

The Stereopticon, *The Tariff Illustrated*, and the 1892 Election

The 1892 US presidential election was a rematch that pitted former President Grover Cleveland against President Benjamin Harrison. Cleveland was a conservative or “Bourbon Democrat” who had been elected governor of New York State in 1882 by a landslide. In 1884 he became the first Democratic president since the Civil War, defeating former Senator James Blaine, a Maine Republican, by the thinnest of margins. His victory depended on winning his home state, which he did by 1,047 votes out of the 1,171,312 that were cast. His strongest supporter—the one most responsible for his success—was the publisher of the *New York World*, Joseph Pulitzer. Pulitzer, a longtime Democrat and owner of the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, had purchased the *World* in 1883. Barely a year later he was working hard on behalf of Cleveland’s nomination for president. During the actual campaign the *World* savagely attacked his Republican opponent for corruption and for his sweetheart deals with the railroads. Pulitzer’s *World* was particularly effective during the final days of the campaign. For the first time, and with some justice, Republicans could blame the liberal media for their loss of the White House, where they had enjoyed a twenty-eight-year occupancy. Mass-circulation daily newspapers had proved themselves to be a dominant political force, and Pulitzer had become a kingmaker.¹

Four years later, Cleveland’s Republican challenger was former Indiana Senator Benjamin Harrison, the grandson of the ninth US president, William Henry Harrison. His running mate was former New York

Congressman and Minister to France, Levi Morton. Although Cleveland won the popular vote, Harrison took New York State by 15,000 votes and so won the election. Republicans had seemingly found the means to counter the Democrats' newspaper advantage (more on this later). In the resulting 1892 redo, Harrison chose a new vice presidential running mate—another New Yorker, Whitelaw Reid. Not only did Reid provide geographic balance, but he was the publisher of the nation's preeminent Republican newspaper, the *New York Tribune*. The Democratic Party chose Adlai Stevenson, a former two-term congressman from Illinois, to be Cleveland's running mate. Stevenson's positions were more Populist than Cleveland's, and it was seen as a purposeful slap at the nominee.²

Republicans and Democrats faced a serious third-party insurgency. Various farm alliances combined with labor and reform groups to organize the People's Party in 1892. Under the banner "Equal Rights to All, Special Privileges to None," these Populists became a potent force in the West, where they would win the states of Nevada, Colorado, Idaho, and Kansas as well as a delegate in North Dakota. In fact, Cleveland did not appear on the ballot in these states—nor in Wyoming, which the Republicans won by a narrow margin. In the South the Populists would take votes away from the Republicans: in Alabama, the People's Party received more than 36 percent of the vote while Republicans were reduced to less than 4 percent. The Populists favored women's suffrage, and for the first time some women could cast ballots for the nation's highest office: they resided in Wyoming, the least populous state, which had been admitted into the union on July 10, 1890.³ The Populists, however, were much less of a factor in the East and the Midwest, receiving less than 1 percent of the vote in New England, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, and Maryland; less than 2 percent of the vote in Ohio and New York; less than 3 percent in Illinois and Wisconsin; and less than 5 percent in Indiana, South Carolina, Virginia, and Iowa. For the Northeast and Midwest, where the election would be largely won or lost, the familiar two-party system remained very much intact. In this regard the political steadfastness of the prominent daily newspapers was undoubtedly important.

Many assumed that this 1892 contest would be a vicious grudge match, but such was not the case. As the *New York Herald* observed, it "had been marked by an obvious calmness"—a comment echoed by Cleveland in the closing days of the campaign.⁴ Harrison and Cleveland had each faced major, even treacherous rivalries from within their own party in order to secure their nominations.⁵ Now, for the first time in



FIGURE 1. This 1888 Cleveland-Thurman campaign poster features slogans that addressed the primary issue of the election: the tariff. Courtesy the Library of Congress.

history, two American presidents (one former, one current) faced each other. Perhaps they were just being “presidential,” but Harrison stayed by the side of his seriously ill wife, while Cleveland refused to take advantage of his opponent’s misfortune. In any case, it was an election in which the candidates and their campaign methods were equally familiar to voters. In a nation that had seen a brutal Civil War, economic panics, and civil unrest, candidates and their politicking offered a degree of ritual comfort and reassurance.

The principal issue dividing Republicans and Democrats was the tariff—a tax on goods imported into the United States. During his first term in office President Cleveland had been a strong advocate for reducing the tariff as a way to make goods more affordable. In contrast, the Republicans demanded a strong tariff to foster and protect American businesses. Joanne Reitano argues, “The year 1888 was unique in American history because it was so singularly dedicated to the discussion of ideas. A decade of ferment over economic theory among academics and reformers culminated in the adoption of the tariff issue by the president, Congress, the two major parties, and the press as a cause célèbre.”⁶ Following Harrison’s 1888 victory the Republicans passed the Tariff Act of 1890. The higher tariff proved unpopular: along with

an economic setback, it helped the Democrats win the 1890 midterm elections by a robust margin. The stage was thus set for an electoral contest in which the tariff would once again be the paramount issue. As in the past, the key to electoral victory was New York State, with Illinois, Indiana, New Jersey, and Connecticut seen as other potential swing states.

POLITICAL ORATORY, PARTISAN PAGEANTRY, AND THE PUBLIC SPHERE

The public sphere remained a vital force in New York City, as numerous political gatherings and public demonstrations remained a central feature of the 1892 presidential election. Although political oratory was crucial to this era's media formation, the actual candidates were remarkably parsimonious in making public appearances and speechifying. Perhaps the most notable exception was an "unprecedented" moment in July when Cleveland, joined by vice presidential candidate Stevenson, departed from his home in Buzzard's Bay, Massachusetts, and arrived by steamer to accept his party's nomination at New York's Madison Square Garden before a crowd of 20,000 people.⁷ Traditionally the nominating committee left the party's convention and visited the candidate at his home and offered a modest if formal notification. Cleveland's appearance was an effort to unify and energize the badly fractured Democratic Party in New York State (the entire New York delegation at the Democratic convention had declared that he could not carry the state and so would lose the election).⁸ With this goal in mind, ex-President Cleveland expressed tried-and-true Democratic sentiments: "No plan of tariff legislation shall be tolerated which has for its object and purpose a forced contribution from the earnings and incomes of the mass of our citizens to swell directly the accumulation of a favored few."⁹ Cleveland declared himself to be the people's candidate who would defend the interests of ordinary Americans against the high-tariff Republicans who were seeking to line the pockets of a few Wall Street capitalists. Indeed, in informing Cleveland of his nomination as the Democrats' standard bearer, Colonel William L. Wilson noted that the Democratic Party was engaged in "a never-ending warfare with the strongest and most enduring force of human nature—the lust of power and the lust of greed" as represented (of course) by the Republicans. Democratic newspapers wrote enthusiastically of the event, and following this grand gesture, Cleveland returned to Buzzard's Bay where he

remained, except for two additional brief visits to New York City for political consultations, until the second week of October.¹⁰

Even after Cleveland moved to his Manhattan home for the last four weeks of the campaign, he gave only a handful of speeches in New York. Most were brief, with two notable exceptions: he addressed a large assembly of German Americans at Cooper Union on October 27 and a crowd of 4,000 people gathered under the auspices of the Businessmen's Democratic Association at the Lenox Lyceum on November 1.¹¹ Since Democratic vice presidential candidate Stevenson had been born in Kentucky, he actively campaigned throughout the South in a successful effort to make sure those states did not leave the Democratic Party for the Populists. As a sitting president, Benjamin Harrison did not campaign at all (he might have broken with this custom except for his ill wife).¹² A New Yorker, Republican vice presidential candidate Whitelaw Reid campaigned actively in his home state. He, too, spoke to an overflowing crowd of German Americans at Cooper Union on November 3, complimenting this ethnic group for its commitment to honesty and integrity.¹³ On the Saturday before the election he spoke to a huge crowd in Mamaroneck, New York, and then was whisked by train to nearby Port Chester for another event.¹⁴ Both candidates were represented by numerous surrogates, who gave speeches throughout the city: Governor William McKinley of Ohio played a particularly prominent role in support of Harrison.¹⁵ Political clubs, composed of members who shared work-related interests such as the Wholesale Dry Goods Republican Club or the Democratic New York Stock Exchange Club, organized many of these events.

