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THE BEDFORD SERIES IN HISTORY AND CULTURE

Plunkitt of Tammany Hall

A Series of Very Plain Talks on Very Practical Politics

Introduction: How George Washington Plunkitt Became *Plunkitt of Tammany Hall*

Plunkitt of Tammany Hall is a contemporaneous portrayal of one of the best-known types of political organization in American history: the urban political machine. The years from about 1890 to 1910 were the heyday of the political machine, and in those days there was no machine more famous than Tammany Hall in New York City. George Washington Plunkitt, a well-known figure in New York politics from the 1860s until his death in 1924, was a district leader or "ward boss" in the Tammany Hall machine from about 1880 to 1905. Since its publication in 1905, *Plunkitt of Tammany Hall* has given generations of journalists, teachers, and students a passport into the world of controversy, conflict, corruption, and color that surrounded the political machines at their zenith. This book has thus influenced how we think of these organizations ever since.

Plunkitt of Tammany Hall is not simply an exact record of the words of Plunkitt, however; it is, rather, the product of a collaboration between a lifelong politician with a carefully crafted public image and a journalist seeking to write a book that would sell. Plunkitt wished to portray himself as powerful, wealthy, generous, and both loyal to and important in Tammany Hall. The book's editor, New York *Evening Post* reporter William L. Riordon, wanted a book that was both entertaining and timely. For Riordon's purposes it was useful to push Plunkitt's self-portrayals toward a sort of humorous extreme. Riordon also encouraged or perhaps even authored Plunkitt's widely quoted comments on "honest and dishonest graft" so that the book would be seen as a response to Lincoln Steffens's widely read book *The Shame of the Cities,* which was published the year before Plunkitt's.

This perhaps inevitably uneasy collaboration produced a book that is a mixture of stories capturing extraordinarily well the ambiguities of urban machine politics in America. Through *Plunkitt of Tammany Hall,* we see the generosity and selfishness, democracy and hierarchy, service and corruption that were the components of machine politics everywhere. Some readers of this book see Plunkitt as a lovable political pragmatist while others find in him a corrupt and self-serving windbag. As a successful machine politician, Plunkitt was by necessity a little bit of all of these things.

To understand why this is so—and thus get the most out of reading this book—we need to place *Plunkitt of Tammany Hall* carefully in its historical context by considering three related questions: First, what was a political machine and what role did a ward boss play in it? Second, who was George Washington Plunkitt and what did he stand for? And third, what were the circumstances in which this book first appeared? This introduction will offer some answers to these questions. In addition, Part Two, Related Materials, contains documents from Plunkitt's own times, some describing him, others expressing typical thinking about the political machine at the time. Use these resources to help find your own answers to these questions. You may discover things about this book or its times that no one else has.

POLITICAL STASIS IN TURBULENT TIMES: THE MACHINE AND THE STRUGGLE FOR POLITICAL CONTROL

George Washington Plunkitt was born in New York City on November 17, 1842, and he died there on November 19, 1924. His life spanned a period of immense and tumultuous social change in the United States. When Plunkitt

was born, the American economy was primarily agricultural, its population was primarily rural, and mass immigration was just getting under way. When he died, the United States was the leading industrial power in the world, more than half the population lived in urban areas, and much of that population was foreign-born or first-generation American. Each of these major changes generated so much social conflict that the years from about 1877 to the turn of the twentieth century—the years when Plunkitt was at the peak of his political power—are known by historians today as the age of the "great upheaval." The rise of industrial capitalism created both new economic opportunities and new, more glaring forms of inequality. Mass immigration brought ambitious new citizens to the United States and raised controversial questions about how their differences in cultures and mores could be assimilated within the same national identity. The growth of great cities heightened and focused these problems. The sheer existence of the cities threatened the myth of the United States as a society of "sturdy yeoman farmers," while their physical forms were inscribed with the new social geography of difference and inequality and their streets were frequently the sites of the conflicts endemic to the age—strikes, ethnic violence, and the like.[1]

In an impressive—indeed moving—display of faith in the ballot box, the white male voters constituting the late-nineteenth-century electorate marched to the polls by the millions seeking political solutions to these issues. Would American society see increasing inequality or a more just distribution of the abundance the economy promised? Would the values and mores of the immigrants or the native-born be honored and legalized? What would the role of the government be in these matters? Immigrants and native-born, workers and farmers, members of a newly emergent middle class and leaders of corporate capital fought pitched political and ideological battles over these and other issues involving the future of American society. And those battles drove electoral participation to the highest levels in American history. But the paradoxical result of this activity seemed to be deadlock and business as usual.[2]

To some observers this deadlock was the result of the political parties themselves and so these years were also a time when honest men and women strenuously disagreed on the value of parties to American society. To their critics the parties had become corrupt large-scale bureaucracies fatally compromised by their relationships with business and more interested in holding and distributing government patronage—jobs and contracts—than in advocating any political principles. In this view the leadership of the parties placed electoral victory above all else because only that victory would bring both the patronage resources that held the parties together and the policy-

making power that would permit them to reward their economically powerful backers. Therefore, party leaders minimized discussion of important issues, wrote platforms full of meaningless generalities, and then marched voters to the polls urging them to ignore the issues and vote on the basis of party loyalty. Once in office elected officials enriched themselves and the coffers of the parties by protecting the interests of the corporations that were their biggest financial backers. The defenders of the party system claimed, on the contrary, that it was precisely their organizing, mobilizing, and compromising efforts that held American democracy together. In their view high levels of voting occurred only because the parties were organized from the national level all the way down to the neighborhood voting precinct and therefore were able to get voters to the polls. Furthermore, party loyalty and platform compromises helped keep America from tearing itself apart along the economic and social divisions in the electorate. If supporters of the victorious party received jobs and contracts from the government, it was a small enough price to pay for a fully functioning democracy. And if, once in office, policymakers seemed to protect the interests of business, that was because economic development was good for all.[3]

This debate over the role of political parties had deep roots in American history (and has by no means been resolved even today), in part because parties were something of an unplanned afterthought in the American political system. In spite of their centrality in American politics, parties are not called for in the Constitution and did not even exist in anything like their contemporary form for the first thirty years or so after the Constitution was ratified in 1789. Parties were irrelevant to the Founding Fathers, who held to a sort of "amateur" theory of politics according to which men were called from their private affairs to take care of political business and then returned to their previous occupations. For them the ideal voter and officeholder were those willing to put their own interests aside and work for the broader good of the country. The idea of "professional" politicians who made their livings in and through politics would have horrified them. However, splits among the founders over political economy, constitutional interpretation, and foreign policy were institutionalized in party-like caucuses in Congress and the state legislatures during the first years after the ratification of the Constitution. As the states removed various barriers to universal white male suffrage in the early nineteenth century, the growing size of the electorate and the geographical expanse of the nation required more thoroughgoing organization for presidential elections, and in the 1820s and 1830s these party-like organizations began to act more like parties, funding newspapers, holding public caucuses and nomination conventions, and setting up their own internal organizations.[4]

As early as the presidential terms of Andrew Jackson (1828–1836), the parties began to support themselves by advocating the principle of "rotation in office," according to which appointed jobs at the various levels of government went to political supporters of the victorious party. This practice was christened the "spoils" system by one of Jackson's supporters who declared that he saw nothing wrong with the philosophy that "to the [political] victors belong the enemy's spoils of war." Throughout the rest of the nineteenth century most appointed government offices and contracts were distributed to supporters of the party in power. Furthermore, officeholders were usually expected to "contribute" some portion of their salaries (and holders of contracts some portion of their fees) to the party from which they received the patronage. In this way the spoils system—called more neutrally "patronage democracy"—both provided government employment for party supporters and financed some of the costs of the party's own employees and activities.[5]

As the century went on, the increasing scope, scale, and resources of corporations brought them into more contact with government and made them another source of funds for the parties. For example, as state legislatures chartered, invested in, regulated (or refused to regulate) railroads, the corporations found it useful to invest in the parties at the same time as politicians realized that they could enrich themselves and build their political campaign funds by charging corporations for their advice or votes. In this way the "spoils" of politics expanded beyond the jobs and contracts of government itself and into the private sector. As politicians became more dependent on these additions to their supplies of patronage it was not surprising that government policy became more protective of business interests.

Much of the contemporaneous discussion of the effects of this spoils system was focused on the American city because the cities and the parties had in effect grown up together. At the same time as the parties were emerging in the 1830s, the United States entered a hundred-year period of rapid urbanization based on the explosive population growth stimulated by immigration and industrialization. As the great metropolises like New York City grew, their political leadership faced formidable challenges as both party organizers and public policymakers. As politicians they needed to naturalize immigrants, register voters, and build political organizations, all the while attempting to exceed the same efforts of the other party. As elected policymakers the politicians were responsible for organizing the provision of government services and building local infrastructure. Most large cities introduced professional police and fire departments by the 1860s, began to build rudimentary school systems in the 1870s, and needed scores or even hundreds of clerks to transact routine business such as the sale of property or the conduct of elections. At the same time, cities contracted for other

services: purchasing water, gas, and later electric light, offering franchises for the provision of public transportation, and letting contracts for the construction of streets, public buildings, harbors, and parks.[6]

For local politicians already familiar with patronage in national politics, it seemed perfectly natural to use local patronage to build municipal political organizations. And in the larger cities there was a good deal of patronage to use. In New York City in the 1880s, for example, the victorious political party controlled about twelve thousand jobs on the public payroll and influenced about twice as many more on municipally franchised or contracted projects. Meanwhile the "contributions" to the party of those holding the jobs or contracts provided a large war chest of funds for conducting further political activities. The key to using this patronage for the political advantage of one party or individual was organization and political control. Politicians ambitious to lead organizations that controlled entire cities had to mobilize enough voters to elect the number of city legislators (e.g., councilmen, aldermen, etc.) necessary to control the making of city policy, especially the awarding of jobs and contracts. The urban political machines were simply the local political organizations that achieved this control, and their leaders were known as "bosses."[7]

Aspiring bosses frequently began their careers by securing control of their own wards and thus becoming "ward bosses" because city legislators were usually elected by wards. Often a would-be ward boss made his first run for office on the basis of popularity he achieved in other all-male activities, like neighborhood gangs or volunteer fire companies. Once in office, ward bosses tried to maintain their power by constructing a ward-level organization that recruited enough voters to elect them and the candidates they supported. Ward bosses usually appointed representatives—called precinct or election district captains—to work on their behalf at the block or neighborhood level. Together the boss and these assistants offered rewards and services to those who voted their way. The most prized reward was a patronage job or contract, of course, and the best of these went to the precinct captains themselves. Ward leaders also hosted neighborhood outings and athletic events, sponsored a variety of political and other organizations in the ward, and offered voters some help finding employment in the private sector and dealing with municipal bureaucracies or courts. The bosses—or more likely the precinct captains—sometimes also offered voters small loans or gifts of cash, food, or fuel, including the almost proverbial holiday turkey or wintertime bucket of coal.[8]

For those bosses who succeeded at the ward level of politics, the road to citywide power offered yet another set of challenges. At the city level the relevant actors were other ward leaders just as ambitious and strategically

skillful, and the goal was to build a coalition of ward bosses who would agree on one of themselves as the boss of the citywide organization. This boss would direct the efforts of the organization's members in the city legislature and allocate the patronage among the other ward bosses. The process of building a citywide organization with strong roots among the voters and control of the city's policymaking apparatus was slow, painstaking, and only rarely completed. Between 1870 and 1945 most—but not all—of the largest American cities were controlled to some extent by political machines, but machines that controlled entire cities—like Tammany Hall—were both rare and short-lived. The most common form of political machine was based in one or a few wards at most. The limits on machine building were to a great extent built into the system of patronage democracy.[9]

The first of these limits, ironically, was the supply of patronage resources itself, which was far from infinite. The forty thousand jobs influenced by politics in New York City in the 1880s, for example, would have helped only one percent of the work force. Significant expansions of the municipal work force had to be financed by increasing taxation, a politically dangerous thing to do even then. Far from responding uncritically to the needs of their voters, the bosses had to think constantly about how to use their limited supplies of rewards. They had to know which political competitors they must placate and which they could afford to snub; which supporters to reward with jobs and which to give only a bucket of coal; which request to respond to and which to refuse. Both the pressure to win elections to maintain control of patronage resources and the need to generate funds to finance other kinds of political rewards led some politicians into illegal activities. Close elections were sometimes "won" by stuffing ballot boxes with fraudulent ballots, hiring voters (called "repeaters") to vote as many times as possible on the same day, or driving the supporters of opponents away from the polls by physical force. Politicians sometimes raised funds for partisan activities by demanding kickbacks from contractors or fees from corporations or by accepting bribes to keep the police from enforcing laws against prostitution, gambling, or other illegal activities. And political bosses sometimes enriched themselves by forcing franchise holders to give them shares of stock in their companies or by buying real estate whose value they knew would soon increase because it was needed for municipal projects.

