

CHAPTER 4

Columbus Day: 1892, Not 1492

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Columbus Day Memorial Celebration, Union Station, Washington, D.C., 1912. Published by Bain News Service. Available at <http://www.loc.gov/pictures/resource/ggbain.11303/>

In the summer of 1892, President Benjamin Harrison was locked in a fierce campaign for reelection to a second term. On July 21, he issued a proclamation calling for a new national holiday: “Discovery Day” (see Source 4.1). To be observed in schools, churches, and other places of assembly, Discovery Day honored Christopher Columbus as a symbol of “progress and enlightenment.” Over a century later, Columbus Day is one of only two American holidays (along with the birthday of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.) that honor an individual.

While previous generations viewed Columbus as an intrepid explorer and courageous risk-taker, today’s historians tend to be less generous. Kirkpatrick Sale’s *Christopher Columbus and the Conquest of Paradise* describes Columbus’s legacy as one of violence, colonialism, greed, and racism. Howard Zinn, whose *A People’s History of the United States* has sold well over a million copies, casts the mariner as a monomaniacal fiend driven by the pursuit of gold in the Indies. Not finding the riches he sought, Zinn’s Columbus resorted to brutality and eventual human trafficking, writing: “Let us in the name of the Holy Trinity go on sending all the slaves that can be sold.”¹

Alas, Columbus has not fared well of late. Like the rhyme about his sailing “the ocean blue” for previous generations, historians’ bleak portrait of Columbus has penetrated popular consciousness ~~for ours~~. South Dakota and the city of Berkeley, California even abrogated Columbus Day in the 1990s, renaming it “Native American Day” and “Indigenous People’s Day,” respectively.

Given Columbus’s falling stock, it is hardly surprising that, in a recent study we completed, high school history students bristled when reading the original Columbus

Day decree.² These students were asked to read a series of documents and to place each in historical context. As they read through the texts, students talked about what they thought the documents were about and any other associations that came to mind.

When they reached Harrison’s “Discovery Day” proclamation, some students wasted no time getting down to Columbus-bashing. Jacob, a high school student in an Advanced Placement U.S. history class, began his comments thus:

The first thing that jumps out is that Columbus is a pioneer of “progress and enlightenment,” which was certainly one way of looking at it, but from what I’ve learned, his goals were not entirely noble. Just get rich, whatever. Find a way to the Indies. Show that the earth wasn’t flat.

Further, Jacob complained, the document “praises Columbus for his devout faith.” Columbus “claimed to be a true Christian, but he also captured and tortured Indians, so he wasn’t maybe as noble as this is having him be.” Asked if anything else occurred to him, Jacob responded: “And the fact that it’s becoming a holiday that we’re supposed to revere, that’s even worse!”

Jacob’s response was common among this group of bright, articulate high school students. Drawing on background knowledge, Jacob went right at the explorer, engaging in what some might view as “critical thinking.” Critical, without a doubt.

President Harrison’s proclamation, it turns out, has little to do with 1492, or even Columbus himself. Capable and articulate as he was, Jacob had missed the document’s real story.

How Did Historians Read It?

Asked what the same document was about, a group of doctoral candidates in history saw it quite differently, citing such things as:

- The “expansion of the heroic pantheon to include former undesirables.”
- A “shameless appeal to superheroes in order to gain votes in urban centers.”
- “The beginning of Pan-Whiteness in post-bellum America.”³

Unlike the high school students, who alighted on Columbus’s name and never budged, the graduate students viewed the document as a reflection of identity politics and good old electioneering. In fact, the historians hardly mentioned Columbus at all. How was it that the two groups saw such different things in the same text?

The easy answer would be to say that the historians simply know more American history. Obviously that’s true, but only to a point. Having studied such topics as gender relations among French colonialists and Arab nationalists in Tunisia, the relationship between the Siege of Paris and German unification, and doctrinal schisms in Islam after Ali’s death, the young historians possessed no factual knowledge of this time period in American history that would change their readings of the text. What they did possess, however, was a “historical approach” to the document, an orientation to documentary evidence that almost seems like common sense to those practiced in it. This orientation unlocks a world closed to untutored readers.

While the high school students responded to the document’s most pronounced feature—the polarizing figure of Christopher Columbus and his changing fortunes in the court of public opinion—the historians employed a different approach. For them, reading a historical document meant putting sources on the stand and demanding that they yield their truths or falsehoods. To be sure, the historians were experts at employing disciplinary canons of evidence and rules of argument. Still, nothing about their approach was particularly complicated. In fact, some of the deepest things they did were also the most basic.

Consider their opening gambit. When historians sat down with the document, their first words were something along the lines of: “Okay, it’s 1892.”

A simple move, really—a recognition that the Harrison proclamation was not a free-floating utterance echoing from the ether. To the historians, the document was an artifact located in a unique time and place, a moment in history unlike any other. For them, this moment was not about 1492, or even 2002. It was about 1892.

