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War Cartooned / Cartoon War: Matt Morgan and the American Civil War in *Fun* and Frank Leslie’s Illustrated Newspaper

CHRISTOPHER KENT

The American Civil War was the bloodiest and most destructive war fought anywhere in the world between 1815 and 1914. Nowhere outside the United States was it followed with greater intensity and sense of involvement than in Britain. Many Britons viewed America as the crystal ball in which, for better or for worse, they might read their own country’s future. This made the war intimately distressing. It was all the more so as the white population of the United States was still ethnically very close to Britain’s. Many Britons had close relatives living there. However wayward, Americans were still “family,” and the conventional British cartoon figure representing the United States was Cousin Jonathan, not yet Uncle Sam. In the autumn of 1860, the young Prince of Wales made a highly successful month-long visit of the United States which generated much journalistic chapsodizing – particularly in *The Times* – about Anglo-American friendship and the greatness of the Anglo-Saxon race. But quite apart from its fratricidal aspect, the Civil War, with its huge armies and savage battlefields employing the latest technologies of killing, also epitomized the horrors of modern warfare, making all the more immediate the virtues of the ideology of peace and free trade so recently embraced by Britain. There was of course a large economic element in British concern. Each nation was the other’s largest trading partner, with the Lancashire cotton industry massively dependent on American raw cotton. British investment in the United State was huge, both in government bonds and in the private sector. All these considerations account for the close attention the war received in the British press. Although a trans-Atlantic telegraph had been successfully laid in 1858, it soon broke down and instantaneous communication was not regained until its relaying in 1865; consequently the news lag throughout the war was about twelve days, the time of the fastest steamer crossing.
Historians have paid much attention to British opinion concerning the Civil War, but they have tended to emphasize editorial views expressed in the words of the newspaper leader writer rather than in the pictures of the cartoonist. The Times was then at the peak of its influence, though the impact on "public opinion" of its portentous leading articles is even more difficult to judge now than it was then. Much of its reputation depended on its skill at following elite opinion so closely as to appear to be leading it. Because historians are drawn to the security of the printed word, the authoritative style of the newspaper editorial makes it a tempting source. "Should Britain Intervene?" "Is cheap cotton more important than slavery?" The editorial voice speaks with seeming clarity, stressing reason, cause, and consequence. But what about the cartoon? British serio-comic journals also "spoke out" on the Civil War. Among these Punch held a position comparable to that of The Times in the early 1860s when John Tenniel took over as chief artist of its "big cut," the regular full-page political cartoon commenting on major issues. The cartoon's address is vaguer, more emotive and participatory, touching levels of public knowledge and cultural reference the leader writer can't reach. At a basic level it is accessible to all, as a simple, typically amusing, picture. But it also challenges the viewer to decode it, usually with the aid of a caption, by asking, "Do you know what this is really about?" The reader's knowingness is thus tested both by an iconography including canonical classical and Shakespearean references as well as the most up-to-date allusions to popular culture, and by the actual subject of the cartoon. The cartoon demands a response usually by introducing an appeal to the emotions that suggests the viewer is entitled to an opinion about its subject matter without any very deep knowledge beyond that needed to recognize it. One can easily skip over any block of text in a periodical but not a cartoon. Punch's writers were miffed when Thackeray remarked that most people bought it for the pictures, but he was surely right.

Matthew Somerville "Matt" Morgan (1816–1890) was the chief artist for Punch's main rival, Fun, which commenced publication on 21 September 1861. By the end of the Civil War in 1865, over a third of Fun's main cartoons had referred directly to it. Morgan was a rising scene painter who was also an artist and illustrator. His first big cut for Fun appeared on 28 December 1861, and he continued to draw almost all of them until October 1864. His only direct experience of the horrors of war was covering the brief but bloody Franco-Austrian War of 1859 in northern Italy as a war artist. This glamorous but dangerous profession had been born during the Crimean War a few years earlier when London's flourishing popular illustrated papers commissioned artists to sketch the action scenes the photographer's bulky camera and low-speed plates couldn't yet capture. Time being of the essence, such artists would sometimes just
sketch out a schematic composition indicating the topography, troop positions, weather and light, often with written notes to assist the office illustrators in London to whom it had been rushed back and who would work up the scene in full detail on the wood block. As a freelance, Morgan supplied both the Illustrated London News and its chief rival, the Illustrated Times. His published illustrations dealt less with actual engagements than with behind-the-lines scenes of soldiers drinking in cafes, disembarking, or on the march. The Illustrated London News also published an engaging dispatch from Morgan in which he light-heartedly described his adventures following the armies, adopting the persona of an inconvenienced tourist whose travels were being greatly disrupted by the hordes of soldiers who got in his way and had the awkward habit of depleting the available supplies of food and accommodation. The deliberately unheroic, civilian’s eye view of the war was one with which the ordinary reader could comfortably identify. It seems to have reflected Morgan’s own unwarlike character. Yet the bloodshed left a mark on him. It was this war that climaxed on the battlefield of Solferino where the carnage so appalled Napoleon III, commanding the French troops, that he decided on an immediate peace settlement. The sight of the casualties left on this battlefield, where some forty thousand were killed or wounded, so shocked Henri Dunant, a passing Swiss traveller, that he was inspired to found the International Red Cross.