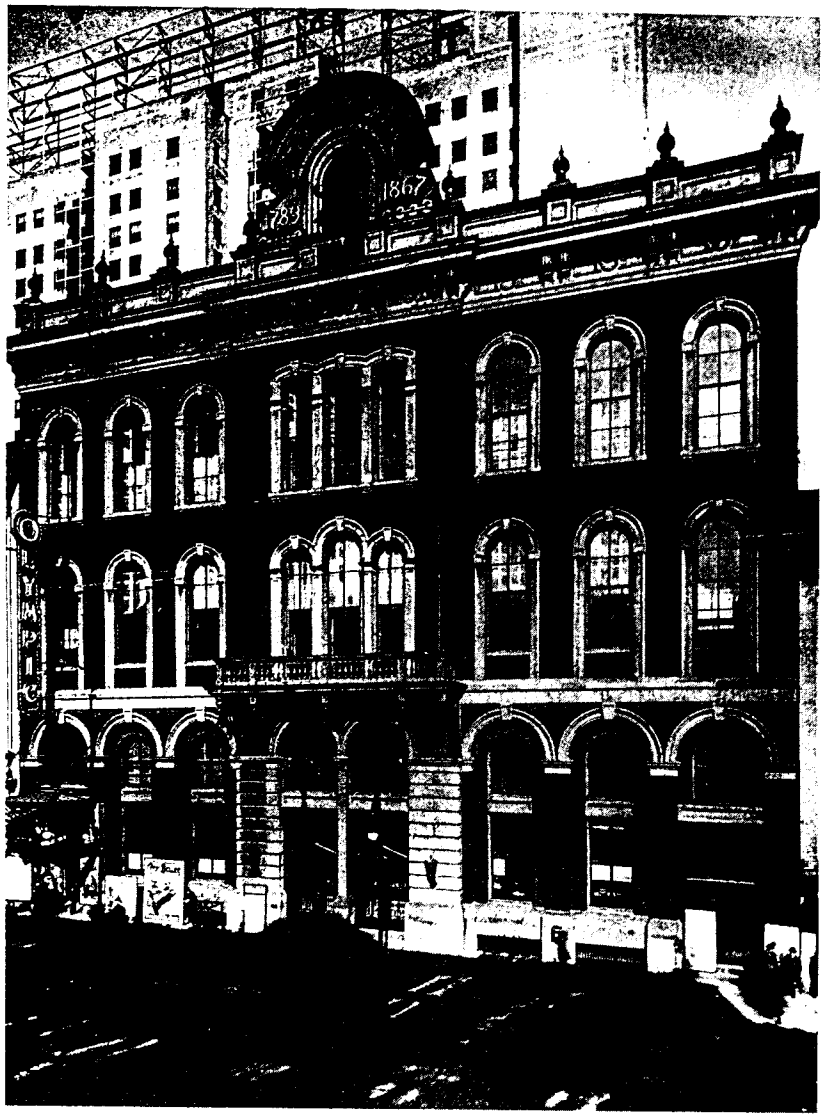
When these kinds of activities were exposed, they aggravated a second problem for the machine builders, the fragile political legitimacy of the system of patronage democracy itself. Although millions voted through the parties, the electorate was by no means immune to the attacks on the partisan system that began in the 1880s and rose to a fevered pitch by the

turn of the century. Critics of partisanship itself, advocates of workers, farmers, and women, partisans who didn't get what they thought they deserved in the way of patronage, ordinary citizens shocked by revelations of electoral fraud or political corruption all added their voices at various times to criticism of the system: The parties were too concerned with patronage or too closely aligned with business and therefore not devoted enough to solving the problems of the day. Meanwhile political reforms aimed at undermining partisanship and the political machines began to move through the federal and state governments. Civil service laws that took government employment out of the hands of the parties began to pass. State after state adopted the so-called Australian or secret ballot, which shifted the right to print and distribute ballots from the parties to state and local government. Closer government supervision of partisan primaries began to remove fraud and violence from these elections and to give opponents of machines the opportunity to challenge them within the parties themselves. Some advocates proposed woman suffrage as an antimachine reform on the grounds that women would not vote to sustain corruption. All of these ideological and structural attacks made it difficult for citywide machines to be built and, from time to time, also facilitated the ouster from power (temporarily at least) of even well-entrenched machines like Tammany.[10]

While they lasted, powerful political machines made the most of the possibilities for organization and political strategy within the system of patronage democracy. They were not necessarily the best or most efficient way to run cities, and they did not emerge simply in response to the needs of the urban electorate. What we see in the story of George Washington Plunkitt and Tammany Hall is, therefore, not the story of a natural outgrowth of urban conditions but the successful building of a political organization.

A LIFE IN THE MACHINE: PLUNKITT IN THE TAMMANY ORGANIZATION

There is no doubt where George Washington Plunkitt stood on the issues proposed by reformers. He opposed every one of these reforms and indeed had little love for reformers themselves either. For Plunkitt, civil service was "the biggest fraud of the age," stricter state supervision of primary elections was "dangerous," woman suffrage was "unamerican," and reformers didn't understand that politics was "a business." Plunkitt believed fully in the



Opened just in time for the Democratic National Convention of 1868, this building, on 14th Street between Irving Place and Third Avenue, was the home of the Tammany Society and the Tammany Democracy until 1928.

system of patronage democracy; in fact, he had made a career out of it in the most famous and best-organized political machine in the country, and he had no use for changes that might undermine it. He first ran for office in 1866 when he was twenty-four years old, and he held or was running for some kind of political position for the next forty years, up to and including 1905, the year *Plunkitt of Tammany Hall* was published.

Plunkitt was born in New York City in 1842 in an area of the upper West Side of Manhattan that was probably a collection of shacks built by Irish squatters. The area was later incorporated into Central Park at about West 84th Street. Although he never mentioned his family in public, the 1850 census found him living with his parents, Patrick and Sarah Plunket (he would later change the spelling of his last name), his twin brother, David, and a brother three years younger named Dan. His parents were both born in Ireland, neither could read, and his father worked as a laborer. In spite of their own lack of education and their probably difficult economic circumstances, the Plunkets had both George and David in school that year. George attended public schools for about five years, from age six to eleven, and then he began driving horse carts for construction projects in his neighborhood. He was later apprenticed to a brush maker and then to a butcher. By 1865 he owned his own butcher shop in the Washington Market, a sprawling collection of shops located along the Hudson River between Fulton and Vesey streets in lower Manhattan that was one of the main places New Yorkers purchased their meat, fish, and produce. Around 1876 he sold the shop and went into contracting and real estate investment on the middle and upper West Side of Manhattan. Some accounts say that he was involved in the building of docks and piers along the Hudson River there. He later became a director of the Riverside Bank and claimed to have become a millionaire through these activities. At some point he was married and had one child, although he rarely spoke of this family either.[11]

Plunkitt's public political career began with an unsuccessful run for the New York State Assembly in 1866. He won the same position in 1868 and was reelected in 1869 and 1870. While still serving in the state legislature, he was elected in 1870 to the first of four one-year terms as a New York City alderman. He would later claim the distinction of having held four offices simultaneously in the early 1870s—assemblyman, county supervisor, alderman, and police magistrate—and he was also a deputy commissioner of street cleaning for six years in that decade. First elected to the New York State Senate in 1883, he served until he was defeated for renomination in 1887. He was elected again to the Senate in 1891 but stepped down for reasons of health in 1893. Reelected to the Senate in 1899, he served there until he was defeated in 1904. Plunkitt never explained why he first went into politics, but he never forgot why he lost his first race and won his

second. In his first unsuccessful race in 1866 he ran without the endorsement of Tammany Hall; in the second he ran with it. For the rest of his life Plunkitt would be a Tammany Hall candidate.

For readers of *Plunkitt of Tammany Hall* today, "Tammany Hall" itself may be the most confusing thing about the book. In Plunkitt's day Tammany Hall meant two different things. One was a building called Tammany Hall that was owned by the Tammany Society or Columbian Order, a men's benevolent organization like today's Masons or Knights of Columbus. The other Tammany Hall was a faction of the New York City Democratic party that rented its headquarters and meeting space in the Tammany Hall building from the Tammany Society. This was the Tammany Hall political machine. Plunkitt belonged to both the benevolent society and the political party and rose to positions of responsibility in each. For our purposes, we will call the political party faction the Tammany Democracy and the benevolent organization the Tammany Society.[12]

In Plunkitt's day the Democratic party of New York City was divided into a number of competing factions based on such things as social class, ethnicity, geography, and political positions on issues. These factions—frequently named after the halls where they met—battled for control of party nominations for political office and the distribution of patronage following a political victory. The Tammany Hall faction was dominated by the Irish, and most of its leadership worked full time in politics. By the turn of the century Tammany Hall had become the most powerful faction, and until the 1930s it was almost synonymous with the Democratic party in the city.[13]

Plunkitt entered the Tammany Democracy when it was being run by the infamous "Boss" William Marcy Tweed. Tweed set the stereotype for the powerful, extravagant, and corrupt boss that the Tammany Democracy spent the rest of the century trying to live down. Tweed had entered politics after achieving popularity in the city's volunteer fire companies. In succession he was elected city alderman and United States congressman. In 1857 he was elected to a newly created bipartisan board of supervisors for the county of New York (then including only the city), which had been set up by the state to control the city's administration. It was this board that in 1858 authorized spending $250,000 for a new courthouse (later called the Tweed courthouse) that was finally finished in 1872 at a cost of $12.5 million. Tweed used kickbacks from this project and funds from wealthy supporters both to enrich himself and to support his bid for political power. By the late 1860s he was simultaneously county supervisor, superintendent of public works, state senator, chairman of the Tammany Democracy, and head of the Tammany Society. With these positions he was able to arrange to have his supporters elected or appointed mayor and city controller as well as to propose bills in the state legislature to help further consolidate his power. He

lived flamboyantly, flaunting his newfound wealth and hobnobbing with the elite of New York City. In 1871 his enemies released records of his financial depredations to the *New York Times*. As a result of this exposure Tweed was arrested; after a series of legal maneuvers and a dramatic escape, he died in prison in 1878.[14]

We do not know exactly what Plunkitt thought of Tweed. It is clear that in the early 1870s, Plunkitt too was following the pattern of multiple officeholding that Tweed pioneered. But by 1870 Plunkitt was a member of an anti-Tweed faction in Tammany called the Young Democracy, and in a climactic series of votes in the state legislature by which Tweed further consolidated his power, Plunkitt voted against the boss. To Tweed's enemies within Tammany, the boss failed in two ways. First, he placed himself above the organization both in his one-man rule and in his undisciplined personal behavior which drew negative attention to Tammany. Second, he failed to build an organization with strong political roots. Tweed's organization is known as a "ring" (not a machine) because it really involved only cooperation and cover-up among Tweed and a handful of his supporters who held critical municipal offices.[15]

