



Chicago Historical Society



# HISTORY THROUGH OPPOSING EYES: AMERICA AND PROTEST

## Cartoons and Protest



Detail from "How High Will She Go?" by John T. McCutcheon

**Grade level:** Late elementary school through middle school

**Estimated time:** Two class periods

**Specific topic:** Political cartoons as tools of protest

**Subtopic:** Protest

### Teacher background information

**P**olitical cartoons can be found in newspapers and magazines and help to inform the public about important issues through satire. They are often used as forms of protest and resistance and leave a mark on individual and public imaginations. Cartoons are subtle, nonviolent, and humorous types of protest that often capture popular sentiment. This lesson uses political cartoons from 1774 through today. Before beginning this lesson, students should have general knowledge of the events leading up to the American Revolution.



## Key concepts

Political cartoons create a message, sometimes humorous and sometimes serious, that is expressed through words and imagery.

## Key questions

What is a cartoon? How do cartoons convey a message? What are some differences between comics and political cartoons? What techniques do cartoonists use to make cartoons funny?

## Goal of this lesson

This lesson is designed to help students improve their ability to read and understand political meaning in cartoons.

## Objectives

1. Students will examine political cartoons and determine their meanings through analysis and discussion.
2. Students will create their own political cartoons.

## Materials

Master copies of the following political cartoons and the political cartoon worksheet are provided.

## Political cartoons

1. “The Bostonians in Distress,” by Philip Dawe, 1774
2. “The Bostonians Paying the Excise-man, or Tarring & Feathering,” by Philip Dawe, 1774
3. “The Bloody Massacre perpetrated in King Street, Boston, on March 5, 1770,” by Paul Revere
4. “How High Will She Go?” John T. McCutcheon, *Chicago Tribune*, 1937

## Other supplies

1. Political cartoon worksheet (one per student)
2. Samples of comic strips and political cartoons from a current newspaper  

Note: These materials are not included in the lesson packet. Each teacher is responsible for selecting strips from his or her local newspaper. The lesson suggests making transparencies of these materials for use on an overhead projector, but the cartoons may also be distributed as photocopies.
3. Basic art supplies: paper, pencils, crayons, markers, and colored pencils

## Procedures

### Day 1

Introduce students to the lesson by asking them, “Who reads the comics in the newspaper?” Show copies of current comics from your local newspaper on an overhead projector, and allow time for the students to pick their favorites. As a class, discuss what makes them funny. Have students identify elements of exaggeration, and explain that comics use humorous exaggeration to convey an idea.

Transition the discussion from comics to political cartoons. Place a current political cartoon from your local newspaper on the overhead projector. Distribute a political cartoon worksheet to each student and use it to analyze and examine the modern cartoon (students should not write on their copy of the worksheet until they are split into small groups). Help students understand the cartoon by asking a series of guided questions: Which characters look mean? Who are they? Which characters are big? Which are small? Why? Is there an argument or disagreement expressed in the cartoon? If so, can you identify the two sides? Are there bad guys and good guys in the cartoon? What is the cartoon trying to tell us?

Tell students that they will now work together to analyze historical political cartoons drawn and published at the start of the American Revolution. Review some basic facts about the issues surrounding the American Revolution. Focus on the policies the British government tried to enforce in the American colonies and the early protests in Boston.

Divide students into small groups and distribute one Revolutionary War–era political cartoon to each group. Plan to distribute the same cartoon to multiple groups. Allow time for students to analyze their assigned cartoon and complete the worksheet. Then ask each group to present its cartoon to the class, using the worksheet as a guide. Compare and contrast ideas generated by groups that used the same cartoon. Display each cartoon on the overhead projector, or distribute photocopies, so that students can follow the presentations. During the discussion, inform students about the person who drew each cartoon. Does it surprise students to learn that an English artist drew two of the cartoons? Does this change their perceptions about the cartoons in any way?

## Day 1 (continued)

### Optional activity

Complete a Venn diagram on the board to compare the American Revolution cartoon to a cartoon from a different era, such as the women's rights cartoon "How High Will She Go?" or a current political cartoon.

## Day 2

The students will now create their own political cartoons. If you are studying the American Revolution, you can have students' cartoons focus on the issues of that era. If you are using this activity as part of a citizenship unit, you may choose to have students focus their cartoons on current issues. In either case, have a class discussion to brainstorm possible topics.

Instruct students to create a cartoon in either one frame or in a comic strip-style of up to four frames. Remind students that their cartoons should express a point-of-view through both images and writing. Pass out paper and art supplies and allow students the remaining time to create their cartoons. If students do not finish in class, assign the completion of the cartoons as homework.

