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Drawing the Revolution: Thomas Nast's Sketches of Garibaldi's Conquest of the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies for the New York Illustrated News and the Illustrated London News.

As Giuseppe Garibaldi and his one thousand volunteers sailed from Quarto for Sicily with the hope of claiming it for the King of Savoy, the twenty year old Thomas Nast, who would become the most influential graphic journalist in post-bellum America, was in London for the New York Illustrated News, a short lived but lavishly illustrated American periodical. When news reached England that Garibaldi was preparing an expedition to liberate Southern Italy from the tyranny of the Bourbons, Nast asked for permission to prolong his European stay and cover Garibaldi's campaign. By the time he reached Genoa, the "Mille" had already left, but Nast befriended Englishman John Peard, who had fought with Garibaldi in '59, and was permitted to join the relief expedition under Giacomo Medici. He was introduced to Garibaldi in Palermo and allowed to draw his portrait later on in the campaign, witnessed the battles of Milazzo and Volturno, accompanied Peard on a reconnoitering expedition on the Italian mainland to gain information for the invading army about to cross the Strait of Messina, saw Garibaldi relinquish power to Victor Emmanuel at Teano, and, finally, attended the plebiscite in Naples which lent the aura of popular approval to the annexation of the territory of the Bourbons to the Kingdom of Italy.[1] During his Italian stay, between June and November

1860, he sent about forty different sketches to the New York Illustrated News and the Illustrated London News, a much better established British periodical with a substantial circulation in the United States.

Nast scholars have generally seen him as a liberal—in fact, a radical republican, committed to a vision of an ideal republic in which all races participated to the administration of the state through the franchise, who afterwards turned sour and abandoned the early egalitarian stance.[2] They point, for instance, to the sharp contrast between his "Uncle Sam's Thanksgiving Dinner" (fig. 1), which dates to the late sixties, and his notorious "The Ignorant Vote—Honors are Easy" (fig. 2) about ten years afterwards. In the first sketch, which celebrates the adoption of the XIV and XV Amendments prohibiting states from abridging the rights of any citizen to the full exercise of citizenship, individuals of different races and nationalities, identifiable by their different national clothing but not caricatured, are invited to dine at the republican table and partake of its offerings of universal suffrage and self-government. In the second sketch, published in the wake of the disputed elections of 1876, when Congress had to appoint an electoral committee to evaluate allegations of electoral fraud and resolve the stalemate between the Republican and the Democratic candidate, the Southern black Republican voter and the Northern Democratic Irish voter are both grossly caricatured to suggest their civic deficiencies and liability to be manipulated by shrewd politicians. Within this interpretative framework of a movement from Reconstruction era Republican idealism to post-Reconstruction disillusionment and cynicism, Nast's coverage of the fall of the tyrannical Bourbons and the annexation of Southern Italy to the constitutional Kingdom of Italy is seen as enthusiastic and as an early indication of the pronounced

egalitarianism of the first phase of his career. A careful examination of Nast's Italian sketches, however, reveals that, far from being an unqualified celebration, they are rife with tensions. Specifically, they oscillate between veneration for the heroic Garibaldi and identification with his project to vilification of the people of the Kingdom of the Two Sicilies, whose participation in the revolution is tainted by anarchic overtones and whose ability to participate through the franchise in the conduct of the new state is cast doubt upon.

Undeniably, Nast shared with the vast majority of his British and American readers the admiration for Garibaldi and the dislike for the Bourbons. The cult of Garibaldi in the English speaking world had several reasons, the most important being that he had placed the welfare of his country above his political beliefs and pragmatically converted to a pro-monarchical stance when the fall of the Roman Republic of 1849 made it apparent that republicanism faced too many obstacles to prevail at the time. Garibaldi's shift in political alliance reflected a similar change in the American public opinion, which ceased at mid-century to support Mazzini and sided instead with the nation-building project of the royal house of Savoy.[3] The Bourbons, on the other hand, were renowned for their despotic and incompetent rule. Ferdinand II, who had quelled the revolution of 1848 by massacring his subject, was commonly referred to in the Anglophone press by the derogatory nickname of "King Bomba" and the New York Illustrated News called his son and successor Francis II, "the idiot king of Naples."[4] Nast reflected these cultural attitudes by portraying Garibaldi as self-sacrificing patriot/hero and the royalist troops he fought as alternatively cowardly and barbarous. Thus, we have his celebratory rendition of the "Meeting of General Garibaldi and Victor Emmanuel at