After the downfall of Tweed the next three bosses of the Tammany Democracy—"Honest" John Kelly (1874–1886), Richard Croker (1886–1901), and Charles Francis Murphy (1903–1924)—worked to transform it into a disciplined and hierarchical organization in which, as an admirer put it, the leader could "cast 110,000 votes as easily as his own." These votes would allow the Tammany Democracy to triumph over its enemies within the Democratic party by nominating the candidates it chose for the party's state and local primaries and then to elect those candidates over their Republican or other opponents in the general elections. Those officials would then be expected to appoint Tammany supporters to positions at their disposal and to make policy favorable to Tammany's interests.[16]

The Tammany organization in the era after Tweed can best be thought of as a pyramid. At the apex was the boss. At the next level down was the executive committee, made up of the thirty or so elected leaders of the Tammany Democracy in the city's state Assembly districts. In cooperation with the boss, the executive committee made decisions for the whole organization at the same time as its members organized Tammany activities in their own districts and maintained district Tammany clubhouses. From 1880 until 1905 Plunkitt was a member of this committee because he was the leader of one of the three Assembly districts that made up his state senatorial district. The organization's next level down was the General Committee, six to seven thousand members strong. This group included the election district captains and their assistants, who worked on Tammany's behalf at the block and neighborhood level, and it was also open to anyone else willing to pay

the five-dollar annual membership fee in hopes of receiving preference for patronage jobs. Plunkitt appointed more than seventy election district captains in his district and they in turn appointed their own assistants. The district captains informed the district leader of the political situation in their neighborhoods and helped to get out the primary and general election vote. Not surprisingly, these men expected to receive patronage jobs or other opportunities in return for their services.[17]

At the very bottom of this pyramid were the voters, with whom Tammany had a complicated relationship. The machine needed votes to retain political power, of course, but it existed to shape and channel those votes. Luckily for the machine, thousands of men already voted for the Democratic party and worked on behalf of the Tammany Democracy out of a loyalty based on the party's ideology, stance on issues, or leadership. Some saw the Democratic party as the party of the common person and associated the Republicans with big business, an impression confirmed by the support of the Republicans for a high protective tariff. Some opposed the Republican-sponsored policies for reconstructing the South after the Civil War and voted Democratic because they saw the Republicans as too protective of black people. Many naturalized immigrant voters supported Tammany because its leadership was composed of Irish and German immigrants like themselves. All Tammany had to do was get these voters to the polls. For those who needed further inducement, both Croker and Plunkitt held out the possibility of a share in the spoils that went to the victorious party, although it is not clear how much of this patronage remained after it had trickled down to the electorate through the other levels of the organization. In an article published in 1892, for example, Croker declared that Tammany "stands by its friends" and that if the result was that "all the employees of the city government from the Mayor to the porter who makes the fire in his office" should be members of the Tammany organization, "this would not be to their discredit." Both Croker and Plunkitt genuinely believed that voters wanted something concrete and material (or at least the prospect of the same) out of politics. It was no coincidence, however, that men whose jobs depended on political victory would work very hard for the political organization that appointed them.[18]

LIFE IN THE DISTRICT

The Assembly district that Plunkitt led for Tammany was one in which the promise of a job could mean a great deal because it was located in an area of Manhattan called "a hotbed of unemployment" by investigators writing after the turn of the twentieth century. Although the boundaries of his district shifted from time to time because of legislative reapportionment,

from the 1860s until his death in 1924 Plunkitt lived within the area bounded by West 51st Street on the north, West 49th Street on the south, Eighth Avenue on the east, and the Hudson River on the west. This was at the northern end of the middle West Side, a mixed residential and industrial area that extended roughly from 34th to 54th Street between Eighth Avenue and the Hudson River. Known more popularly as "Hell's Kitchen," this area was famous for its concentration of Irish immigrants, brawling street gangs, and colorful personalities from all walks of life, including crime and sports. Beneath this colorful image, however, its overwhelmingly immigrant population struggled to carve out a life of working-class respectability in the midst of underemployment and inadequate tenement housing.[19]

Industries moved into the middle West Side in the years after the Civil War because of its cheap land and its proximity to the river, and as the century went on the area became home to carpet and twine factories, slaughterhouses, iron and steel foundries, breweries, piano works, gas works, and railroad yards. By 1910 the three hundred industrial establishments in this area employed about eleven thousand workers (roughly 80 percent of them men), the largest employers being in piano manufacturing, printing, and metalwork. But the most highly skilled workers in these plants did not live in the area, and the largest number of middle West Side residents worked in lower-paying and more casual jobs. For men living in the area, the most numerous occupations were teamster, building trades worker, laborer, and longshoreman; most women did "day work" (cleaning, ironing, and so on in private homes), public cleaning, and laundry or hotel work.[20]

By all indications, much of the district was hardworking but underemployed. Detailed employment histories of area residents revealed working careers among both men and women that were interrupted by the irregularities of employment, illness, and injury. Few men were able to support their families unassisted and so a large percentage of married women with children worked. Thirty percent of the children at the 53rd Street public school and almost 40 percent at the 38th Street school lived with mothers who worked outside the home at a time when the national rate of employment among married women with children was about 4 percent. Even in families where both parents worked, however, average incomes hovered around a minimal subsistence level. In part for this reason, most of the district's population lived in three-to-five-story tenements housing from six to twenty families each.[21]

In spite of its poverty, the middle West Side was no cultural wasteland. There was, to begin with, remarkable cultural homogeneity in the area because it was composed overwhelmingly of Catholic immigrants and their children. In 1900 the largest ethnic groups in the area—together accounting

for more than 60 percent of its residents—were the Irish and the Germans, who had begun arriving in the mid-nineteenth century. Because the latter were from the Catholic regions of southern Germany, intermarriage between the two groups was high. These immigrant groups now looked disparagingly on the more recently arrived Italians and Poles, calling them "foreigners." One reason for this attitude was a surprisingly high rate of permanence in the area among its residents. At a time when upwards of 60 percent of some urban neighborhoods would turn over every ten years, as many as 50 to 60 percent of residents of the middle West Side surveyed in 1910 had lived in the area for twenty years or more, and a good many of these had actually been born in the district.[22]

Eighth Avenue was the middle-class "main street" of this area, the place where those with the means and need caught the streetcars for downtown Manhattan, shopped, or socialized. Observers called this street the "Broadway and Fifth Avenue" of the middle West Side. A walk westward traversed the social geography of the district. Between Eighth and Ninth avenues the area's middle class lived in spacious flats or multistory, single-family dwellings. The tenements began west of Ninth Avenue, and the industrial works crowded out residential areas between Eleventh Avenue and the river. The elevated railway (the El) ran above Ninth Avenue, and the New York Central Railroad went up the middle of Eleventh Avenue beginning at 30th Street, so the areas around these avenues took on an air of dirt, noise, and danger. The commercial heart of the working-class area was Ninth and Tenth avenues, where the residents of the tenements went about their shopping and socializing. On Saturday nights pushcart vendors set up a street market known as "Paddy's Market" under the El along Ninth Avenue.[23]

The similarities between Plunkitt's life and those of his constituents were important political assets for him. Because he was the son of Irish immigrants, a longtime resident of the area, and a practicing Roman Catholic, he shared the ethnicity and permanence of many and the religion of most of his neighbors. These attributes alone were sufficient to secure the votes of many. The permanence that he shared with many district residents was a double advantage because it gave him many years to get to know the voters and also ensured that his favors for them would not be wasted. Permanent residents would repeatedly repay favors at the polls and continue to tell the stories of the boss's generosity (or their influence or "pull" with him) long after.[24]

At the same time, however, the differences between his life and theirs were potential political liabilities and as time went on the economic and social distance between Plunkitt and many of his constituents seemed to grow. The house to which he moved in the 1890s (and where he lived until

his death) was a multistory, single-family townhouse (with room for the maid he hired) in the best part of the district, at 323 West 51st Street, between Eighth and Ninth avenues. His political headquarters, Washington Hall, was located not in the grimy working-class area of the district but at 781 Eighth Avenue on the area's "Broadway and Fifth Avenue." In all the accounts of Plunkitt's life after 1880—his own or others—there is not a single mention of him actually going to work as a contractor or, for that matter, as anything other than a ward boss.[25]

While Plunkitt's constituents trudged off to work on the docks on the Hudson if they were male or to scrub the steps of a Broadway theater if they were female, his day began with reading the newspapers at home. That done, it was off to the neighborhood barber for a shave. All his life Plunkitt was known to be something of a dandy, proud in particular of his whiskers, which went from a full beard to the long muttonchop sideburns known as dundrearies to just a mustache. He usually wore a pearl gray homburg and one account said he dressed more like a dancing master than a man with contracts for work on the docks. Whiskers tended to, Plunkitt usually took the streetcar downtown to conduct business. One stop was his "informal headquarters" at Graziano's bootblack stand in the old county courthouse, where he would hold forth on one of the shoe shine chairs. Another frequent stop was at Tammany Hall itself, which was on 14th Street between Irving Place and Third Avenue. These trips concluded, he returned to the district where he could be found at Washington Hall or nearby most afternoons and evenings.[26]

The reason Plunkitt sold his butcher shop around 1876 was that he had found he could make a living in and through politics. Not surprisingly, therefore, his career was marked by controversy. In 1872 he was indicted but never tried for selling street railway franchises as an alderman. In the 1880s and 1890s he was alleged to be on the payroll of the New York Central Railroad while he was serving in the state legislature. The newspapers charged that he had deals with the city Department of Streets, which rented properties from him at high rates, with the Dock Department, from which he received construction contracts, and with the city assessor, who underassessed his properties to reduce his taxes. In 1905 other politicians claimed that Plunkitt sold nominations for office over which he had control. In spite of these complaints, however, by the turn of the century Plunkitt was both a powerful politician and, he claimed, a millionaire.[27]

Plunkitt was undoubtedly a good organization man. He served loyally as a district leader under three different Tammany bosses and held a variety of positions in the Tammany hierarchy. He was often the chairman of the Tammany Democracy's election committee, which was responsible for interpreting election law to other party members, and he was always chairman

of the Tammany transportation committee, which arranged the transportation of delegates to the state and national conventions of the Democratic party. Another sign of the respect in which he was held by his peers was his leadership roles in the Tammany Society, a kind of "old boys club" for prominent Democrats complete with secret rituals, regalia, passwords, and signs. The organization was founded in 1789 and named after a legendary Indian chief of the Delaware tribe, Tammanend. Its rituals combined patriotic and pseudo-Indian themes. Internally, for example, it was divided into thirteen tribes (the number of original states) ruled by sachems or chiefs. These sachems named a Grand Sachem who ran the organization with them. In the 1860s Boss Tweed consolidated his power by being elected both head of the Tammany Democracy and Grand Sachem of the Tammany Society, and from then on there was a close link between the leadership of the benevolent organization and that of the party faction. The Tammany Society was a much more exclusive organization than the Tammany Democracy. From its founding until 1926, only about six thousand men were invited to join the society, a process that required nomination of the new member by one of the old members and a vote on the nomination at three successive meetings. Plunkitt was initiated into the society in 1882, and in 1897 he was elected to a one-year term as a sachem. He was elected a sachem again in 1900 and remained one until his death. In 1902 he was elected Father of the Council of Sachems, in which capacity he conducted the meetings of the council; he also held that position until his death.[28]

As Plunkitt traveled from Washington Hall to Tammany Hall, he moved among men remarkably like himself. Many of the other leaders of the Tammany Democracy had similar careers, and a good number of them also claimed to be millionaires and were proud of it. These men were linked by a history of social and political struggle in the past and cultural and political values in the present. There was, in fact, exceptional overlap in membership, organization, framework, and guiding philosophy among the three organizations that claimed and rewarded Plunkitt's allegiance. The Roman Catholic Church, Tammany Democracy, and Tammany Society were all dominated by Irish immigrants and their children in membership and leadership; their leadership was exclusively male; they were all organized hierarchically, with authority designed to flow from the top down; and the leadership of each was convinced that there was no "salvation," either religious or political, outside of its organization.[29]