## Day 3

### Optional activities:

1. Devote a third class period to analyzing the student-created cartoons. Group students into pairs and ask them to exchange cartoons. Distribute a second copy of the political cartoon worksheet as a guide for each student to analyze the other's work.
2. Have students evaluate their own work by completing another political cartoon worksheet. After using the worksheet, students should write a short paragraph analyzing whether or not their cartoon successfully conveyed its message. Students should be able to clearly articulate the intended message of their cartoon.
3. Ask students to give oral presentations about their cartoons to the class or in small groups.

### Suggestions for student assessment

The political cartoon worksheet or the cartoon drawing assignment can be used to assess student learning.



Detail from "The Bostonians Paying the Excise-man, or Tarring & Feathering" by Philip Dawwe

### Extension activities

Ask students to make a mural of cartoons based on the same theme or collect and analyze a group of current political cartoons.

### This lesson fulfills the following Illinois Learning Standards:

#### English Language Arts

State Goal 3: Write to communicate for a variety of purposes.

State Goal 4: Listen and speak effectively in a variety of situations.

#### Social Science

State Goal 14: Understand political systems, with an emphasis on the United States.

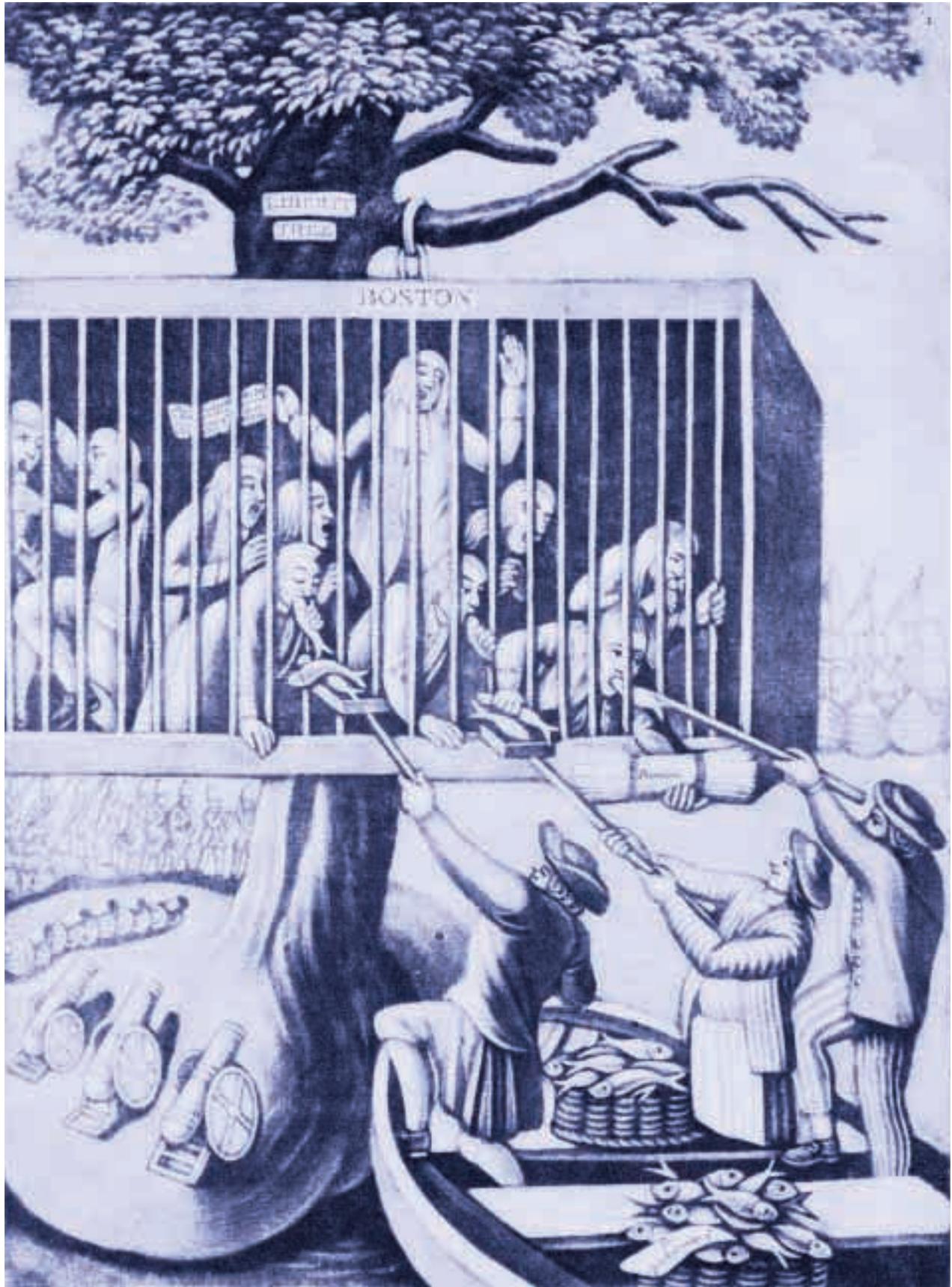
State Goal 16: Understand events, trends, individuals, and movements shaping the history of Illinois, the United States, and other nations.