There was an interactive feedback loop between the two political parties and the media—that is, the daily press—when it came to carefully orchestrated political demonstrations. As Paul Starr has noted, American newspapers both “helped their readers to act as competent citizens and enabled them to organize for political purposes. The channel that the press provided for communication between parties and the electorate raised levels of voting participation.”¹⁶ New York City's major newspapers were closely aligned with either the Democrats or the Republicans: they covered both sides—though hardly evenhandedly. They also played an organizational role by communicating information to the public for their respective parties. The *New York Press* used prime space on its editorial page to promote “another great Republican demonstration” at the Cooper Union in which ex-Governor Foraker of Ohio would speak: “No Republican who can go to Cooper Union on

Tuesday night can afford to stay away,” it added.¹⁷ The Republican *Brooklyn Standard Union* kept a full “Republican Calendar” on its editorial page. For Monday, October 17, it listed seven gatherings in the Brooklyn area, including a “rally and mass meeting” of the Harrison and Reid Campaign Club of College Point, a Third Assembly District Republican Convention at the Town Hall in Jamaica, and regular weekly meetings of the Harrison and Reid Tippecanoe Club of the Seventh Ward and similar clubs.¹⁸

New York newspapers would then report on activities they had been promoting, using an appropriately enthusiastic tone and giving front-page coverage to the most important events. When nearly a dozen local Republican clubs organized an evening parade in Harlem, which culminated in a reception for vice presidential candidate Whitelaw Reid, the *New York Tribune* devoted a column and a half to describing the event: “All along the line hundreds of Republicans cheered the parade. The sidewalks were crowded and all Harlem seemed alive with political activity. Many loyal Republicans who lived along the line of march had decorated their houses, and fireworks were discharged in great profusion as the clubs went by.”¹⁹ The several thousand club members ambled through Harlem’s streets for almost an hour and a half before reaching Reid at the reviewing stand, where the persistence of the marchers forced him to make a brief speech in which he “hoped that he would be able to rejoice with them a few weeks hence in a common victory.”²⁰

Through editorials and investigative articles, these newspapers made arguments for or against the high tariffs advocated by the Republicans. The pro-Democratic *New York Herald*, for instance, asserted that Republican tariffs would suck in cheap labor from abroad, undercutting wages. The Republican *New York Tribune*, in contrast, claimed that tariffs made possible the high standard of living enjoyed by working people in comparison to the conditions they endured in Europe. On the same page as its “Republican Calendar,” the *Brooklyn Standard Union* ran a lengthy column reporting the speech of President John Rooney of the Kings County Protective League, which he had delivered to the Second Ward Republicans. He asserted that more than \$450,000,000 in goods were imported duty free, more than twice the amount in 1884: “The goods imported free of duty were goods that are not produced in this country, so that the people obtain the kinds of goods they do not produce themselves at the lowest possible price.”²¹ The Republicans, he argued, were looking out for the average American.



FIGURE 2. A trim Benjamin Harrison waits for a presidential rematch with Grover Cleveland, whom he previously defeated. A battered Cleveland is being sent into the ring by Adlai Stevenson (his running mate) and John Bull (a personification of Britain, which favored free trade). *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Weekly*, August 11, 1892. Courtesy the Library of Congress.

The preeminence of the press at this moment is evident through two men. Before becoming the Republican candidate for vice president, Whitelaw Reid was (and continued to be) the owner of the *New York Tribune*—the foremost Republican newspaper in New York City and so in the nation. On the Democratic side, Pulitzer was no longer Cleveland's champion. Rather there was Henry Villard, the owner of the

Democratic *New York Evening Post* and *The Nation*. Villard claimed chief responsibility for engineering Cleveland's presidential nomination in 1892. He soon became a constant presence at the Democratic national headquarters in New York City, raised money for Cleveland, and supported his campaign in other ways as well.²²

Given New York State's pivotal position, it is worth noting the loyalties of its various newspapers. The Republicans had notable advantages outside the large cities; but in Manhattan and Brooklyn, the balance of forces favored the Democrats. The *New York Tribune*, the *New York Press*, the *New York Mail and Express*, and the *Brooklyn Standard Union*—as well as *Harper's Weekly* and *Judge* magazine—were solidly Republican. As it had been in 1884 and 1888, the *New York Times* was pro-Cleveland. So too was Villard's *New York Evening Post*, Joseph Pulitzer's *New York World*, St. Clair McKelway's *Brooklyn Daily Eagle*, James Gordon Bennett Jr.'s *New York Herald* (along with its afternoon counterpart, the *New York Evening Telegram*), and Joseph Keppler's *Puck* magazine.²³ Charles Dana's *New York Sun* had traditionally been a Democratic newspaper but refused to back Cleveland in 1884 and 1888 for largely personal reasons. In 1892 Dana's *Sun* supported the Democratic ticket even though his endorsement of Cleveland was at best lukewarm.²⁴ These newspapers not only detailed the success of their party's choreographed events, they tried to stoke factionalism and despair among their political rivals. Typically the *New York Tribune* compared the meetings of German Republicans and German Democrats at the Cooper Union, finding the Republicans to be filled with mirth and joy while the Democrats suffered in a state of despondency under the shadow of the nation's great prosperity, largely credited to Republican governance.²⁵

The political parties looked for spectacle and arresting visuals to balance speeches and the written word. Many newspapers complemented their accounts with elaborate illustrations of the most notable events. Ephemera such as campaign buttons were common on both sides. The Cleveland and Stevenson campaign had the Red Bandana. Harrison and Reid had blue bandanas and white campaign top hats. (The switch in colors associated with each party occurred relatively recently.) Both sets of candidates had colorful broadsides with portraits of their respective candidates. Cleveland Democrats had silver-colored tokens with portraits of Cleveland and maxims such as "Democracy. The Party of the People 1892." The Harrison camp favored gold-colored tokens featuring portraits of the Republican candidates. Banners and other decorations were displayed wherever possible.