Which immediately raises the question: What does 1892 mean?

President Harrison in Context

To the historians, President Harrison’s proclamation was more about 1892 than it was about Columbus. Consequently, their questions focused on the late 19th century rather than the 15th. Why would Harrison have honored Columbus? Did he harbor some personal affinity for the explorer? Did Harrison consider Columbus a role model? Or was there something more to this move that doesn’t immediately strike the eye? Surely, there must have been some reason.

The historians brainstormed what little they could remember about the era’s historical context (recall that none was an expert in American history). Most, in fact, could remember only what they had covered in high school and undergraduate survey courses. In thinking about the United States in the 1890s, they tried to recall major events, themes, and people: the Progressive Era, the closing of the frontier, Frederick Jackson Turner, Populism, William Jennings Bryan, the “Cross of Gold” speech—the kinds of references found in any high school textbook. But as the historians continued to talk about the period, they inevitably arrived at the topic of immigration. When they did, light bulbs clicked on.

At the end of the 19th century, the United States was getting a makeover. Unprecedented waves of immigration transformed the country overnight (see Source 4.4). In the 30 years between 1880 and 1910, 18 million newcomers came to America’s shores. And they were immigrants of a different breed—in the terminology of the time they were “Slavs,” “Alpines,” “Hebrews,” “Iberics,” or “Mediterraneans.” They were from Europe, mostly, but not the Europe most American immigrants had come from previously. They were from further east and further south. They were swarthy and spoke strange languages. They worshipped differently from the indigenous Protestant majority.⁴

The most numerous of these new arrivals were Catholics. At the beginning of the 1880s, there were about 300,000 Italians in the United States, almost all of them Catholic. By 1910 that number had reached 2 million out of a population of 92 million Americans. As the Italians joined the Irish American community that had formed during the previous three decades, urban Catholics became a political bloc with the potential to swing elections. But though their numbers were strong and growing, they remained a much-maligned minority.

Throughout the 19th century, Catholics were attacked as un-American “papists,” accused of being more loyal to Rome than to the United States. The Know-Nothing movement that sprang up before the Civil War and sent dozens of its members to Congress was founded in large part in order “to resist the insidious policy of the Church of Rome and all other foreign influence”⁵ (see Source 4.6).

Catholics faced prejudice and suspicion everywhere they went, most egregiously in schools and at the workplace. Opponents of Catholic immigration included well-known figures like Samuel F. B. Morse, inventor of the telegraph, and Lyman Beecher, a religious leader and father of Harriet Beecher Stowe. Morse, in fact, penned a tract titled “Foreign Conspiracy against the Liberties of the United States,” which warned Protestant Americans of a plot to control them hatched by the Vatican bishops and their American agents—Irish and Italian immigrants.

When their children were harassed in the public schools and subjected to a Protestant-leaning curriculum, Catholics responded by creating separate systems of parochial schools. But even though the Catholic schools received no public money, they remained visibly different from public schools: they used a Catholic bible rather than the King James version, classes were often led by members of the clergy, and instruction was frequently in foreign languages for the benefit of the immigrant pupils. As a result, Catholic schools were portrayed as breeding grounds of anti-Americanism.

In the workplace the story was much the same. Like many 19th-century immigrants, the Catholic newcomers were often desperately poor and willing to work for reduced wages. Consequently, they were scorned for driving down the earning power of American-born workers. When strikes shut down urban factories, owners frequently turned to Catholics as strikebreakers, providing them with temporary employment but further stigmatizing them in the eyes of the native-born. Whether they were Irish, Italian, or some other ethnic origin, Catholics often got the message that they did not belong.

Not surprisingly, Catholics were eager to improve their social and economic standing, and worked overtime to express their patriotism. Many Catholics, particularly Italians and Portuguese, promoted their connection to Columbus, discoverer of the New World and a devout Catholic. An 1878 editorial in the *Connecticut Catholic* put it succinctly: no one was more deserving “of grateful remembrance than the great and noble man—the pious, zealous, faithful Catholic . . . Christopher Columbus.”⁶

To further their image, American Catholics created a feast day in Columbus’s honor, named schools and hospitals after him, and sought his official canonization by the Pope. The University of Notre Dame commissioned twelve murals in its Main Building honoring “Columbus the Catholic,” and in 1882, ten years before Harrison’s proclamation, Catholics from New Haven, Connecticut, founded the Knights of Columbus, which eventually became the nation’s largest pan-Catholic fraternal organization. Its members believed that as Catholic descendants of Columbus, they were “entitled to all the rights and privileges due such a discovery by one of our faith.”⁷ Thus, despite disparate national origins and different customs, the Catholic minority drew on their

connection to the famous and still-beloved explorer both as a means of creating pan-Catholic unity and to show how American they really were (see Sources 4.2 and 4.3).