Teano" (fig.3), where Garibaldi famously saluted the King of Sardinia as King of Italy and thereby relinquished to him the territories he has wrested from the Bourbons, or his depiction of one of Garibaldi's many feats of courage during the campaign at the battle of Milazzo. In this particular sketch, "Garibaldi Cutting Down the Leader of a Band of Horseman" (fig. 4), Nast captures a notorious episode when Garibaldi, whose had lost his horse and his gun, intercepted the retreating enemy cavalry and killed the commander with his sword alone.[5] Unlike the portrayal of Garibaldi, the sketches devoted to the Royalist troops are unambiguously condemning. In a scene drawn for his London and New York outlets both, for instance, Nast showed the Neapolitan soldiers engaged in finishing off with their bayonets the wounded Garibaldini, an action that defied accepted rules of warfare, or, even more shocking, throwing the wounded onto the same pyre where the bodies of the dead were being burned (fig. 5). In the commentary on the engraving, the Illustrated London News called the incident a "deed of abominable cruelty" committed by soldiers who would then refuse to fight the enemy and "throw themselves down on their knees when on the point of being taken, and beg for their lives."[6] Finally, Nast manifested his adhesion to Garibaldi's project of national liberation and unification most clearly by dressing up as one of the volunteers. His self-portrait features him donning a red shirt, a knife, and a hat intended to resemble Garibaldi's (fig.6).

Other sketches, however, suggests the limits of Nast's identification with Garibaldi's enterprise, especially as it extended beyond the original group of volunteers and involved the inhabitants of the conquered regions. His representation of the rejoicing of the peoples of Naples the day of Garibaldi's entrance in the city, for instance, features

troubling images of sexual misconduct, one of the classic tropes of anti-revolutionary propaganda (fig. 7). The young woman at the center of the sketch walks arm in arm with one of Garibaldi's volunteers. But she is guilty of more than a public display of sexual intimacy. Her feathered, military-looking hat and the dagger she rather threateningly holds are a form of cross-dressing, a usurpation of masculine attire and attitudes in complete opposition to the code regulating female behavior in the ante-bellum era. She has, moreover, covered her gown with patriot ribbons, transforming her dress into a declaration of her political stance. The same is true of the older woman ahead of her, whose apron, normally an article of clothing worn within the house and for the performance of household duties, is now embroidered with Garibaldi's countenance and thus serves a public rather than a domestic function. The banner of the House of Savoy that she carries, not unlike the olive branch held by the child who leads the procession, are symbols of order and peace ironically waving over a society turned upside down, where women have moved from the private world of domesticity to the public world of war and politics. The comments of the Illustrated London News on the sketch confirm this reading of the image as a condemnation of the revolution. The British periodical features a letter by a correspondent, which, the editors maintain, "describes just such a scene" as depicted by Nast. The letter reads: "Toledo [the main street in Naples] was thronged with an insane multitude, a pray to a Bacchanalian fury which I should be sorry if I was able to describe." But he does describe it, and in the following terms: "throng of carriages, throng of men, throng of women—the men brandishing naked swords, or waving flags or hats; the women bareheaded, disheveled, with disordered garments, cheering, embracing and kissing, as they passed each other, like so many victims of a

rabid drunkenness." The article further censures the "mingling and blending of classes and sexes" that occurred during the celebrations in honor of Garibaldi. While sexual license and the crossing of sexual boundaries are most prominent in Nast's sketch, the blending of classes condemned by the Illustrated London News is also intimated in the contrast between the young couple at the center of the sketch, which could be middle-class, and the older woman and youth at the left, who, bare-headed and bare-footed respectively, are connoted as members of the popular classes.

The issue of class relations features more prominently in another of Nast's Neapolitan sketches depicting one of the polling booths where the plebiscite for annexation to the Kingdom of Italy was held (fig. 8). The scene is crowded, but the most prominent figures are the two men at the center right, who clearly belong to opposite ends of the social spectrum. Gentleman and proletarian, who presumably have just voted in favor of annexation, are looking at each and acknowledging each other's presence, but do so differently. While the former takes his hat off, the latter keeps his cap on and returns the other's salute with a smile that seems more defiant than congratulatory. On a small scale, the tension of the encounter across class boundaries in the voting booth echoes much more violent clashes elsewhere. In fact, Garibaldi's expedition was accompanied by the eruption of class warfare all over the liberated territories and especially in the Sicilian countryside. There, Garibaldi's early decree promising an equitable division of the land among the property-less incited hopes for a social revolution that led on several occasions to illegal appropriations, the destruction of municipal buildings and their property registers and, in the renown Bronte incident, to several murders.[8] In Naples, afflicted by urban rather than agrarian poverty, Garibaldi granted unemployment relief,

fixed the maximum price of common goods, and provided work for the unemployed at the city's arsenal, all measures which gained him the support of the poor but concerned the affluent.[9] When the proletarians in Naples voted "yes" to annexation, therefore, they were making a social rather than a political choice. As the Illustrated London News put it in an article on the voting at Naples, "many, though probably they did not understand the political question, were fully sensible that the change was to bring them relief from misery, and persecution, and poverty."[10] The bare footed man of Nast's sketch must have hoped for change too. And, indeed, that he should be asked to vote, that his opinion should carry the same weight as that of the neatly dressed gentleman saluting him, must have seemed to him the beginning of a new order. Hence, the arrogance of his gaze. How did Nast evaluate the social aspirations of the southern lower classes, aspirations that he must have known had already erupted in episodes of violence? His depiction of the contemptuous popular voter suggests a negative assessment. Of all the characters in the sketch, including other members of his class like the youth sitting at the extreme right, he is the only one whose features are exaggerated. While the caricature does not reach the level of the grotesque, that he should be singled out for it implies an authorial condemnation of his behavior.