The Irish-American leaders of the church, the bosses of the Tammany Democracy, and the sachems of the Tammany Society had all known poverty and marginality, but not for some time. As they looked around in the 1880s and 1890s they saw themselves as part of a growing middle-class community that had made its way by sticking together and building organi-

zations that allowed them to carve a niche for themselves within the existing economic and political structures. While these leaders stood shoulder to shoulder in defense of their immigrant membership, they also stood in firm opposition to popular political movements they did not control, such as the labor-backed New York mayoral campaign of Henry George in 1886, the populist movement in the 1890s, and the socialist movement after the turn of the century. These men were all Democrats, but not democrats; the idea of a kind of grassroots democracy was totally foreign to them because that way led to both religious apostasy and ticket-splitting, the greatest sins, respectively, to the church and the party.[30]

As Plunkitt moved up the ranks of Tammany, he walked a fine line in his district between being a local boy who made good and a politician who forgot his roots. The difference came down to three things: service, generosity, and the common touch in both reputation and reality. The social surveys of the area claimed that the "average opinion" of the neighborhood was represented in the Irish-American mothers, described as "rough and ready Irish women who give themselves no airs and 'don't pretend to be better than the people they was raised with.' " To the husbands of women like these (who actually did the voting) Plunkitt was entitled to his millions—however gotten—as long as he worked hard on their behalf, shared some of his wealth, and didn't put on airs. He clearly understood all this, claiming in one conversation with Riordon that "nobody ever saw me putting on any style" and noting in another that there was an implicit contract between boss and ward according to which the boss was owed support as long as he "hustles around and gets all the jobs possible for his constituents."[31]

Luckily for Plunkitt, relatively small amounts of money from him could have a significant impact on his reputation for generosity in his district in areas other than employment. Average rents in the tenement areas ranged from $115 to $165 per year, so $10 could cover a month's rent for those in the poorest housing. The fine for a juvenile offense might be $3. These were significant sums for the poorest families in the district, some of whom might bring in only $6 or $7 a week, although they were pocket change for a generous district leader who claimed to be a millionaire.[32]

While it was absolutely crucial for Plunkitt to claim that he was constantly working on behalf of his district, there is some evidence to the contrary in surveys of working women and juvenile delinquents in the middle West Side conducted in 1910. A study of 370 working mothers who were among the most needy and most permanent residents of the area revealed that not a single one of them or their husbands had ever received a job—or anything else—from a boss. A similar study of 183 families of juvenile delinquents found that only two had ever received help from a boss

or precinct captain when their children got in trouble with the law. And in one of these cases the boss paid the fine of one boy and left the other in jail because his parents did not have enough pull with the boss. Not all of these people lived in Plunkitt's Assembly district, but the question of Plunkitt's generosity would continue to be an issue among both reformers and his enemies within Tammany.[33]

GEORGE W. PLUNKITT,
Sachem.

By the turn of the twentieth century this photograph of Plunkitt—portraying him as handsome, forthright, and upstanding—was the one that he supplied to publications requesting a portrait.

THE BATTLE OVER THE MEANING OF THE BOSS

Plunkitt's skills were warmly admired in the Tammany machine and just as warmly denounced by political reformers. In one of its frequent portrayals of the leaders of the Tammany Democracy, *The Tammany Times,* the machine's official newspaper, declared in 1895 that Plunkitt was "one of nature's noblemen" who had "devoted the best portion of his life to the interests of his constituents." According to this account, "the name of George W. Plunkitt stands as a guarantee of good faith." Writing at almost the same time, political reformer and New York *Evening Post* editor E. L. Godkin declared that Plunkitt was "the greatest hustler in Tammany Hall," with a reputation as a state senator in Albany that was "most unsavory."[34]

While the machine system might work for Plunkitt and at least some of his constituents, there was strong agreement among the generation of reformers and journalists such as British author James Bryce, Godkin, or New York reform mayor Seth Low that it was no way to run a city. Bryce's classic analysis of American political institutions, *The American Commonwealth* (1888), declared that American city government was the "one conspicuous failure of the United States" because of its domination by corrupt political machines like the Tammany Democracy. Godkin argued that Tammany had long since ceased to be a political organization—"that is, an association for the spread of any set of particular opinions or for producing cooperation in anything that could be called political agitation"—and was now simply "an organization of clever adventurers, most of them in some degree criminal, for the control of the ignorant and viscous vote of the city in an attack on the property of the taxpayers." In part because of its makeup and intentions, Tammany stayed in power "not through its own strength, but through the supineness, indifference, and optimism of the rest of the community."[35]

Stimulated in part by Bryce's work and in part by his own sense of a growing complacency about Tammany in New York and the nation, Godkin decided to declare journalistic war on Tammany in the 1890s. Believing that the three things a Tammany leader hated most were "the penitentiary, honest industry, and biography," he opened his campaign with the "Tammany Biographies," a set of biographies of the Tammany leaders that first appeared in 1890 and was reprinted as a pamphlet throughout the decade. Summarizing the backgrounds of the current twenty-eight members of the Tammany executive committee, Godkin claimed that all were "professional politicians," that twenty-five of them were current or former officeholders, nine were current or former liquor dealers, nine current or former gamblers

or owners of gambling houses, seven former "pugilists" or "toughs," and so on. Not on the list, Godkin noted, was "a single man who owes his eminence to anything save his skill in Tammany politics." According to Godkin's account, Plunkitt was in politics "as a business," had "no hesitation in using his position for his private gain," and was a "thoroughly bad Senator."[36]

For a man like Godkin, the machines were the temporary result of political institutional conditions and of the lies and intimidation of unscrupulous politicians who were subverting the American political process. He was, therefore, a strong supporter of reforms such as state supervision of primary elections, civil service, and the election to office of men of the "better sort" (that is, upper middle class like himself). His journalistic exposure of the men and methods of Tammany was designed specifically to arouse the better sort to take action toward removing Tammany from power, and it did have an effect. Godkin's campaigns, combined with a state investigation that revealed massive political corruption within the police force, stimulated the growth of reform organizations in the 1890s and resulted in the election of mayors William L. Strong in 1894 and Seth Low in 1901, both of whom vowed to drive Tammany and its ways out of city government. But neither of these reform mayors was reelected.[37]

Realizing the potential power of these attacks, Tammany boss Richard Croker responded by starting an official weekly newspaper for the machine in 1892 called *The Tammany Times* and by authorizing a new history of Tammany Hall that was first serialized in *The Tammany Times* and then published as a book in 1901. Week after week the *Times* stressed the machine's link with the more distinguished national leaders of the Democratic party and described the leaders of Tammany in a way diametrically opposed to that of Godkin. Photos of prominent Democrats like Grover Cleveland, William Jennings Bryan, and Woodrow Wilson frequently appeared on the front page of the *Times,* and inside the leaders of Tammany were described in glowing terms as "manly" men of broad vision and democratic commitment. According to the *Times* Croker, for example, owed his popularity to "his manly spirit, fixed resolve, indomitable will and his unswerving honesty of purpose in his protective and aggressive warfare for the people's rights." And Plunkitt was described as "an excellent debater, an argumentative and forcible speaker, carrying with him that earnestness which is almost certain of conviction . . . and a personal bearing to all with whom he comes in contact calculated to rally strong support." The theme of the new history of Tammany was that there had been a blot of corruption during the days of the notorious Tweed but that Tammany had purified itself and thus was now the best vehicle for reform in New York City.[38]

Croker reiterated these themes in many interviews he granted to journalists. The most influential interview was conducted by William T. Stead and published in the London *Review of Reviews* in October 1897. Stead began by asking Croker whether there was anything in his political career that he regretted having done. Croker's solemn answer was "No sir. Not one. For I have done only good all my life." The proof of his good deeds, according to Croker, was the persistence of Tammany Hall itself. Because "those things that are rotten do not last," he claimed, Tammany could not have had the power it had for as long as it had if it had been built on dishonesty or corruption. It survived because its brand of politics was more in conformity with human nature and because of the various services it provided to New York society. According to Croker, a "strong effective party machine" was "essential to the safe working of popular institutions," and the much derided "spoils system" was the only way to motivate and guarantee people's participation in political affairs. Furthermore, for the sake of winning elections Tammany performed an important service by Americanizing immigrants. While there was not a reformer in New York City who would "shake hands with" the thousands of foreigners arriving in the city, Croker asserted, Tammany looked after the immigrants "for the sake of their vote, graft[ed] them upon the Republic, [made] citizens of them in short."[39]

Croker's themes of his own frankness and the machine's kindness quickly made their way into the journalistic coverage of the Tammany Democracy beginning with Hartley Davis's frankly admiring portrait, "Tammany Hall, the Most Perfect Political Organization in the World," in *Munsey's* magazine in October 1900 and continuing in 1901 in William Allen White's "Croker" in the February *McClure's* magazine and in Alfred Henry Lewis's biography *Richard Croker* published in May. Each of these works cited the Stead interview with Croker, praised Croker for his frank avowal of Tammany's desire for the spoils of office, and rooted the power and persistence of the machine in the services it provided to the voters. Davis claimed that while Tammany politicians were motivated by "no patriotic concern" and were in politics "for what there was in it," they nonetheless did "wonderful work" for their constituents. In "relieving distress, in providing for daily wants, in furthering ambitions, in helping men out of their troubles and in assisting them to get on in the world," he wrote, Tammany did "more for the daily personal comfort, happiness, and well being of the average tenement dweller than all the charitable and philanthropic institutions in New York." In part on this basis White flatly contradicted Godkin, arguing that Tammany persisted "by its virtues and in spite of its vices." Lewis and White also added an important secondary theme to the discussion by crediting Tammany's kindness and political socialization with preventing radicalism from

taking root among the immigrants. "Take away the steel hoops of Tammany from the social dynamite, and let it go kicking around under the feet of any cheap agitator who may come by with his head in the clouds, and then look out for fireworks," White wrote, while Lewis similarly extolled the machine's "suppressive influence."[40]

In these political and journalistic battles between bosses and reformers it was not always clear who, if anyone, spoke for the interests of the urban population itself. Calls for electoral reform, civil service, an end to corruption, or government by the better sort surely did little to alleviate the immediate needs of those in the city who faced unemployment, poor housing, and poverty. But political machines like Tammany clearly wanted to shape, rather than be shaped by, the needs of the voters, some bosses undoubtedly worked harder for themselves than for their constituents, and there was no evidence other than the testimony of the bosses themselves for Tammany's frankness and kindness.

This concern for who was standing with and responding to the needs of the urban population motivated two of the most famous evaluations of the machine and reform ever written: "Why the Ward Boss Rules," by the social worker and reformer Jane Addams, and "New York: Good Government in Danger," by the muckraking journalist Lincoln Steffens. The influence of these articles stemmed from the backgrounds and the analyses of the authors. Both Addams and Steffens were well-known opponents of political corruption and both wrote about machines as part of their broader effort to describe a new kind of urban reform politics, one concerned less with the structure or personnel of government and more with its scope. They did not share the faith of men like Godkin and Bryce in civil service, ballot or primary reform, or government by the "better sort." For them a "reformed" government was one that met the human needs of its constituents.[41]

Jane Addams had come to Chicago in 1889 and opened Hull House, a social settlement house that offered help to the immigrants and the poor in Chicago's nineteenth ward. She became famous in Chicago for, among other things, her strenuous criticism of the corruption and malfeasance of Johnny Powers, the alderman from and political boss of the ward in which Hull House was located. With the help of the Chicago Municipal Voters' League, Addams organized unsuccessful political campaigns against Powers in 1896 and 1898. Because she lived among those whom bosses and reformers claimed to help and because she had worked so hard against a ward boss, her views were given wide legitimacy. "Why the Ward Boss Rules" caused a sensation because its startling argument was the same as Croker's—that ward bosses ruled not through faulty institutions, the ignorance of foreigners, or the indifference of the "better sort" (as Bryce or Godkin might have

argued) but because they practiced "simple kindness" in the wards day in and day out. According to Addams, the desperate situation of the urban poor gave them many opportunities to practice "simple kindness" to one another and thereby to develop an ethical standard for which apparent kindness was the test. To these "simple" people, the corrupt boss, unlike the hectoring reformer, practiced the kindness that the immigrant poor admired. The kindly alderman stayed in office because he bailed out his constituents, found them jobs, paid the rent for those too poor to do so themselves, attended weddings, christenings, and funerals, got railroad passes for those needing to travel, bought "tickets galore" for benefit entertainments, and provided prizes and spent dramatically at the neighborhood bazaars.[42]

Addams's article said nothing about her long campaign against her own local boss, and she discussed political corruption only briefly. She emphasized the kindness of the boss in part because her article was also designed to send a message to other reformers. "If we discover that men of low ideals and corrupt practice are forming popular political standards simply because such men stand by and for and with the people," she wrote, "then nothing remains but to obtain a like sense of identification before we can hope to modify ethical standards."