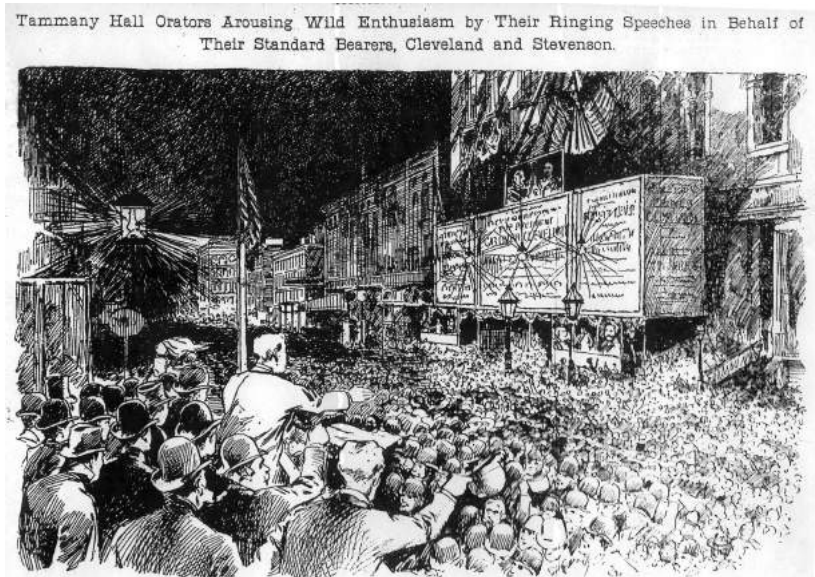


FIGURE 3. Outside their headquarters, 20,000 Tammany Hall Democrats gather for a nighttime rally in support of Grover Cleveland, November 3, 1892. *New York Herald*, November 4, 1892, 1. “The Great Wigwam was in a blaze of light and enthusiasm. There was victory in the air, it was in the voices of those who spoke, it was in the very music of the band, and it lurked in the rub-a-dub-dub of the big brass drum. Everybody was enthusiastic,” wrote a *New York Times* reporter. November 4, 1896, 1.

Most importantly there was public pageantry. The Republicans were busy organizing the Business Men’s Republican parade for Saturday, October 29, which was to follow the standard path up Broadway, jogging over to Fifth Avenue at Waverley Place. President Harrison, his then-vice president, New Yorker Levi Morton, and Reid were all invited to review some 30,000 marchers from the Tobacco Trade Republican Club, the University of Dentistry Republican Club, the Boot and Shoe Trade Republican Association, and many others. To pump up enthusiasm, speakers flooded the business districts and regaled lunchtime crowds; banners were unfurled and club members marched through the streets to their respective headquarters.²⁶ Then Caroline Scott Harrison, the president’s wife, died on October 25, and these plans for the Business Men’s Republican parade had to be cancelled.²⁷

The Democrats culminated their campaign with several large-scale events. Five days before the election, they held a huge evening rally

centered around Fourteenth Street opposite Tammany Hall but with a dozen speakers' stands scattered about the area.²⁸ This rally had special symbolic importance since the tensions between candidate Cleveland and the Tammany Hall machine remained considerable. Dana's *New York Sun*, which had its own issues with Cleveland, boosted the event: "From up town, from down town, from east and from west, the organizations were marching in, each headed by a band or drum corps to add its music to the crash of the bands already there. There seemed to be half a dozen great armies coming toward the one centre. Far beyond the brightness of the colored fires one could see long arrays of people, filling the sidewalks, spanning the streets from curb to curb, streaming forward from every direction."²⁹ Cleveland did not attend the rally lest he alienate the reform wing of his party by paying direct homage to Tammany Hall. Rather it was "Tammany's Rally for Cleveland. With Mass Meetings Inside and Outside the Wigwam the Unterrified Braves Attest Their Loyalty to the Ticket."³⁰ This was followed by a Saturday parade in which at least 35,000 members of the businessmen's Cleveland and Stevenson clubs marched past Cleveland, who was in a reviewing stand at Madison Square.³¹

The relationship between political campaigning and other cultural modes varied considerably during the 1892 election. Although these campaign speeches were obviously performances and the rallies involved a great deal of political theater, presidential politics were rarely present inside actual theaters. On November 6, the Sunday before Election Day, theatrical impresario Henry C. Miner, a district leader for the Tammany Hall Democrats, turned the People's Theater over to party loyalists for an evening of rousing speeches. The evening was not leavened, however, with any specialties from the resident performers.³² Surely vaudevillians joked about aspects of the presidential contest, but mixing politics with theatrical amusements was downplayed. Political theater and theatrical entertainments were rivals in that presidential elections had a negative impact on theatergoing as potential ticket buyers attended campaign events instead. Likewise, betting focused on the election rather than sporting events: with voting only a few days away, the *New York Sun* claimed that the betting line favored Cleveland ten to nine.³³

Audiovisual media, in particular the stereopticon, were employed for campaign purposes, though in limited and unequal ways. If the 1892 election witnessed a relative absence of noisy demonstrations, torch-light processions, and campaign songs, the illustrated lecture, which was part of what Bill Nichols has called "the discourse of sobriety,"

played a noteworthy role.³⁴ With the tariff the central issue in 1892 as it had been in 1888, politicians spoke and newspapers published endlessly on the subject. Arguments for and against the tariff must have become extremely familiar, challenging speakers to find ways to keep their audiences attentive and entertained. The illustrated lecture provided one solution. It functioned as a form of political oratory while adding a visual dimension that could bolster a speaker's rhetorical effectiveness. In this arena, the Republicans had a monopoly as they developed a template that had been introduced by Judge John L. Wheeler in the 1888 presidential campaign.

JUDGE WHEELER, *THE TARIFF ILLUSTRATED*, AND THE 1888 PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION

Judge Wheeler should be recognized as the progenitor and pioneering advocate of what we now recognize as the political campaign documentary. Born in Buffalo on March 13, 1847, Wheeler was in his teens when he served in the Eighth New York Cavalry during the Civil War. He later settled in Red Bank, New Jersey, where he became active in Democratic politics and eventually developed a billiard and pool ball business.³⁵ A lay judge, Odd Fellows grand master, and assistant adjunct general of the New Jersey GAR (Grand Army of the Republic), Wheeler began to give illustrated lectures on the Civil War.³⁶ After delivering a sequence of three presentations at the Brooklyn YMCA in February and March of 1886, he offered a course of four stereopticon lectures on *The Great Battles of the Civil War* at Manhattan's Chickering Hall in April.³⁷ He then toured smaller towns in upstate New York such as Ogdensburg, Gouverneur, and the village of Hermon.³⁸ Given the effectiveness of his illustrated presentations, Wheeler continued to give lantern lectures in a variety of New York venues.³⁹

The Honorable John L. Wheeler had also become a well-regarded speaker at Democratic campaign rallies. Then, in March 1888, he met a reporter for the *New York Tribune* and declared that he had switched sides: "I am a strong protectionist; I have for some time called myself a Randall Democrat, but the way things look at present I can no longer sail under false colors, and am a good Republican, for that party has proclaimed its policy to protect American industry."⁴⁰ He then added, "I shall take the platform, as I always do in Presidential campaigns, for the National ticket which has the strongest protective tariff plank in its platform." Wheeler declared himself a man of conscience who was so

concerned for the nation and his fellow Americans that he was ready to suffer the ridicule of past associates as he changed parties.