When war broke out in America less than two years later, Morgan did not cross the Atlantic to join the flock of war artists covering it, most of them for American journals like Frank Leslie’s Illustrated Newspaper and Harper’s Weekly. Morgan’s colleague in the Italian war, Frank Vizetelly, went over for the Illustrated London News but lost accreditation in the North for his illustrated account of the Union defeat at Bull Run and was forced to cover the rest of the war from the Southern side where his sympathies lay. Morgan, however, would soon be covering the war in a different way, through his Fun cartoons. Presumably he received some direction on the choice of topic. The paper’s heavy emphasis on the war—no other topic received anywhere near its coverage—was clearly a matter of editorial policy. Fun followed the Punch practice of making the big cut’s theme a subject of general discussion at a weekly staff dinner, though it is unlikely that his instructions as to treatment were as comprehensive and detailed as were those given to Tenniel, his Punch counterpart. Fun’s politics were Liberal and supportive of the prime minister, Lord Palmerston. Its staff was largely composed of gentlemen, that is to say, university graduates, a class frequently assumed to be pro-Southern in its sympathies. Morgan did not bear the stamp of gentleman, being born into a theatrical family. But Fun’s gentlemen were also bohemians, closely connected with the theatre as journalists and playwrights. They
were thus, like Morgan, closely in touch with popular taste, since the Victorian stage was vibrant in topical and populist. It was also decidedly trans-Atlantic. This cultural ambience is strongly evident in Morgan's cartoons.

Discussions of English attitudes to the Civil War tend to neglect the extent and strength of these trans-Atlantic links in the world of entertainment and popular culture. P.T. Barnum, the self-proclaimed epitome of Yankeedom, was well known in Britain from the 1840s onwards; his prize meal ticket, General Tom Thumb, was literally a household word. By the late 1850s, the minstrel show, another recent American import, was the most popular form of stage entertainment in Britain. Uncle Tom's Cabin, with its very different picture of black life, was every bit as popular in England as in America. Spiritualism and revivalism were other flourishing American imports, with a distinct flavour of entertainment to them. Actors and dramatists criss-crossed the Atlantic: Dion Boucicaut was equally at home and successful on either side. The most popular play in both England and America during the early 1860s was Our American Cousin, which combined a parodic English aristocrat, Lord Dundreary, of almost surreal silliness, and a caricature Yankee, Asa Trenchard, who foils the villain and shows a heart of gold beneath his bumptious exterior. Trenchard's language, full of "tarnation," "I reckon," and the like, and his taste for drinks with names like "gin sling" and "brandy smash" fascinated English audiences. Written by an Englishman, but transformed by American actors who made it a hit, this was the play that Abraham Lincoln was watching when he was assassinated. If the balance of trans-Atlantic trade in high culture still favoured Britain at this time, in popular culture it arguably already favoured the United States. There were even some high cultural imports from America, if Longfellow can be so considered: one of Morgan's earliest commissions was five illustrations for an English edition of the best-selling Courtship of Miles Standish. Concerns about the Americanization of Britain expressed by some of its elites were not as widespread as scholarship focussing on writers like Charles Dickens and Mrs. Trollope tends to imply.

The Civil War was all the more puzzling to the British for their being the people who should have been best able to understand it, since they shared so much with the Americans. But the war embodied several contradictions and paradoxes that undermined the traditional lines of demarcation along which Britain's dominant creed of liberalism was defined. The cause of the North did not sit comfortably with personal, political, economic, or national liberty, insofar as the North initially refused the abolition of slavery, suspended habeas corpus, imposed protectionist tariffs, refused local (states') rights, and denied the principle of national self-determination to the Confederacy. What outweighed everything else was
the cause of the North — that sacred and mystical idea, "the Union" — which justified the utmost sacrifice and demanded unconditional victory. This was something most English people, and indeed many Americans themselves, could not fully comprehend or support. The cartoons of Matt Morgan reflect this puzzlement.

The misapprehension was mutual. At the start of the war, both sides expected the support of Great Britain. The free-trading, Lancashire-dependent, ethnically more purely Anglo and "gentlemanly" victims of Yankee oppression expected that Britain would recognize their new nation. The United States government wanted Britain to regard the war as purely an internal rebellion and accept that from the diplomatic standpoint the Confederacy simply did not exist. Britain quickly offended both sides by proclaiming its neutrality, which made it the target of Southern efforts to win recognition and of threats from Washington that such recognition would mean war.15 Morgan took over at Fun in the midst of the Trent Affair. The US Navy had stopped a British passenger ship in international waters, boarded it, and seized two Confederate diplomats, an action clearly violating international law and an unendurable affront to the world's leading naval power. American intransigence brought the two nations to the brink of war before Washington finally backed down. Public concern was intense, as was public relief when the crisis ended. Benjamin Moran, Assistant Secretary to the US minister in London, recorded in his diary the response to news that the US had released the two envoys: "the peace news ... was announced at most of the London theatres between the acts, and the audience arose like one & cheered tremendously."16