In the mid-1860s New Yorkers hosted Columbus-themed festivities. San Francisco’s Italians celebrated their first Discovery Day in 1869, and Philadelphians erected a statue of Columbus in Fairmount Park in 1876. Well before the 1892 proclamation, celebrations of Columbus were already on the calendar in St. Louis, Boston, Cincinnati, and New Orleans. And so, when Benjamin Harrison proclaimed October 21, 1892, “Discovery Day,” he wasn’t creating anything new. Rather, he was sanctioning the many celebrations already in place, according recognition to grassroots efforts by Catholics around the country. According to Thomas J. Schlereth, for Catholics, Columbus had become “an American ethnic saint in an era of unprecedented immigration.”⁸

The proclamation had a political angle, too. Harrison was engaged in a battle for his political life. By formally recognizing Columbus, he sought to bring legions of new voters into the fold. Thus, “Discovery Day” may have been less about hero worship than tried and true party politics. Harrison’s public recognition of Columbus was an astute political appeal to a special-interest group—urban Catholics—whom he believed had the power to swing the election in his favor.

It was an election with many strange twists, pitting the incumbent Harrison against Grover Cleveland, himself a former president. After becoming the first Democrat elected to the office since the Civil War, Cleveland lost his 1888 reelection bid to Harrison, despite narrowly winning the popular vote. Four years later, the same two opponents were locked in a battle for reelection. Neither the sitting president nor the former leader was a runaway favorite.

Thanks to Cleveland’s resurgent popularity, and third-party candidate James B. Weaver, Harrison faced an uphill battle in the traditionally Republican Midwest. Looking to secure those states, along with the Eastern cities, Harrison and his Republican allies decided to go all out in their pursuit of the immigrant vote.

In the Midwest they courted Scandinavian- and German-Americans, as well as the Irish and Italian groups in the East. To appeal to ethnic Americans who were often taught in their mother tongue, Harrison openly advocated local control of public and parochial schools. To appeal to Irish Catholics, Republicans organized the Irish-American Protective Tariff League and the Irish-American Republican League, inserting an endorsement for Irish home rule in the 1892 Republican Platform—a symbolic gesture if there ever was one. While recognition of Columbus was an appeal to all Catholics, it particularly targeted Italian-Americans, who had been celebrating Cristoforo Colombo as their own for as long as they had been in the New World.

In the end, Harrison's "Discovery Day" was celebrated less than 3 weeks before the voters went to the polls. Despite its timing, the move was not enough to secure Harrison's victory. Cleveland was returned to the White House in a landslide.

Even though "Discovery Day" failed to produce Harrison's second term, it proved to be a success in its own right. A slate of patriotic activities accompanied celebrations of Columbus Day across the nation, including one that would become an enduring school ritual: the Pledge of Allegiance, written by Francis Bellamy. On Discovery Day 1892, 10 million schoolchildren proudly swore their loyalty to the United States, regardless of religion or national origin. While the practice was more symbolic than substantive, it resonated powerfully at a time when immigrants sought to display their patriotism. This was especially true for those facing the charge of being foreign agents of the Vatican. The pledge soon became a daily classroom fixture.

Although other Discovery Day activities didn't share the pledge's staying power, including the "Song of Columbus Day," celebrating Columbus certainly did. In 1905, Colorado Governor Jesse F. McDonald declared the first official noncentennial Columbus Day, a practice taken up by other states. Thirty years later, at the urging of the Knights of Columbus, President Franklin D. Roosevelt and Congress made Columbus Day a federal holiday, moving the official celebration to October 12.

Puzzles, Questions, and the Process of History

When they first encounter the Harrison proclamation, many students become so fixated on 1492, they never notice that this document appeared 400 years *later*. Putting Harrison's declaration in the context of 1892 changes a reader's next steps in exploring the story of Columbus Day.

The historians who read the Discovery Day proclamation wanted to understand this historical puzzle. They wanted to know if there was a precedent to Harrison's declaration, whether Discovery Day had ignited opposition or anti-Catholic backlash. They were curious to know if other states had made October 21 a holiday before the federal declaration, and if so, whether those states had large Catholic populations. Finally, they wanted to know how and when the event had gone from a proclamation to a national celebration.

In thinking historically about the document, historians ended up going down a different path from the high school students. While the students revisited what they already knew about Columbus and repeated politically correct slogans, historians found themselves dealing with puzzles and questions, the unexplored and the unknown.

As a result, they were challenged to think more critically, more creatively, and more *historically*.

In the end, the historians uncovered new information—not only about immigration and identity politics but also about Columbus's evolving legacy. Whatever positions they may have today, in the late 19th century Americans held a uniformly positive view of Columbus. Understanding that, students are less likely to interpret celebrations of Columbus solely through the lens of the present. By putting documents like Harrison's Proclamation into context, a new world opens up—one filled with unanswered questions and new ways of looking at the past.

Why Teach about "Discovery Day"?