A few months later, Wheeler unveiled the vehicle he would use in the upcoming campaign: an illustrated lecture entitled *The Tariff Illustrated*. Perhaps not too surprisingly, the Republican *New York Tribune* gave enthusiastic attention to his lantern lecture, describing the ways he situated the tariff as a positive force in the broad expanse of American history and stymied efforts of rebuttal by the Democrats. (See document 1 in the appendix.) Wheeler gave several subsequent presentations in the metropolitan area: for the Sixth Ward Harrison and Morton Campaign Club at Grand Union Hall in Brooklyn (August 6), for the East River Park Harrison and Morton Club at Bruning's Hall, 206 East 86th Street in Manhattan (August 10), and for the American Protective Tariff Association at Phoenix Park (August 14).⁴¹

Wheeler's *The Tariff Illustrated* was not an independent effort, but rather depended for its prominence and effectiveness on the sponsorship of the foremost political action committee of the day, the American Protective Tariff League. The league was started in May 1885, shortly after Cleveland's first inaugural, and became active on a number of fronts to aid protective-tariff candidates (initially for the 1886 midterm elections). As Cleveland became more vocal about reforming the tariff, the league began to publish pro-tariff pamphlets and the *Tariff League Bulletin*, which started as a monthly in the second half of 1887 and then became a weekly from January 1888 onward. "*The Tariff League Bulletin* came into existence under the pressure of a special emergency, war having been declared upon our industrial institutions and through them—indirectly and, to some extent unconsciously—upon our political institutions as well," according to its editors. "It at once entered the fight to sustain the American economic policy of making the home market (or consumption of wealth by the laboring classes) the basis of our industrial and commercial prosperity, against the attempt to supplant it by the English economic doctrine of foreign markets, the chief features of which are Free-Trade and cheap labor (or small consumption of wealth by the masses)."⁴²

By the end of the 1888 campaign, league president Edward Ammidown claimed that the organization had distributed 150 million pages of documents; its *Bulletin* was sent "to the press, and to influential men in all parts of the country, as well as to regular subscribers and to all our members."⁴³ The league also employed speakers in New York and its adjacent states to advocate for the protective tariff. Ammidown then added:

The most serious and effective work of this kind was done under our direction by Judge John L. Wheeler, of New Jersey, in his lectures on the Tariff, illustrated by stereopticon views. During the months of August, September and October last Judge Wheeler delivered more than 80 lectures, always to crowded and enthusiastic audiences, in the most important cities and towns of New York, New Jersey and Connecticut. So well satisfied are we of the effectiveness of this kind of work in attracting and convincing average audiences that it is now proposed to continue it, as one of the best means of popular Tariff education.⁴⁴

Early in the campaign Wheeler traveled through his home state of New Jersey, including Trenton, New Brunswick, Patterson, Woodbridge, Perth Amboy, and South Amboy. The *New York Tribune* noted, "He covered the same territory four years ago for Cleveland, but this year came out for protection rather than English free trade."⁴⁵ Wheeler proved himself effective at the podium. "As a speaker the Judge is earnest and at times eloquent, his use of language is simple and plain, so that the 'plain people' fully and clearly understand him," the *Newark Union* (New York) remarked.⁴⁶ During the first part of September, Wheeler toured Connecticut, where his presentation at Bridgeport's Hawes Opera House was hailed as a Republican success. All 1,300 seats were taken, and standing room was also fully occupied. The theater had never held a larger audience. "An immense screen was displayed on the stage, and upon this were reflected pictures thrown from a stereopticon located in the gallery," explained the *Bridgeport News*. It added: "Judge Wheeler is a good speaker, and possesses a pair of stentorian lungs. He handled his subject—Protection—in a novel way, and one that made it decidedly entertaining."⁴⁷ The pro-Cleveland *New York Times* offered a different account of the evening: When Democrat Patrick Cassidy passed out anti-tariff literature to those entering the opera house, he was promptly arrested on complaints, placed by telephone from the Republicans. The police chief who arrested Cassidy was a Republican, and soon released him in the resulting brouhaha. The Democratic newspaper dismissed the Republicans' behavior as overly sensitive, calling their civic values into question.⁴⁸

As the presidential contest intensified, Wheeler focused most of his time and energy on the crucial swing state of New York, visiting small cities and towns such as Mount Kisco, Cortland, Troy, and Newark as well as larger cities such as Syracuse and Buffalo. The *Buffalo Sunday Morning News* also lauded Wheeler's rhetorical effectiveness in a front-page account of his presentation. (See document 2 in the appendix.)

According to this unusually detailed description, he spoke with impressive moral authority as a former Democrat who had crossed party lines because he found the stakes around the tariff issue to be of overriding importance. His title of “judge” (rarely “ex-judge”) suggested dispassionate impartiality, and his strong, self-confident voice further added to that sense of authority. The heroic sweep of US history and the images of past presidents clearly elicited a strong emotional response from his audiences. Wheeler began by quoting George Washington’s support for protection of native industries, then declaimed: “Then was passed the first tariff law. The country began with the protective policy. Now here is Alexander Hamilton, the first Secretary of the Treasury, the man who brought into life the great American system of protection. (Cheers.) This system has lasted until the present day. It has fought back all the assaults of free trade.”⁴⁹

The savvy orator then evoked a series of national heroes who supported the tariff (Thomas Jefferson, James Madison, Abraham Lincoln, and so forth) and pariahs who did not (Martin Van Buren, Henry Clay, Jefferson Davis). He placed Harrison in the former category and Cleveland in the latter. A closing set of images of the American flag was contrasted with the Democrats’ Red Bandana, which was refigured as a symbol warning of danger. At other moments Wheeler’s arguments depended upon tables and statistics that had the appearance of objective facts as well as evidence that relied on photographic truth, including reproductions of newspaper advertisements for clothing. The carefully selected and organized images enabled him to present an overarching historical narrative, with free trade undermining the US economy and tariffs fostering prosperity: such a totalizing account proposed a compelling logic. For those who came with an open mind, as an undecided or wavering voter, these elements reverberated through the enthusiasm of the more partisan crowd. Only the *Syracuse Daily Journal* described a Wheeler presentation where “a good many Democrats” were in attendance and made “manifestations of disapproval at the facts demonstrated.”⁵⁰

In 1888 Wheeler’s illustrated lecture was an unprecedented novelty. Never before had such a documentary-like program been used in conjunction with a political campaign for an elected office. Yet it certainly had a context beyond Wheeler’s illustrated lectures on the Civil War and other historical subjects. One notable antecedent was the illustrated lecture *The Other Half—How It Lives and Dies in New York*, which Jacob Riis presented at the regular monthly meeting of the Society of

Amateur Photographers on January 25, 1888, and at many subsequent venues.⁵¹ It became the basis for his groundbreaking book *How the Other Half Lives: Studies Among the Tenements of New York*, in which the photographer-investigator “aimed to tell the truth as I saw it.”⁵² Poverty and its causes were a topic Riis and Wheeler shared even though their underlying concerns differed substantially—not surprising, given that Riis was employed by Charles Dana’s *New York Sun*, which had a strong Democratic affiliation.

