New Jersey Political Machines and Efforts to End Political Corruption

“In the bad old days there used to be machines,” Herblock drawing, 1984, LC-DIG-hlb-10790


Grade Level: 9-12

Time Required: Three-four classroom periods:
1: America at the turn of the 20th century and political machines
2: Corruption in New York City, Atlantic City and Jersey City
3: Progressive Reforms
4: Today

Objectives: Students will be able to:

- Describe the structure of a political machine
- Explain the role and goals of a political boss
- Examine the importance of immigrants to political machines
- Identify how political corruption and illegal activities developed in many political machines
- Evaluate the impact that political machines and political bosses had on the growth of cities

NJ Core Content Social Studies Standards
Essential Questions:

- How did the electoral process affect political machines in New Jersey?
- How did political machines affect the electoral process in New Jersey?
- Do political machines help or hinder progress?
- How effective were the legislative reforms of the Progressive Era in controlling political corruption?
- How can the public eliminate or prevent political machines and bosses?

Supporting questions:

- What is a political machine?
- What is a political boss?
- How did the rapid economic growth of this period in American history (1870-1929) contribute to an environment of political corruption?
- What political machines and bosses have had an impact on New Jersey?
- What has been the impact of New Jersey political machines?

A. Anticipatory Set

To engage students, show a clip from the 2002 film, “Gangs of New York”. Possible scenes to show include the following:

- Machine greeting Irishman off the boat (17.50-22.30)
- Machine greeting Irishman off the boat (1:12:57-1:15)

B. Vocabulary

1. What is a “political machine”?

   Students will probably focus on the idea of corruption. This is clearly a part of the meaning of a political machine because they have often been corrupt and have a reputation for corruption. But political machines may also work for the benefit of the community. A political machine is a political organization in which an authoritative boss or small group commands the support of a corps of supporters and businesses (usually campaign workers), who receive rewards for their effort.

2. What is the role of a “political boss”?
The person, or it may be a small group, with authority to make decisions. That person or group controls votes and dictates appointments.

What names come to mind when you think of political machines and political bosses? Students may mention Tammany Hall and Boss Tweed, and even Atlantic City and Jersey City. One of the most infamous political machines was Democratic-controlled Tammany Hall in New York City (1865-1934). Also, Tom Pendergast of Kansas City, Missouri; Richard Daley in Chicago, Illinois; Huey Long in New Orleans, Louisiana and James Curley in Boston, Massachusetts. New Jersey had its own political machines, most notably Louis Kuehnle and Nucky Johnson’s Republican “Boardwalk Empire” machine in Atlantic City (1900-1941) and Boss Hague’s urban empire in Jersey City (1917-1947).

3. In what ways were political machines corrupt?

Political machines required kickbacks from those they gave favors to—city workers and vendors. A “kickback” was a return of a part of a sum received often because of confidential agreement or coercion.

What is “political graft”? “Graft” is an interesting word. A shoot or twig inserted into a slit on the trunk or stem of a living plant, from which it receives sap, is a graft. A piece of living tissue that is transplanted surgically is also a graft. Graft is also a form of political corruption. It is the unscrupulous use of a politician's authority for personal gain. This is the kind of graft we are talking about.

When is it legal for someone to pay for patronage, protection, or information? If someone is paying for a service or providing a favor for a local politician, should it be considered acceptable? Where do we draw the line? Is it okay to lobby a political official to persuade him or her to do something? How about using insider information to obtain money or a benefit from a governmental body?

C. Historical Background

The period from 1870 to 1929 (after the Civil War until the Great Depression) was a time of robust economic growth and an influx of immigrant labor. At the national level, America was building railroads, skyscrapers, bridges, and bringing electricity and public water to homes. Economic growth increased dramatically. How did the rapid economic growth of this period in American history (1870-1929) contribute to an environment of political corruption? We’re going to explore the impact of political machines in New York City, Atlantic City and Jersey City.

1. New York City

After the Civil War, real estate was booming in New York City with the influx of immigrants and the growth of industry. The population of New York City was less than one million in 1870 and grew to more than three million by the turn of the century. It was a time when public services, including drinkable water and a sewage system, were being developed in the city. Fire and police departments were also expanding. Businesses and investors were willing to pay for information about the location of subway stops, bridges, and parks.
2. **Atlantic City**

It was also a time of great growth and expansion in Atlantic City. The natural beauty of the ocean and beach had made Atlantic City a resort town. The first hotel was built in 1854, attracting rich Philadelphia railroad executives as well as those coming for the “medical treatment” of the sun and air. The construction of a competing railroad in the 1870s led to fares being cut so low that even the working classes could afford a day trip to Atlantic City. After 1874, approximately 500,000 passengers were coming to Atlantic City by train every year. Local politicians understood the importance of hotels, the boardwalk (started in 1870 to keep sand out of the lobbies of the city’s many hotels), the movie industry, and ignoring restrictions on drinking, gambling, and prostitution.
3. Jersey City

With a huge influx of immigrants, Jersey City expanded greatly after 1870 and became a hub for industry and transportation. Jersey City had always been a point of transport to Manhattan, beginning with ferry service in 1764 and the first steam ferry starting in 1812. The construction of several passenger train terminals, including the intermodal (train and ferry) waterfront terminal (Exchange Place) and the Hudson tubes (PATH) 1889-1909, growing industrialization and a steady supply of workers to man the factories and run the trains, saw the city rapidly grown from 30,000 in 1860 to 300,000 by 1920.

Pennsylvania Railroad Terminal, Jersey City, 1905

D. Background on Political Bosses

1. Tammany Hall and Boss Tweed in New York City

One of the most infamous political machines in the United States was Democratic-controlled Tammany Hall in New York City (1865-1934). Started in 1789 for patriotic and fraternal purposes, after the Civil War the Society of St. Tammany began to weave together social club organization with the Democratic Party and basically ran New York City for the next 70 years.

Tammany Hall's electoral base lay predominantly with New York's burgeoning immigrant population, which often exchanged political support for Tammany Hall's patronage. During the Industrial Age in the late 19th Century, the extralegal services that Tammany and other urban political machines provided often served as a rudimentary public welfare system. The patronage Tammany Hall provided to immigrants, many of whom lived in extreme poverty and received little government assistance, covered three key areas: 1. providing food, coal, rent money or a job in times of emergency; 2. acting as an intermediary between immigrants and the government; and 3. familiarizing immigrants with American society and its political institutions and helping them become naturalized citizens.

Under Tweed's regime, "naturalization committees," made up primarily of Tammany politicians and employees, were established. The "committees" filled out paperwork, provided witnesses, and lent immigrants money for the fees required to become citizens. Judges and other city officials were bribed and otherwise compelled to go along with the workings of the committees. In exchange for these benefits, immigrants assured Tammany Hall that they would vote for their candidates.
Under "Boss" Tweed, New York City expanded into the Upper East and Upper West Sides of Manhattan, the Brooklyn Bridge was begun, land was set aside for the Metropolitan Museum of Art, orphanages and almshouses were constructed, and social services--both directly provided by the state and indirectly funded by state appropriations to private charities--helping tens of thousands of people and bringing great wealth to Tweed and his friends. It also brought them into contact and alliance with the rich elite of the city, who either accepted the graft and corruption or else tolerated it because of Tammany's ability to influence and control the immigrant population, of whom the "uppertens" of the city were wary.