The sketch would have suggested more than latent class conflict to a contemporary British or American audience. Specifically, the setting of the plebiscite would have appeared irregular and likely to predetermine the results of the elections. As the Illustrated London News described it and Nast illustrated it, the voting booth included two wooden boxes from which one would pick a "yes" or "no" ticket and then deposit it in a central urn, all in full view of the crowd outside. Moreover, the London News

explained, election officers occasionally asked voters their choice as they entered the booth and handed them tickets accordingly, which made the vote audible as well as visible. The British periodical concluded that the proceedings were characterized by an "apparent scrupulousness in obtaining the real and voluntary votes of the people,"[11] in other words, by the semblance of correctness rather than its reality. Indeed, Admiral George Mundy, commander of the British fleet at Palermo, observed that it would have taken a brave man to vote against annexation.[12] Nast would have been aware of the pressure placed on voters in the plebiscite because in the United States, while voters handed a ticket to an election official in public, the ticket itself could be clipped out of a party newspaper and filled out privately as well as picked up outside the voting booth.[13] Although electioneering did go on at the polls and voters could be swayed, intimidation was not built into the system as in the case of the Italian plebiscite. Nast, who had developed a friendship with Garibaldi's Colonel John Peard, could also have known that the plebiscite was a brain child of the Piedmontese prime minister, Camillo di Cavour, while Garibaldi and the more liberal members of his cabinet favored a Constituent Assembly that would evaluate the options of federalism and independence for southern Italy as well as annexation to Sardinia. A plebiscite with only two options and the "no" construed as a vote in favor of the return of the Bourbons, was certain to grant a majority for annexation. Whether one stresses the obvious intimidation of the public setting or the subtler false choice offered to voters, the plebiscite undoubtedly manipulated public opinion. Hence the men in caps that throng around the voting urn to cast their "si" are early versions of the gullible, "ignorant voters" that Nast would caricature at the end of Reconstruction. Indeed, they would be disillusioned in their expectations for social

change. A mere three weeks after the article on the plebiscite, the Illustrated London News reported that disturbances had erupted in Naples after the departure of Garibaldi and the abrogation of his liberal measures and that the protesting "Lazzaroni . . . were dispersed by the Piedmontese troops."[14] And like the issue of the manipulation of easily duped, inexperienced voters, the intimation of class warfare and anarchy present if not blatant in Nast's sketches of the popular rejoicing for Garibaldi's entry in Naples and the plebiscite for annexation to the Kingdom of Italy will loom large in his commentary on the American scene of the 1870s and 1880s, when he would look with distress at class polarization and at expressions of social unrest prompted by severe economic depression (fig. 9).

More could be said about Nast's coverage of Garibaldi's expedition. For one, I am sorry I could not discuss with you his depiction of the role played by the southern Catholic clergy in ensuring the success of the enterprise. Unfortunately, however, it is now time to draw conclusions. As we have seen, the sketches alternate between a celebration of Garibaldi and identification with his project and a condemnation of the inhabitants of the liberated territories, whose behavior is marred with anarchic overtones and whose capability to participate in the democratic process is questioned. This in turns leads to a reconsideration of Nast's early politics, which were already characterized by the suspicion towards the popular classes that will dominate his later work. For scholars interested mainly in the American response to the Italian political scene, the analysis has confirmed once more that the perception of the Risorgimento was complex, often contradictory, ranging within the boundaries of the same text from sympathetic revolutionary enthusiasm for the spread of liberalism abroad to counterrevolutionary

mistrust towards any movement that may compromise order and--above all else--the preservation of private property.

Notes

[1] I am indebted for information on Nast's participation in Garibaldi's expedition to Albert Bigalow Paine's Thomas Nast. His Period and His Pictures (1904. Gloucester, Mass.: Peter Smith, 1967) 44-63.

[2] Such is the thesis of Morton Keller's The Art and Politics of Thomas Nast (New York: Oxford UP, 1968).

[3] The most detailed extant study of this shift in attitude in the American public opinion is Giuseppe Monsagrati's "Gli intellettuali americani e il processo di unificazione italiana," Gli Stati Uniti e l'unità d'Italia, eds. Daniele Fiorentino and Matteo Sanfilippo (Roma: Gangemi, 2004) 17-44.