A TALE OF TWO SCREENS: THE DEMOCRATIC PARTY’S USE OF THE STEREOPTICON IN 1888

The Tariff Illustrated was a significant departure from prior uses of the lantern for political purposes, for the stereopticon itself had had—and continued to have—a modest if familiar role in the political campaigns of both parties. The Democrats in particular preferred to project miscellaneous collections of words and images onto large outdoor canvases. Thus in Boston’s Scollay Square, enterprising young “patriots” of the Young Men’s Democratic Club projected “flashes of wit and nuggets of wisdom” on a twenty-five-foot-square canvas. Most of these were directed against Republican James Blaine, who four years before had run for president against Cleveland and lost, though he remained a potent force in the party. The club’s slides featured such political poetry as

Some things are dark
But this is plain—
Blaine owns the party
And the trusts own Blaine⁵³

Later in the campaign season, it offered an array of “campaign paragraphs” such as “Protectionism is the art of taxing the many for the benefit of the few.”⁵⁴

Much the same was happening in New York City. The *Sun* chortled as it reported on the activities of “the wicked stereopticon man of Madison square, who has been guying the Republicans for a week past on the roof of the Flat Iron, at Broadway and twenty-third street.” At nightfall it fired off a series of tariff maxims. The crowd cheered:

The perfection of the people’s government is the lightness of its burden on the people.

Up to 1850 we exported cotton cloths largely to China and the East Indies. When the tariff was raised the trade dwindled and finally ceased.⁵⁵

In Watertown, New York, the Democratic Party used the stereopticon to project contradictory statements on the tariff made by the town's Republican *Watertown Daily Times*—to the delight of its Democratic rival, the *Watertown Re-Union*.⁵⁶ Finally, John Boyd Thacher, former mayor of Albany and president of the League of Democratic Clubs, outfitted a large boat, the *Thomas Jefferson*, to travel the Erie Canal. It was refurbished with a heavy platform on which “speakers stand to address the crowds on the bank” as well as a stereopticon. Traveling though Republican territory, the boat and its crew were often objects of abuse. Near Syracuse, “Admiral Thacher’s stereopticon man was having a fine time standing in the crowd on shore and flinging his pictures of eminent Republicans with their tariff reform declarations to go with each picture, when suddenly the Republicans began to blot out the views by throwing the glare of a calcium light on his screen on the boat.” The lanternist’s defeat turned to victory when he “discovered a blank wall and flung his pictures there, instead of on his screen. The Republicans could not get at that wall, and so the canallers scored a victory.”⁵⁷ Public spaces often became sites for symbolic struggle and confrontation. In this case, Republican interference was depicted as uncivil—and ineffective.

The Democrats were using techniques developed by early advertisers. They were appealing primarily to random, distracted viewers who would be attracted by the bright, colorful images at night. Perhaps it is worth pausing for a moment to reflect on urban life, particularly nightlife, during these quadrennial exercises in democracy. Political campaigns were above all masculinist and homosocial. As citizens who would cast their vote, men were expected to participate in the democratic process, which meant participating in the public sphere. This also meant being active—out and about—at night as the days became shorter and nights became colder. Moving about the city, these mobile spectators possessed the qualities of Charles Baudelaire’s flaneur, whose “passion and his profession are to become one flesh with the crowd.” It was a time to enjoy the pleasures of personal freedom from enforced domesticity when it became “an immense joy to set up house in the heart of the multitude, amid the ebb and flow of movement, in the midst of the fugitive and the infinite. To be away from home and yet to feel oneself everywhere at home; to see the world, to be at the centre of the world, and yet to remain hidden from the world.” Baudelaire declared the spectator to be “a prince who everywhere rejoices in his incognito.”⁵⁸ Clerks, bricklayers, and manual laborers during the day became democratic princes at night, thanks to presi-

dential campaigns. At the ballot box, financial titans and their humblest employees became equals. Election season provided a fleeting but potent sense of democracy's utopian aspiration.

At this moment two kinds of screens were matched by two kinds of spectatorship: the casual, ephemeral, and unrestrained spectator who was free to roam the streets—for whom electioneering was a kind of holiday and a moment in which the citizen could feel his own importance—and the more genteel and attentive spectator, for whom citizenship meant participating in a solemn exercise that relied on, or at least claimed to rely on, discourses of sobriety. Looking for analogies, we might say the Democratic stereopticon was more like the newspaper, particularly those popular newspapers such as the *New York Herald* and the *New York World* that used illustrations, while Wheeler's illustrated lectures offered an epic account of national formation not entirely different from historical accounts of the Civil War. The Democrats were appealing to those moving through the city who might stop for and enjoy the witticisms and cartoons projected onto the wall of a building—and then move on. Of course, one should not forget that Democrats also took pleasure in annoying those Republicans who passed through these same urban spaces.⁵⁹

Although Cleveland won the popular vote on the national level by a margin of 90,000, Benjamin Harrison carried New York State by 15,000 votes and so won the 1888 US presidential election. What were the factors that contributed to Cleveland's defeat? Internecine warfare inside the Democratic Party, with Tammany Hall refusing to enthusiastically support Cleveland, was one consideration. Many citizens may have also voted their pocketbooks: a brief recession and increase in unemployment in 1888 must have hurt the incumbent.⁶⁰ How much credit was due to Judge Wheeler's *The Tariff Illustrated*? This kind of question recurs again and again when dissecting the results of a presidential election: impossible to avoid, it is also impossible to answer. Ammidown's enthusiasm for Wheeler's contribution can be placed against the historian H. Wayne Morgan's assessment: "Republicans used funds to advertise tariff protection and the party's nationalism, and although industrialists provided most of the money, the GOP did not speak merely for business. It could never have won an election with a monolithic constituency. All observers agreed that millions of people read closely the pamphlets that filled the mails, and listened attentively to speakers who discussed protection. The tariff was one of the most



FIGURE 4. When the Democratic *New York Herald* announced that Harrison had won New York State, Republican victory was certain. Madison Square, election night, November 6, 1888. *Harper's Weekly*, November 17, 1888. Courtesy Jack Judson and the Magic Lantern Castle Museum.

vital and meaningful issues in American political history, reflecting the material self-interest of workers, farmers, and businessmen. It also appealed to all the emotions and security around political nationalism.”⁶¹ In this context, Wheeler’s efforts were taken seriously and seen as a significant factor in Harrison’s victory. To Republican eyes, *The Tariff Illustrated* had proved a new and valuable weapon in their campaign repertoire. It was a media form that could counter Democratic dominance of the press. They would try to use it more systematically in 1892.

Democrats, in contrast, saw the stereopticon with its miscellaneous combination of title slides and pictorial attractions as a visual flourish—at best a sideshow. One commentator on the campaign felt that the Democratic National Committee was avoiding any serious exertion. His evidence? “A stereopticon man in New York is nightly employed to blazon on his canvas in monumental letters, gibes and flings at the republicans. This is an agreeable kind of oratory for hot weather, but indicates lack of usual spirit in the committee.”⁶² The Democrats’ use of the stereopticon, it seemed, revealed a certain intellectual laziness, a lack of seriousness that put them on the wrong side of the ethical binary.

If the stereopticon had been a strong positive for the Republicans, it was arguably a mild negative for the Democrats.