Tweed’s downfall began with Tammany’s inability to control Irish laborers in the Orange riot of 1871 (See https://www.nytimes.com/1858/12/09/archives/the-decline-of-tammany.html) Campaigns to topple Tweed by the New York Times and Thomas Nast of Harper’s Weekly began to gain traction in the aftermath of the riot, and disgruntled insiders began to leak the details of the extent and scope of the Tweed Ring’s avarice to the newspapers.

In 1872 Tweed was arrested and charged with fraud, and forced to resign as public works commissioner, state senator, and head of Tammany Hall. The first criminal trial against Tweed resulted in a hung jury, but the second ended with a conviction on misdemeanor charges. The sentence was a $12,500 fine and 13 years in jail, which an appeals court reduced to $250 and one year. He was rearrested and being unable to raise the $3 million bail, Tweed ended up in Ludlow Street jail. He was granted privileges and liberties not allowed to other inmates, such as carriage rides and visits to his home and those of his adult children. On December 4, 1875, he escaped while on such a sojourn and hid out in New Jersey. In March 1876, the civil jury found Tweed guilty and liable for over $6 million. Learning of the judgment, he fled to Cuba, then Spain. In September, Spanish officials arrested and deported him, mistakenly identifying him (through a Nast cartoon) as a child abductor. Back in New York by late November, he was placed in the Ludlow Street jail again where he died.

Political reformers took over the city and state governments. Following Tweed's arrest, Tammany survived but was no longer controlled just by Protestants and was now dependent on leadership from bosses of Irish descent. There is little question that the Tweed Ring were outright thieves: an estimated $75-200 million was swindled from New York City between 1865 and 1871.
Louis Kuehnle and Nucky Johnson in Atlantic City

Louis Kuehnle was born in New York City on December 25, 1857, the son of German immigrants. The family moved to Egg Harbor City, New Jersey, where Kuehnle began his first hotel, The New York Hotel. The family then moved in 1875 to nearby Atlantic City to open another hotel, Kuehnle's Hotel. When he was 18 and his father died, Kuehnle took over running the hotel, which became a popular meeting place for local politicians, including Atlantic County power brokers, such as Nucky Johnson's father Sheriff Smith E. Johnson. Kuehnle, known as the “Commodore”, became the leader of the Republican organization that controlled Atlantic City from 1900 to 1911 and a mentor to Enoch ("Nucky") Johnson. (The “Commodore” in the fictitious “Boardwalk Empire” television series is based on Kuehnle and Nucky Thomson is based on Nucky Johnson.)

In 1913, Kuehnle was convicted of a conflict of interest and related corruption and was sentenced to a year of hard labor plus a $1,000 fine. After serving a six-month sentence he took an extended vacation to Bermuda and then Bavaria, Germany. When he returned to Atlantic City, Nucky Johnson had become the unofficial boss of the city. After Kuehnle unsuccessfully challenged Johnson's leadership, Johnson agreed to support his former mentor for City Commissioner. Kuehnle was elected in 1920 and reelected to four terms as City Commissioner until his death in 1934.

From 1911 until 1941, Nucky Johnson was the undisputed "boss" of the political machine that controlled Atlantic City and Atlantic County government. His rule encompassed the Roaring Twenties when Atlantic City was at the height of its popularity as a refuge from Prohibition. In addition to bootlegging, his organization was involved in gambling and prostitution.

Nucky Johnson was mentioned frequently in a series of articles by the New York Evening Journal about vice in Atlantic City and came under increased scrutiny by the federal government. The repeal of Prohibition in 1933 ended a major selling point for Atlantic City, as well as a major source of income for Johnson and his political machine. In 1939 Johnson was indicted for evading taxes, convicted and sentenced to ten years in federal prison and fined $20,000. He entered Lewisburg Federal Penitentiary in 1941, was paroled in 1945, and took a pauper's oath to avoid paying the fine. Following Johnson's 1941 conviction, Frank S. Farley succeeded him as the leader of Atlantic City's political machine. (See
3. “Boss” Frank Hague in Jersey City

Frank Hague was mayor of Jersey City from May 15, 1917 until his retirement on June 17, 1947. By the time he left office, he enjoyed palatial homes, European vacations, and a private suite at the Plaza Hotel in New York City. His wealth was estimated at more than $10 million at the time of his death, although his Jersey City salary never exceeded $8,500 per year and he had no other legitimate sources of income. His desk had a special drawer that opened in the front, allowing visitors to deposit bribes that then disappeared inside the desk. (See https://www.city-journal.org/html/how-steal-election-12824.html).

Hague rose through the Democratic machinery of Hudson County, which drew much of its strength by providing newly arrived immigrants with basic social services. As a reward for his efforts in turning out votes in the 1905 election, Hague was made the party leader for the Second Ward and appointed as Sergeant at Arms for the New Jersey State Assembly.

In the spring of 1913, having assured himself a place on the commission, Hague supported the renewed effort to change the Jersey City government to a commission model that would place all executive and legislative powers in a five-man commission, each of whom would head a city department, and together choose one of their colleagues to be mayor. The vote to change the form of government passed and Hague was elected to the first City Commission of Jersey City in 1913, and named public safety commissioner, with control over the police and fire departments. In the same year, Hague cemented his control of the Hudson County political machine by securing for himself the leadership of the Hudson County Democratic Organization Executive Committee.

In 1917, Hague ran on a five-man ticket on the Democratic Party slate using the campaign slogan "The Unbossed". The voter tally placed A. Harry Moore, a future governor, ahead of Hague, 19,883 to 18,648, in a crowded field of candidates. Even though he lost by almost 3000 votes, Hague became the mayor in 1917. (See Foster, Mark. The Early Career of Mayor Frank Hague and https://www.nj.com/jerseyjournal150/2017/04/frank_hague_era_in_jersey_city_redefined_what_it_m.html).
Some suggest that Hague helped to get President Roosevelt elected. When Roosevelt won the Democratic Party nomination for president, Hague offered to organize the biggest political rally anyone had ever seen if Roosevelt would launch his presidential campaign in New Jersey. When Roosevelt formally began his campaign with an event at the Jersey Shore town of Sea Girt, Hague's machine made sure there were several thousand Hudson County voters looking on and cheering. Hague's support was rewarded with funding for a massive medical center complex complete with a maternity hospital named after his mother, Margaret Hague. During the 1936 campaign Hague provided 150,000 adults and children to cheer Roosevelt during a visit.

Although Hague was accommodating to labor unions during the first half of his mayoral career (1917-29), with Jersey City police turning back strikebreakers, he became an opponent of organized labor in the 1930s when efforts to organize the work crews constructing the Pulaski Skyway turned into an intense labor war. When Socialist presidential candidate Norman Thomas came to speak on behalf of the CIO during a May Day rally in Journal Square, Hague's police swept Thomas and his wife into a car, took them to the Pavonia ferry and sent them back to New York. Hague spent much of the decade inveighing against Communists and labor unions, and his attempts to suppress the CIO's activities in Jersey City led to a U.S. Supreme Court decision, Hague v. Committee for Industrial Organization, 307 U.S. 496 (1939), that is a cornerstone of law concerning public expression of political views on public property.