[4] "The Sicilian Insurrection," New York Illustrated News, 30 June 1860: 114.

[5] See Jasper Ridley, Garibaldi (1974. London: Phoenix, 2001) 468.

[6] "Incidents of the Battle on the Volturno," Illustrated London News, Oct. 20 1860: 380.

[7] "Street Scene in Naples," Illustrated London News, 29 Sept. 1860, 296.

[8] See the chapter on the peasants' revolt in Sicily in Denis Mack Smith, Victor Emanuel, Cavour, and the Risorgimento (London: Oxford UP, 1971) 190-222.

[9] Ridley 490-1.

[10] "The Voting at Naples," Illustrated London News, 3 Nov. 1860, 408.

[11] Ibid.

[12] Ridley 505.

[13] See Richard Franklin Benson, The American Ballot Box in the Mid-Nineteenth-Century (New York: Cambridge UP, 2004) 9-17.

[14] "Italy. The Two Sicilies," Illustrated London News. 24 November 1860, 480.

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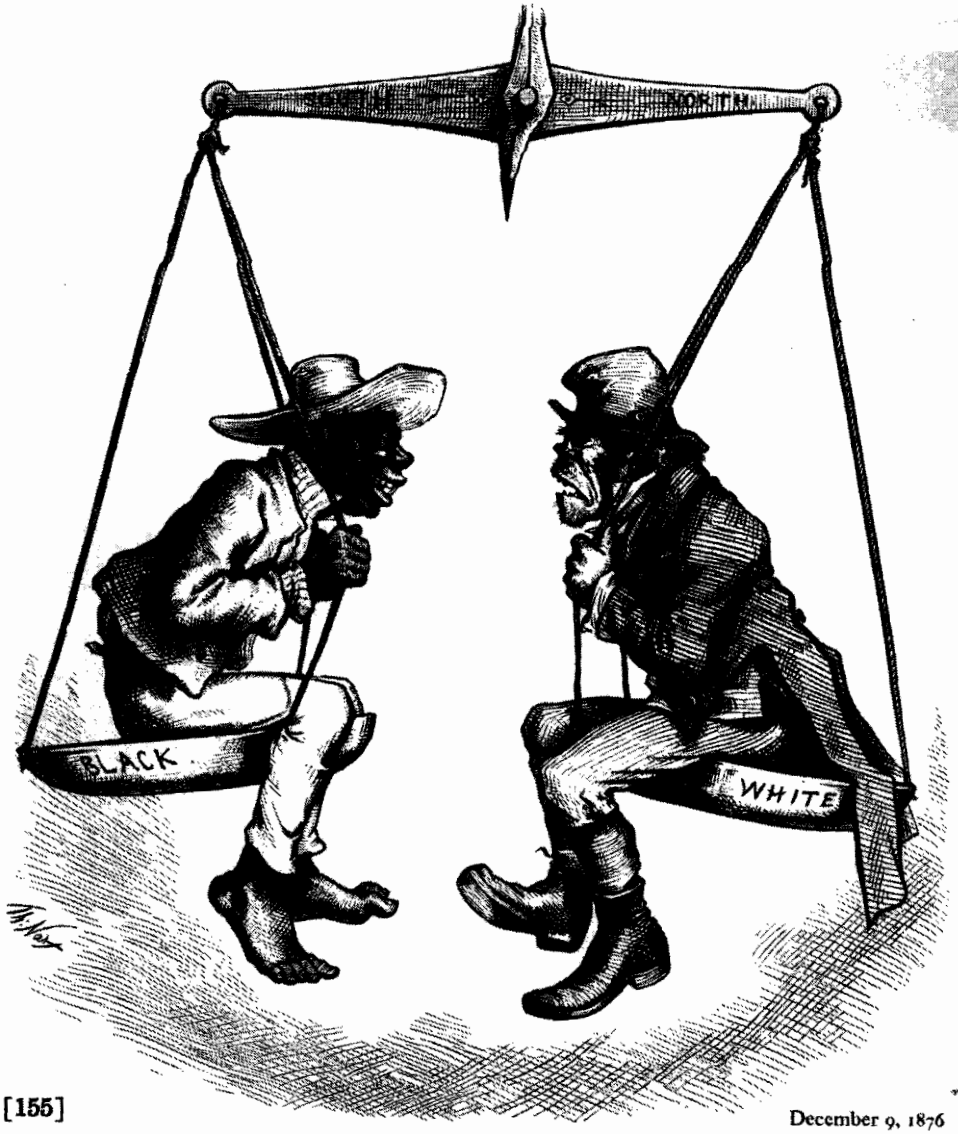
WELCOME
UNIVERSAL SUFFRAGE.
UNCLE SAM'S THANKSGIVING DINNER.



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