THE STEREOPTICON AND THE 1892 ELECTION

Following Harrison's election the Protective Tariff League declared victory and sought to institutionalize its organization and broaden its scope, rebranding its journal the *American Economist*. An expanded protective tariff bill was obviously going to be one of the hallmarks of the new administration, and the result was the Tariff Act of 1890, generally known as the McKinley Tariff after Representative William McKinley (R-Ohio) who managed the bill to passage.⁶³ The new bill raised tariffs on many goods to a rate approaching 50 percent.⁶⁴ This plus a faltering economy enabled the Democrats to win the midterm elections of 1890 by a landslide margin—even unseating Representative McKinley himself.⁶⁵ The stage was set for a presidential rematch in which the tariff would once again be the central issue. This time the Republicans rather than the Democrats were on the defensive. For both sides, the new tariff on tin plate had become the locus of dispute. As the *American Economist* explained, “No other provision of the new law has been so bitterly assailed as that framed to establish tin-plate making in the United States. Even the Democrats who do not go the full length of the Chicago platform in denouncing Protection, but believe that it may sometimes be beneficial, profess to see in the tin-plate Tariff only pure abomination.”⁶⁶

Americans needed to be convinced anew of the tariff's value to their political economy, and the Protective Tariff League once again enlisted Wheeler and his stereopticon. In early January 1889 its staff began working with Wheeler on a new edition of *The Tariff Illustrated*—about the same time that the *American Economist* published at least one article by Wheeler, on protection in the South, where free-trade sentiments had had long-standing support.⁶⁷ After publicizing this arrangement in mid-June 1892, the league began lining up venues. This time, *The Tariff Illustrated* would be offered as two separate lectures, each with one hundred or more lantern slides: “A History of the American System” and “Protection, Reciprocity and Business.” Since the first of these bore a strong resemblance to the 1888 edition, Wheeler would deliver the second of these in places where only one presentation would be given.⁶⁸ In practice, however, it seems that Wheeler generally delivered a single lecture that combined the two. Even for those who attended his spiel

four years before, hearing some portions again could be seen as a useful refresher.

Wheeler debuted his 1892 version of *The Tariff Illustrated* in Harlem on July 25, after which the *American Economist* offered weekly updates of his itinerary during the 1892 campaign. In late July he gave a week's worth of lectures in different New York City venues. He toured Brooklyn halls for another week in early August. On September 21 he participated in a "monster meeting" at Cooper Union under the auspices of the Tariff League itself.⁶⁹ "The telling effect of the use of stereopticon views presenting the conditions of people in countries which would compete with us under the Free-Trade system cannot be overestimated," opined the *American Economist*.⁷⁰ By the time Wheeler had reach Middletown, Connecticut, in mid-October, he and his lanternist, a Mr. Brower, had given "his famous lecture" for eleven weeks and had "nightly spoken to an audience which filled the houses to overflowing."⁷¹

Most newspaper accounts of his presentation are brief, but the *Middletown Daily Press* offered a detailed, full-column, front-page account of his well-attended lecture. The journalist found, "The illustrations were captivating of themselves, but when accompanied by strong, convincing arguments in favor of protection, became doubly attractive."⁷² Its first section was quite similar to what Wheeler had delivered in 1888, beginning with George Washington and wending his way to Lincoln and the post-Civil War Republican presidents (see "Pictured Politics" in the *Buffalo Sunday Morning News*, document 2 in appendix). Wheeler then focused the second half of his lecture on the ups and downs of the last decade, giving more emphasis to the contemporary moment than in his earlier iteration—including a defense of the McKinley tariff that had been instituted in the interim. "He showed pictures of cotton mills, fields, etc., stating that there were 500 cotton mills in this country which would be closed were the Democrats to have their way."⁷³ Wheeler claimed to be offering the truth of photographic evidence to sustain his cause. The Middletown reporter readily concurred: "The effect of this presentation of true facts in this happy manner can not but be felt in the coming election."⁷⁴

Wheeler's *The Tariff Illustrated* had been unique in 1888 and contributed to victory in the pivotal state of New York. The Protective Tariff League confessed, "It is a source of regret that we cannot duplicate the now famous presentation of the cause of Protection by Hon. John L. Wheeler."⁷⁵ More illustrated lectures on the protective tariff would presumably multiply its impact. Yet the league's expression of

regret proved misplaced, for that is precisely what happened. As often occurred to creators of successful lantern programs, Wheeler's presentation was soon being imitated, in this instance by at least five men: Elijah R. Kennedy, T. De Quincy Tully, Judge Lucius P. Deming, S. W. (Samuel Widdows) Reese, and Daniel. G. Harriman.

D. G. Harriman was based in Brooklyn, where he had been active in the Republican Party for many years.⁷⁶ Even before the campaign season, the American Protective Tariff League sometimes assigned him to debate people advocating tariff reform.⁷⁷ During the 1892 campaign he wrote a short article entitled "Protection a Necessity" for the mid-September issue of the *American Economist*.⁷⁸ Harriman also began to give illustrated lectures on the protective tariff, perhaps as Wheeler's substitute when the latter was otherwise engaged. Or else some other speaker's bureau provided him with these opportunities. In September he presented at Brooklyn's Grand Union Hall under the auspices of the joint Campaign Committees of the Sixth and Tenth wards.⁷⁹ In early October Harriman went to New Jersey with "his stereopticon views illustrating the advantages of protection."⁸⁰ One day after the death of President Harrison's wife, Harriman gave a solemn stereopticon lecture on protection at the Criterion Theater in Brooklyn. The *Brooklyn Standard Union* published much of his talk, which seemingly lacked Wheeler's rhetorical flair.⁸¹

In the late 1880s Professor T. De Quincy Tully of Ohio would give illustrated Civil War lectures in the Midwest, often as fundraisers for veteran groups.⁸² While continuing to travel with the stereopticon, he had settled in Brooklyn by 1891 and became the assistant secretary of the Law Enforcement Society of Brooklyn, which was dedicated to keeping saloons closed on Sundays.⁸³ Based on his expertise with the lantern, the Republican State Committee employed Tully to give "an illustrated disquisition on the tariff, 125 stereopticon scenes being introduced."⁸⁴ Venues included Brooklyn's Fifth Ward Harrison and Reid Club, the Flushing Republican Club, and the Ocean Hill Campaign Club.⁸⁵

S. W. Reese, a manufacturer of stencils and an active Republican, was busy presenting his lantern lecture in such New Jersey localities as Rahway (September 24), Hackettstown (October 27), and North Plainfield (October 29). His arguments were apparently well expressed and at one venue "convinced several Democrats that Protection was the issue to support in the coming election."⁸⁶ Early in 1892 Judge Lucius P. Deming of the Court of Common Pleas in New Haven, Connecticut, was giving illustrated lectures on travel topics related to Europe and the

Middle East. By October he had switched to political campaigning with his stereopticon, traveling through the state's cities and towns.⁸⁷ At Burnap's Hall in Windsor Locks, "he confined his remarks wholly to the tariff history of the country and explained its effects in a clear and comprehensive way so that all present could have no doubt as to how they ought to vote to continue their present prosperity."⁸⁸

Elijah R. Kennedy was a well-known insurance broker and locally prominent Brooklyn Republican who had once served as a park commissioner.⁸⁹ Kennedy had been a successful platform orator during the 1888 campaign and also had a history of presenting illustrated lectures, including at a Labor Day weekend event in Bridgehampton, Long Island, for the benefit of the local tennis club.⁹⁰ The first day of October 1892, Kennedy was at Republican headquarters at the Fifth Avenue hotel, offering his services to J.J. Bealin, who booked speakers for New York City and environs. Pulitzer's *New York World*, which favored Cleveland, offered this snidely ironic account:

Mr. Elijah R. Kennedy, of Brooklyn, came to offer his services to the glorious cause of high tariff and protection to American industries at \$12 per night, which barely covers the cost of production. Mr. Kennedy was very swell in his get-up, not gaudy, understand, but well dressed. No unbuttoned Prince Albert for him, no string tie, but a dashing cutaway coat, fashionable scarf, patent-leather shoes. You should have seen the old war-horses look at him.