An Opportunity to Teach About Understanding Sources in Context. Many students are so blinded by Columbus's name in the Discovery Day document that they never get past it. Historians, on the other hand, begin their reading by situating a document in place and time. They begin by "sourcing" and "contextualizing" a document, asking who wrote it, where it appeared, when it was published, and what the burning issues of the day were. By asking such questions, historians develop a better understanding of a document's significance and the real motives of its author.

In the case of the Discovery Day proclamation, many students drew on 20th-century interpretations of Columbus's voyage to critique Harrison's proclamation. Inevitably, they overlooked that the document was signed in 1892, a fact that invites a host of questions about why public figures issue proclamations when they do. Teaching about Discovery Day provides an opportunity to help students situate documents in time and place. It can show them how developing historical habits of mind will instinctively point them to the context of a document's creation.

A Chance to Explore the Uses to Which History Is Put. History is constantly being put to various uses; the same historical figure or event may be used for different purposes at different times. Such changes can occur when new information comes to light, producing the need for reevaluation. At other times, shifts in political and cultural developments make us look anew at our previous interpretations. In the case of Discovery Day, both forces are at work. On one hand, present-day scholarship is more critical of Columbus than it was in the 19th or even 20th centuries. On the other, while modern celebrations of Columbus are seen as insensitive to native peoples, in 1892 they were a way of reaching out to the maligned urban Catholic.

A Chance to Teach About Change over Time. Students often assume that the layout of the world into which they are born is the way things have always been. An America in which Catholics faced constant discrimination and charges of disloyalty is hard to imagine. The distinctions between Protestant and Catholic rarely matter today, except as they touch on issues like abortion or same-sex marriage. But even here, the Catholic vote is hardly monolithic: there is considerable overlap between their stances and those held by Americans from other religions. The 19th century fear that American Catholics were receiving marching orders from Rome seems like the stuff of wacko fringe groups with little influence on public life. Still, as late as 1960, presidential hopeful John F. Kennedy was obliged to defend himself against charges that his Catholicism rendered him unfit to be president (Source 4.7). An excursion into the 1890s helps students understand how far America has come in its journey from being a Protestant country that faintly tolerated outsiders to a multicultural nation with a wide range of religious faiths.

Connection to Today. Discovery Day shows how a presidential platform addressed the demographic upheavals of America, prefiguring a tactic that has become a fixture in the political landscape: reaching out and courting votes among varied constituencies. Harrison's campaign opens a window on why politicians court voters from different backgrounds—racial, ethnic, and religious—and how this practice has increased as America has become more diverse. Considering Harrison's motives in the 1890s raises questions about today's immigration and presidential politics, including how contemporary candidates tailor their message to curry favor with different groups.

How Might You Use These Materials?

Scenario 1 (1–2 Hour Lesson). What date matters most, 1492 or 1892? Learn to put a document in context and understand what influenced Harrison to make his “Discovery Day” proclamation.

Ask students to read the Discovery Day proclamation (Source 4.1), but first eliminate the document's date and author. Have students write down their responses to the document and jot down questions they would ask about its historical context. Unless you've already done some work on placing documents in context, many students will zoom in on Columbus's troubled legacy and never think to ask when the document was written or for what purpose. After briefly discussing students' responses, give them the document's date and author, and ask them to write down ideas that these new pieces of information may prompt.

After pointing out that 1892 was an election year, divide students into groups to consider Harrison's motives in proclaiming “Discovery Day” a national holiday (see Tool 4.1). Give each group Sources 4.1, 4.2, 4.3, and 4.4. Depending on how much time you have, provide additional documents, such as Source 4.5. **Assign an essay in which students explain why Harrison issued his “Discovery Day” proclamation when he did, and how the events of 1892 shape how the document should be read.**



Targeted list of skills in this scenario

- Contextualizing sources
- Questioning sources
- Corroborating sources
- Evidence-based thinking and argumentation

Scenario 2 (2–4 Hour Lesson). Focus on context. This scenario expands on the previous one, and is designed to give students more practice reading documents in context.

First, lead them through the analysis and discussion described above, using Sources 4.1, 4.2, 4.3, 4.4, and 4.5. In this scenario, students will confront the issue of anti-Catholic prejudice, as seen in the Civil War-era excerpt about the Know-Nothing Party (Source 4.6) and John F. Kennedy's 1960 speech that confronted the issue of anti-Catholicism head-on (Source 4.7). **Consider having students compare issues of immigration policy across time. In what ways are issues the same and different? Give students an opportunity to consider how the issue of religion has influenced debates about immigration during the last hundred years.**



Alternately, go deeper with the particular era of immigration and Harrison's Proclamation. Once students are acquainted with the broader issues of the 1890s, read them Jacob's response to the Harrison proclamation at the beginning of this chapter. Ask them to consider what Jacob is missing. **Have students write an essay about what Jacob, the high school student, missed when he commented on the Harrison proclamation.**



Targeted list of skills in this scenario

- Contextualizing sources
- Questioning sources
- Corroborating sources
- Evidence-based thinking and argumentation
- Making connections to more recent history

Scenario 3 (1–2 Hour Lesson). ~~Analyze an editorial cartoon.~~ This scenario will help students analyze an editorial cartoon from a different era. We use an illustration by Thomas Nast (Source 4.8), who was not only one of the most famous editorial cartoonists in America, but also the man largely responsible for making the elephant and donkey the symbols of two major political parties.