The beginning of the end for Hague came in 1943, when former governor Walter Edge was returned to office. Edge's attorney general, Walter Van Riper, initiated several prosecutions of Hague cronies. Hague retaliated by having his handpicked U.S. Attorney for the District of New Jersey bring federal indictments against Van Riper, but Van Riper was acquitted. Edge also initiated reforms in the civil service, freeing it from Hague's control. Edge's successor, fellow Republican Governor Alfred Driscoll, succeeded in further curbing Hague's power. Governor Driscoll led the effort to implement a new constitution, which streamlined state government and made it less vulnerable to control by locally based bosses like Hague. For example, county prosecutors were now directly accountable to the state attorney general. It also set up a new state Supreme Court, which was given supervision over the state's judges. As the first Chief Justice, Driscoll appointed an old Hague foe, Arthur T. Vanderbilt. Driscoll also installed voting machines throughout the state, which made it harder for corrupt politicians to steal elections.

Creating a Timeline

Use Handout 1 to place Tammany Hall, Kuehnle and Johnson AC and Boss Hague on a timeline and connect with the historical trends:

1. Height of immigration 1890-1920
2. Boss Tweed and Tammany Hall, 1870-1915 (FIX)
3. Louis Kuehnle 1900-1911
4. Nucky Johnson, 1911-1933
5. World War I, 1915-1918
6. Frank Hague, 1917-1947
7. Prohibition 1920-33
8. Women’s Suffrage, 1920-
9. New Deal 1933-1941
10. World War II 1941-45

See the completed chart below:

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**Compare and Contrast Jigsaw**

Divide the class into three groups and handout background about:

1. Tammany Hall and Boss Tweed (Handout 2)
2. Atlantic City and Nucky Johnson (Handout 3)
3. Jersey City and Frank Hague (Handout 4).

Each group will review one of the sets of cards about machines and bosses. The groups will then jigsaw and explain the background of their machine and boss to the members of the other two groups. Students can use graphic organizers (Handout 5) to take notes.

**E. Do Political Machines help or hinder progress?**

Lord James Bryce was a Presbyterian Scot born in Belfast, Ireland in 1838. In 1867 he was called to the bar, and from 1870 to 1893 he served as professor of civil law at Oxford, where, with Lord Acton, he founded the *English Historical Review* (1885). From 1880 to 1907 Bryce was a Liberal member of the House of Commons, serving as Undersecretary of State for Foreign Affairs (1886).
Bryce made the first of several visits to the United State in 1870, then again in 1881, 1883 and twice more. Before serving as the British ambassador to the United States (1907-13), Bryce examined "the institutions and the people of America as they are" and presented his findings in *The American Commonwealth*, first published in London in three volumes in 1888 and revised many times. In 1914, Bryce became a viscount and a member of the International Court of Justice, The Hague. Later, during World War I, he headed a committee that judged Germany guilty of atrocities in Belgium and France. Subsequently, he advocated the establishment of the League of Nations. Lord Bryce died in 1922. In *The American Commonwealth*, Bryce sought to describe the United States as it existed, including how the political parties sometimes worked through political machines, rings and political bosses.

Lord James Bryce, Library of Congress

**Activity 3: Document Analysis**

Divide students into three groups and assign reading as homework:


In class, provide groups 5-10 minutes to summarize. Then jigsaw the groups and have one person from each original group summarize the excerpt to the other groups. Then have all of the students participate in a class discussion regarding the questions below:

- Why did political machines develop in large cities? (“A vast population of ignorant immigrants. The leading men all intensely occupied with business. Communities so large that people know little of one another and that the interest of each individual in good government in comparatively small.”)
• How do “professional politicians take over control? (Either through the party machinery of the great cities which command the surrounding county or they get on good terms with the state party managers)
• How did the machines control elections? (through local leaders or “workers”)
• Draw conclusions.

**Inquiry: Do political machines help or hinder progress?**

There is more to the story than a confrontation of the machine form of city government and the ideology of reformer exhortations. Political machines offered basic necessities, such as housing, food, and jobs in return for votes. Political machines and the bosses who controlled them also played a large role in the economic development of many American cities during the late 19th and early 20th centuries. During the period 1890-1920, the three cities we are looking at expanded and grew dramatically. Unskilled immigrants who teamed in from Southern and Eastern Europe found productive jobs in all three cities.

While **New York City** was controlled by Tammany hall, Manhattan Eye, Ear and Throat Hospital was opened in 1869. Land was set aside for the newly founded Metropolitan Museum of Art in 1870. The Brooklyn Bridge was constructed and opened in 1883. The five borough were consolidated in 1898 and the New York City subway was built and opened in 1904.

In **Atlantic City**, “Commodore” Kuehnle was responsible for numerous improvements. Concerned with high rates for telephone and gas, he created his own telephone and gas companies, resulting in lower prices. His telephone company, Atlantic Coast Telephone Company, would later be bought by Bell Telephone. Kuehnle also helped lower electric prices by supporting a competing utility in the area. He helped expand the boardwalk and even increased the amount of fresh water in town by building a water main from the mainland to Absecon Island. He also helped to modernize the trolley system. Like other summer resorts, Atlantic City had a seasonal economy. By offering alcohol during Prohibition, Nucky Johnson was able to attract tourists during the winter, making Atlantic City the nation’s premier location for conventions. In an effort to promote a year-round convention-supported economy, Johnson directed the construction of Atlantic City Convention Hall, which opened in 1929.

In **Jersey City**, Boss Hague founded the Bureau of Special Services for troubled youth in the city. He raised tens of thousands of dollars for the city from taxes on the railroads, the Standard Oil Company and the Public Service Corporation. Three high schools—Snyder, Ferris and Lincoln—and five elementary schools were built to increase educational opportunities available to Jersey City's youth. Hague chose Mary T. Norton, a community volunteer he had met during World War I, and convinced her to run as the first woman on the Hudson County Board of Chosen Freeholders in 1921 and then as New Jersey’s first female member of Congress. Norton served 13 consecutive terms (1923-49) in the House of Representatives and ’s seniority in the House of Representative and her seniority by the time of the Depression afforded her the ability to secure funds for Hague’s jobs creation program in Jersey City under the Works Progress Administration (WPA). The federally funded program resulted in grants and loans for the construction of the A. Harry Moore School, Roosevelt Stadium and the completion of the Medical Center Complex begun by Hague.

Considering the readings in The American Commonwealth as well as the above facts, have a class discussion regarding:

• The extent to which there is a direct or indirect relationship between domestic events in the United States and corruption in New Jersey
The extent to which machine bosses were able to help their constituents and their cities

On balance, did the political machines in New York City, Jersey City and Atlantic City help or hinder progress in the city?

F. The Press and the Progressives demand Reform

Political Cartoons

As American cities and industry were growing with increasing immigrants and political bosses were expanding their influence, so was the press. Harper's Weekly, which began in 1857 as a “journal of civilization,” was the leading weekly newspaper in the United States during this industrial period. Primarily due to the political cartoons of Thomas Nast (1840-1902), Harper’s Weekly played an important role in the election of Abraham Lincoln in 1864, and Ulysses S. Grant in 1868 and 1872. In 1868, Nast and Harper’s Weekly began to focus on political corruption with a series of political cartoons and articles seeking to bring the corruption of Boss Tweed and Tammany Hall in New York City to the public’s attention. See Handouts 9, 10 and 11.