The question of municipal political ethics was also much on the mind of Lincoln Steffens as he traveled around the country surveying the state of local politics in 1902. Steffens had come to New York in 1892 and begun working as a reporter for the New York *Evening Post* that year, covering reform campaigns against Tammany, among other things. He left the *Post* in 1897 to become city editor of the New York *Commercial Advertiser,* and he joined *McClure's* magazine in 1901. In October 1902 Steffens published in *McClure's* the first of what would be seven articles on the state of corruption in municipal politics in America. His report on New York City was the last of the series, published in November 1903. These articles were collected and published together as the book *The Shame of the Cities* in 1904.[43]

The New York article was actually an attempt to assess the prospects for the continuation of the reform surge that had elected Seth Low to the mayoralty in 1901, and Steffens argued, like Addams, that reformers had something to learn from the techniques of machine politicians. According to Steffens the problem with the New York reform movement was that it was businesslike but not democratic; Mayor Seth Low applied excellent principles to the management of municipal government but was unable to build a democratic political movement to support reform. Steffens saw a better understanding of "practical" democratic politics in the Tammany Democracy. Tammany bosses made no bones about their corruption but

ruled through the suffrage of the people because they spread the fruits of their corruption widely. In a manner strikingly similar to that of Addams, Davis, and the others, Steffens provided a long list of the kindnesses of the ward bosses and argued that "Tammany kindness was real kindness and went far" and its power, "gathered up cheaply like garbage in the districts," was passed on through the organization to the boss. It was "living government, extra-legal, but very actual," and Tammany was, therefore, the most democratic of all the corrupt urban political organizations Steffens had studied.[44]

However, Steffens's article also contained a scathing attack on the way Tammany financed its kindness through corrupt deals that brought in "untold millions of dollars a year." Steffens's catalog of this corruption was long and detailed, and it mentioned bribes to the bosses and the police from saloons and houses of gambling and prostitution, kickbacks on public works, profiting on inside information about public improvements, and forcing corporations to allow Tammany leaders to buy stock. Considering all these sources of wealth Steffens thought it was no wonder that the members of the Tammany executive committee were wealthy, but as they grew wealthy ward bosses were likely to become cruel. "Their charity is real, at first. But they sell out their own people," Steffens wrote. "They do give them coal and help them in their private troubles, but, as they grow rich and powerful, the kindness goes out of the charity and they not only collect at their saloons or in rents—cash for their 'goodness'; they not only ruin fathers and sons and cause the troubles they relieve; they sacrifice the children in the schools; let the Health Department neglect the tenements, and, worst of all, plant vice in the neighborhood and in the homes of the poor." This, Steffens argued, was bad politics and in the end it would lead to Tammany's downfall if reformers could build a political movement that was both honest and committed to practical democratic politics.

Both Addams and Steffens wrote to offer hope to reformers. The seemingly omnipotent political machines had an Achilles' heel in their corruption, and reformers could take advantage of this weakness if they would propose that government itself develop social welfare–type programs to meet the real human needs of urban citizens. To make this point they emphasized—perhaps overemphasized—the "kindnesses" of the bosses and thus lent their stamp of approval to the ongoing revision of the image of the boss. By 1903 the journalistic portrayal of the machine had shifted from Godkin's band of "clever adventurers" to a group of frank, practical, kind (but unfortunately corrupt) do-gooders. The time was ripe for the transformation of George Washington Plunkitt into *Plunkitt of Tammany Hall.*

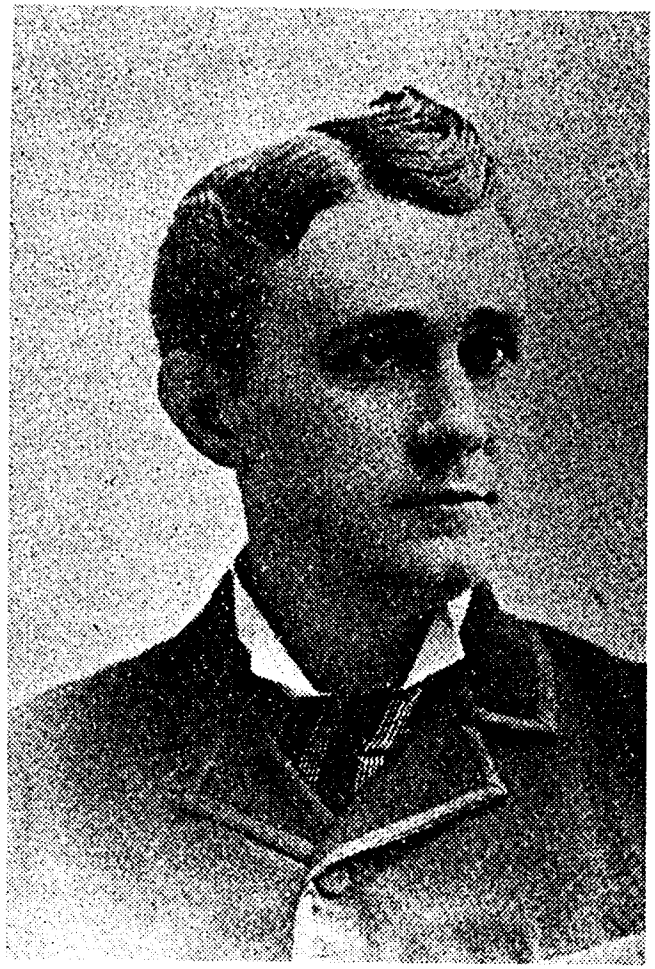
Steffens. While Godkin's anti-Tammany fulminations were filling the editorial page, Riordon and Steffens worked together as reporters from 1892 to 1897, when there were only six full-time reporters on the paper's staff. It is quite likely that Steffens learned some things about the inner workings of Tammany from Riordon, and Riordon would later return the favor by focusing portions of *Plunkitt of Tammany Hall* on Steffens's book *The Shame of the Cities*.

Born in Richmond, Virginia, in 1861, Riordon, like Plunkitt, was an Irish-American and a Roman Catholic. Indeed, Riordon began studies at a seminary to become a Catholic priest but left to write for newspapers in Washington, D.C. He came to New York in 1886 and was a political reporter for the *Commercial Advertiser* for five years before joining the *Evening Post,* where he worked until his death in 1909. Riordon spent his years at the *Post* covering local politics except during 1899, when he covered the state legislature in Albany. He was also the New York correspondent for the *Boston Transcript.*[45]

Riordon was not just one of the hundreds of journalists in New York in his time, but one of the best known. He enjoyed high contemporary journalistic status by virtue of his selection by the *Post* to cover local politics. This beat was reserved for star reporters at the turn of the century. But in his 1922 history of the *Post,* Allen Nevins wrote that Riordon also was thought to be one of the "three most remarkable" reporters on the *Post* in the 1890s (Lincoln Steffens was one of the others). According to Nevins, who was a member of the editorial board of the *Post* when he wrote, Riordon "never failed to bring home news; if there was nothing in the assignment he went to cover, he would get a story as good or better somewhere else." Therefore, Riordon could always be counted on "to have something worthwhile up his sleeve" when the *Post* needed to fill the paper.[46]

Riordon undoubtedly got some of these stories at Tammany Hall, where he was both liked and respected. When he died, the *New York Times* noted that he was "closely identified with Tammany Hall affairs," and the *Post* reported that he was well liked by political leaders both in Tammany and on the Republican side and that "few other reporters held the leaders' confidence so unfailingly." Nevins thought that Riordon had been a member of Tammany Hall (although there is no evidence of this) and said he was "invaluable in getting material for assaults" on the machine but protected from resentment there by his fairness. After a critical story about Tammany by Riordon had appeared in the *Post,* no less a person than Tammany boss Richard Croker himself was supposed to have said, "He has to earn a living like the rest of us."[47]

There is no evidence that Riordon set out originally to write a book about Plunkitt. Their relationship probably began as one of mutual short-term



William L. Riordon, New York *Evening Post* reporter and editor of *Plunkitt of Tammany Hall,* was thirty-eight years old when this portrait was published in 1899. It is not known when the photo was taken.

BECOMING *PLUNKITT OF TAMMANY HALL*

The crucial middleman between these evaluations of ward bosses and the life of George Washington Plunkitt was William L. Riordon, whose life personally touched those on all sides of the debate over Tammany. When Riordon began his conversations with Plunkitt in 1897, he was a well-known political reporter covering the Tammany machine for the *Evening Post;* the editor of the *Post* was E. L. Godkin; and Riordon's office mate was Lincoln

advantage. A ward boss was never hurt by publicity about his power, practicality, or generosity, and Riordon's personal background and knowledge of (if not sympathy with) Tammany must have made him seem like an ideal vehicle for Plunkitt's political self-promotion. At the same time, a reporter could make money out of a relationship with a colorful, quotable figure. Reporters of Riordon's day were paid for the number of column inches of their writing that appeared in the paper. Given the ongoing controversy over the Tammany machine, Riordon's editors were likely to select for publication entertaining stories purporting to reveal the secrets of a ward boss.

Riordon, of course, controlled the timing and influenced the focus of the stories about Plunkitt by selecting those that would appear in the *Post* from his many conversations with Plunkitt. As far as we can tell, Riordon's first interview with Plunkitt was published in the *Post* around the time of municipal elections in 1897, and fifteen had been published by 1905. Most of these appeared in election years and contained Plunkitt's electoral predictions or postmortems in addition to snatches of his philosophy. The themes of the latter in these interviews were the necessity of the spoils system in general and Tammany in particular and the various ways civil service was "humbug," or fraud.[48]