We sometimes assume that cartoons are easy for students to understand because they make their point in pictures, not in words. While this might hold true for contemporary images, trying to decode a cartoon from the distant past is a different story. The very features that make an image easy to understand today—George W. Bush’s huge floppy ears—are what will trip up students when trying to decipher an editorial cartoon from a different era. Codes and symbols that readers would recognize in 1870 will often be indecipherable to today’s students (and often to us as well).

Editorial cartoons employ a series of conventions that are unfamiliar to many students. For this purpose, we have developed a mnemonic tool, “B.A.S.I.C.” (Tool 4.2), to help students crack a cartoon’s code.

The goal of an editorial cartoon is different from regular cartoons (think Gary Larson or Dilbert) that seek to amuse or entertain. If an *editorial* cartoon makes us smile, it’s a side effect, not the primary goal. First and foremost, editorial cartoons convey messages that carry a trenchant political or social critique. Editorial cartoons have a point, sometimes a very sharp one.

Source 4.8 displays one of Nast’s most famous cartoons, “The American River Ganges,” published in *Harper’s Weekly* on September 30, 1871, and again, in a slightly different form, in 1875. Despite its ubiquity (the cartoon appears on dozens of websites), few students will be able to unlock its meaning without a carefully scaffolded entree to this unfamiliar world.

“The American River Ganges” appeared during a debate over public funding of Catholic schools in New York State. In 1869, William “Boss” Tweed, whose powerful Democratic headquarters, Tammany Hall, symbolized graft and corruption, authored a bill to allow New York City to fund parochial schools of 200 students or more (in general, this applied only to Catholic schools, as Protestant and Jewish schools were typically much smaller). When the press learned of Tweed’s scheme, they tarred and feathered it with anti-Catholic taunts of

“Popery.” Although the Republican majority in the New York legislature killed the bill, the die was cast: people feared that Catholics were determined to take money away from the public schools to promote a sinister “Roman” agenda.⁹

Before asking students to tackle the riddle that is “The American River Ganges,” begin by going over the B.A.S.I.C. acronym (Tool 4.2). First, try practicing it on contemporary editorial cartoons, whose meanings are more transparent to modern audiences. In our teaching, we have found that a three-part sequence is useful when decoding visual evidence such as cartoons, artwork, and photographs. We begin by asking students to *describe* what they see, staying close to the details of the image. By doing this as a whole-class activity, students can collectively glimpse more than whatever first meets their individual eyes. Once students have exhausted the details of the image, we move on to *interpreting* what we see. For this stage Tool 4.3 will be crucial, familiarizing students with symbols and indicators used by Nast (mitres, St. Peter’s Basilica, and so on).

During the final stage—speculating—students are ready to tackle the cartoonist’s argument. **Tool 4.4 includes questions that guide students through this analysis. Using this set of questions will allow students to make observations about “The American River Ganges” without unnecessarily forming conclusions or interpretations.**



Draw students’ attention to the crocodiles shown in the cartoon: Are they real? What are they wearing? Make sure students note the difference between the boy onshore with smaller children huddled behind him, and the other children in the background. Do they notice the book protruding from the older boy’s pocket? What does the book say? Finally, when students speculate about the meaning of the cartoon, help make the connection between the Ganges River and Catholicism (i.e., the Ganges is sacred to the Hindus, a religion considered by many 19th-century Americans to be foreign and “barbaric”).

Targeted list of skills in this scenario

- Analyzing political cartoons
- Contextualizing sources
- Questioning sources

Sources and Tools

SOURCE 4.1: HARRISON'S PROCLAMATION (MODIFIED)

By the President of the United States of America
A Proclamation

Now, therefore, I, Benjamin Harrison, President of the United States of America, in pursuance of the aforesaid joint resolution, do hereby appoint Friday, October 21, 1892, the four hundredth anniversary of the discovery of America by Columbus, as a general holiday for the people of the United States. On that day let the people, so far as possible, cease from toil and devote themselves to such exercises as may best express honor to the discoverer and their appreciation of the great achievements of the four completed centuries of American life.

Columbus stood in his age as the pioneer of progress and enlightenment. The system of universal education is in our age the most prominent and salutary feature of the spirit of enlightenment, and it is peculiarly appropriate that the schools be made by the people the center of the day's demonstration. Let the national flag float over every schoolhouse in the country and the exercises be such as shall impress upon our youth the patriotic duties of American citizenship.