Muckrakers

Due to the rise of advertising, magazine subscriptions were cheap and ubiquitous by the turn of the 20th century, influencing the way people received the news, and the way people wrote about it. A group of writers, journalists, and critics nicknamed “muckrakers” by President Theodore ‘Teddy’ Roosevelt (1901-1908) (he borrowed the term from John Bunyan’s Pilgrim’s Progress, in which a rake was used to dig up filth and muck), exposed corporate malfeasance and political corruption to the American public (1890-1915) and sought to inspire moral outrage and social change. Muckrakers targeted many turn-of-the-century injustices brought on by the large increase of immigrants, the rapid growth of the cities, unregulated big business and the influence of political machines, as well as many other social problems.

McClure’s Magazine (1893–1929) was an illustrated monthly periodical that was highly popular at the turn of the 20th century, credited with having started the tradition of investigative “muckraking” journalism. The magazine featured both political and literary content, publishing serialized novels-in-progress, a chapter at a time, including writers such as Willa Cather, Arthur Conan Doyle, Herminie T. Kavanagh, Rudyard Kipling, Jack London, Lincoln Steffens, Robert Louis Stevenson, and Mark Twain. At the beginning of the 20th century, its major competitors included Collier’s and the Saturday Evening Post. McClure’s was sold and restyled as a women’s magazine 1921-29.

While muckraking is often associated with sensationalistic reporting, in many cases these journalists--including Upton Sinclair, Nelly Bly, Ida Tarbell, Jacob Riis, Ray Stannard Baker and Lincoln Steffens--demonstrated the enormous power of the press, and the democratic value of fact-based investigative journalism.

Political Cartoons and Investigative Journalism

Have students look at the three political cartoons by Thomas Nast from Harper’s Weekly attached as Handouts 9, 10 and 11. What are the political cartoons saying to the public?

Have students read Handout 12: Excerpt from George Plunkitt Chapter 23: Strenuous Life of the Tammany District Leader, chap. 23, by William L. Riordon (1905)

https://www.marxists.org/reference/archive/plunkett-george/tammany-hall/#s23

Discuss: What do the cartoons (handouts 9, 10 and 11) and the excerpts (Handouts 12 and 13) have in common?

Have your students identify additional political cartoons about political bosses and political machines in New Jersey.

The “Progressive” Reformers

The “Progressive Era” (1890-1920) was a time when a broad consensus was developing about the need for government to address the problems created by rapid industrialization and mass immigration. It was led by “progressives”, activists in the late 1800s and early 1900s who fought to make the economic and political systems in the U.S. fairer, and was given a push by Presidents Theodore Roosevelt (1901-1909), William Taft (1909-1913) and Woodrow Wilson (1913-1921)

The politics of the Gilded Age that Bryce first chronicled had passed into the Progressive Era with the passage of a plethora of social reform legislation. Between the publication of the first edition of *The American Commonwealth* in 1888 and Bryce’s death in 1922 there had been four constitutional amendments. In addition to the ill-fated 18th Amendment prohibiting intoxicating liquors (repealed by the 21st Amendment in 1933), the fundamental structure of the Constitution was altered by allowing for an income tax (16th Amendment in 1913), providing for the direct election of Senators (17th Amendment, also in 1913), and giving women the right to vote (19th Amendment in 1920). The creation of the Interstate Commerce Commission in 1887 was a foreshadowing of the coming age of national regulation: the Sherman Anti-Trust Act (1890); the Pure Food and Drug Act (1906); and the Child Labor Act (laws restricting child labor were passed in 1916 and 1918 but struck down by the U.S. Supreme Court as unconstitutional).

How effective were the legislative reforms of the Progressive Era in controlling political corruption?

By utilizing the initiative process, citizens can propose and vote on proposals directly, without need of legislative referral. Most states that permit the process require a 2/3 majority vote. Not all amendments proposed will receive sufficient support to be placed on the ballot. There is no statewide process in New Jersey or New York for citizens to initiate a state issue, no recall of state officials and the only referendum process is for bonds, constitutional and other issues placed on the ballot by the legislature. Only 165 New Jersey municipalities and 6 counties have initiative and referendum for local ballot measures.

Use Handout 14 to explain the goal of the following legislative reforms and assess how effective they have been in eliminating political machines:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Purpose</th>
<th>Effectiveness</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>State—Recall</td>
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<td>State—Referendum</td>
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</table>
State—Initiative

Federal Food and Drug Administration, 1906

16th Amendment Income Tax, 1913

17th Amendment Direct Election of Senators, 1913

Federal Reserve System, 1913

Clayton Act, 1914

Federal Trade Commission, 1914

8-hour day for railroad workers, 1916

18th Amendment-Prohibition, 1920

19th Amendment-Women’s Suffrage, 1920

Federal Campaign Finance laws (Tillman Act), 1907

G. Today: State efforts to eliminate political corruption

New Jersey (and many other states) has enacted several laws to try to eliminate political corruption, including Campaign Finance laws, Open Public Meetings and “Pay to Play”.

The Open Public Meetings Act (the “Sunshine Law”) (N.J.S.A. 10:4-6), enacted in 1973, provides the public with a right of access to the meetings of a large number of government bodies at the state and local level in New Jersey. It is designed to ensure that decision-making governmental bodies conduct their meetings in public.
The “Pay to Play” Act (N.J.S.A. 19:44A-20.4 et. seq.), enacted in 2005, prohibits contractors from entering most state contracts above $17,500 if the firm or its management-level employees or their spouses made contributions of more than $300 during the 18 months preceding the award of the contract. These pay-to-play restrictions apply to contracts at the state, legislative, county, and municipal levels of government.

**Research politics in your town today and Discuss**

Research and consider who has the ability to influence/manipulate decisions in your town. Would any individual or group (i.e., a large corporation, a club, a mayor) constitute a political boss or machine or have powerful influence?

What criteria would you consider to determine if there is a political machine or boss or a powerful influence? What if one political party wins election year after year with little contest?

Who might be today’s muckrakers?

Newspapers like the *Washington Post* and the *New York Times* do periodic investigative journalism, as well as online publications, such as NJ Spotlight and NJ.com in New Jersey and online journalism. Others?

What are some issues that need reform and might be the subject of investigative reporting today?

Possibly climate change, pollution, police brutality, double dipping, hostile workplace environments, discrimination. Others?

Do you think that the Open Public Meetings Act and the Pay to Play law have successfully eliminated political bosses and machines in New Jersey?

**Assessment**

Have students write an essay explaining:

1) whether political corruption is the result of:
   - complacent citizens?
   - ability of elected officials to circumvent laws?
   - absence of checks and balances in local and state government?
   - failure of the media to expose corruption?
   - economic and/or special interests?

2) what reforms are needed to reduce or prevent political corruption and what can citizens do to help get such reforms enacted?
Handout 1: Timeline: Connect political machines with historical trends by coloring the years

- Height of immigration 1890-1920
- World War I, 1915-18
- Prohibition 1920-33
- Women’s Suffrage, 1920-
- New Deal 1933-1941
- World War II 1941-45

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Immigration</th>
<th>Prohibition</th>
<th>Women Suffrage</th>
<th>New Deal Reforms</th>
<th>World War 1 &amp; 2</th>
<th>Boss Tweed – Tammany Hall</th>
<th>Louis Kuehnle Atlantic City</th>
<th>Nucky Johnson Atlantic City</th>
<th>Frank Hague – Jersey City</th>
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Handout 2: Tammany Hall and Boss Tweed in New York City

One of the most infamous political machines in the United States was Democratic-controlled Tammany Hall in New York City (1865-1934). Started in 1789 for patriotic and fraternal purposes, after the Civil War the Society of St. Tammany began to weave together social club organization with the Democratic Party and basically ran New York City for the next 70 years.

