

Master the GED® Test, 31st Edition
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The image that appears before questions 6-7 on page 87 of the Social Studies Diagnostic Test is a political cartoon by Thomas Nast. Although it does not have a title, the cartoon is usually referred to as “The Union As It Was—Worse Than Slavery.” It first appeared in *Harper’s Weekly* on October 24, 1874.

Warning: The cartoon includes depictions of racialized violence. Click [here](#) for a high-resolution version of the image. Click [here](#) to see the image and its associated text as it originally appeared in *Harper’s Weekly*.

Nast was a German-born cartoonist who published thousands of political cartoons in the late 1800s and is famous for creating the Republican elephant symbol and popularizing the indelible image of Uncle Sam. During the Civil War and Reconstruction, Nast created political cartoons that depicted white supremacist violence and its lasting impacts on Black Southerners. The most frequent forum for Nast’s cartoons was *Harper’s Weekly*, a Northern newspaper that supported Abraham Lincoln and the Union during the Civil War.

This cartoon uses graphic depictions of violence toward Black Southerners to illustrate the effects of a white supremacy conspiracy in the Reconstruction-era South. While members of the White League and KKK shake hands, a Black couple cowers with the limp body of their child, surrounded by images of a burning school and a lynched figure. This imagery shows the violence that Black citizens had endured and continued to endure under the open brutality of paramilitary terrorist organizations and the racist platform of Southern leaders. The words “Worse Than Slavery” imply that, even though slavery has ended, a white supremacist society will continue to perpetuate violence against Black citizens, attempting to thwart the achievements won with the end of the Civil War. Featured at the top of the image is the expression “This Is A White Man’s Government.” Nast borrowed the expression from the Democratic platform of 1868 where leaders committed to excluding people of color from voting, serving, and other civil rights that were established under congressional Republicans’ “Radical Reconstruction.”

Although the cartoon uses graphic, racialized imagery to represent its message, Nast was sympathetic to the Black cause and intended his cartoon to show the depravity and cowardice of the white figures. Many of Nast’s cartoons during this period championed Black rights while denouncing white supremacy. Later in his career, as the political landscape in the US began to change, the messages in Nast’s cartoons became as critical of Black politicians and legislators as he had been of white ones, sometimes relying on harmful racial stereotypes in his depictions.

Around 40% of the questions on the GED Social Studies Test include a visual depiction, which can include a political or editorial cartoon. The test also requires test-takers to understand, evaluate, analyze, or apply information gleaned from primary sources, including political or editorial cartoons. These cartoons can cover any of the four subject areas covered on the test: history, political science, economics, or geography. Frequently, these cartoons present an (often critical) opinion or perspective on a

contemporary issue, idea, or institution. Imagery in political or editorial cartoons often employs human or human-like characters, animals, or objects to symbolize a larger group, overarching idea, or ideology. These cartoons also often include words written in the image or a caption under the image that gives clues about its content and context. Political and editorial cartoons are complex images that require historical, contextual knowledge and analytical skills to fully understand the intended message.

Sources:

Dr. Kimberly Kutz Elliott and Dr. Beth Harris. "Nast and Reconstruction: Understanding a Political Cartoon." *Smarthistory*. Accessed August 31, 2021. <https://smarthistory.org/seeing-america-2/all-works/nast-the-union-as-it-was/>.

"Thomas Nast's Political Cartoons." PBS. Public Broadcasting Service. Accessed August 31, 2021. <https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/americanexperience/features/reconstruction-thomas-nasts-political-cartoons/>.

NOTE: This image and associated questions will be replaced in the next edition.