In the churches and in the other places of assembly of the people let there be expressions of gratitude to Divine Providence for the devout faith of the discoverer and for the divine care and guidance which has directed our history and so abundantly blessed our people. . .

Source: President Benjamin Harrison's Proclamation, July 21, 1892

SOURCE 4.2: CATHOLICISM IN AMERICA

As American Catholics we do not know of anyone who more deserves our grateful remembrance than the great and noble man—the pious, zealous, faithful Catholic, the enterprising navigator, and the large-hearted and generous sailor: Christopher Columbus.

Source: Excerpt, unknown author, "Christopher Columbus—Discoverer of the New World," *Connecticut Catholic*, May 25, 1878, 4.

SOURCE 4.3: KNIGHTS OF COLUMBUS

4 *The COLUMBIAD*

The Knights of Columbus

First meeting of the Order—Determination to have ritualistic ceremonies—The adoption of a name

By Daniel Colwell, Historian of the Order

(Continued from last issue)

The first subject taken up was the selection of a name for the new society. Father McGivney suggested as a name "Sons of Columbus," stating that by the adoption of this name, we would be indicating in a way the Catholic and American character and tendency of the Order. James T. Mullen took the floor, and in his remarks said that if he understood the situation correctly, the new society was to be a ritualistic one. If such were the case, he would offer an amendment to Father McGivney's suggestion, and that the society should be known as the *Knights of Columbus*.

Retyped:

"The first subject taken up was the selection of a name for the new society. Father McGivney suggested as a name 'Sons of Columbus,' stating that by the adoption of this name, we would be indicating in a way the Catholic and American character and tendency of the Order. James T. Mullen took the floor, and in his remarks said that if he understood the situation correctly, the new society was to be a ritualistic one. If such were the case, he would offer an amendment to Father McGivney's suggestion, and that the society should be known as the *Knights of Columbus*."

Source: Excerpt from Daniel Colwell, "The Knights of Columbus: First Meeting of the Order," *The Columbiad*, March 1910.

SOURCE 4.4: IMMIGRATION TO THE UNITED STATES BY NATIONALITY: 1850–1930

| Year | Total Immigration | Ireland | Italy |
|------|-------------------|-----------|-----------|
| 1850 | 2,244,602 | 961,719 | 3,679 |
| 1860 | 4,138,697 | 1,611,304 | 11,677 |
| 1870 | 5,567,229 | 1,855,827 | 17,157 |
| 1880 | 6,679,943 | 1,854,571 | 44,230 |
| 1890 | 9,249,547 | 1,871,509 | 182,580 |
| 1900 | 10,341,276 | 1,615,459 | 484,027 |
| 1910 | 13,515,886 | 1,352,251 | 1,343,125 |
| 1920 | 13,920,692 | 1,037,234 | 1,610,113 |
| 1930 | 14,204,149 | 744,810 | 1,790,429 |

Source: U.S. Census Bureau. Available at <http://www.census.gov/population/www/documentation/twps0029/tab04.html>

SOURCE 4.5: HARRISON SPEECH (ADAPTED & MODIFIED)

Some may suggest that the question of the pending legislation relating to Ireland, which is being debated in the British Parliament, is not a proper subject of discussion in an American town meeting. We have no official say in what the British government does. It can take notice or not of what we do and say here, but all the same we will exercise the liberty of saying it. We are not here to suggest to Great Britain that she shall grant the Irish their independence. We are here simply to say that, in our opinion as American citizens, what Ireland needs is not **coercion**, is not the **constable**, is not the soldier with musket and bayonet. What Ireland needs is liberal laws, that **emancipate** her people from the results of long centuries of ill government. When this British Ministry starts in the direction of coercion, and postpones suggestions for reform, it is traveling in the wrong direction.

Source: Campaign speech made by Benjamin Harrison in Indianapolis, April 8, 1887.

(Original)

WORD BANK

coercion—the act of being forced
constable—a policeman
to emancipate—to free

It may be suggested that we are engaged to-night in an act that savors somewhat of impertinence—that the question of the pending legislation relating to Ireland, which is the subject of discussion in the British Parliament, is not a proper subject of discussion in an American town meeting. . . . We have no official representations to make to the British government. It can take notice or not of what we do and say here, but all the same we will exercise the liberty of saying it. . . . We are not here to suggest to Great Britain that she shall concede Irish independence. . . . We are here simply to say that, in our opinion as American citizens, what Ireland needs is not coercion, is not the constable, is not the soldier with musket and bayonet; but liberal laws, tending to emancipate her people from the results of long centuries of ill government, and that when this British Ministry starts in the direction of coercion, and postpones suggestions for reform until a coercion bill has been enacted, it is traveling in the wrong direction.

SOURCE 4.6: KNOW-NOTHING PARTY

The object of this organization shall be to protect every American citizen in the legal and proper exercise of all his civil and religious rights and privileges; to resist the **insidious** policy of the Church of Rome and all other foreign influence against our republican institutions in all lawful ways; to place in all offices of honor, trust, or profit, in the gift of the people or by appointment, none but native-born Protestant citizens and to protect, preserve, and uphold the Union of these States and the Constitution of the same.