Tammany Hall’s electoral base lay predominantly with New York’s burgeoning immigrant population, which often exchanged political support for Tammany Hall’s patronage. During the Industrial Age in the late 19th Century, the extralegal services that Tammany and other urban political machines provided often served as a rudimentary public welfare system. The patronage Tammany Hall provided to immigrants, many of whom lived in extreme poverty and received little government assistance, covered three key areas: 1. food, coal, rent money or a job in times of emergency; 2. acting as an intermediary between immigrants and the government; and 3. familiarizing immigrants with American society and its political institutions and helping them become naturalized citizens.

Under Tweed’s regime, “naturalization committees,” made up primarily of Tammany politicians and employees, were established. The “committees” filled out paperwork, provided witnesses, and lent immigrants money for the fees required to become citizens. Judges and other city officials were bribed and otherwise compelled to go along with the workings of these committees. In exchange for all these benefits, immigrants assured Tammany Hall they would vote for their candidates.

Under "Boss" Tweed, New York City expanded into the Upper East and Upper West Sides of Manhattan, the Brooklyn Bridge was begun, land was set aside for the Metropolitan Museum of Art, orphanages and almshouses were constructed, and social services--both directly provided by the state and indirectly funded by state appropriations to private charities--helping tens of thousands of people and bringing great wealth to Tweed and his friends. It also brought them into contact and alliance with the rich elite of the city, who either accepted the graft and corruption or else tolerated it because of Tammany's ability to influence and control the immigrant population, of whom the “uppertens” of the city were wary.

Tweed’s downfall began with Tammany's inability to control Irish laborers in the Orange riot of 1871 (See https://www.nytimes.com/2005/03/27/books/chapters/boss-tweed.html. Campaigns to topple
Boss Tweed continued:

Tweed by the *New York Times* and Thomas Nast of *Harper's Weekly* began to gain traction in the aftermath of the riot, and disgruntled insiders began to leak the details of the extent and scope of the Tweed Ring's avarice to the newspapers.

In 1872 Tweed was arrested and charged with fraud, and forced to resign as public works commissioner, state senator, and head of Tammany Hall. The first criminal trial against Tweed resulted in a hung jury, but the second ended with a conviction on misdemeanor charges. The sentence was a $12,500 fine and 13 years in jail, which an appeals court reduced to $250 and one year. He was rearrested and being unable to raise the $3 million bail, Tweed ended up in Ludlow Street jail. He was granted privileges and liberties not allowed to other inmates, such as carriage rides and visits to his home and those of his adult children. On December 4, 1875, he escaped while on such a sojourn and hid out in New Jersey. In March 1876, the civil jury found Tweed guilty and liable for over $6 million. Learning of the judgment, he fled to Cuba, then Spain. In September, Spanish officials arrested and deported him, mistakenly identifying him (through a Nast cartoon) as a child abductor. Back in New York by late November, he was placed in the Ludlow Street jail again where he died.

Political reformers took over the city and state governments. Following Tweed's arrest, Tammany survived but was no longer controlled just by Protestants and was now dependent on leadership from bosses of Irish descent. There is little question that the Tweed Ring were outright thieves: an estimated $75-200 million was swindled from New York City between 1865 and 1871.
Handout 3: Louis Kuehnle and Nucky Johnson in Atlantic City

Louis Kuehnle was born in New York City on December 25, 1857, the son of German immigrants. The family moved to Egg Harbor City, New Jersey, where Kuehnle began his first hotel, The New York Hotel. The family then moved in 1875 to nearby Atlantic City to open another hotel, Kuehnle's Hotel. When he was 18 and his father died, Kuehnle took over running the hotel, which became a popular meeting place for local politicians, including Atlantic County power brokers, such as Nucky Johnson's father Sheriff Smith E. Johnson. Kuehnle, known as the “Commodore”, became the leader of the Republican organization that controlled Atlantic City from 1900 to 1911 and a mentor to Enoch (“Nucky”) Johnson. (The “Commodore” in the fictitious Boardwalk Empire television series is based on Kuehnle and Nucky Thomson is based on Nucky Johnson.)

In 1913, Kuehnle was convicted of a conflict of interest and related corruption and was sentenced to a year of hard labor plus a $1,000 fine. After a six-month sentence he took an extended vacation to Bermuda and then Bavaria, Germany. When he returned to Atlantic City, Nucky Johnson had become the unofficial boss of the city. After Kuehnle unsuccessfully challenged Johnson’s leadership, Johnson agreed to support his former mentor for City Commissioner. Kuehnle was elected in 1920 and reelected to four terms as City Commissioner until his death in 1934.

From 1911 until 1941, Nucky Johnson was the undisputed "boss" of the political machine that controlled Atlantic City and Atlantic County government. His rule encompassed the Roaring Twenties when Atlantic City was at the height of its popularity as a refuge from Prohibition. In addition to bootlegging, his organization was involved in gambling and prostitution. Nucky Johnson was mentioned frequently in a series of articles by the New York Evening Journal about vice in Atlantic City and came under increased scrutiny by the federal government. The repeal of Prohibition in 1933 ended a major selling point for Atlantic City, as well as a major source of income for Johnson and his political machine. In 1939 Johnson was indicted for evading taxes, convicted and sentenced to ten years in federal prison and fined $20,000. He entered Lewisburg Federal Penitentiary in 1941, was paroled in 1945, and took a pauper's oath to avoid paying the fine. Following Johnson's 1941 conviction, Frank S. Farley succeeded him as the leader of Atlantic City's political machine. (See https://www.atlanticcityexperience.org/exhibits/exhibit-nucky-johnson-prohibition/boss-nucky-johnson.htm)
Handout 4: “Boss” Frank Hague and Jersey City

Frank Hague was Mayor of Jersey City from May 15, 1917 until his retirement on June 17, 1947. By the time he left office, he enjoyed palatial homes, European vacations, and a private suite at the Plaza Hotel in New York City. His wealth was estimated at more than $10 million at the time of his death, although his Jersey City salary never exceeded $8,500 per year and he had no other legitimate sources of income. His desk had a special drawer that opened in the front, allowing visitors to deposit bribes that then disappeared inside the desk. (See https://www.city-journal.org/html/how-steal-election-12824.html).

Hague rose through the Democratic machinery of Hudson County, which drew much of its strength by providing newly arrived immigrants with basic social services. As a reward for his efforts in turning out votes in the 1905 election, Hague was made the party leader for the Second Ward and appointed as Sergeant at Arms for the New Jersey State Assembly.

In the spring of 1913, having assured himself a place on the commission, Hague supported the renewed effort to change the Jersey City government to a commission model that would place all executive and legislative powers in a five-man commission, each of whom would head a city department, and together choose one of their colleagues to be mayor. The vote to change the form of government passed and Hague was elected to the first City Commission of Jersey City in 1913, and named public safety commissioner, with control over the police and fire departments. In the same year, Hague cemented his control of the Hudson County political machine by securing for himself the leadership of the Hudson County Democratic Organization Executive Committee.

