



Bernhard Gillam created this political cartoon, “Switchmen at Loggerheads,” which mocks politicians vying to become America’s next president or to set the Congressional agenda. *Puck*—the influential journal whose tagline, borrowed from Shakespeare, is “What Fools These Mortals Be”—published the illustration in its June 13, 1883 issue.

Who are these people? Arguing politicians who think their ideas are good (if not best) for Americans.

Standing on the train track, right in front of a speeding locomotive called “1884,” they seem oblivious to everything but themselves and their points of view. Arguing about issues like free trade and tariffs, they have even knocked down (and nearly stepped on) one of their colleagues. Meanwhile ... the train keeps coming.

The cartoon’s caption asks an interesting question: “Will there be another smash-up?”

Who are the people depicted in this illustration and what roles did they play in the election of 1884? Dr. Jon Grinspan, Jefferson Fellow and Curator of Political History at the Smithsonian’s National Museum of American History, [tells us about these arguing men](#):

*By the start of the real campaign, in 1883, the election is no distant goal—suddenly 1884 is a speeding locomotive, bearing down on bickering politicians.*

*In this cartoon, Puck mocks the Democratic politicians squabbling over the direction of their party. It shows Pennsylvania Congressman [Sam Randall](#) and Delaware Senator [Thomas Bayard](#)—both closely tied to thuggish, violent party bosses—grappling. New York politician [Abram Hewitt](#)—widely respected as an honest, well-intentioned, moderate reformer, lies on the ground, knocked out by his sleazier rivals.*

It’s interesting to note there are far fewer people depicted in this illustration than the original number of candidates who developed cases of “[presidential fever](#)” before the election of 1884. Two years before, in 1882, the number of men who wanted the top job resembled the initial number of Republican contenders during the presidential campaign of 2016. (See “[Premature Snowball-Rolling](#),” an illustration by Joseph Keppler, published in the February 1, 1882 issue of *Puck*.)

There are other similarities between the two election years of 1884 and 2016.

For starters, many Republicans were distressed with their nominee, [James G. Blaine](#) (a former Senator from Maine). Some were even urging fellow Republican “independents” to vote for the Democratic nominee, Grover Cleveland (the Governor of New York).

[A broadside, published in 1884](#), urges Republicans to “Save the Party!” Among other things, Harry Ward Beecher (Republican, reformer, abolitionist, brother of Harriet Beecher Stowe and [author of the broadside](#)) writes:

*Suppose you were travelling in a stage-coach and plunged headlong down an embankment into mud and morass, and the driver cries, “Come, out with you, out with you all, and help me put it [the coach] back again!” and every mother’s son of you should say, “No; we are not going to leave this coach.”*

*I should say, if I were driver, “Get the coach out of the mud, and then get in again or go afoot.”*

Beecher is making the point that the best way to vote Republican values is to vote against the Republican nominee. [He continues](#):

*To elect Mr. Blaine under all the conditions, under all the charges and imputations, and in the light of all his history, is to say to every unprincipled man on this continent, “No matter what your life has been, if you get a regular nomination, you are going to be in the Presidential chair.”*

*Vote for Cleveland.*

Many Americans heeded that "Vote for Cleveland" message. And ... after Cleveland won ... people were bemoaning "The End of the Republican Party."



All of the political wrangling, hand-wringing and mud-slinging has a familiar ring, doesn't it ... 132 years on?!

Credits:

Bernhard Gillam created this illustration, entitled "Switchmen at Loggerheads." It appeared in "Puck" on June 13, 1883. Public Domain image. Online via the Library of Congress.

The in-text image, copyright expired due to passage of time, is entitled "The End of the Republican Party After 'The Destruction of Jerusalem' by Kaulbach." It was created by M.P. Bowman around October of 1884. It is maintained at the Library of Congress whose curators have provided this [summary of the illustration](#):

*After a large painting by Wilhelm von Kaulbach showing the "destruction of Jerusalem", this print shows the demise of the Republican Party with various Republicans, Mugwumps, Democrats, and allegorical figures, along with portraits of Jefferson, Washington, and Lincoln, as well as the newly elected Democratic president Grover Cleveland on horseback (as the Roman emperor Titus), with Vice President Thomas A. Hendricks on horseback behind him, and Carl Schurz and another man, carrying fasces, walking beside them. At center appears Samuel Tilden holding up a shield labeled "1876" and brandishing a short sword. He appears about to strike a man, possibly Rutherford B. Hayes, winner of the controversial 1876 presidential election. Moving toward the foreground, James G. Blaine is standing with a large dagger raised, which he is about to plunge into a fainted female figure labeled "Republican Party" supported by his left arm; kneeling beside Blaine is Benjamin Butler holding a jester doll. Three crouching figures in front of Butler are Chester A. Arthur, John A. Logan, and an unidentified man wearing glasses. A man labeled "Corruption", possibly John Roach, flees to the left, pursued by three male furies. On the far right is a "flight to Egypt" scene with a Madonna and two children riding on a mule, which has stopped to graze on a thistle, other figures are around them, as well as two men walking in the midst who may be Henry Ward Beecher and Thomas F. Bayard. Above the central figures are three trumpeters, one holding a staff topped with an eagle and bearing the initials G.C., heralding the arrival of Grover Cleveland. Above these figures appears a horde of angels wielding rushes. In the upper left corner, several people are standing at the entrance to a temple, among them are Whitelaw Reid and John St. John.*

See Alignments to State and Common Core standards for this story online at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicAlignment/Running-for-the-Presidency-American-Politics>

See Learning Tasks for this story online at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicActivities/Running-for-the-Presidency-American-Politics>