Source: Article II of the National Council of the United States of North America, otherwise known as the Know-Nothing Party. Circa 1855.

WORD BANK
Insidious—evil

SOURCE 4.7: KENNEDY SPEECH

Note: On September 12, 1960, presidential candidate John F. Kennedy gave a speech to the Greater Houston Ministerial Association. Many at the time questioned whether Kennedy's Catholic faith would interfere with his ability to lead the country.

Because I am a Catholic, and no Catholic has ever been elected president, the real issues in this campaign have been obscured, perhaps deliberately, in some quarters less responsible than this. So it is apparently necessary for me to state once again not what kind of church I believe in—for that should be important only to me—but what kind of America I believe in. . . .

I believe in an America that is officially neither Catholic, Protestant nor Jewish . . . where no religious body seeks to impose its will directly or indirectly upon the general populace or the public acts of its officials. . . .

Finally, I believe in an America where religious intolerance will someday end; where all men and all churches are treated as equal; where every man has the same right to attend or not attend the church of his choice; where there is no Catholic vote, no anti-Catholic vote, no bloc voting of any kind; and where Catholics, Protestants and Jews . . . will refrain from those attitudes of disdain and division which have so often marred their works in the past, and promote instead the American ideal of brotherhood. . . .

If I should lose on the real issues, I shall return to my seat in the Senate, satisfied that I had tried my best and was fairly judged. But if this election is decided on the basis that forty million Americans lost their chance of being president on the day they were baptized, then it is the whole nation that will be the loser—in the eyes of Catholics and non-Catholics around the world, in the eyes of history, and in the eyes of our own people.

Source: Excerpt from a speech given by Presidential candidate John F. Kennedy, September 12, 1960.

SOURCE 4.8: NAST CARTOON



Source: Thomas Nast, *Harper's Weekly*, "The American River Ganges," September 30, 1871 (see also http://www.aoh61.com/images/ir_cartoons/river_ganges.htm).

TOOL 4.1: PUTTING A SOURCE IN CONTEXT

Directions: Use Sources 4.2–4.5 to help you understand why Harrison established Discovery Day in 1892.

1. What does this source tell us was going on in 1892?

Source 4.2:

Source 4.3:

Source 4.4:

Source 4.5:

2. How might the events or issues presented in this source have influenced Harrison?
3. After reading these sources, why do you think Harrison established “Discovery Day” in 1892?

TOOL 4.2: B.A.S.I.C

B.A.S.I.C: Steps to Interpreting Editorial Cartoons

Editorial cartoons use features that pack dense information into a small space. The acronym B.A.S.I.C. reminds you what to look for when exploring a cartoon from a different time.

B: Background Knowledge

Cartoonists make certain assumptions, and one of them is that they and their readers share a common world. In a cartoon about strip searches by Homeland Security agents, an artist can depict two burning buildings, and we'll immediately recognize them as the Twin Towers of the World Trade Center. These features are so basic that we take them for granted, yet in another generation or so they won't be. When we interpret a cartoon from a hundred years ago, we often lack necessary background knowledge to crack the cartoon's code. Studying the period in which a cartoon appeared can help you figure out what the artist is trying to say.

A: Argument

The A in B.A.S.I.C. stands for Argument. Although editorial cartoons can make us laugh or smile, they have a more serious goal: to convey a point and convince us to adopt a position. When you look at a cartoon, ask yourself, "What does the artist want me to think?" Try to state the artist's point, or thesis, in a short statement, e.g., "From this cartoon, it is clear that the author thinks dependence on foreign oil will ruin America."

S: Symbolism

Cartoons use symbols to pack a lot of information into a single frame. Symbols are designations that point to something broader than themselves. A crescent, a six-pointed star, and a cross are more than moons, stars, or geometric figures. They stand for entire religious civilizations: Islam, Judaism, and Christianity, respectively. Symbols are part of the toolbox of every editorial cartoonist.

I: Indicators

But symbols can't do it alone. Cartoonists use *indicators*, or written labels, that point us in a certain direction. Often indicators tell us directly what something stands for (and may be the only words used in the cartoon). In addition to the cartoon's title and caption, be on the lookout for other indicators, sometimes found in small print in the body of the cartoon itself.

C: Caricature

Cartoons follow the adage, "What's worth stating is worth overstating," and caricature exemplifies such exaggeration. When we're stuck in a traffic jam, we might say, "There are a million cars in front of us! It'll take years to get out of here." In the same spirit, cartoonists compare a bad government policy to one of the Ten Plagues, or an aging candidate to the Thousand-Year-Old Man. Caricature can also employ stereotypes, distorted images that exaggerate the features of entire groups. Such images, particularly those from a different era, often seem racist or bigoted to our modern eyes.