Mr. Kennedy will not speak except in New York or Brooklyn and he goes around with a sort of peep-show. It is a magic lantern affair, the stylish name for it is "stereopticon," but it is a magic lantern just the same and he shows upon the canvas pictures of the tin-plate mills established since the McKinley law went into effect. He has no picture to show what a pretty price the American people had been made to pay for this tin whistle. . . .

Mr. Kennedy announced that he proposed to take the hide off the Democrats in his speeches by devoting more time to the "rag-money, wildcat bank" plank, as he calls it, of the Democratic platform.⁹¹

Within the week Kennedy was presenting an illustrated lecture on the tariff and "red-dog" money at the Opera House in East Orange, New Jersey. "No one present went away ignorant of the inconvenience, loss and ruin resulting from the system the Democrats propose to restore," claimed the *New York Tribune*.⁹²

Perhaps Kennedy's reward for traveling outside his geographic comfort zone was some flattering newspaper coverage from a prominent and reliably Republican newspaper. If so, he could hardly complain of the reportage provided by Reid's *Tribune* when several weeks later he went to Empire Hall in South Orange for the local Republican club. (See doc-

ument 3 in the appendix.) This was a well-planned and elaborate event that included many displays of tinware manufactured in the United States. Kennedy, however, was clearly the main attraction. As the *Tribune* journalist reported, “Major Elijah R. Kennedy, of New York, was in command of the Republican forces, which were entrenched behind breastworks of American tinware. It was in the nature of an artillery duel, and Major Kennedy fired solid shot from a double-barreled stereopticon into the ranks of the Democracy, and followed that up with a rattling volley of statistics and arguments.”⁹³ Appealing to local factory workers, Kennedy began with a lengthy speech in which he asserted, “The United States has applied Protection more thoroughly than has any other nation, and has been more highly prospered.” The room was kept lit until his stereopticon lecture began in earnest as he used images of tinware manufactories as evidence to refute the Democratic Party’s disparagement of tariffs as effective in stimulating local industries (somewhat predictably, tin plate manufacture was his prime example). He also showed photographs of women who were treated as beasts of burden in European countries that supposedly failed to use the tariff as a form of economic protection. If “seeing is believing,” this photographic evidence associated the Democrats with the abuse of women and other unconscionable policies. The abomination then was not the tariff for tin plate but Democratic dishonesty.

Kennedy’s enthusiastic rhetoric drew some bemused attention from the *New York Times*, which cited a “letter to the editor” that Kennedy had written to the *Tribune* in 1890. In it, Kennedy was quite critical of the McKinley tariff, particularly as it might impact Republican chances in the 1892 presidential election. Minnesota and other western states strongly opposed it.⁹⁴ Kennedy’s concerns proved well founded, for Cleveland won Wisconsin and California while other Western states went into the Populist column.

Recognizing *The Tariff Illustrated* as a potent campaign weapon, Republicans and the American Protective Tariff League had six lantern lecturers on the road reprising Wheeler’s innovative and successful stereopticon presentation. How many people actually saw them? The American Protective Tariff League claimed that Wheeler spoke at eighty-seven meetings: six in New Jersey, four in Connecticut, and seventy-seven in New York State. Audiences averaged 2,000 people per venue, “making fully 174,000 persons to whom the lecture was presented.”⁹⁵ The other five undoubtedly did not do as well, but they too were deemed to have been well attended and effective. Even if the five of them combined only



FIGURE 5. An 1892 Cleveland-Stevenson campaign poster calls for tariff reform to reduce the costs of necessities. Courtesy the Library of Congress.

equaled Wheeler's figures, this would mean roughly 350,000 people saw some version of *The Tariff Illustrated* in the tristate area during the 1892 presidential campaign.

Believing that Wheeler's stereopticon had been key to their success in 1888, the Republicans were even ready to try out some of the techniques previously used by the Democrats. The Harlem Republican Club had a stereopticon that threw political maxims and "economic truths" onto a large outdoor canvas. They included "Whatever is manufactured at home gives work and wages to our own people" and "Never surrender to England. No pauper wages for us."⁹⁶ Sam Engel ran "a Republican free magic lantern show" in less favorable territory: in front of the John A. Logan Club's house on the Lower East Side of Manhattan.⁹⁷ Local ruffians (perhaps with Tammany encouragement) repeatedly pelted the lantern and its operator with mud, forcing Engel to shut it down.⁹⁸ Certainly the stereopticon became more integrated into the Republican playbook. At a rousing Republican gathering in Sausalito, California, "one of the principal features was Henry Hook's stereopticon cartoons and pictures of all the Republican leaders."⁹⁹

The Democrats, who lost the 1888 election, had come to the opposite conclusions but for similar reasons. The use of outdoor advertising methods by their “wicked Stereopticon man” had not been too successful, and perhaps even counterproductive. In 1892 the Democrats rarely used the stereopticon. Conceivably it had become unremarkable and therefore an unremarked part of the urban landscape, but the absence of newspaper commentary seems telling. A major gathering of Democrats in San Francisco’s Metropolitan Hall was one of the very few exceptions: after numerous speeches, the evening ended with a stereopticon entertainment. Its contents were not specified and its presence was clearly something of an afterthought.¹⁰⁰

The Democrats had lost confidence if not interest in using screen practices for political purposes. Nevertheless they did recognize the potency of *The Tariff Illustrated*. The *New York Times* railed against these Republican propagandists. In early August, it went after Wheeler’s tin-plate arguments with heavy irony:

The latest addition to the Protective Tariff League’s band of “spell-binders” is ex-Judge JOHN L. WHEELER, who makes his eloquence attractive by the use of a stereopticon. MR. WHEELER’S idea about tin resemble those of Eli Perkins, who saw in Dakota many square miles of glittering ore bearing 65 per cent of the metal. The *Tribune* reports as follows a part of an address made by Mr. Wheeler Wednesday evening:

He killed the argument of the Democrats that there was not sufficient tin in the country to keep the mills at work for any length of time, by saying that it had been proved that there was enough tin in one mine in Wyoming alone to supply all the tin that could be used in the United States in the next hundred years.

This is very interesting. The owners of the Temescal mines in California, where a few tons have been extracted with great difficulty, and those of the so-called mines in Dakota, where nothing has been produced but talk, should at once throw aside those properties and “go for” the phenomenal deposits in Wyoming. As this country uses about one-third of the world’s product of this metal, one mine that can supply our demands for a century ought not to be overlooked.¹⁰¹

Another brief article in the *New York Times* mocked Elijah R. Kennedy’s presentation of photographic evidence, suggesting that he was treating the audience as if it was a bunch of yokels, and made fun of the *New York Tribune*’s excessive language and eulogistic rhetoric. (See document 4 in the appendix.) The *Times* clearly enjoyed ridiculing its Republican rival in the newspaper business as much as these orators whose effectiveness had gained people’s attention. If *The Tariff Illustrated* manipulated the “seeing is believing truths” of photographic evidence and played on the audience’s

emotions with bogus assertions, it was hardly the last time such strategies would be employed.

