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Blaine! Blaine! The Tattooed Man from the State of Maine.

This paper will include a discussion regarding the demonization of tattoos during the late-nineteenth century and how this phenomenon subsequently changed the course of a presidential election in America. Through an analysis of the primary and secondary sources it is clear that there was a variety of ways that tattoos were demonized, in newspapers and circus acts, subsequently affecting the way they were seen by society. Of all the documents that implicitly demonized tattoos possibly the most affective regarding American history are political cartoons depicting a Presidential candidate with tattoos all over his body. The tattooed candidate was James G. Blaine, and secondary source material argues that these political cartoons played a pivotal role in his presidential campaign of 1884. This begs the question of how these cartoons had such an effect. Why were people so affected by the cartoon's imagery? How did the cartoonist's use of tattoos help to create such an effective image of Blaine? How much of an effect did this have on the election? Overall this paper will aim to answer these questions but will place the primary focus on connecting the demonization of tattoos during the middle of the nineteenth century to the political election of 1884.

The methodology that was used in creating this work was essentially following the especially interesting aspects of a variety of sources about tattoos. In the beginning of the project I was looking at when tattoos became popular in America, who was the first tattoo artist, how did he become popular, and why people were getting tattoos. By doing research on this I ended up collecting a wide variety of primary sources such as newspaper articles, advertising images, political cartoons, letters to the editor of

prominent magazines, books about tattooed individuals from the time period, campaign slogans, and campaign songs. The secondary sources that I used for this project were books that focused on tattooing, circus acts, political campaigns, political cartoons, and tattoos in literature. Once all of this was gathered I looked at the material and began searching for what the material was saying about tattoos in the nineteenth century. What stuck out was the fact that many of the first tattooed men and women in America had a consistent story of being "tattooed by savages" on some journey to foreign lands. This was fascinating and so I looked deeper and it seemed as though all circus acts were employing this story to augment their sideshows. Then, looking at the newspaper articles that mention tattoos from later years of this time period I noticed a shift from this "tattooed by savages" narrative to journalists making a connection between "savages" and criminals. This is to be expected as journalists need to continuously present material with different angles; however, in 1884 these political cartoons from Bernard Gillam featured the presidential candidate James G. Blaine as a tattooed man. Upon further research I found that Blaine had been accused of some nefarious dealings with a railroad so the cartoon was arguably playing upon the current understanding of tattoos as a symbol of crime. To show how effective these cartoons were I looked for articles about Blaine and, sure enough, all critical articles of the candidate were calling him the tattooed man. Further investigation into the effects of these cartoons just solidified my understanding of what happened: that the odious introduction of tattoos to society in the nineteenth century negatively affected campaign bid for James G. Blaine. Overall, this project is a result of research that just followed interesting nuances until there was an

argument to be made. I had no idea going into this research project that I was going to end up writing about this topic.

This project will add to the current scholarship on tattoos by focusing specifically on how the systematic demonization of tattoos throughout the nineteenth century effected the 1884 presidential election. Most of the historiography on this subject, such as Robert Bogdan's 1988 book *Freak Show*, simply identifies the history of tattoos and their appeal in sideshows. Other scholarship, such as Jennifer Putzi's *Identifying Marks*, discusses the use of tattoos in literature during the nineteenth century; however, her focus is mainly relegated to the literary use of tattoos and authors' implications about gender and race. Most of the scholarship that is relevant to this subject focuses on much broader topics than the use of tattoos in this specific election. The sources that do mention the Blaine incident do not focus on *why* it happened, instead, these sources simply mention *that* it happened. One source that does detail the Blaine incident is by Harlen Makemson and his doctoral dissertation *Images of Scandal.* Makemson discusses the effect the tattoo had on this election but he does not remark on the origins of the tattoo stigma. This paper will add to the historiography of nineteenth-century America by linking the origins of the tattoo stigma with the presidential campaign of 1884.

The importance of this work is simply that facilitates an understanding of contingency in history. No event in history just happened; rather most events are the result of many other seemingly harmless events. This work explores the nuance effects of seemingly unimportant aspects of history and shows how effectual something small can be on larger parts of history. Specifically, this research shows how a simple story, created to garner more of an audience at circus sideshows, eventually effected a

presidential election. Overall, this examination of historical contingency is immensely valuable to the understanding of how society works because it exemplifies the complex nature of human society especially in relation to past events. This is a relatively new idea for historical writers as for thousands of years historians have supposed that there were simple answers to why everything happened. For example why did the Germans try to take over Europe in WW2? Because Hitler was evil of course. Why did the French Revolution happen? Because people obviously hated monarchy. This type of history is not done much any more and has died out due to the rise of Marxist history, and Revisionist history which both look for deeper causes for past events. For the Marxist everything is about class. But for the Revisionist history is the result of a multitude of causes not just one or a few. This work that I have done will hopefully portray just how complicated, and fluid, our understanding of history actually is.

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