Morgan's Fun cartoons were certainly not anti-American. His response to the Trent settlement showed John Bull vigorously shaking Cousin Jonathan's hand over the caption "Well Done, Brother!" (18 Jan 1862). His Civil War cartoons contrasted significantly with those of Tenniel in Punch, which tended towards condescension, often depicting the North and South as quarrelling children or old women, with Britain as the authority figure ignoring or threatening to chastise them. There was considerable debate in Britain over the question of recognizing the South, culminating in the public declaration of one cabinet minister, William Gladstone, that Jefferson Davis had "made a nation." Morgan lightly dismissed the recognition question with two cartoons (25 Oct. 1862; 11 July 1863). Another concern was that the Northern "war party" might try to precipitate hostilities with Britain, perhaps by invading Canada, as a way of unifying American opinion. The New York Herald was identified with this position, as indicated in "The Neutral Beast" (12 Sept. 1863) which depicts that newspaper doing an Indian war dance, brandishing knife and tomahawk in a vain attempt to incite the recumbent British lion. Such
fighting as took place between the two nations was fortunately confined to the boxing ring. Intense public interest, stimulated by much media hype, had greeted the match in 1860 between John C. Heenan of the US and Tom Sayers for what was effectively the first world boxing championship. It ended in a controversial and bloody draw, but both fighters were widely praised for their endurance and character, Heenan spending most of the Civil War years in Britain where he was a popular favourite. In December 1863, he lost to the British boxer Tom King in a championship match. “The Fight” (19 Dec. 1863) shows King writing a diplomatic note to the American Secretary of State, the bellicose William Seward, at the dictation of Lord John Russell, the British Foreign Secretary, to regret the fight and “hope it won’t occur again.” King adds: “P.S. – Walker” – the mid-Victorian equivalent to “hogwash.” The Fun staff took a warm interest in things American, especially American humour. Tom Hood in particular established close relations with Ambrose Bierce, Artemus Ward, Godfrey Leland, and Mark Twain once the war was over, publishing them in Fun. Morgan was an acquaintance of the young American artist James Abbott McNeill Whistler, whose earliest great work The White Girl was first exhibited at an art gallery run by Morgan in 1862. Whistler, who had been a West Point cadet and whose brother was a surgeon with the Confederate army, liked entertaining his friends with buckwheat flapjacks, mint juleps, and minstrel songs. Though Whistler was pro-South, Fun was not. Morgan depicted the Confederacy as a man with a whip. However Fun was respectful of Southern military prowess, even though its victories were often presented more in terms of Northern military incompetence, particularly that of General McClellan who was three times singled out in cartoons.

The war’s impact on Britain was the subject of several cartoons. The impact of the cotton famine was referred to only obliquely, with the cities of Manchester and Lyons watching in anguish as the American “Kilkenny Cats” (who in folklore fought each other until there was nothing left of them but their tails) go at each other (19 July 1862). Fun was quick to pick up on the significance of the duel between USS Monitor and CSS Virginia (ex-Merrimack) in March 1862 and the threat the new ironclads (depicted as tortoises) posed to the wooden walls of the Royal Navy and to British security (12 Apr. 1862). The failure of the Union ironclads to capture Richmond was shown as a collection of ironmongery tied to the tail of a Lincoln-faced dog (9 May 1863). The success of the Union navy against Southern blockade runners, many of them British, was also noted with concern (2 May 1863). The revolutionary implications of the naval side of the Civil War (the Confederate navy achieved the first ever sinking of a ship by a submarine) were of the deepest interest to Britain. Another impact of the war directly affecting thousands of Britons was the Union’s
recruitment effort in Britain, referred to in “Recruiting a la Mode” (23 Aug 1862), which shows Lincoln fishing in the “Bounty River,” baiting his hooks with $150 bundles. This activity was unofficial, in view of Britain’s Foreign Enlistment Act, but Northern bounty recruiters, and the notorious “substitute brokers” who facilitated draft avoidance for those who could afford it, looked to unemployed Britons as prime targets.20 Another cartoon, “To the West – To the West, To the Land of the Free!! Dedicated to Ireland” (26 Sept. 1863), shows an unhappy Irishman in Northern uniform staggering beneath the weight of the draft and taxes while shackled to the stone of “The Union or Death,” an ironic allusion to the fact that many Irish had gone to America to escape the Union – with Britain. Many in Britain had family members fighting in this war. The specificity of Morgan’s cartoons, greater than that of Tenniel’s in *Punch*, suggests a readership that followed the war in close detail.

Though not anti-American, Morgan’s cartoons were vehemently opposed to the Civil War. And in this they probably reflected the most widespread British attitude. The “irrepressible conflict” of subsequent historiography did not appear thus in British eyes. The very notion was an affront to rationality and utilitarian principle for a nation already largely convinced of the futility even of its recently-won Crimean War. It was puzzling too that the great lesson unforgettably drilled into Britain by the Thirteen Colonies—that no Anglo-Saxon people should or could be held in a union against its will—was now being denied in America itself. The savagery and futility of the war were conveyed by Morgan’s frequent visual references to it in terms of a knife fight between two equally villainous looking males. The early Southern victories persuaded many that the war was unwinnable, and that the North might even be defeated by the South’s superior military skills and will. The bloody deadlock of Antietam was noted by one of Morgan’s ghastliest cartoons, “Go It Ye Cripples!” (11 Oct. 1862). Here the two combatants are reduced to jumbled collections of body parts, over which “The Real President of the United States” – grinning Death in Uncle Sam’s garb – urges them to “Have another round, do, jist to see who’s victor.” As late as autumn of 1863, the war was presented as a “See-Saw” (14 Nov. 1863) in which Fortune straddled the fulcrum, putting the South in the ascendant. And even should the North eventually win on the battlefields, it was widely believed that the South could never be reconciled after all its sacrifices, given the brutality of the occupying Northern armies, which Morgan refers to in “The Federal ‘Dis’-Graces” (24 Jan. 1863), with an allusion to Bertel Thorvaldsen’s famous sculpture *The Three Graces and Cupid*. Benjamin “Bear” Butler and John McNeil, two Union Generals notorious for their harshness towards civilians, pose coyly with nooses, Butler inviting a third Dis-grace to step forward and complete their classi-
cal tableau. A significant decline in the number of cartoons concerning the war in 1864 reflects a growing weariness with the subject as it became increasingly clear that the North was going to grind out victory at whatever cost. It also faced competition for the cartoonist's attention from the Schleswig-Holstein crisis, which raised the threat of European war in that year. Morgan's cartoons suggesting mediation or a peaceful settlement had an air of hopelessness about them (1 Jan. 1864; 13 Aug. 1864).

