

Political Machines – Document Analysis

Tammany Hall was a powerful political machine that dominated New York City politics at the end of the 1800's. While analyzing the cartoons and quotes within this packet you will uncover the story of Tammany Hall while identifying the positives and negatives of the political machines.

Terms and Notes to remember:

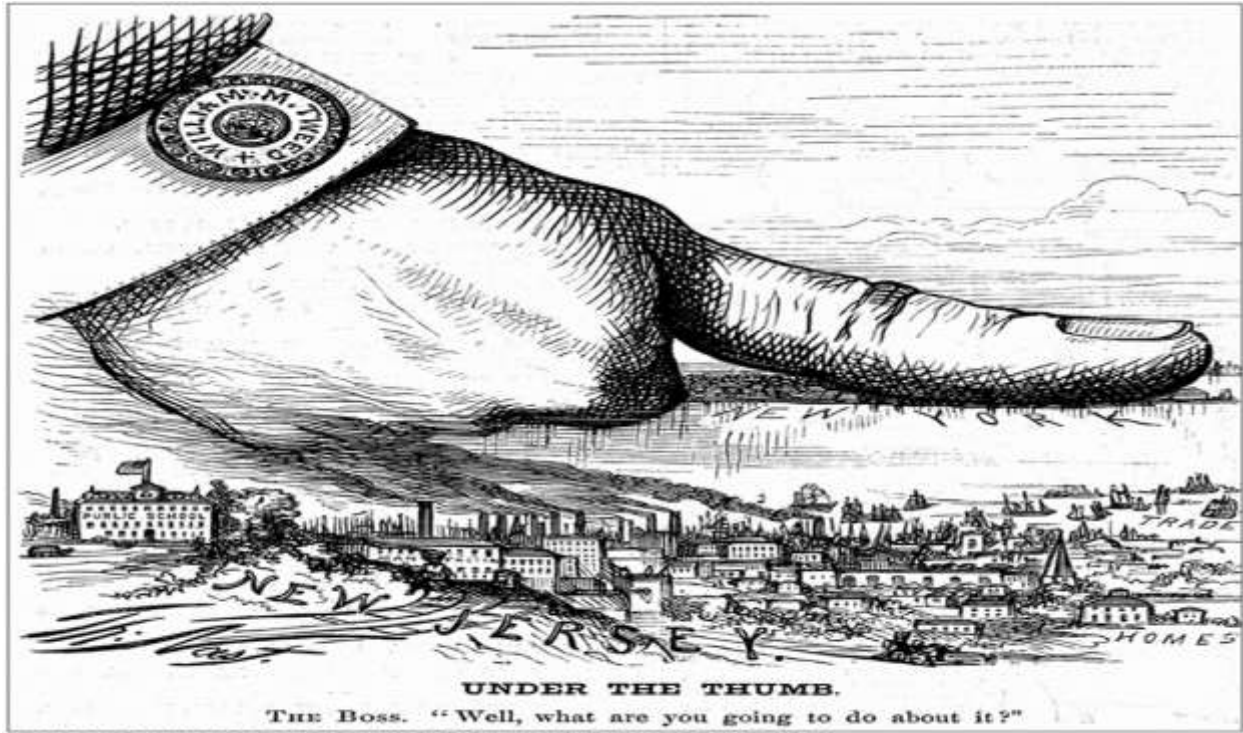
- **Political Machines:** An organized group that controls a political party in a city
- **Tammany Hall:** The political machine of New York City.
- Machines were successful because even though they cheated voters, they often provided assistance to newly-arrived immigrants in exchange for their votes.

Thomas Nast Cartoons

Political cartoonist Thomas Nast ridiculed Boss Tweed and his machine in the pages of *Harper's Weekly*. Nast's work threatened Tweed, who reportedly said, "I don't care so much what the papers write about me – my constituents can't read; but . . . they can see pictures!"

Directions: Analyze the cartoons within the packet and answer the following questions for each. Record your answers below.