In 1917, Hague ran on a five-man ticket on the Democratic Party slate using the campaign slogan "The Unbossed". The voter tally placed A. Harry Moore, a future governor, ahead of Hague, 19,883 to 18,648, in a crowded field of candidates. Even though he lost by almost 1000 votes, Hague became the mayor in 1917. (See Foster, Mark. The Early Career of Mayor Frank Hague and https://www.nj.com/jerseyjournal150/2017/04/frank_hague_era_in_jersey_city_redefined_what_it_m.html.)
Some suggest that Hague helped to get President Roosevelt elected. When Roosevelt won the Democratic Party nomination for president, Hague offered to organize the biggest political rally anyone had ever seen if Roosevelt would launch his presidential campaign in New Jersey. When Roosevelt formally began his campaign with an event at the Jersey Shore town of Sea Girt, Hague's machine made sure there were several thousand Hudson County voters looking on and cheering. Hague's support was rewarded with funding for a massive medical center complex complete with a maternity hospital named after his mother, Margaret Hague. During the 1936 campaign Hague provided 150,000 adults and children to cheer Roosevelt during a visit.

Although Hague was accommodating to labor unions during the first half of his mayoral career (1917-29), with Jersey City police turning back strike breakers, he became an opponent of organized labor in the 1930s when efforts to organize the work crews constructing the Pulaski Skyway turned into an intense labor war. When Socialist presidential candidate Norman Thomas came to speak on behalf of the CIO during a May Day rally in Journal Square, Hague's police swept Thomas and his wife into a car, took them to the Pavonia ferry and sent them back to New York. Hague spent much of the decade inveighing against Communists and labor unions, and his attempts to suppress the CIO's activities in Jersey City led to a U.S. Supreme Court decision, *Hague v. Committee for Industrial Organization*, 307 U.S. 496 (1939), that is a cornerstone of law concerning public expression of political views on public property.

The beginning of the end for Hague came in 1943, when former governor Walter Edge was returned to office. Edge's attorney general, Walter Van Riper, initiated several prosecutions of Hague cronies. Hague retaliated by having his handpicked U.S. Attorney for the District of New Jersey bring federal indictments against Van Riper, but Van Riper was acquitted. Edge also initiated reforms in the civil service, freeing it from Hague's control. Edge's successor, fellow Republican Governor Alfred Driscoll, succeeded in further curbing Hague's power. Governor Driscoll led the effort to implement a new constitution, which streamlined state government and made it less vulnerable to control by locally based bosses like Hague. For example, county prosecutors were now directly accountable to the state attorney general. It also set up a new state Supreme Court, which was given supervision over the state's judges. As the first Chief Justice, Driscoll appointed an old Hague foe, Arthur T. Vanderbilt. Driscoll also installed voting machines throughout the state, which made it harder for corrupt politicians to steal elections.
Handout 5 Compare and contrast the Political “Bosses”

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<tr>
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<th>Tammany Hall and Boss Tweed</th>
<th>Nucky Johnson and Atlantic City</th>
<th>Frank Hague and Jersey City</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>When did they rule?</td>
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<td>How did they get started?</td>
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<td>Who were their constituents?</td>
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<td>What did they accomplish?</td>
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<td>What was the nature of their corruption?</td>
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<td>How and why did their rule come to an end?</td>
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<td>What legacy did they leave?</td>
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<td>Conclusions about political bosses</td>
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Handout 6: Excerpt from Chapter 62 "How the Machine Works," in *The American Commonwealth* by Lord James Bryce (originally published in 1888, revised through 1941)

The tests by which one may try the results of the system of selecting candidates are two. Is the choice of the candidates for office really free – i.e. does it represent the unbiased wish and mind of the voters generally? Are the offices filled by men of probity and capacity sufficient for the duties?

In the country generally, i.e. in the rural districts and small cities, both these tests are tolerably well satisfied. It is true that many of the voters do not attend the primaries.

In these primaries and conventions the business is always prearranged - that is to say the local party committee comes prepared with their list of delegates or candidates. This list is usually, but not invariably, accepted; or if serious opposition appears, alterations may be made to disarm it, and preserve the unity of the party. The delegates and candidates chosen are generally the members of the local committee, their friends or creatures. Except in very small places, they are rarely the best men. But neither are they the worst. In moderately-sized communities men’s characters are known and the presence of a bad man in office brings on his fellow-citizens evils which they are not too numerous to feel individually.

In large cities the results are different because the circumstances are different. We find here, besides the conditions previously enumerated, viz numerous offices, frequent elections, universal suffrage, an absence of stimulating issues, three others of great moment.

A vast population of ignorant immigrants.

The leading men all intensely occupied with business.

Communities so large that people know little of one another and that the interest of each individual in good government is comparatively small.

Anyone can see how these conditions affect the problem. The immigrants vote, that is, they obtain votes after three or four years’ residence at most (often less), but they are not fit for the suffrage. They know nothing of the institutions of the country of its statesmen, of its political issues. Neither from Central Europe nor from Ireland do they bring much knowledge of the methods of free government and from Ireland they bring a suspicion of all government. Incompetent to give an intelligent vote, but soon finding that their vote has a value, they fall in to the hands of the party organizations, whose officers enroll them in their lists, and undertake to fetch them to the polls. I was taken to watch the process of citizen-making in New York. Droves of squalid men, who looked as if they had just emerged from an emigrant ship, and had perhaps done so only a few weeks before, for the law prescribing a certain term of residence is frequently violated, were brought up to a magistrate by the ward agent of the party which had captured them, declared their allegiance to the United States, and were forthwith placed on the roll. Such a sacrifice of common sense to the abstract principles has seldom been made by any country. Nobody pretends that such persons are fit for civic duty, or will be dangerous if kept for a time in pupilage, but neither party will incur the odium of proposing to exclude them. The real reason for admitting them, besides democratic theory was that the party which ruled New York expected to gain their votes. It is an afterthought to argue that they will sooner become good citizens by being immediately made full citizens. A stranger must not presume to say that the Americans have been imprudent but he may doubt whether the possible ultimate gain compensates the direct and unquestionable mischief.
In these great transatlantic cities, population is far less settled and permanent than in the cities of Europe. In New York, Brooklyn, Chicago, St. Louis, San Francisco, a very small part of the inhabitants are natives of the city, or have resided in it for twenty years. Hence, they know but little of one another, or even of those who would in Europe be called the leading men. There are scarcely any old families, families associated with the city, whose name recommends one of their scions to the confidence of his fellow-citizens. There are few persons who have had any chance of becoming generally known, except through their wealth; and the wealthy have neither time nor taste for political work. Political work is a bigger and heavier affair than in small communities; hence ordinary citizens cannot attend to it in addition to their regular business. Moreover, the population is so large that an individual citizen feels himself drop in the ocean. His power of affecting public affairs by his own intervention seems insignificant. His pecuniary loss through over-taxation, or jobbery, or malversation, is trivial in comparison with the trouble of trying to prevent such evils.