Within the conventions of the cartoon, with its drive to personify, the simplest way to express abhorrence of the war was to focus on Lincoln and implicitly blame its commencement and prolongation on him. Moreover, such a view was not without some foundation in American opinion. To accept Lincoln was to admit the necessity of war; to admire him was to accept the necessity of Northern victory. Morgan rejected Lincoln, portraying him cruelly and at times savagely. He was never a master of portrait caricature and his representations were essentially ugly, verging at times on the animal or simian in the treatment of the mouth and jaw: with a semitic nose and outsize goatee his Lincoln at times resembles his version of Disraeli, or Louis Napoleon, two other frequent Fun targets. Morgan's strength lay in depicting situations and settings, as befitted his theater background. In "Sensation Jumble" (5 Apr. 1864), "Professor Lincoln" is a bartender flamboyantly mixing a cocktail of falsehoods and exaggeration (see fig. 1). (Curious Londoners were then flocking to the recently opened American Bar in Leicester Square to sample its exotic drinks, chilled with imported ice cut from New England lakes -- which Morgan also shows.) Punch lifted this idea for its own big cut a few months later. Lincoln of course fitted the stage -- Yankee stereotype with his lanky frame, gaunt features, and well publicized rail-splitting, log cabin persona. Other stage Yankee elements are featured in "Yankee Pancakes" (21 Feb. 1863), where Lincoln approvingly watches Salmon Chase, Secretary of the Treasury, flip another government paper debt out of the frying pan onto a mounting stack, or "Settling Day" (30 May 1863), where as a seedy gambler Lincoln discusses his losing "hosses" -- Generals "Freeman" (Fremont), McClellan, and Hooker -- with his bookmaker (again, Chase) while a young widow and her children watch grimly. The cleverly conceived "Yankee Olmar" (15 Nov. 1862) likens Lincoln to a current London sensation who performed aerial acrobatics without a net, to the crowd's peril as much as his own (see fig. 2). Morgan's cartoon captions made considerable play with such stage Yankeisms as "Tarnation," "Jerusalem," "Oh, Snakes." Lincoln appeared in twenty-five of Morgan's forty-five Civil War cartoons for Fun, in every case discredibly. He was depicted as a donkey, a quack, a simpleton, a thief, an arsonist, a cardsharp, a failed father -- always unkempt and usually in ill-fitting striped pants -- in one way or another bringing his country to misery and ruin.
SENSATION JUMBLE.

FIGURE 1
Lincoln bore the brunt of *Punch*’s suspicion about the North’s commitment to the cause of the Blacks. The preliminary announcement of the Emancipation Proclamation was widely viewed in Britain as a cynical attempt to incite a slave rebellion: “Penny Jupiter” (18 Oct. 1862) showed Lincoln as a puny god hurling a tiny thunderbolt at a cotton field full of unconcerned, toiling Blacks. By contrast, Morgan’s comment on the New York draft riots of July 1863, in which a black man was lynched, was “King Mob upon his Throne” (8 Aug. 1863), showing a simianized White brute with his jackbooted feet on the back of a terrified Black who cowers under the American flag, while Lincoln looks on unconcernedly, hands in his pockets. In “The Yankee Guy Fawkes” (7 Nov. 1863), Lincoln warms his hands before a burning effigy made up of the Constitution and other charters of democracy, capped by the head of George Washington. The implication of such cartoons is not that democracy or the American system of government were at fault but that Lincoln had perverted them. The numerous references in Morgan’s cartoons to the financial policies of Lincoln’s government, to the exploding national debt and the inflationary issue of unsecured treasury notes (“greenbacks”) and other government paper, might seem to be rather crassly materialistic, not to say hypocritical given that Britain had adopted virtually the same policies during its wars with France from 1794 to 1815. Since then, however, Britain had taken on the role of international guardian of the gold standard and sound money, which the ideology of liberalism raised to the level of a moral imperative. Particularly irresponsible by this standard was Lincoln’s preference for financing the war by borrowing rather than taxation, thereby saddling a future generation with the costs of the present generation’s follies. It is noteworthy that the only other member of Lincoln’s cabinet to appear more than once in Morgan’s cartoons was Treasury Secretary Chase—four times. Undoubtedly self-interested concern about the safety of British investment in America was also a major factor in British desire for peace in America. That the far more calamitous finances of the Confederacy never rate an allusion, except very indirectly in the patched state of Jefferson Davis’s trousers, reflects the real focus of British interests. The Morgan cartoon that comes closest to the condescension of *Punch* is “Thanksgiving” (5 Dec. 1863), where John Bull asks Lincoln, dressed as an Indian and clutching a Bible, “Don’t you think you’d better wash off your war paint before going to church, friend?” “Niagara Doves” (13 Aug. 1864), showing the peace advocate Horace Greeley (of whom Morgan would later know more) as a dove, also suggests that Lincoln’s interest in peace was dubious. In short, blaming Lincoln was the simplest way for British liberals to reconcile the tragedy of the Civil War with their American sympathies and interests.