It is worth assessing the Republican embrace of the stereopticon and the Democratic indifference to it by situating them within a larger media context. The Democrats hardly ran an inept campaign: they won, and quite decisively. For the 1892 election, the Democrats had substantial dominance when it came to the New York press. The three principal Republican newspapers were closely aligned with the GOP—perhaps too closely for some independent voters. Two were reliable party organs (the *New York Press* and the *New York Mail and Express*), while the third had its publisher running for vice president on the Republican ticket. On the Democratic side there were many more papers, and their relationship to the Democrats was more variable. The *New York Herald* tried to be more evenhanded in its coverage of the presidential campaign. Charles Dana and his *New York Sun* did not like Cleveland: they were Tammany Hall Democrats. The *New York Times* favored the reformists. Although other Democrats favored New York State Governor Hill, the different factions in the Democratic Party managed to work together for their common goal: the defeat of Harrison. Moreover, the Democratic press was as a whole more lively. Their prose was often more entertaining to read and they used illustrations more extensively, particularly the *Herald* and the *World*.

There was little the Republicans could do about this imbalance, at least in the short run. Stereopticon lectures on the tariff were a means for the Republicans to intervene in the larger media system—an intervention that seemed much less necessary for the Democrats. Republican innovation in one area was motivated by weakness in another. Moreover, in a city that was heavily Democratic, the Democratic party apparatus mobilized those bodies and resources through the rituals of public pageantry and performance. All this was then reported, celebrated, and amplified through a sympathetic press. On Election Day eve, a reporter for the *Washington Evening Star* remarked, “The leaders at both national headquarters are absolutely in the dark as to the results of tomorrow’s election.”¹⁰² The results of the next day’s voting, however, gave Cleveland a respectable margin of victory—this time winning New York State by 45,000 votes (three times Harrison’s margin of victory four years earlier). When the balance of political forces is considered in relation to the media overall, Cleveland and the Democrats were well positioned: in an election that seemed closely contested and lacked disruptive factors favoring one side or the other, they had more effectively tapped into the available media formation.

WATCHING THE ELECTION RETURNS

The culmination of every presidential campaign is Election Day—first voting and then waiting to learn who will be the next president. The rituals of this day are particularly well established, though some of the specifics have changed over time. Certainly the places where people follow the results have varied. In 1892 Harrison waited to learn the results in the White House while Cleveland was handed updates at his home, surrounded by a few family members and friends. Politicos waited at their party headquarters. The Tammany braves, for instance, gathered in their Wigwam on Fourteenth Street. Others attended the theater, where the management announced results from the stage between acts—or at moments when there was some decisive news to communicate.¹⁰³ This was a pregnant, transitional moment when political theater would again give way to theatrical entertainment: their momentary convergence (after voting was completed) generated a certain holiday spirit, and also an affirmation of community. Suspense and denouement could occur on both accounts, though more often the electoral outcome would not be known until the early hours of the morning. Intrepid followers of returns might then head into the streets to find additional updates, staying “till well-nigh sunrise.”¹⁰⁴

For many members of the electorate, the night’s ritual involved going down to the headquarters or branch office of one’s local newspaper of choice and watching the returns as they were posted. In Washington, DC, and other cities it was a night of male camaraderie whether in victory or defeat—the conclusion of a quadrennial ritual.¹⁰⁵ In New York, one reporter was struck by the fact that there seemed to be as many women as men on the streets.¹⁰⁶ For these boisterous, good-natured crowds, the papers gathered information primarily via telegraph and shared it with their readers, traditionally by posting bulletins on boards (thus the term “bulletin boards”). In this respect newspapers engaged in some friendly (or not so friendly) competition as to which would be the first to deliver the latest news to the public. It was a public test of their newsgathering abilities.

The 1892 election was transitional in one particular respect. The stereopticon was emerging as the preferred instrument for disseminating bulletins on election night, supplanting the standard boards. In New Haven, Connecticut, the voting results were still being posted on bulletin boards.¹⁰⁷ However, in Connecticut’s state capitol,

It looked last night as if every man in Hartford had come down State street way to learn how the election was going. The street in front of and on both

sides of THE COURANT building was crowded with 4,000 or 5,000 excited people eagerly watching for the bulletins which were thrown by a stereopticon [upon] a sheet attached to the federal building. As soon as the news began coming in, bulletins were put out at frequent intervals. They presented some surprises for both republicans and democrats, and the crowd was sufficiently divided in sentiment to cheer lustily every bit of news, no matter to which side it brought consolation.

During the intervals of giving news the stereopticon threw comical and taking pictures¹⁰⁸—made by THE COURANT artist—upon the screen, and these amused the crowd almost as much as the bulletins, although the election news was what they hungered for.¹⁰⁹

The more partisan, Democratic *Hartford Times* also showed returns using the stereopticon: “First, great majority for Cleveland; second, picture of a rooster; third, picture of Grover. Repeated at frequent intervals.”¹¹⁰

In New York City, the epicenter for gatherings on Election Day evening was Printing House Square near City Hall, where most of the newspapers had their central offices. According to the *New York Times*, the newspapers were still posting the latest bulletins on their boards. “Not a newspaper in the row failed to bulletin the returns, and there was not an office which did not have about it thousands of people anxious for every little scrap of information that might give them an inkling as to the result.” The problem was that only those closest to the boards could see the new bulletins; the crowds behind required an audio relay. “As soon as new figures were placed upon the boards a shout would arise from those nearest the bulletin only to be taken up by those in the rear and carried along down the row, across the park, and in every direction until the first cheer had grown into a mighty burst of sound that gradually died away in the distance.”¹¹¹ The World Building (aka the Pulitzer Building) on Park Row, built in 1890, was the tallest edifice in New York City, if not the world, for its first four years.¹¹² This presidential contest was the newspaper’s first at its new locale, and Joseph Pulitzer tried to make the most of it while addressing the challenges created by large crowds. Ladders ran up each side of the recently constructed twenty-six-story building (309 feet) to a chair on top. As results came in, the figures of Cleveland and Harrison would move up their respective ladders as each gained his electoral votes until the victor’s dummy finally occupied the chair. In between waits, people chanted campaign songs.¹¹³ At its branch office in Harlem, the *New York World* communicated results to the crowds using the stereopticon.¹¹⁴ The *Herald*, which had its new main office on Broadway and Ann Street, just off



FIGURE 6. Bulletin boards traditionally adorned the facades of newspaper offices such as the *New York Journal*. On election night they were bathed in lights as citizens gathered to follow the returns. Byron Company (New York), [Park Row] ca. 1896. Courtesy the Museum of City of New York, 93.1.1.15310.

of Printing House Square, projected the latest results on a screen there and also at its branch offices at Madison Square, Broadway and Thirty-Sixth Street, and 126th Street and Seventh Avenue in Harlem.¹¹⁵ Dana's *New York Sun* likewise projected results on a white screen at its relatively modest office building at 170 Nassau Street. "When THE SUN was not telling the story of the day in figures, the crowd was kept in humor by THE SUN'S cartoonist and portrait maker."¹¹⁶ It used the same approach at its uptown office.¹¹⁷ Although Cleveland and the Democratic Party showed little or no interest in the stereopticon in 1892, the Democratic newspapers found it useful as a way to enhance their public profile at this key moment. (In 1882 Charles Dana did a survey and found that presidential elections increased circulation more than any other news event.)¹¹⁸ Already, publishers were developing a relationship between the press and the screen that would flourish in the late 1890s and early 1900s, when cinema became commonly referred to as a visual newspaper.