As party machinery is in great cities most easily perverted, so the temptation to pervert it is there strongest because the prizes are great. The offices are well paid, the patronage is large, the opportunities for jobs, commissions on contracts, pickings, and even stealings, are enormous. Hence it is well worth the while of unscrupulous men to gain control of the machinery by which these prizes may be won.

Such men, the professional politicians of the great cities, have two objects in view. One is to seize the local city and county offices. A great city, of course, controls the county in which it is the situate. The other is so to command the local party vote as to make good terms with the party managers of the State, and get them from them a share in the State offices, together with such legislation as is desired from the State legislature, and similarly to make good terms with the Federal party managers, thus securing a share in Federal offices, and the means of influencing legislation in Congress.
Handout 8: Excerpt from Chapter 63 "Rings and Bosses" The American Commonwealth by Lord James Bryce (originally published in 1888, revised through 1941)

How is the Machine run? What are the inner springs that move it? What is the source of the power the committees wield? What force of cohesion keeps leaders and followers together? What kind of government prevails among this army of professional politicians?

Those who in great titles form the committees and work the Machine are persons whose chief aim in life is to make their living by office. Such a man generally begins by acquiring influence among a knot of voters who live in his neighborhood or work under the same employer, or frequent the same grog-shop or beer saloon, which perhaps he keeps himself. He becomes are member of his primary, attends regularly, attaches himself to some leader of the body, and is forward to render service by voting as his leaders wishes, and by doing duty at elections. He has entered the large and active class called, technically, "workers," or more affectionately, "the Boys." Soon he becomes conspicuous in the primary, being recognized as controlling the votes of others - "owning them" is the technical term - and is chosen delegate to a convention. Loyalty to the party there and continued service at elections mark him out for further promotion. He is appointed to some petty office in one in the city departments, and presently is himself nominated for an elective office. By this time he has also found its way on to the ward committee, whence by degrees he rises to sit on the central committee, having carefully nursed his local connection and surrounded himself with a band of adherents, who are called his "heelers," and whose loyalty to him in the primary, secured by the hope of something good," gives weight to his words. Once a member of the central committee he discovers what everybody who comes to the front discovers sooner or later, by how few persons the world is governed. He is one of a small knot of persons who pull wires for the whole city, controlling the primaries, selecting the candidates, "running" conventions, organizing elections, treating on behalf of the party in the city with the leaders of the party in the State. Each of this knot, which is probably smaller than the committee, because every committee includes some ciphers put on to support a leader, and which may include one or two strong men not on the committee, has acquired in his upward course a knowledge of men and their weaknesses, a familiarity with the wheels, shafts and bands of the party machine, together with a skill in working it. Each can command some primaries, each has attached to himself a group of dependents who owe some place to him, or hope for some place from him. The aim of the knot is not only to get good posts for themselves, but to rivet their yoke upon the city by garrisoning the departments with their own creatures, and so controlling elections to the State legislature that they can procure such statues as they desire, and prevent the passing of statues likely to expose or injure them. They cement their dominion by combination, each placing his influence at the disposal of the others and settle all important matters in secret conclave.

Such a combination is called a ring. In a Ring there is usually some one person who holds more strings in his hand than do the others. Like them he has worked himself up to power from small beginnings, gradually extending the range of his influence over the mass of workers, and knitting close bond with influential men outside as well as inside politics, perhaps with great financiers or railway magnates, whom he can oblige, and who can furnish him with funds. At length his superior skill, courage and force of will make him, as such gifts always do make their possessor, dominant among his fellows. An army led by a council seldom conquers: it must have a commander-in-chief, who settles disputes, decides in emergencies, inspires fear or attachment. The head of the Ring is such a commander. He dispenses places, rewards the loyal, punishes the mutinous, concocts schemes, negotiates treaties. He generally avoids publicity, preferring the substance to the pomp of power, and is all the more dangerous because he sits, like a spider, hidden in the midst of his web.

He is a boss.
Thomas Nast depicts the Tweed Ring: "Who stole the people's money?" / "'Twas him."
On the left holding his hat is Tweed. To the left of Tweed in the background are city contractors involved with much of the city construction.

*Harper's Weekly*, August 19, 1871
Thomas Nast cartoon in *Harper’s Weekly*, October 7, 1871 shows Tweed’s source of power: control of the ballot box. "As long as I count the Votes, what are you going to do about it?"
Thomas Nast depicts Boss Tweed as The “Brains” that achieved the Tammany Victory at the Rochester Democratic Convention

*Harper’s Weekly*, October 21, 1871
Now, the typical American citizen is the business man. The typical business man is a bad citizen; he is busy. If he is a "big business man" and very busy, he does not neglect, he is busy with politics, oh, very busy and very businesslike. I found him buying boodlers (sic) in St. Louis, defending grafters in Minneapolis, originating corruption in Pittsburgh, sharing with bosses in Philadelphia, deploiring reform in Chicago, and beating good government with corruption funds in New York. He is a self-righteous fraud, this big business man. He is the chief source of corruption, and it were a boon if he would neglect politics. But he is not the business man that neglects politics; that worthy is the good citizen, the typical business man. He too is busy, he is the one that has no use and therefore no time for politics. When his neglect has permitted bad government to go so far that he can be stirred to action, he is unhappy, and he looks around for a cure that shall be quick, so that he may hurry back to the shop.

Naturally, too, when he talks politics, he talks shop. His patent remedy is quack; it is business. "Give us a business man," he says ("like me," he means). "Let him introduce business methods into politics and government; then I shall be left alone to attend to my business." There is hardly an office from United States Senator down to Alderman in any part of the country to which the business man has not been elected; yet politics remains corrupt, government pretty bad, and the selfish citizen has to hold himself in readiness like the old volunteer firemen to rush forth at any hour, in any weather, to prevent the fire; and he goes out sometimes and he puts out the fire (after the damage is done) and he goes back to the shop sighing for the business man in politics. The business man has failed in politics as he has in citizenship. Why? Because politics is business.
That’s what’s the matter with it. That’s what’s the matter with everything,—art, literature, religion, journalism, law, medicine,—they’re all business, and all—as you see them. Make politics a sport, as they do in England, or a profession, as they do in Germany, and we’ll have—well, something else than we have now,—if we want it, which is another question. But don’t try to reform politics with the banker, the lawyer, and the dry-goods merchant, for these are businessmen and there are two great hindrances to their achievement of reform: one is that they are different from, but no better than, the politicians; the other is that politics is not "their line" .... The commercial spirit is the spirit of profit, not patriotism; of credit, not honor; of individual gain, not national prosperity; of trade and dickering, not principle. "My business is sacred " says the business man in his heart. "Whatever prospers my business, is good; it must be. Whatever hinders it, is wrong; it must be. A bribe is bad, that is, it is a bad thing to take; but it is not so bad to give one, not if it is necessary to my business." "Business is business" is not a political sentiment, but our politician has caught it. He takes essentially the same view of the bribe, only he saves his self-respect by piling all his contempt upon the bribe-giver and he has the great advantage of candor. "It is wrong, maybe," he says, ‘but if a rich merchant can afford to do business with me for the sake of a convenience or to increase his already great wealth, I can afford, for the sake of living, to meet him half way. I make no pretensions to virtue, not even on Sunday."