If the scowling, black-bearded Lincoln represented the forces of dark-
ness in Morgan's Civil War melodrama, the forces of light were embodied in female forms. He chose on one occasion to depict Lincoln in drag, in a scene borrowed with acknowledgment from the popular painting Broken Vows by his friend Philip Calderon, with Lincoln as the maiden who happens upon her "young man" (Napoleon III) wooing a "Secesh Gal" (6 Dec. 1862). But almost all his other female figures were allegorical: classically draped embodiments of Peace, of Britannia in her characteristic Roman helmet, and above all of Columbia, usually in classical robe, but on one occasion dressed as an Indian maiden with a fur cape and feather headdress (27 Aug. 1864). In four of Morgan's most successful cartoons, Columbia and Lincoln are melodramatically juxtaposed. In "Abe's Last" (27 Dec. 1862), Columbia is trapped with him in a wooden washtub amidst stormy seas (see fig. 3). "The Modern Andromeda" (10 Jan. 1863) shows her chained to the rock of war while a fiendish monster whose bulging eyeballs ingeniously bear Lincoln's profile prepares to ravish her (see fig. 4). "Columbia's Nightmare" (10 Sept. 1864), Morgan's brilliant last Civil War cartoon for Fun, is inspired by Henry Fuseli's The Nightmare, with Lincoln as the demon perched on the bosom of a tormented Columbia. In interesting contrast to these three depictions of Columbia as the female victim of Lincoln's male cruelty is "Advice to Columbia" (4 Oct. 1863; see fig. 5). Here, in a reference to the forthcoming presidential election, a gigantic, Amazonian Columbia vigorously wields a broom to sweep a verminous rabble of politicians and generals, a donkey-eared Lincoln prominent among them, tumbling down flag-draped steps. Dressed in her clinging, virginal robe, the allegorical figure of Columbia allowed Morgan to avoid having to choose between North and South by representing in non-political and highly emotive terms an ideal of America—the higher, better self of the American people.

Studies of British opinion concerning the Civil War tends to assume that all who took an interest in it were either pro-South or pro-North and to focus on the questions of who and how many were on each side, and why— with particular attention to social class. This "either with us or against us" approach is perhaps a legacy of the official attitude of the US government. Not to choose was considered indicative of a "plague on both your houses" attitude and was liable to be construed as anti-Americanism. Hyper-sensitivity to British opinion and quickness to detect an affront were pronounced among many Americans. Benjamin Moran's Diary offers an example. There was unquestionably much condescension and patronization in British opinion for Americans to be affronted by: the Civil War cartoons in Punch, whose political complexion was very close to Fun's, often breathed such condescension, as already noted. Without attributing to Morgan's cartoons any particular influence at the level of policy, or claiming that they represented elite or intellectual opin-
Abe's Last.

Abe: " Quite well, thank you, Mr. McClellan. Nothing could be smoother."

Figure 3
THE MODERN ANDROMEDA.

Caption: "HEAVEN SEND ME A DELIVERER!"

Figure 4
ADVICE TO COLUMBIA.

Figure 5
ion, since they certainly did not make such claims, one may consider them as at least a window into popular British opinion. The fact that the Fun staff were closely involved with the business of popular entertainment – of giving the public what it wanted – suggests that they may have had a fairly shrewd notion of what much of the British public thought or, more interestingly, felt about events in America. A generalized pro-Americanism and an abhorrence of war were among its most prominent features if Matt Morgan’s cartoons are any guide.

Morgan’s cartoons were lambasting Lincoln as late as September 1864, but shortly thereafter, he ended his connection with Fun. It was left to his less talented successor, F. W. Lawson, to interpret the collapse of the Confederacy, Lincoln’s assassination, and the dramatic reversal of British opinion about the president’s stature. Morgan concentrated for a few years on his blossoming career as chief scene painter at London’s Covent Garden Theatre. He took up cartooning again in early 1867 for the newly launched Tomahawk, a more sensational rival to Punch, which flourished briefly thanks largely to Morgan’s melodramatic, moralizing cartoons on social and political issues, most controversially his cartoons criticizing Queen Victoria and the Prince of Wales. In the midst of apparent prosperity, he then suffered unspecified personal difficulties, including bankruptcy, and Tomahawk mysteriously ceased publication. At this point, Columbia beckoned in the form of Frank Leslie, the magnate of American illustrated journals, who offered him work. By 1871, Morgan had moved to New York. Leslie needed a top-flight cartoonist for his flagship publication, Frank Leslie’s Illustrated Newspaper, to pit against Harper’s Weekly’s Thomas Nast, then in the full flush of success with his brilliant cartoon attacks on civic corruption and Boss Tweed. Having unsuccessfully tried to lure Nast back (Leslie had given him his first job), Leslie turned to Morgan as the 1872 presidential election approached.

Morgan and Leslie had much in common in background and temperament, and they hit it off. Leslie, born Henry Carter, had learned the wood engraving trade in his native England and worked for the Illustrated London News before emigrating in 1848 to the United States, where he changed his name and within ten years created a publishing empire. His main journal was now locked in a fierce circulation battle with Harper’s. During the Civil War, he had initially attempted a neutral stance, and after that became impossible, he took a moderate non-partisan stance in Northern politics. Harper’s, by contrast, evolved into an ardently pro-Lincoln, pro-Republican journal and profited by its partisanship. Leslie, having little taste for the politics of the Bloody Shirt, decided in 1872 to commit his journal to Horace Greeley, candidate of the breakaway Liberal Republicans and the tag-along Democratic Party. Morgan had little detailed knowledge of American politics, but he enhanced his credibility as a car-
toonist in his new home by encouraging the story that he had been forced into exile from England by a vindictive monarchy. The full signature “Matt Morgan” with which he had insisted on signing his controversial Tomahawk cartoons—the first English cartoonist to do so—would now appear on his Leslie’s cartoons, an emphatic indicator of his reputation. The signature also carried an emphatic implication of artistic authority and responsibility. Morgan had been a virtual co-editor of Tomahawk, enjoying extensive creative initiative. At Leslie’s the cartoon decision-making process is not known, but the remarkable annual salary of $10,000 that Leslie paid him was for his extensive repertoire of ideas and his particular talent for injecting a moralistic element into a cartoon, rather than for just his skills as a draftsman.66 Morality, after all, was what the Greeley campaign was all about. Morgan’s cartooning brief was unquestionably congenial. To him Grant meant not just immorality; he also evoked the Civil War, about which Morgan had some firm opinions. The ensuing cartoon campaign between Morgan and Nast, if not exactly a refighting of the Civil War, was certainly soaked in references to the recent conflict.