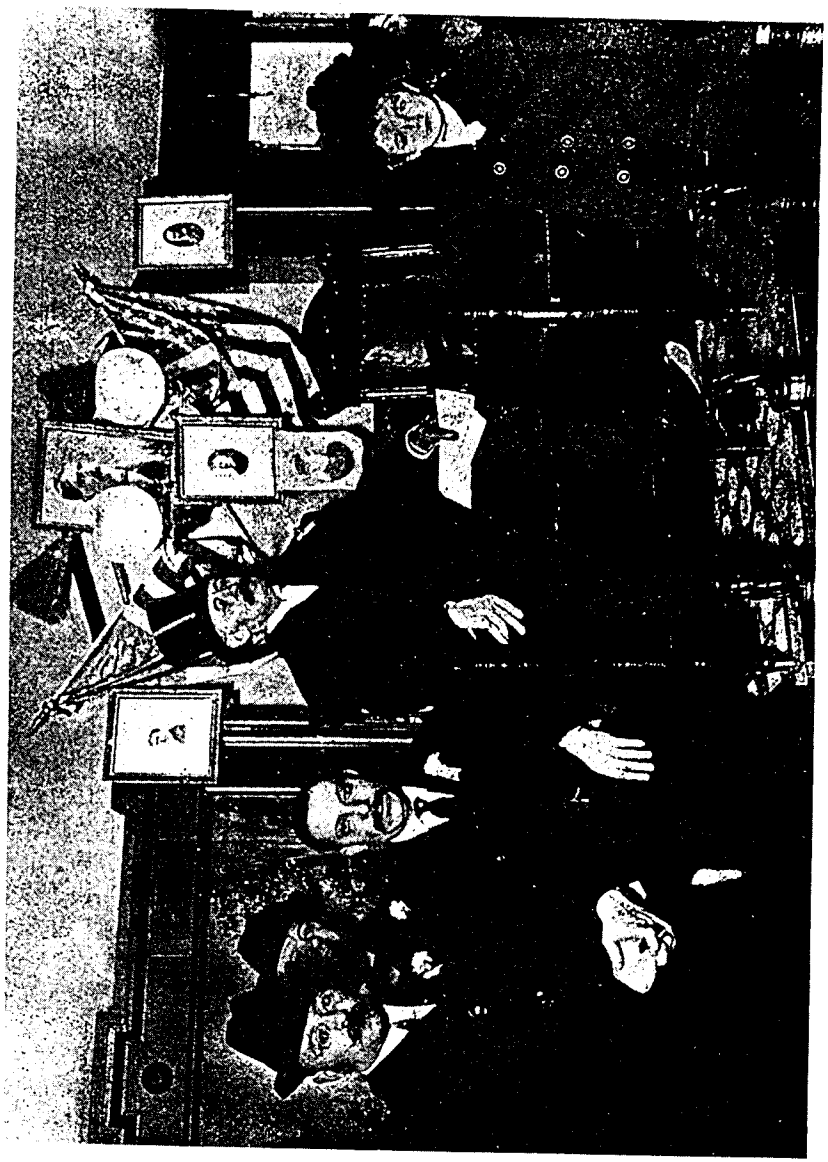
When Riordon decided to produce a book out of Plunkitt's wisdom, he did not simply collect these interviews. None of the themes and phrases that made the book famous appeared in the interviews in the *Post;* there was, for example, no mention of honest and dishonest graft, Plunkitt's millions, reformers as "morning glories," the trouble with Lincoln Steffens, or Plunkitt's diary. Instead, Riordon added sections to the book that had never appeared before. The new sections included the first ("Honest Graft and Dishonest Graft"), the seventh ("On 'The Shame of the Cities' "), and the last ("Strenuous Life of the Tammany District Leader"). He then edited the previously published interviews to reflect the themes in these new sections.

Did Riordon invent these sections? The pressure to get one's work published led to the journalistic practice known among Riordon's contemporaries as "faking"—the manufacture of quotations to liven up a story. A 1905 article in *The Journalist,* a newspaper for reporters published in New York, deplored the fact that "you've got to fake to be entertaining enough to hold a job" and claimed that "nearly all of the newspaper stories of humorous every-day happenings are wholly imaginary, or built on slender foundations." And when Riordon died in 1909, *Editor and Publisher* attributed the famous phrases of the book to him, claiming, for example, that "he gave to the English speaking world the phrase 'honest graft' " and noting that Plunkitt was "made to say" what Riordon wrote. Because almost all of our knowledge of Plunkitt comes through Riordon, we may never be able to

determine whether Riordon was a "fakir" (as it was spelled in those days). But we must understand that Riordon's portrait of Plunkitt was consciously composed out of the cultural materials at Riordon's disposal. These included Riordon's own experience of Plunkitt and Tammany Hall, of course, but also his reading of the works by other journalists and reformers on the political machine and the available literary stereotypes of the ward boss.[49]

Because so much of both fiction and nonfiction had been written about ward bosses and Tammany Hall by the time Riordon wrote, there was already a widely understood way to portray the typical—perhaps stereotypical—ward boss. A literary critic writing in 1904 noted that "the Tammany boss has always been, we have been led to believe, an essentially blunt, matter-of-fact, semi-humorous personage. He never really quite takes himself seriously. Like Byron's buccaneer, he's the mildest mannered man that ever scuttled a ship or cut a throat." In choosing this way to portray Plunkitt, Riordon rejected two other possibilities with which he was familiar: the portrayals of Plunkitt by both Godkin and *The Tammany Times.* For both literary and marketing purposes the portrait of Plunkitt in *The Tammany Times*—"an excellent debater, an argumentative and forcible speaker"—was too boring, while that of Godkin in the *Post*—"a thoroughly bad Senator"—was too harsh and off-putting.[50]

Riordon further rounded off Plunkitt's rough edges and tried to increase the readership for *Plunkitt of Tammany Hall* by focusing some of the new sections on Steffens and adding the excerpt from Plunkitt's diary. In 1903 *McClure's* magazine had more than three hundred seventy thousand subscribers and Steffens's series of articles on municipal corruption had been a sensation when originally published. The articles received even more attention when they were released together in the fall of 1904 as *The Shame of the Cities.* By making some portions of *Plunkitt of Tammany Hall* seem like Plunkitt's response to Steffens's charges of graft in Tammany Hall, Riordon both tried to attach his book to Steffens's star and constructed something that had not existed before: an "honest" grafter. At the turn of the century "graft" was a term that was widely used but not sharply defined, but "honest graft" was surely an oxymoron. The author of the 1901 book *The World of Graft* defined it as "a generic slang term for all kinds of theft and illegal practices generally." By having Plunkitt declare himself an honest grafter, Riordon portrayed him as frank (willing to admit he was a grafter) and self-conscious (knowing the difference between honest and dishonest graft, even if this was a meaningless distinction). By adding a diary of Plunkitt's kindnesses in the ward, Riordon further stressed his Robin Hood–like character. So far as we know there is no Plunkitt diary; Riordon simply reorganized the lists of kindnesses in the articles by Addams, Steffens, Davis, and the others into a diary form.[51]



THE ROLE OF *PLUNKITT OF TAMMANY HALL* IN PLUNKITT'S POLITICAL DOWNFALL

Riordon's portrait of Plunkitt was influenced not only by the things he added to the text but also by one significant thing that he kept out of it. For all of the talk about Plunkitt's political expertise, he had already suffered a serious defeat before the book went to press, and at the moment the book appeared he was engaged in a losing fight for his political life, a fight that was not helped by the appearance of the book itself.

Plunkitt's slide into local political oblivion began in November 1904 when he was defeated for reelection to his seat in the state Senate by a man half his age, a political newcomer, a college and law school graduate, and, perhaps worst of all, a Republican. Martin Saxe was born in 1874 and was raised in a neighborhood not far from Plunkitt's. He attended public schools in the district but then went to prep school and Princeton University, where he studied law, philosophy, history, and literature. He graduated from the New York Law School in 1897 and practiced law privately before joining the city corporation counsel's office in 1902 during the reform mayoralty of Seth Low. His job with the city was to collect personal property taxes that were in arrears, and his supporters claimed that he had collected $600,000 in back taxes during his two-year term, in contrast to his Tammany predecessor's collection of only $157,000 in four years.[52]

Saxe campaigned hard in the district, going door to door to meet voters and holding many meetings and rallies. His campaign was focused on two slogans: "Lift the Plunkitt Mortgage" and "Give Young Men a Chance." According to Saxe, Plunkitt's self-enriching deals in the state legislature had "mortgaged" the district to railroad and other interests at the same time as Plunkitt's twenty years of district leadership and six previous terms in the state Senate had prevented younger men from taking leadership there. "Plunkitt is so chock full of Plunkitt that he can't see anybody else," Saxe

Left: This photograph was the frontispiece of the 1905 edition of *Plunkitt of Tammany Hall.* It was posed to heighten Plunkitt's image as a Tammany boss by seating him on Graziano's bootblack stand, surrounding him with political cronies, and placing a top hat on his head. As a sachem of the Tammany Society, Plunkitt was required to wear a top hat in public once a year for the society's July 4 ceremonies, but that was the only time he did so. His own favorite photograph of himself at this time—on the cover and page 19 of this volume—can be seen in this photo hanging between the crossed flags.

claimed. "When a man rides roughshod over a district like this for years it's time he was stopped."[53]

Not surprisingly, Plunkitt had a hard time taking Saxe's campaign seriously. He said that he had met Saxe and thought he was a nice young man but that he had warned him not to invest too much money in the campaign because it was so hopeless. Portraying himself as the "father" of both his district and the entire West Side of the city, Plunkitt claimed that "the very cobble stones would rise up to defend and vote for" him. In fact, Plunkitt's vote totals in the three previous elections suggest that there was a strong opposition to him and that, like many machine politicians, he was a somewhat conservative mobilizer of votes. On average about eleven thousand voters from his senatorial district voted against him in each of the elections of 1898, 1900, and 1902—a loyal opposition. Furthermore, Plunkitt's own base of support was almost static. The votes for him in those elections were 14,883, 14,541, and 14,723, numbers that suggest that he had identified his supporters and gotten them to the polls but that his support was not growing. In spite of these signs, however, no one could have been more surprised than Plunkitt when Saxe won the 1904 election by more than six hundred votes.[54]

Some of Plunkitt's statements during the campaign raise questions about how good a "father" he had actually been to his district. He often seemed to claim that he deserved to continue representing the district because of the wealth he had accumulated. The *New York Times* reported that Plunkitt's "favorite way of expressing his confidence in his everlasting hold on his constituency was the statement that 'I am worth $3 million, and I would just like to see the man who would be able to beat me in my district.' " And the *Tribune* reported that, contrary to his claim of being generous, he was "notoriously 'thrifty,' and the voters of the district, having this in mind, are settling old scores." Was his self-proclaimed reputation for generosity and service exaggerated? This question would be the issue in Plunkitt's contest the next year, a bitter, unsuccessful fight to retain his Tammany leadership of the fifteenth Assembly district, a position he had held for more than twenty years.[55]

The day after Plunkitt's defeat by Saxe for the Senate, a wag placed a sign in Plunkitt's chair at the courthouse bootblack stand saying, "For Sale—Apply to Senator Martin Saxe." While this surely added insult to injury, more ominous was the statement by a supporter of Assemblyman Thomas J. "The" McManus on the day after the election that "Plunkitt will be knocked out of the leadership of the Fifteenth as well as out of the Senate." The 1904 election returns seemed to predict as much, because McManus's vote for Assembly in the fifteenth district was one thousand more than the total cast for Plunkitt for Senate in the same district. (Plunkitt's larger state

Senate district included three state Assembly districts.)[56] Furthermore, in 1898 the state legislature had passed a primary law requiring that elections within political organizations be supervised by the state. The 1905 election for Tammany Hall district leader would be the first with strong opposition to Plunkitt that would have its outcome monitored by the state.

McManus had been a thorn in Plunkitt's political side since McManus first won election to the state Assembly as an independent, non-Tammany candidate in 1891. Born in 1864, and thus twenty-two years younger than Plunkitt, McManus was an attorney with a reputation as an orator. After his 1891 election he carried on a series of unsuccessful campaigns for Assembly against candidates backed by Plunkitt. His closest later campaign came in 1899 when, running as a Republican, he came within seventy-one votes of defeating Plunkitt's handpicked Tammany candidate. Apparently bowing to the inevitable, Plunkitt backed McManus's successful Assembly campaigns after the turn of the century. Supported within the fifteenth district by his mother and six brothers—who were a formidable political force themselves—and his own political club, the Thomas J. McManus Association, McManus steadily built his political base against Plunkitt as he watched support for the older man wane. In June 1905 the McManus Association, not surprisingly, unanimously endorsed McManus in his bid for Plunkitt's Tammany Hall leadership of the district. At the McManus Association picnic that August, the ten thousand in attendance were led in the campaign song:

> Good-bye to Plunkitt boys,
> He used us like play toys;
> Now we'll stick to Tom McManus,
> For "The" is true blue.
> He'll stick to me and you
> So we'll chase old Plunkitt to Gowanus.[57]

The song jokingly conjured up Plunkitt's self-proclaimed worst nightmare and raised the point that would become the central issue of the campaign. Gowanus Bay was a body of water off Brooklyn, a place that Plunkitt had frequently said he hated because it was full of "hayseeds," or country bumpkins. (For Plunkitt everywhere outside of Manhattan was the "country.") To "chase old Plunkitt to Gowanus," then, meant to put him in exile in the worst place imaginable. Less humorous were the charges at the center of the campaign that Plunkitt had used his constituents, growing rich while doing little or nothing for them, and that Plunkitt made Tammany candidates for office pay him for their nominations. The first charge had also been a theme of Saxe's 1904 campaign, of course. This campaign was different, though, because those making the charges were Tammany insiders.