#### Fine Arts

State Goal 26: Through creating and performing, understand how works of art are produced.

State Goal 27: Understand the role of the arts in civilizations, past and present.

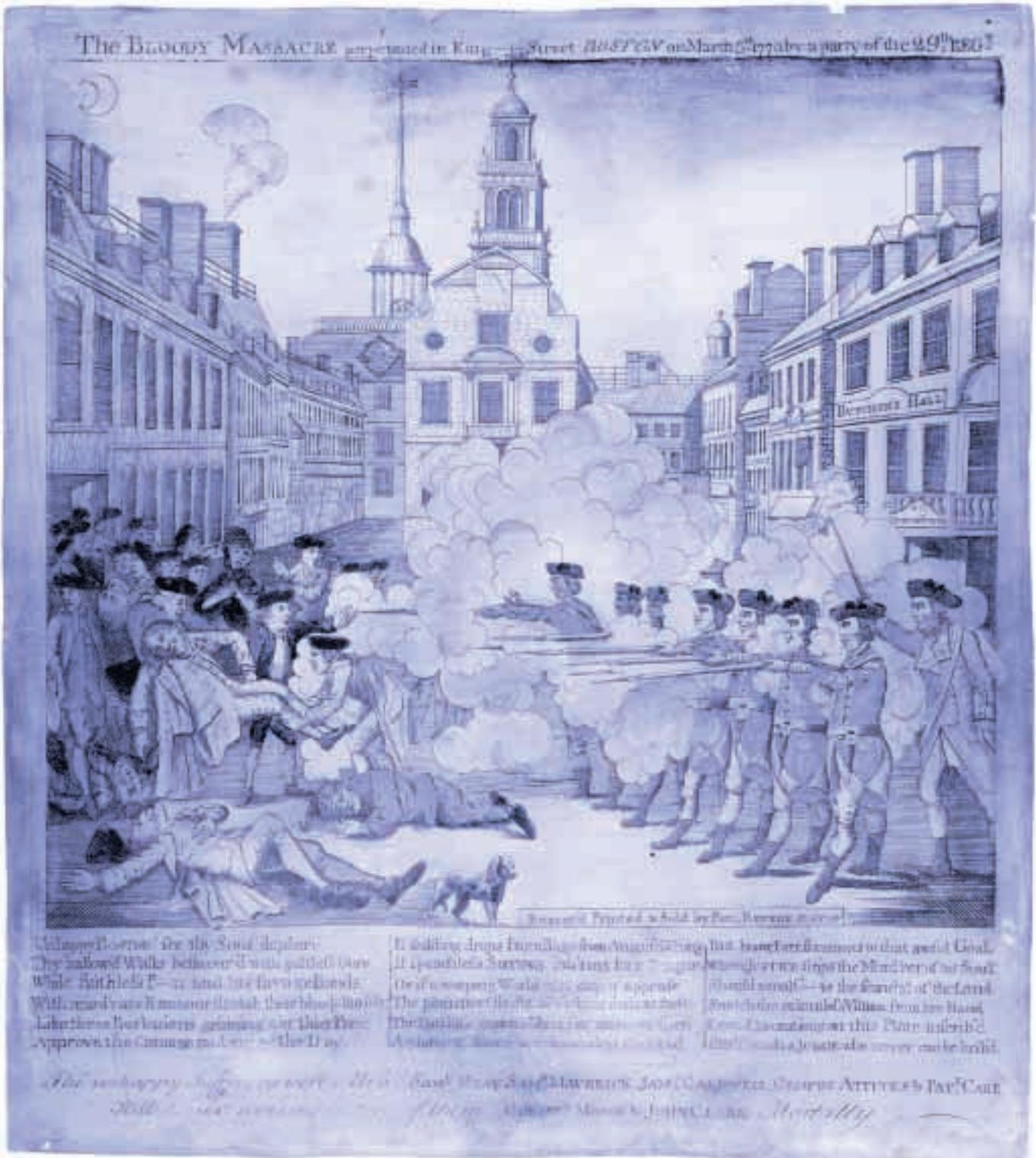
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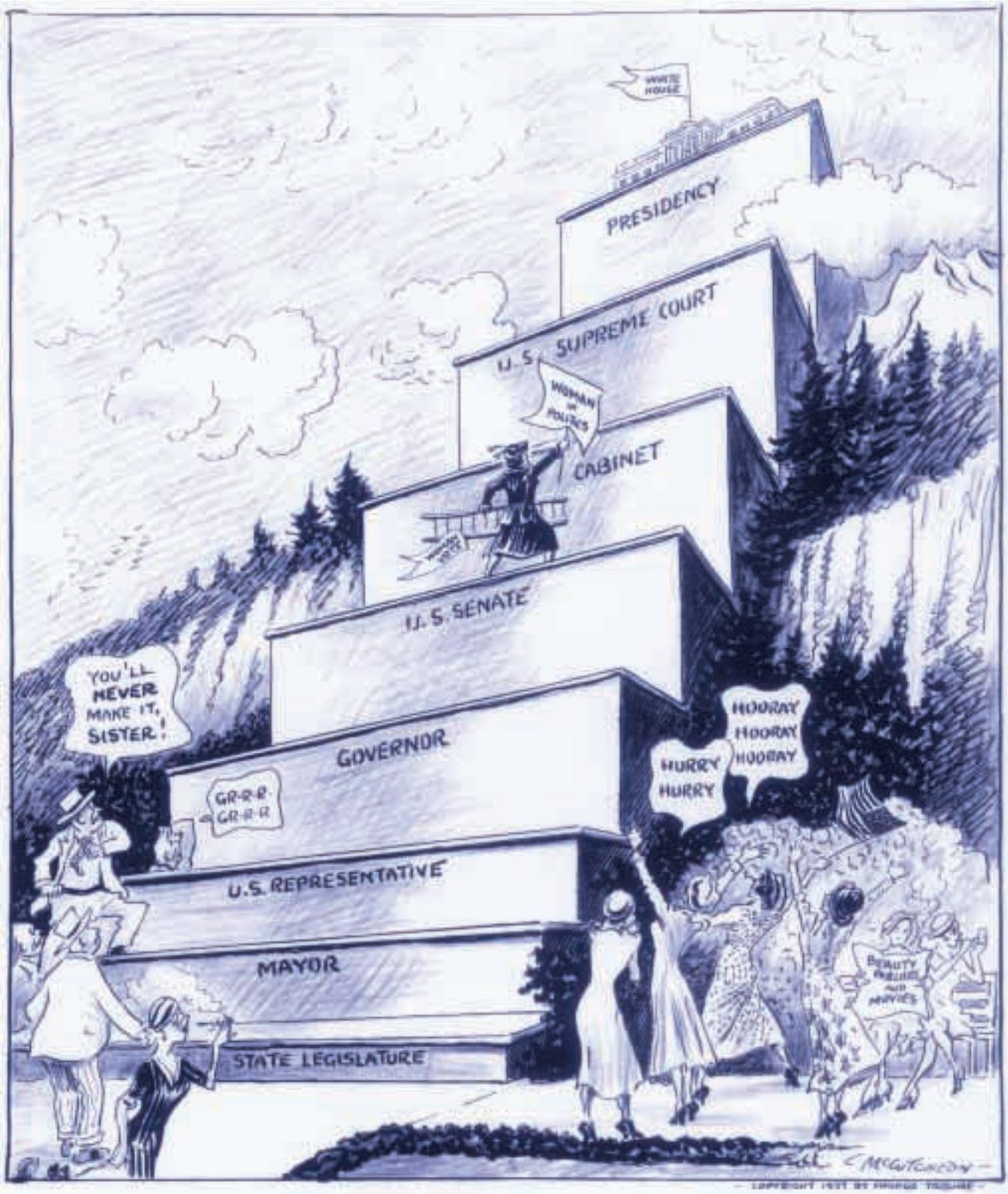
THE BOSTONIANS IN DISTRESS



THE BOSTONIANS PAYING THE EXCISE-MAN, OR TARRING & FEATHERING



THE BLOODY MASSACRE PERPETRATED IN KING STREET, BOSTON, ON MARCH 5, 1770



How High Will She Go?

Name(s): \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

**POLITICAL CARTOON WORKSHEET**

1. What is the name of the cartoon? What does it tell you about the cartoon?

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2. Who is the cartoonist?

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3. When was it drawn?

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4. Describe the cartoon. Note the people, objects, animals, and setting pictured in the cartoon.

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5. Are there any words in the cartoon? What do they tell you?

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6. Why do you think the cartoon was drawn? What is its message?

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7. What things or words in the cartoon support your answer to question #6?

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8. Do you agree or disagree with the cartoon? Explain your answer.

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