The Civil War, which Morgan had criticized in Fun as futile and savage, was the making of Thomas Nast. Like Morgan, he had early experience as a war artist, first covering Garibaldi’s picnic campaign against the Bourbons of Naples in 1860, a very different Italian war from the slaughter Morgan had witnessed in 1859.67 Nast briefly covered the Civil War in the field, before returning to the New York office of Harper’s where he worked as an editorial artist, specializing in propaganda pictures on themes of Southern atrocities, real and imagined, and increasingly explicit partisan cartoons on behalf of Lincoln and his party.68 He revelled in patriotic gore, and General Grant became as great a hero for him as was Lincoln. Nast’s cartooning approach was straightforward: go for the throat; concentrate on attacking your opponent rather than portraying your own candidate. Nast, who also signed his cartoons in full, enjoyed extensive freedom in choice and treatment of cartoon subjects, even to the point of going against his editor who objected to the viciousness of his attacks on the Liberal Republicans.69 For Nast, Greeley was the enemy—a renegade Republican, promoter of negotiations with the Confederacy, the man who stood bail for Jefferson Davis; he was treachery embodied. Moreover, he presented a huge target. During his long opinionated, didactic career as a journalist, he had given many hostages to posterity, and Nast delighted in dredging up embarrassing old Greeleyisms. Physically too, Greeley was an ideal cartoonist’s target with his moon-like face, surrounded by a full fringe of white whiskers, and his signature white coat and white hat. Nast, a skilled portrait caricaturist, took full advantage. Morgan, by contrast did not have any particular personal antipathy towards Grant, nor had he Nast’s caricaturing skills, not that Grant was
as caricaturable. He therefore resorted to a tactic similar to the one he had used with Lincoln: draw him ugly. Morgan's Grant was less an individual than the villainous embodiment of war, violence and vengeance, militaristic ambition, political authoritarianism, and all-round corruption. But more frequently than did Nast, Morgan tried to present his own candidate in positive terms. Thus Greeley was the man of peace, of conciliation and moderation, of civilian virtue, prosperity and democracy.

Morgan's recent success as Tomahawk's cartoonist had depended on a large scale, heavily atmospheric style that invoked an apocalyptic mood of imminent moral collapse by means of dark, stormy skies and melodramatic lighting. Working on the same large scale at Leslie's (he was often given a full centre spread space of up to twelve by eighteen inches), he drew upon similar effects, portraying Grant's presidency as a panorama of violence, immorality, and impending calamity, courting the retribution of caesarism that classical history taught to be the inevitable fate of corrupt republics. "Beware" (28 Oct. 1872) is characteristic: a stern Columbia, draped in the flag, confronts Grant and his cowering cronies who are vainly attempting to conceal stuffed ballot boxes, with the spectre of anarchy and vigilantism raised by their disrespect for the law. The words "San Francisco 1856" shimmering luridly amidst smoke and flame refer to the lynching of two Englishmen by a xenophobic mob, an episode firmly fixed in the consciousness of English immigrants like Morgan and Leslie. The composition is highly theatrical and staged like a tableau against a backdrop. The confrontation between Grant, portrayed as a slouching, dissipated ruffian, cigar in mouth, hands in pockets - the essence of failed manliness - and Columbia, the essence of ideal womanly virtue, was a frequent feature of Morgan's cartoons for Leslie's. The oblique linkage of sex and violence is more explicit in "The Republic on the Brink" (9 Nov. 1872) where Grant, hands still in his pockets, cigar at a more phallic angle, tells his henchmen to shove Columbia into the pit, along with liberty, the ballot, and popular government. "Ruffianism Triumphant" (4 Jan. 1873) commemorates the year of Grant's re-election with a mock-heroic statue (see fig. 6). Here violence is depicted in a way that suggests associations with male impotence: the over-dressed bully with ridiculously padded shoulders, a pistol, knife, club, and semi-erect cigar, triumphantly plants his boot on the back of the fallen female figure of Justice, in flimsy gown and full bondage - all against a melodramatic skyline. Morgan plainly enjoyed the licence of invoking the sexuality of the female figure in a morally safe symbolic context and in taking advantage of the paradoxical identification, in an age when actual female virtue was protected by corsets and crinolines, of the lightly clad or nude female figure with ideal virtue. His Fun cartoons had shown early signs of this proclivity, but in Leslie's it became more pronounced.10
The critique of Grant’s Radical Reconstruction lent itself to treatment in terms of that particularly Southern pre-occupation, violated woman-
hood. Thus the expulsion of the anti-Grant Louisiana state legislature by Federal troops evoked “The Louisiana Slave” (11 Jan. 1873), one of Mor-
gan’s most arresting cartoons (see fig. 7). Here three symbolic figures ap-
pear together: Columbia stands beside Uncle Sam, both looking up in
dismay at a demurely beautiful young white woman, Louisiana, bare
breasted and otherwise scantily draped in the gauziest of fabric, who
stands exposed for sale on the auction block, her hands shackled. The car-
toon is an artistic allusion, underlined by its punning subtitle, “A Dis-
grace to Columbia, by the ‘Powers’ that Be,” to perhaps the most famous
and controversial work of nineteenth-century American art Hiram Pow-
ers’ sculpture The Greek Slave, which Morgan may well have seen as a
boy in 1851 at the Crystal Palace Exhibition, where it created a sensation.
Morgan copies it almost exactly, except for the drapery, which is entirely
absent in the original. Powers’ statue defiantly challenged objections of
indecency with the classical resonance of its marmoreal coldness; by the
unflinching chastity and modesty of its pose; and by the religious and
racial content of its subject, Christian maidenhood sold to the lustful
Turk. Or, to put it another way, it invoked the sanctity, and sanctimony,
of classicism to arouse and rebuke simultaneously an erotic response.
Such a richly ambiguous mixture of aesthetic moral and ideological sig-
als fascinated Morgan,11 as it did many others, and made it an ideal sym-
bol for his cartoon purposes. But there was worse yet in store for
Morgan’s Louisiana. In one of his last Leslie’s cartoons, Grant, enthroned
in the operatic uniform of a banana republic dictator, lunges forward to
stab her in the breast (30 Jan. 1875). It is not too far-fetched, perhaps, to
see in Morgan’s cartoons, which invoke certain traditional associations,
war and rape, sexual violence and male inadequacy, a critique of the post-
Civil War culture of militarism as masculinity, and a response to those of
Grant’s supporters who questioned the masculinity of the reformers and
celebrated the politics of disciplined party machinery, grinding out vic-
tory like Grant’s armies, against effete reformist intellectuals like Gree-
ley with their speeches and ideas.12