In a widely reported incident that may very well have been planned,

McManus confronted Plunkitt on the steps of police headquarters with the charge that he had forced McManus and the alderman from Plunkitt's district, Fred Richter, to pay $500 for their nominations for office. Plunkitt concluded the exchange with a remark that echoed one he made during the campaign against Saxe: "Ain't you ashamed of your dirty work trying to destroy an old man like me—a man who has given forty years to the Democratic Party and all his time to the people? I tell you I've got $2,000,000 and I'll spend them and go to the poorhouse or back to the Senate." The alderman, meanwhile, supported McManus's version, adding that all the people were "sore on" Plunkitt because "he makes no bones of saying that he's in politics for what he can get out of it for himself and his boy Georgie and his nephew."[58]

The complaints of McManus and Richter seemed confirmed when the book *Plunkitt of Tammany Hall* landed like a bombshell in the campaign. Tammany district leadership campaigns moved into their most intense stages in September. The 1905 election was scheduled for Tuesday, September 19. The book was released on September 1, and on September 2 and 3 the New York *World* ran excerpts from it and other newspapers followed suit. Although as late as September 6 Plunkitt said he had not read the book, he was clearly pleased by its appearance and delighted that it carried a "tribute" from Charles F. Murphy, who was then the leader of Tammany Hall. "I guess that's enough to hold 'The' McManus and them fellows for a while," Plunkitt reportedly said. There is no evidence that Riordon had timed the appearance of the book to damage Plunkitt. More likely the publication date was chosen by the publisher in an attempt to promote sales.[59]

What Plunkitt was not prepared for, however, was the effect of his comments about "honest graft" on his campaign. As newspaper reports about the book appeared, Plunkitt first declared flatly that "they know that I never stuck my hand out for graft." But once the book arrived and it was seen that Plunkitt was proud to admit he gained his fortune through graft—albeit allegedly "honest" graft—Plunkitt was forced to change his campaign tack. Now his claim was that he was being persecuted by his political opponents because he had never allowed "dirty" money into the district. "If I'd let this district be a bedhouse to satisfy some of the blackest scoundrels on earth I'd be all right. If I'd let the bootblacks and the peanut women be blackmailed $5 a month I'd be a good man. That's the only thing that can be brought up against me. If I'd allow filth and dirt here there wouldn't be nobody thinking he was making a run against old Plunkitt." While this claim was a clever attempt at political damage control, there is no way of knowing if it was true. And in any case Plunkitt's response could not stop the constant references to him in the press as "honest graft Plunkitt," or "the apostle of

honest graft." Nor could he take back the book's boasts about his millions or his willingness to see his opportunities and take them.[60]

Four hundred police were assigned to the district on election day, and two calls for additional police help were put in during the day. More than fifty men were arrested on charges ranging from voting fraud to assault. At midnight Plunkitt and his allies conceded defeat and the supporters of McManus paraded through the district carrying a coffin symbolic of Plunkitt's political death. The next fall McManus completed his triumph by nominating himself for the state Senate seat that Plunkitt had held and winning that too. In 1907 Plunkitt made an attempt to retake the district leadership, but observers said from the start that his campaign was futile. The outcome was a three-thousand-vote slaughter that decisively ended the Plunkitt era.[61]

The election campaigns of 1904 and 1905 revealed yet another side of George Washington Plunkitt that was not much emphasized by Riordon. In these campaigns Plunkitt seemed arrogant, peevish, and obsessed with his millions. He claimed a sort of right to the leadership of his district because of his seniority and the money he had allegedly accumulated through his "honest" graft. Furthermore, his political vulnerability to the charges of "dishonest" graft (selling political nominations) and stinginess raised questions about whose benefit he had really worked for all those years and how much he actually did for the voters of his district. Was this stingy and dishonest man the real Plunkitt of Tammany Hall? Perhaps Plunkitt's career had followed the trajectory that Steffens proposed in 1903: from initial kindness to riches and power to "selling out" the residents of his district. Writing in the introduction to the 1948 edition of *Plunkitt of Tammany Hall,* political scientist Roy V. Peel said as much. Based on a study of Tammany ward bosses he had written in the 1930s, Peel wrote that the bosses lived a double life: "Once in the saddle [as a district leader] . . . you are selfish, cold, calculating, and corrupt but you maintain the illusion that you are generous, warm, informal, and honest. You deftly present one picture of yourself to your equals and still another to your superiors. You remain in power until times change and another younger man drives you into obscurity."[62]

READING *PLUNKITT OF TAMMANY HALL*

Media coverage of Plunkitt's death on November 19, 1924, revealed how well Riordon had done his job. By then George Washington Plunkitt and *Plunkitt of Tammany Hall* had almost become one. Plunkitt's humiliating political defeats of twenty years before were hardly mentioned, and Rior-

don's role in the composition of the book was almost ignored. Remembering Plunkitt as he was portrayed in the book, national magazines hailed him as a political sage while local newspapers speculated on the size of his estate, confidently predicting that it would add up into the millions. *The Nation,* then as now a leading voice of liberal opinion, declared that Plunkitt had been "one of the wisest men in American politics" and claimed that although he had been a "grafter," his constituents did not care because "they could understand a cheerful and honest grafter who made no pretense of virtue but did practical good right and left every day in the week."[63]

In reality Plunkitt was not a millionaire when he died, and he may never have been one. And there is considerable doubt about his status as a political wise man. When his estate was appraised one year after his death it contained only $280,000, mostly in real estate. While this was a substantial sum, it was surely a far cry from the millions with which he had tried to threaten his political opponents. Moreover, because prices had risen since 1905, it is possible that Plunkitt's holdings had been worth even less during his political heyday. Plunkitt's claim to be a millionaire—perhaps along with his claims of service and generosity—was part of the image he had created for himself. It was this image that his constituents had rejected in 1904 and 1905 when they showed they did care about his grafting by supporting candidates who claimed that Plunkitt had enriched himself at the expense of the district.[64]

Plunkitt of Tammany Hall remains a valuable historical source, however, even if everything it says about Tammany Hall in general and Plunkitt in particular is not true. This is so because it allows us to see how someone writing in 1905 could construct a portrayal of a ward boss that many people, both at the time and since then, have thought was true. One focus of our consideration of this book, then, should be on the author and what he used to construct such a portrayal in a particular context; another should be on the readers and how they read—and continue to read—the author's work. The readings in Part Two of this book have been selected to help us with these considerations because they come from the same time period.

As should be clear by now, *Plunkitt of Tammany Hall* is not simply reportage but a piece of persuasive or argumentative writing. Whether he or Plunkitt actually invented the famous phrases in the book, Riordon built the character of Plunkitt from a variety of sources. The first four and last two selections in Part Two are all other portrayals of Plunkitt in particular or ward bosses in general that appeared in print before this book. Which of these portrayals does Riordon appear to ignore? Which may have been

sources for his portrait of Plunkitt? What do the answers to these questions tell us about who Riordon thought his audience was? How does his understanding of his audience differ from that of, say, the *Post*'s *Tammany Biographies, The Tammany Times,* Jane Addams, or Lincoln Steffens?

Riordon also selected, revised, and arranged the information in this book to make his points about Plunkitt and urban politics. What is the overall message that Riordon is trying to convey? Why does the book open with the section known as "Honest Graft and Dishonest Graft" and close with that entitled "Strenuous Life of the Tammany District Leader"? How does he highlight and repeat certain themes in the rest of the chapters? How do humor, satire, ridicule, and exaggeration help make his points? How does the concept of "honest" graft fit into his argument? How does Riordon's argument differ from that of Addams and Steffens? What techniques do Addams and Steffens use to make their points? Whose understanding of graft seems more persuasive, Riordon's or Steffens's?

In trying to answer these questions we join a long line of observers of the political machine whose understanding comes from *Plunkitt of Tammany Hall.* Three examples of direct responses to this book are in Part Two: two reviews of the 1905 edition of the book and *The Nation*'s 1924 discussion of Plunkitt's wisdom. How would you characterize the response of the reviewers? How does their tone compare with that of the article from *The Nation*?

Because we, too, are learning about the political machine from Plunkitt, we need to consider what experiences and references we bring to our own reading of the book. *The Nation* commended this book for "telling all that needs to be told about American politics," which was that "honesty doesn't matter, efficiency doesn't matter, progressive vision doesn't matter. What matters is the chance of a better job, a better price for wheat, better business conditions." Does this seem true about American politics then? Now? Would you like to live under a political machine? Why or why not? In general do you find yourself liking or disliking Plunkitt? Why? If you had to choose the portrayal of the political machine that most impressed you, would it be Riordon's, Addams's, or Steffens's? Why?[65]

A final way of thinking about the lasting value of this book is to consider less the "truth" it reveals and more the question it raises. Whatever else *Plunkitt of Tammany Hall* may have achieved or failed to achieve, it helped identify the parameters within which American politics has oscillated ever since. Published at the moment when the country first considered the appropriate role of the government in the economy, the book posed a crucial question. In Plunkitt's terms, can we build a society where everyone can "see his [or her] opportunities and take 'em" but where the

less fortunate are also well provided for? *Plunkitt of Tammany Hall* argued that the machines had already found the answer to this question. But did they?

Have we?

NOTES

[1]For overviews of the social issues of the period, see Alan Trachtenberg, *The Incorporation of America: Culture and Society in the Gilded Age* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1982), and Nell Irvin Painter, *Standing at Armageddon: The United States, 1877–1919* (New York: Norton, 1989).

[2]Useful overviews of the political system in these years include Richard L. McCormick, *The Party Period and Public Policy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986); Stephen Skowronek, *Building a New American State: The Expansion of National Administrative Capacities, 1877–1920* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982); and Morton Keller, *Affairs of State: Public Life in Late Nineteenth Century America* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1977).

[3]The spectrum of debate over the parties can be seen in the works mentioned in notes 1 and 2 and also in Walter Dean Burnham, *Critical Elections and the Mainsprings of American Politics* (New York: Norton, 1970); Leon Fink, *Workingmen's Democracy: The Knights of Labor and American Politics* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1983); Lawrence Goodwyn, *Democratic Promise: The Populist Moment in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978); and Michael E. McGerr, *The Decline of Popular Politics: The American North, 1865–1928* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986).

[4]M. J. Heale, *The Making of American Politics, 1750–1850* (London: Longman, 1977), is a useful, brief overview of the formation of the early American parties.

[5]Heale, *Making,* 158.

[6]Jon C. Teaford, *The Unheralded Triumph: City Government in America, 1870–1900* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1984), surveys these city-building activities.

[7]For a classic discussion of the role of patronage and other incentives in machine politics, see Raymond Wolfinger, "Why Political Machines Have Not Withered Away and Other Revisionist Thoughts," *Journal of Politics* 34 (1972): 365–98. Recent works emphasizing the political machines' techniques of political control include Steven P. Erie, *Rainbow's End: Irish-Americans and the Dilemmas of Urban Machine Politics, 1840–1985* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), and Martin Shefter, "The Emergence of the Political Machine: An Alternative View," in Willis Hawley et al., *Theoretical Perspectives on Urban Politics* (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall, 1976). Erie examines the extent of patronage in New York and elsewhere. Not all ward bosses held public political office; some were party officials, and some held no formal political post at all.

[8]Harold Zink, *City Bosses in the United States: A Study of Twenty Municipal Bosses* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1930), 42–43, discusses the career patterns of bosses.

