Between the lines

Standard Oil was one of the world’s first and largest multinational corporations until it was broken up by the Supreme Court in 1911. Today’s ExxonMobil Corporation is a direct descendant. The magazine, Puck, published this cartoon in 1904 showing an oil tank/octopus labeled “Standard Oil.” Its tentacles grasp the steel, copper, and shipping industries as well as a state house and the U.S. Capitol. One tentacle reaches for the White House.

Source: http://vulgararmy.com/2009/06/01/standard-oil/

Symbolism: Octopus

Talking points

The octopus has long been a useful symbol for cartoonists. Its tentacles make a convenient metaphor for a grasping, threatening, strangling force. In Keppler’s 1904 drawing, the Standard Oil monopoly ensnares other industries as well as our political leadership. Explain how the octopus symbol works in the others.

Additional resources

Association of American Editorial Cartoonists
http://editorialcartoonists.com/

More by Nate Beeler
http://editorialcartoonists.com/cartoon/browse.cfm?BeelerN

More by Nick Anderson
http://blogs.chron.com/nickanderson/

More on octopuses in political cartoons: http://nationalhumanitiescenter.org/pds/gilded/power/text1/text1read.htm