write down the meaning of the words in bold, then write a summary of this part in five lines.

But it was Nast's **insight** to present American politics as one big, messy menagerie -- a circus, much like the one Barnum & Bailey had debuted in New York three years earlier. Like the best satirists, he ridiculed his own side almost as gleefully as he did his opponents' -- and so, he reimagined the GOP as a weak, panicky creature that was constantly lumbering off in the wrong direction, its size more of a **liability** than an **asset**.

Nast's donkeys fare no better; a typical cartoon from 1879 shows the stubborn beast dangling by the tail, about to fall into an abyss of "financial chaos." More often than not, in fact, his cartoons **depict** elephants and donkeys only a hair's breadth away from chaos -- a pretty **fair** assessment of Republican and Democratic leadership during the Gilded Age.

In the 1880s, Nast was the most feared artist in the country, the sworn enemy of crooks and swindlers on the right and the left alike. Then, in a Nast-y twist of fate worthy of his cartoons, he lost all his money in a Ponzi scheme, the kind of **sleazy** operation he'd spent his entire career cautioning against. In 1890, he tried to rebuild his fortune by publishing a book of Christmas illustrations.

By that point, however, he seems to have lost some of the creative **momentum** he'd gained at Harper's, and he spent the last decade of his life in poor health, painfully aware that his best work was long behind him.

But the elephant and the donkey live on in political pageantry, thanks to Nast's ingenuity. To date, the elephant remains the official symbol of the Republican Party, and although the Democrats have yet to declare their own, you wouldn't need to walk more than a couple paces at one of their **rallies** before spotting a donkey.

It's a little weird that both of the major American political parties have embraced their mascots so enthusiastically, considering how poorly the two animals come across in Nast's original cartoons: how stupid, how **pliable**, how easily confused. Maybe neither party bothered to check before stocking up on pins and tote bags.

Or maybe they knew about Nast's **mockery** and decided that the appropriate response was to join in mocking themselves.

This article was originally published in November 2018.