Grant, the man of violence, the displaced soldier whose qualities were
hostile to the needs of peace, was frequently depicted by Morgan as a mil-
itary despot, as king, emperor, or would-be Napoleon. This was in keep-
ing with a leading theme in the Greeley campaign — Caesarism — and
Grant’s offence against the one-term rule which many saw as a bulwark
of republican virtue. “Our Modern Belshazzar” (6 Apr. 1872) set the
tone: it shows Grant sprawled drunkenly (Grant’s drinking propensities
were a regular theme) amidst Babylonian excess, toadyin political min-
ions at his feet, bayonets bristling menacingly around him in a setting of
Cecil B. de Mille-scale decadence. While a menacing sky lowers, there appear the prophetic words, not the Lord's “Mene Mene Tekel ...,” of the less inspiring B. Gratz Brown, Greeley's running mate. At his most brutal, in “A Useless Appeal” (2 Nov. 1872), Morgan shows Grant as a Nero-like figure, almost unrecognizably dissipated, dismissing a group of crippled Civil War veterans seeking assistance with the words “No! No! I make it a rule only to receive. I never give anything” (see fig. 8). The occasional humorous note was struck in Morgan's cartoons, as where Grant shows his admiring teacher, Boss Tweed, a new dance routine (7 Sept. 1872), but his anti-Grant cartoons generally ran to a humourless righteousness. Nast, for all his vitriol, raised a smile more often. Indignation is less productive of humour than ridicule, an important part of Nast’s stock in trade. Greeley’s journalistic verbosity was easier to ridicule than Grant's grim, soldier-like taciturnity.

Morgan relentlessly plied the war versus peace theme, usually at the level of allusion, and sometimes more explicitly as in the double panelled “Look Here Upon This Picture, And On This” (31 Aug. 1872), based on a text from the closet scene in Hamlet, a perennial favourite among nineteenth-century cartoonists who all knew their Shakespeare (as did the American public). In one panel, King Grant is seated on his cannon-armed throne, backed by the usual bayonets, grimly accepting the homage of his pygmy courtiers under the supervision of a repulsive grinning hag. Here War unusually receives a female but utterly unfeminine embodiment, though the loathsome creature Morgan draws may be intended as the all-purpose symbol of war and all its consequences - anarchy, corruption, famine, and the rest. By contrast, Morgan surrounds the benign Greeley with handsome children symbolizing all the right things, under the tutelage of the virginal young matron “Industry.” Cliché-ridden though it is, the cartoon has a certain earnest power. Rather better realized is another traditional cartoon device, the two candidates on the scales (7 Sept. 1872): Napoleon Grant with his sword, whiskey bottle, boxes of cigars and the usual swarm of cronies and relatives (frequently depicted as leeches) clinging to him, is outweighed by Greeley, with only his axe, boots, and white hat, those symbols of frontier virtue that Greeley self-consciously deployed (see fig. 9). Elsewhere, inevitably, the familiar text from the Prophet Isaiah is summoned by Morgan on behalf of Greeley, who is shown beating Grant's swords into ploughshares, a reminder that Greeley campaigned for national reconciliation and an end to the military occupation of the South, which, though denied the status of a nation in war, was in defeat treated in many respects like a conquered nation (25 May 1872). Inevitable too, though in a lighter vein, is Morgan's invocation of the pen versus the sword (13 July 1872): Greeley, dignified and erect, holding his giant pen like a resting lance, looks pityingly down
upon Grant, a puny, swaggering, pantomime warrior, brandishing his preposterously misshapen sword. At Grant’s feet are the yapping miniature bulldogs that constantly attended Grant in Morgan’s cartoons (despite the fact that Grant apparently disliked dogs).