Political Cartoon	Describe what you see in the cartoon. Please be detailed.	What is the cartoon trying to say about Boss Tweed /Tammany Hall?	How is the cartoon effective or ineffective at showing Nast's view?
"Under the Thumb"			
"The Tammany Tiger Loose"			
"The Brains"			



A cartoon commenting on the power of Tammany Hall over New York City

"Under the Thumb"

This cartoon illustrates Boss Tweed's total control over New York City. The words directly under the thumb read "New York."



"The Tammany Tiger Loose"

Under the Tammany tiger's victim is a torn paper that reads "LAW." In the back you can see Boss Tweed and his cronies, portrayed as noblemen, watching from the stands on the left. The cartoon's caption reads "What are you going to do about it?"



“The Brains”

This is a depiction of Boss Tweed. The statement at the bottom says “That Achieved the Tammany Victory at the Rochester Democratic Convention.”

Source: Excerpt from a book by muckraker Lincoln Steffens, *The Shame of Cities*, published in 1904. (Modified)

New advances in printing technology during the 1890s made magazines and other publications inexpensive to print. Magazines became available to a broader middle-class audience. Lincoln Steffens was well known for writing magazine articles about child labor, prisons, religion and political machines

The typical American citizen is a business man. The spirit of business is profit, not patriotism; individual gain, not national prosperity. “My business is sacred,” says the business man in his heart. “Whatever helps my business, is good; it must be. Whatever hurts it, is wrong; it must be. A bribe is bad, that is, it is a bad thing to take; but it is not so bad to give one, not if it is necessary to my business.”

And it’s all a moral weakness. Oh, we are good—on Sunday, and we are “fearfully patriotic” on the Fourth of July. But the bribe we pay to the janitor is the little brother of the bribe passed to the councilman to sell a city street, and the father of the deal made by the president of the railroad, who agrees to use air-brakes only if he is given stock in the air-brake company.

We are responsible, not our leaders, since we follow them. We let them divert our loyalty from the United States to some “party”; we let them boss the party and turn our democracies into autocracies. We cheat our government and we let our leaders loot it, and we let them bribe our sovereignty from us. We are content to let them pass bad laws, giving away public property in exchange for money.

Vocabulary

Divert- redirect, change

Autocracy- rule by one person

Sovereignty- independence

Source: Excerpt from a talk by George Plunkitt, a political boss in New York City. The talk was called “Honest Graft and Dishonest Graft,” recorded in 1905. (Graft is another word for corruption and bribes). In this talk, Plunkitt responds to Lincoln Steffens’s book, *The Shame of the Cities*. (Modified)

I’ve been readin’ a book by Lincoln Steffens on *The Shame of the Cities*. Steffens means well, but like all reformers, he don’t know how to make distinctions. He can’t see no difference between honest graft and dishonest graft and, consequently, he gets things all mixed up. . . . For instance, I ain’t no looter. The looter hogs it. I never hogged. I made my money in politics, but at the same time, I served the organization and got more big improvements for New York City than any other livin’ man.

The Irish was born to rule, and they’re the honestest people in the world. Show me the Irishman who would steal a roof off an orphanage! He don’t exist. Of course, if an Irishman had the political pull and the roof was in bad shape, he might get the city authorities to put on a new one and get the contract for himself, and buy the old roof at a bargain-but that’s honest graft...

One reason why the Irishman is more honest in politics than many Americans is that he is grateful to the country and the city that gave him protection and prosperity when he was driven by oppression from Ireland. His one thought is to serve the city which gave him a home. His friends here often have a good place in one of the city departments picked out for him while he is still in Ireland. Is it any wonder that he has a tender spot in his heart for old New York when he is on its salary list the mornin’ after he lands?

Vocabulary

Graft- illegal activities; corruption

1. Based on the documents above, were political machines corrupt? Your written response must be at least 9 sentences long and provide supporting evidence and explanation.