And as for giving bad government or good, how about the merchant who gives bad goods or good goods, according to the demand? But there is hope, not alone despair, in the commercialism of our politics. If our political leaders are to be always a lot of political merchants, they will supply any demand we may create. All we have to do is to establish a steady demand for good government. The boss has us split up into parties. To him parties are nothing but means to his corrupt ends. He ‘bolts" his party, but we must not; the bribe-giver changes his party, from one election to another, from one county to another, from one city to another, but the honest voter must not. Why? Because if the honest voter cared no more for his party than the politician and the grafter, there the honest vote would govern, and that would be bad—for grail. It is idiotic, this devotion to a machine that is used to take our sovereignty from us.

If we would leave parties to the politicians, and would vote not for the party, not even for men, but for the city, and the State, and the nation, we should rule parties, and cities, and States, and nation. If we would vote in mass on the more promising ticket, or, if the two are equally bad, would throw out the party that is in, and wait till the next election and then throw out the other party that is in—then, I say, the commercial politician would feel a demand for good government and he would supply it. That process would take a generation or more to complete, for the politicians now really do not know what good government is. But it has taken as long to develop bad government, and the politicians know what that is. If it would not "go," they would offer something else, and, if the demand Were steady, they, being so commercial, would "deliver the goods."
Chapter 23. Strenuous Life of the Tammany District Leader

Note: This chapter is based on extracts from Plunkitt’s Diary and on my daily observation of the work of the district leader. - W.L.R.

The life of the Tammany district leader is strenuous. To his work is due the wonderful recuperative power of the organization.

One year it goes down in defeat and the prediction is made that it will never again raise its head. The district leader, undaunted by defeat, collects his scattered forces, organizes them as only Tammany knows how to organize, and in a little while the organization is as strong as ever.

No other politician in New York or elsewhere is exactly like the Tammany district leader or works as he does. As a rule, he has no business or occupation other than politics. He plays politics every day and night in the year, and his headquarters bears the inscription, "Never closed."

Everybody in the district knows him. Everybody knows where to find him, and nearly everybody goes to him for assistance of one sort or another, especially the poor of the tenements. He is always obliging. He will go to the police courts to put in a good word for the "drunks and disorderlies" or pay their fines, if a good word is not effective. He will attend christenings, weddings, and funerals. He will feed the hungry and help bury the dead.

A philanthropist? Not at all. He is playing politics all the time.

Brought up in Tammany Hall, he has learned how to reach the hearts of the great mass of voters. He does not bother about reaching their heads. It is his belief that arguments and campaign literature have never gained votes.
He seeks direct contact with the people, does them good turns when he can, and relies on their not forgetting him on election day. His heart is always in his work, too, for his subsistence depends on its results.

If he holds his district and Tammany is in power, he is amply rewarded by a good office and the opportunities that go with it. What these opportunities are has been shown by the quick rise to wealth of so many Tammany district leaders. With the examples before him of Richard Croker, once leader of the Twentieth District; John F. Carroll, formerly leader of the Twenty-ninth; Timothy ("Dry Dollar") Sullivan, late leader of the Sixth, and many others, he can always look forward to riches and ease while he is going through the drudgery of his daily routine.

**This is a record of a day's work by Plunkitt:**

2 A.M.: Aroused from sleep by the ringing of his doorbell; went to the door and found a bartender, who asked him to go to the police station and bail out a saloon-keeper who had been arrested for violating the excise law. Furnished bail and returned to bed at three o'clock.

6 A.M.: Awakened by fire engines passing his house. Hastened to the scene of the fire, according to the custom of the Tammany district leaders, to give assistance to the fire sufferers, if needed. Met several of his election district captains who are always under orders to look out for fires, which are considered great vote-getters. Found several tenants who had been burned out, took them to a hotel, supplied them with clothes, fed them, and arranged temporary quarters for them until they could rent and furnish new apartments.

8:30 A.M.: Went to the police court to look after his constituents. Found six "drunks." Secured the discharge of four by a timely word with the judge, and paid the fines of two.

9 A.M.: Appeared in the Municipal District Court. Directed one of his district captains to act as counsel for a widow against whom dispossess proceedings had been instituted and obtained an extension of time. Paid the rent of a poor family about to be dispossessed and gave them a dollar for food.

11 A.M.: At home again. Found four men waiting for him. One had been discharged by the Metropolitan Railway Company for neglect of duty, and wanted the district leader to fix things. Another wanted a job on the road. The third sought a place on the Subway and the fourth, a plumber, was looking for work with the Consolidated Gas Company. The district leader spent nearly three hours fixing things for the four men, and succeeded in each case.

3 P.M.: Attended the funeral of an Italian as far as the ferry. Hurried back to make his appearance at the funeral of a Hebrew constituent. Went conspicuously to the front both in the Catholic church and the synagogue, and later attended the Hebrew confirmation ceremonies in the synagogue.

7 P.M.: Went to district headquarters and presided over a meeting of election district captains. Each captain submitted a list of all the voters in his district, reported on their attitude toward Tammany, suggested who might be won over and how they could be won, told who were in need, and who were in trouble of any kind and the best way to reach them. District leader took notes and gave orders.

8 P.M.: Went to a church fair. Took chances on everything, bought ice cream for the young girls and the children. Kissed the little ones, flattered their mothers and took their fathers out for something down at the corner.

9 P.M.: At the clubhouse again. Spent $10 on tickets for a church excursion and promised a subscription for a new church bell. Bought tickets for a baseball game to be played by two nines from his district.
Listened to the complaints of a dozen pushcart peddlers who said they were persecuted by the police and assured them he would go to Police Headquarter: in the morning and see about it.

10:30 P.M.: Attended a Hebrew wedding reception and dance. Had previously sent a handsome wedding present to the bride.

12 P.M.: In bed.

That is the actual record of one day in the life of Plunkitt. He does some of the same things every day, but his life is not so monotonous as to be wearisome. Sometimes the work of a district leader is exciting, especially if he happens to have a rival who intends to make a contest for the leadership at the primaries. In that case, he is even more alert, tries to reach the fires before his rival, sends out runners to look for "drunks and disorderlies" at the police stations, and keeps a very close watch on the obituary columns of the newspapers. A few years ago there was a bitter contest for the Tammany leadership of the Ninth District between John C. Sheehan and Frank J. Goodwin. Both had had long experience in Tammany politics and both understood every move of the game.

William L. Riordon was a reporter from the New York Evening Post. His book Plunkitt of Tammany Hall includes "plain talks" with George Washington Plunkitt who was born in a shantytown on Manhattan’s upper west side in 1842 and became a ward boss in New York City’s Tammany Hall at the turn of the century, dying a very rich man in 1924. The book was originally published by Riordon in 1905.
**Handout 14:** How effective were the legislative reforms of the Progressive Era in controlling political corruption? Explain the goal of the following legislative reforms and assess how effective they were in eliminating political machines:

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<th>Purpose</th>
<th>Effectiveness</th>
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<td>State--Recall</td>
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<td>State--Initiative</td>
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<td>17th Amendment Direct Election of Senators, 1913</td>
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<td>Federal Reserve System, 1913</td>
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<td>Federal Trade Commission, 1914</td>
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<td>18th Amendment-Prohibition, 1920</td>
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<td>19th Amendment-Women’s Suffrage, 1920</td>
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<td>Federal Campaign Finance laws (Tillman Act, 1907)</td>
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