

ALBUM INQUIRY STARTER SET - FROM PICKS TO POSTS: SATIRE IN THE GOLD RUSH AND THE INFLUENCER BOOM

Album Description



The California Gold Rush, which began in 1848, was one of the most significant events in American history, sparking a mass migration of people from all over the world to the western United States in search of fortune. The discovery of gold at Sutter's Mill triggered an influx of over 300,000 people, many of them Easterners who hoped to strike it rich. This sudden rush westward transformed California almost overnight, but for most who made the journey, the dream of easy wealth quickly turned to disappointment as the harsh realities of mining and competition set in. The Gold Rush not only reshaped the physical and economic landscape of the West, but it also became a fertile ground for artists, writers, and cartoonists who used humor and satire to comment on the craze.

Satirical cartooning was a popular form of social commentary in the 19th century, with artists using exaggerated caricatures and humorous depictions to critique societal trends and behaviors. The rush of Easterners to California offered ample material for cartoonists, who poked fun at the naïve optimism of gold



seekers, the chaotic conditions in the mining camps, and the vast gap between the promise of wealth and the reality many encountered. These cartoons reflected the skepticism of many Americans toward the “get-rich-quick” mentality, and they often highlighted the absurdity of abandoning established lives in the East for uncertain prospects in the West. By studying these cartoons, we can gain a deeper understanding of how the Gold Rush was perceived and critiqued during its time, and how satire was used as a tool to explore complex social dynamics.

Contextualize the Cartoons:

Have students consider how these cartoons fits into the historical context of the time. Why was there a sudden rush to California? How did perceptions of the West differ between Easterners and Westerners? What challenges did Easterners face upon arrival?

Critical Questions:

- Who do you think was the intended audience for these cartoons?
- How might different audiences (Easterners, Westerners, recent immigrants) have responded to these cartoons?
- How do these cartoons reflect broader societal issues of migration, economic opportunity, and regional stereotypes?

How did these cartoons reflect broader attitudes toward the Gold Rush and the movement of Easterners to the West?

- How do these satirical portrayals compare to modern-day caricatures or stereotypes in media?
- What historical lessons can we draw from these cartoons about the pursuit of wealth and the risks of migration?

Extension Activity: Drawing Parallels Between 19th-Century Satire and Modern Social Media Culture

The rise of social media platforms like Instagram, TikTok, and YouTube has created a new form of celebrity where individuals, seemingly overnight, can gain fame and fortune through viral content. The appeal of becoming a social media influencer can be seen as a modern “Gold Rush,” where many aspire to wealth through sponsorship deals and ad revenue. However, the highly competitive nature of this space and the challenges of sustaining long-term success make it comparable to the ill-fated dreams of many Gold Rush fortune seekers.

Questions for Discussion:

- What motivations drove people to join the Gold Rush? What motivates individuals to become social media influencers today?
- What risks did Gold Rush participants face, and what risks do social media influencers face (financial, personal, societal)?
- How did/would satire critique both groups? What might a satirical cartoon about social media influencers highlight?
- How did each “rush” shape societal values around wealth, success, and fame?

THE INDEPENDENT GOLD HUNTER ON HIS WAY TO CALIFORNIA: I NEITHER BORROW



Reference Link: <http://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/2002699704/>

Creator(s): N. Currier (Firm), lithographer

Date Created/Published: New York : Published by N. Currier, [between 1849 and 1852]

Summary: Print shows prospector carrying mining tools, cookware, and food as he walks to California.

Call Number: PGA - Currier & Ives--Independent gold hunter... (A size) [P&P]

Repository: Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division Washington, D.C. 20540 USA

<http://hdl.loc.gov/loc.pnp/pp.print>

Notes: Currier & Ives : a catalogue raisonné / compiled by Gale Research. Detroit, MI : Gale Research, c1983, no. 3288

Subjects: Gold miners--1840-1860. Gold mining equipment--1840-1860. Gold rushes--1840-1860.

THE WAY THEY GO TO CALIFORNIA / LITH. & PUB. BY N. CURRIER.



Reference Link: <http://www.loc.gov/item/91481165/>

Summary

- Gold rush cartoon, showing dock crowded with men with picks and shovels, and men jumping from the dock to reach departing ship; a crowded airship and a man on a rocket fly overhead; and a man with a pick and shovel parachutes from the airship.

Created / Published

- Spruce, N.Y. : Published by N. Currier, c1849.

Genre

- Cartoons (Commentary)--1840-1850
- Lithographs--1840-1850

Notes

- - Currier & Ives : a catalogue raisonné / compiled by Gale Research. Detroit, MI : Gale Research, c1983, no. 7107.
- - Exhibited: "Rufus Porter's Curious World: Art and Invention in America, 1815-1860" at the Bowdoin College Museum of Art, 9400 College Station, Brunswick, ME, November 14, 2019 - June 1, 2020.

Repository



- Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division Washington, D.C. 20540 USA
<http://hdl.loc.gov/loc.pnp/pp.print>

Digital Id

- pga 05072 //hdl.loc.gov/loc.pnp/pga.05072
- cph 3c04557 //hdl.loc.gov/loc.pnp/cph.3c04557

THE MINING BUSINESS IN FOUR PICTURES : GOING IN TO IT, MAKING SOMETHING, MAKING NOTHING, GOING OUT OF IT // LITH. & PUBLISHED BY QUIROT & CO., CORNER



Reference Link: <http://www.loc.gov/resource/ppmsca.32172/>

Summary

- Pictorial lettersheet with four images on one page and attached blank leaf.

Created / Published

- S[an] F[rancisco] : Lith[ographed] & published by Quirot & Co., corner of Montgomery & California Sts. ; [between 1850 and 1860]

Genre

- Pictorial lettersheets--1850-1860
- Lithographs--1850-1860

Notes

- - Title from item.
- - Baird, California pictorial letter sheets, no. 171.
- - Accession box no. DLC/PP-2011:179.07



Repository


- Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division Washington, D.C. 20540 USA
<http://hdl.loc.gov/loc.pnp/pp.print>

Digital Id

- ppmsca 32172 //hdl.loc.gov/loc.pnp/ppmsca.32172



Teaching Notes:

Super engaging connection between the gold rush and the rush in modern social media culture. This certainly is something students can dig into and provides a pathway to researching both! Great idea  [Peter Pappas](#) .





Teaching Notes:

Fantastic job linking history to the present, bravo
[set of Gold Rush resources](#).



[Peter Pappas](#) ! I'm adding this album to this [curated](#)

Teaching Notes:

It could be an interesting connection for students to explore  [Cheryl Davis](#)  [Julie Schaul](#)