Morgan largely avoided direct reference to Grant’s role in the Civil War itself, since this was risky ground and the basis, after all, of Grant’s strength. Indirectly, and rather convolutedly, Morgan tried to capture the moral high ground of the Civil War for Greeley in “The Modern Moses to His People” (24 Aug. 1872) in which Charles Sumner, orator-in-chief of the Liberal Republicans, addresses a noble assemblage of Blacks, while the Red Sea closes over the armies of Pharaoh Grant. Greeley stands by modestly while his long and committed opposition to slavery is contrasted with Grant’s accidental contribution to its abolition as a soldier plying his terrible trade. The cartoon is rather static and didactic. In another cartoon of slight visual interest, Morgan recalled an 1863 military proclamation issued by Grant against Jews (19 Oct. 1872). By contrast Nast, wave par excellence of the Bloody Shirt, delighted in recalling the Civil War against Greeley. His favourite text was Greeley’s declaration of reconciliation, “Let us clasp hands across the bloody chasm,” and in various cartoons he showed Greeley clasping hands across Lincoln’s grave, dead Union soldiers, and the graveyard of the notorious Andersonville prison. The nearest Morgan came to countering Nast directly on this point was “Sweep Away the Past” (28 Dec. 1872), which appeared after the election and recalls an earlier Fun cartoon. Columbia, here dressed as a sturdy, down-to-earth housewife, sweeps away the debris of cannons, laurel wreaths, battle honours, and inevitably a tiny Grant in Napoleonic cocked hat.

Morgan’s cartoons in Fun and Leslie’s visualized the Civil War in symbolic terms. Significantly, he avoided depicting the actual battlefield, as he had as a war artist too. Only once in Fun did he depict soldiers in action. That cartoon, ironically titled “Yankee Glory” (26 July 1861), showing Northern troops in panic-stricken flight from the Confederates, McClellan retreating hell-for-leather in their midst, was Morgan’s comment on the failure of McClellan’s Peninsular campaign. In one Leslie’s cartoon he depicted a corpse-strewn battlefield, a reference to the consequences of the Grant administration’s controversial arms sale to the French in the Franco-Prussian war (30 Mar. 1872). Though an unsuccessful campaign issue, it gave Morgan an outlet for his feelings about war. Otherwise, war was symbolically depicted in his cartoons by turbulent seas, stormy skies, brawling thugs, or grim hags, but mainly in terms of its political, economic, and social costs, and its psychological prolongation in the climate of vindictiveness promoted by Grant’s presidency.

Grant of course won by a landslide in 1872, and in that restricted sense
Nast beat Morgan in their cartoon war. Organization beat oratory at the polls, and Greeley, humiliated, died a few weeks after his defeat, eliciting from Morgan the conventional black-veiled Columbia mourning over the coffin (21 Dec. 1872). However, Morgan did not retire defeated from cartooning, despite some scholars' suggestions. He continued to cartoon vigorously for Leslie's and against Grant for several more years, though in diminishing volume as he became increasingly involved in scene painting and theatre management in New York. His successor at Leslie's was Joseph Keppler, who went on to found the comic weekly Puck in 1876. In the opinion of Richard Marschall, a leading historian of American cartooning and a cartoonist himself, "Morgan must be considered the last great woodcut-era cartoonist." Morgan never returned to Britain, but turned his versatile talents and entrepreneurial energies to a number of areas of fine and commercial art before his death. He never lost his interest in the Civil War, however. One of his later achievements was a series of twelve huge diorama paintings of Civil War battle scenes depicting with graphic realism, including light and sound effects, the horrors of the battlefield that he had previously avoided representing. Recalling to his new fellow countrymen and women, lest they forget, the price of civil war, the pictures briefly toured the Midwest to critical acclaim in 1886 before being accidentally destroyed by fire the following year.

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NOTES


7 Illustrated London News (28 May 1859): 256.

8 Martin Gunpetz, Dunant. The Story of the Red Cross (London: Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1939), ch. 1.


17 Alan Lloyd, The Great Prize Fight (London: Cassell, 1977). Heenan’s popularity was increased by his having married, and divorced, “America’s first great international sex symbol,” Ada Isaacs Menken, who cut a wide swath in Britain during the Civil War years (she also fell by Swinburne). Menken gained notoriety by playing Mazeppa in fleshings and lashed to a horse’s back. See Wolf Mankowitz, Mazeppa: The Lives, Loves, and Legends of Ada Isaacs Menken (London: Blond & Briggs, 1982). A 18 Fun cartoon (not by Morgan) shows Lincoln as “The Modern Mazeppa” (1 Nov. 64) being carried helplessly to ruin.
18 Lauterbach, 173–93.
21 For a comprehensive discussion of this artistic and cultural convention, see Marina Warner, Monuments and Maidens: The Allegory of the Female Form (London: Picador Books, 1987).
26 Stern, Purple Passage, 63.
28 Thompson, Image of War, 90–97.
30 Morgan also did some illustrations at this time for another of Leslie's periodicals, the salacious The Day's Doings, which had London and New York editions.
33 Paine (227) says of Morgan's cartoons in Leslie's, "From beginning to end they do not raise a single laugh," which is not quite fair.
34 See Esther Cloudman Dunn, Shakespeare in America (New York: Macmillan, 1939) 219-84.
36 Hess and Kaplan, 100; see also Alfred Turnbull, "Satire with Crayon and Pen," Epoch (5 April 1889).
37 Horn, IV, 400.