TOOL 4.3: DECODING THOMAS NAST'S "THE AMERICAN RIVER GANGES"

This background information will help you answer questions in the following handout.

1) **Mitre:** a religious head covering worn by the Pope, as well as bishops and cardinals.



A mitre (head covering) worn by the Pope, <http://www.onlygospel.com/POPE~4.JPG>

2) **Basilica of St. Peter:** Located in Vatican City, St. Peter's Basilica is the Pope's principal church, and home to official ceremonies of the Roman Catholic Church. Catholic tradition holds that this church is the burial site of its namesake, Saint Peter, one of the Twelve Apostles and the first Bishop of Rome.



Saint Peter's Basilica in Rome (i.e., the large building with a dome), symbolic "Mother Church" of the Catholic Church. Photograph available at <http://countries-of-europe.com/wp-content/uploads/2011/02/St.-Peters-Basilica1.jpg>

3) **Columbia:** A late-17th-century synonym for the New World, "Columbia," for which the District of Columbia is named, is symbolically represented as a female figure. Depicted in a simple white gown, she is frequently shown holding the liberty pole, the American flag, or the Constitution, and is often accompanied by an eagle. As an icon Columbia evokes Christopher Columbus, the ostensible "discoverer" of America, from whom she derives her name, while also functioning as an allegorical figure who represents liberty and progress.

TOOL 4.3: DECODING THOMAS NAST'S "THE AMERICAN RIVER GANGES" (continued)



Image of Miss Columbia in a World War I recruiting poster. “Columbia calls—Enlist now for U.S. Army,” designed by Frances Adams Halsted; painted by V. Aderente. 1916. Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division, Washington, D.C., <http://lcweb2.loc.gov/service/pnp/cph/3g00000/3g03000/3g03600/3g03685v.jpg>

4) **Tammany Hall:** Founded in 1789, the Tammany Society (alternately known as “the Sons of St. Tammany” and “the Columbian Order”) was at the heart of New York City politics throughout the 19th century. Operating out of Tammany Hall, the organization was the city affiliate for the Democratic Party and grew in influence as it gained the loyalty of immigrants, many of whom were Irish Catholics. Governing through a system of public outreach, political patronage, and corruption,

Tammany “bosses” were among the most powerful politicians in New York State. The most famous of them, William “Boss” Tweed, even won a seat in the New York State Senate before ending his days in prison.

5) **The Inverted Flag:** An upside-down national flag is a common symbol of distress. According to *Admiral Smyth's Sailor's Word Book of 1867*, when a ship is “in imminent danger,” its crew “hoists her national flag upside down, and if she is armed, fires minute guns.”

6) **The Ganges River:** The Ganges runs roughly 1,500 miles through India. It is considered a holy river by the Hindus, who make pilgrimages to bathe in its waters by descending the stone steps called “ghats” along its banks. Hindus attribute special powers to the Ganges waters. In the 19th century, many Americans considered Hindus and their religious practices not only strange and exotic, but inferior to the more “developed” religious traditions of the West.

TOOL 4.4: THOMAS NAST'S "THE AMERICAN RIVER GANGES"

1. Look carefully at the crocodile-infested waters. What do the crocodiles have on their heads? What does this symbolize?
2. What do the crocodiles in this cartoon represent?
3. Who are the people casting the children off the cliff?
4. Who is the woman being dragged to the gallows?
5. There are two buildings in this cartoon; both contain "indicators" to help the reader correctly interpret the cartoon. What are these indicators and what do they tell you about the cartoon's message?
6. What is the argument of this cartoonist? What does he want the reader to think after viewing this cartoon?
7. Why do you think Nast titled the cartoon "The American River Ganges"? By connecting Catholic symbols with a river sacred to the Hindus in India, what do you think the cartoonist wanted people to think about American Catholics?

Suggested Resources

<http://www.loc.gov/teachers/classroommaterials/primarysourcesets/immigration/>

This is the home page of a primary document set, "Immigration Challenges for New Americans," created and maintained by the Library of Congress. In addition to primary source materials like audio and video footage, photographs, and cartoons, teacher materials are available as well.

<http://www.digitalhistory.uh.edu/modules/immigration/index.cfm>

This page from Stephen Mintz's Digital History website offers a range of resources about the history of immigration to the United States.

<http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/mod/modsbook28.html>

This page from Paul Halsall's Internet Modern History Sourcebook lists document and website links that focus on the American immigration of various ethnic groups.

http://avalon.law.yale.edu/19th_century/harris.asp

Read Benjamin Harrison's inaugural address at The Avalon Project, an online archive of legal and political documents housed at Yale University.

<http://historymatters.gmu.edu/mse/sia/cartoon.htm>

See how a historian interprets another Thomas Nast cartoon at History Matters, a website developed and maintained by the Center for History and New Media at George Mason University.

<http://cartoons.osu.edu/nast/portfolio.htm>

Find other Thomas Nast cartoons on this site hosted by Ohio State University.