[9]New work on the timing, rise, and fall of political machines includes M. Craig Brown and Charles N. Halaby, "Machine Politics in America, 1870–1945," *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 8 (1987): 587–612; Alan DiGaetano, "The Rise and Development of Urban Political Machines: An Alternative to Merton's Functional Analysis," *Urban Affairs Quarterly* 24 (1988): 242–67; Harvey Boulay and Alan DiGaetano, "Why Did Political Machines Disappear?," *Journal of Urban History* 12 (1985): 25–49.

[10]The effects of these changes on the political system are discussed in McCormick, *Party Period.*

[11]For accounts of Plunkitt's life and political career, see the articles in Part Two of this book in addition to "George Washington Plunkitt," *The New York Red Book: An Illustrated Legislative Manual* (New York, 1904); also see obituaries in the New York *Sun,* November 19, 1924; New York *Evening Post,* November 19, 1924; New York *World,* November 20, November 23, 1924; *New York Times,* November 29, 1924. All of these accounts seem influenced by the account in the *Red Book,* the text for which was undoubtedly provided by Plunkitt himself. For the census information about Plunkitt's family, see U.S. National Archives and Records Service, 7th Census of the United States, 1850 (Washington, D. C.: NARS, 1973), reel 559, 87.

[12]A useful history of both Tammany Halls is Alfred Connable and Edward Silberfarb, *Tigers of Tammany: Nine Men Who Ran New York* (New York: Rinehart and Winston, 1967).

[13]The standard account of New York City politics in Plunkitt's time is now David Hammack's *Power and Society: Greater New York at the Turn of the Century* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1982).

[14]Useful accounts of the Tweed era include Amy Bridges, *A City in the Republic: Antebellum New York and the Origins of Machine Politics* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1984); Jerome Mushkat, *Tammany: The Evolution of a Political Machine, 1789–1865* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1971); Alexander B. Callow, *The Tweed Ring* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1965); and Seymour J. Mandelbaum, *Boss Tweed's New York* (New York: Wiley, 1965).

[15]Alexander Callow describes the episode of the Young Democracy revolt against Tweed in *Tweed Ring,* 223–35.

[16]Hartley Davis, "Tammany Hall: The Most Perfect Political Organization in the World," *Munsey's,* October 1900, 58.

[17]Explanations of the structure of the Tammany Democracy can be found in the *New York Herald* Sunday magazine, September 17, 1905, and in Connable and Silberfarb, *Tigers,* 181–85. Martin Shefter emphasizes the importance of the district clubs in "The Emergence of the Political Machine: An Alternative View," in Willis Hawley, *Theoretical Perspectives.*

[18]Richard Croker, "Tammany Hall and the Democracy," *North American Review* 154 (1892): 225–30.

[19]The location of Plunkitt's homes can be followed in the *New York City Directory* (New York, 1865–1924). The following paragraphs on the area in which he lived are based on Pauline Goldmark, ed., *West Side Studies* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1914), 2 vols. These volumes actually contain four separate studies of the area, including *Boyhood and Lawlessness,* and Ruth S. True, *The Neglected Girl,* in volume 1; and Ortho G. Cartwright, *The Middle West Side: A Historical Sketch,* and Katharine Anthony, *Mothers Who Must Earn,* in volume 2. Plunkitt himself was one of the sources for Cartwright's "sketch." Research for these studies was done in 1910, five years after Plunkitt left his post as Tammany District leader, but the studies focus on the lives of long-term residents of the area. Indeed, one of their most important findings was how many long-term residents there were. Therefore, they provide useful information on life in the district for the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. For a useful popular history of the same area, see Richard O'Connor, *Hell's Kitchen: The Roaring Days of New York's Wild West Side* (Philadelphia: Lippincott, 1958).

[20]Cartwright, *Middle West Side,* 33–42; Anthony, *Mothers,* 12–13.

[21]Anthony, *Mothers,* 2. Anthony's study was based on detailed employment histories of 370 working women and their husbands (if alive) that asked them to review their employment, wages, and so on, from their first job to 1910.

[22]Cartwright, *The Middle West Side,* 46–47. All the West Side studies remarked on the stability of the neighborhood. More than 60 percent of the families studied in *Boyhood and Lawlessness,* for example, had lived in the area fifteen years or more.

[23]*Boyhood and Lawlessness,* 1–5.

[24]For evidence of Plunkitt's church membership, see *New York Times,* November 23, November 25, 1924, and New York *Evening World,* November 9, 1904.

[25]Plunkitt is first listed at the West 51st Street address in the New York City Directory for 1891–92 and it is the same address given in his obituaries (note 11). The address of Washington Hall is given in many issues of *The Tammany Times.* See, for example, March 15, 1902, 7.

[26]For accounts of Plunkitt's day, see New York *Globe,* October 15, 1904; New York *World,* November 23, 1924; *New York Times Magazine,* February 1, 1925.

[27]*New York Times,* October 27, October 29, 1872, June 8, 1905; *New York Tribune,* August 5, 1894, October 12, 1903, January 30, 1906; New York *Evening Post,* October 17, 1903.

[28]Plunkitt's career in the Tammany Society can be followed in the "Membership List, 1789–1924" and "Minutes of the Grand Council of Sachems" of the Society of Tammany or Columbian Order in the City of New York, both in the Edwin P. Kilroe Collection of Tammaniana, Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Columbia University, New York.

[29]These parallels can only be suggestive. A full scale comparison of the organizations—taking into consideration their structures, ideologies, and rituals—remains to be done and would no doubt focus as much on the tensions within the organizations as on the power flowing down from the top of their hierarchies. For a recent overview of American Catholic historiography emphasizing the tensions within the church, see Leslie Woodcock Tentler, "On the Margins: The State of American Catholic History," *American Quarterly* 45 (1993): 104–27.

[30]Hammack, *Power and Society,* 158–85. For a useful account of the Henry George campaign against Tammany, see David Scobey, "Boycotting the Politics Factory: Labor Radicalism and the New York City Mayoral Election of 1886," *Radical History Review* 28–30 (1984): 280–325.

[31]*Boyhood and Lawlessness,* 70. Plunkitt's comments are from the sections of this book called "Ingratitude in Politics" and "Dangers of the Dress Suit in Politics."

[32]On rents, see Anthony, *Mothers,* 137. Juvenile fines are discussed in *Boyhood and Lawlessness,* 88.

[33]Anthony, *Mothers,* 89; *Boyhood and Lawlessness,* 88. Although undertaken by social workers, these studies were not intended to attack the ward bosses. The employed women and their husbands were asked the sources of all jobs they had held; the parents of juvenile delinquents were asked directly if they had ever received help from the boss. The latter study noted that those who had (or thought they had) "pull" with the boss liked to brag about it. This makes the few reports of aid even more credible.

[34]"Hon. Geo. W. Plunkitt," *Tammany Times,* September 21, 1895, 9; "George Washington Plunkitt," in *Tammany Biographies,* 3rd ed. (New York: Evening Post, 1894), 15–16. For the full text of these documents, see Part Two of this book.

[35]James Bryce, *The American Commonwealth* (London: Macmillan, 1888) 2:109. New York *Evening Post,* April 3, April 4, April 22, 1890.

[36]New York *Evening Post,* April 3, 1890.

[37]Hammack, *Power and Society,* 120.

[38]*The Tammany Times,* which called itself "a weekly newspaper devoted to the Tammany Organizations of the United States," began publication in 1892 and ceased publication sometime in the 1920s. The new history of Tammany was Euphemia Vale Blake, *History of the Tammany Society or Columbian Order from Its Organization to the Present Time* (New York: Souvenir Publishing, 1901).

[39]William T. Stead, "Mr. Richard Croker and Greater New York," *Review of Reviews* (London), October 17, 1897, 340–55.

[40]Hartley Davis, "Tammany Hall: The Most Perfect Political Organization in the World," *Munsey's,* October 1900; William Allen White, "Richard Croker," *McClure's,* October 1901, 317–26; Alfred Henry Lewis, *Richard Croker* (New York: Life, 1901).

[41]Jane Addams, "Why the Ward Boss Rules," *Outlook,* April 2, 1898; Lincoln Steffens, "New York: Good Government in Danger," *McClure's,* November 1903, 84–92. Both of these articles are reprinted in Part Two.

[42]For a useful biography of Addams that includes information on her Chicago activities, see Allen F. Davis, *American Heroine* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977). Addams's article was reprinted in two other places in 1898, and she used it extensively in later writings.

[43]Steffens's years on the *Post* are included in Justin Kaplan's *Lincoln Steffens: A Biography* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1974).

[44]Steffens, "New York." This article was renamed "New York: Good Government to the Test" when the articles were published together in Steffens, *The Shame of the Cities* (New York: McClure, Phillips, 1904).

[45]Sources of this biographical information about Riordon are obituaries in *Editor and Publisher,* July 31, 1909; New York *Evening Post,* July 22, 1909; and *New York Times,* July 23, 1909.

[46]Allan Nevins, *The Evening Post: A Century of Journalism* (New York: Boni and Liveright, 1922), 550–51; *Editor and Publisher,* March 6, 1909.

[47]*New York Times,* July 23, 1909; New York *Evening Post,* July 22, 1909; Nevins, *The Evening Post,* 550.

[48]For examples of the Plunkitt interviews in the *Post,* see, for example, New York *Evening Post,* February 25, 1897; May 1, 1901; March 14, 1902; January 10, 1905.

[49]*The Journalist,* July 29, 1905; *Editor and Publisher,* July 31, 1909.

[50]John Seymour Wood, "Alfred Henry Lewis," *Bookman* 18 (January 1904): 486–94.

[51]For information on the circulation of *McClure's,* see Peter Lyon, *Success Story: The Life and Times of S. S. McClure* (New York: Scribner's, 1963), 251; Josiah Flynt, *The World of Graft* (New York: McClure, Phillips, 1901), 4.

[52]"The Reminiscences of Martin Saxe," Oral History Research Office, Columbia University, New York, 1948; New York *Globe,* October 15, 1904. Saxe's "Reminiscences" include both a microfilm copy of his papers and a transcribed oral history interview. For details of Saxe's biography, see "Testimonial Dinner to Honorable Martin Saxe," in "Reminiscences"; for reports of his work in the corporation counsel's office, see New York *Mail,* October 18, 1904; New York *Evening Post,* November 3, 1904.

[53]"Lift the Plunkitt Mortgage," election pamphlet, "Reminiscences"; New York *Evening Telegram,* November 3, 1904; New York *Sun,* October 23, 1904; New York *Evening Post,* November 3, 1904.

[54]New York *Globe,* October 15, 1904; New York *Evening Post,* November 10, 1904.

[55]*New York Times,* November 10, 1904; *New York Tribune,* October 30, 1904.

[56]New York *Sun,* November 10, 1904; New York *Evening Post,* November 9, 1904.

[57]*New York Times,* June 7, September 17, August 15, 1905.

[58]For accounts of the conservation, see New York *Evening Post,* June 7, 1905; *New York Times,* June 8, 1905. The latter is reprinted in Part Two of this book.

[59]New York *World,* September 2, September 3, 1905.

[60]New York *Sun,* September 3, 1905; New York *World,* September 6, 1905. For a useful recent look at the relationship between Tammany politicians and vice, see Timothy J. Gilfoyle, *City of Eros: New York City, Prostitution, and the Commercialization of Sex, 1790–1920* (New York: Norton, 1992).

[61]*New York Times,* September 20, 1905; New York *Evening Post,* September 20, 1905; New York *World,* September 25, 1907.

[62]Roy V. Peel, ed., *Plunkitt of Tammany Hall* (New York: Knopf, 1948), xvii–xviii. For a recent view of the image of another Tammany politician from Plunkitt's time, see Daniel Czitrom, "Underworlds and Underdogs: Big Tim Sullivan and Metropolitan Politics in New York, 1889–1913," *Journal of American History* 78 (1991): 536–59.

[63]"Plunkitt's Way," *The Nation,* December 3, 1924, 591.

[64]For a report on the valuation of Plunkitt's estate see *New York Times,* October 31, 1925.

[65]"Plunkitt's Way."