



DUMBBELL TENEMENT

18.4 "Practical Politics" for Urban Immigrants: The Machine at Work

William L. Riordon

One of the major forces in the lives of immigrants who settled in American cities was the political "machine." The machine was run by bosses, often recent immigrants themselves, who traded favors for votes. These bosses not only dispensed jobs and material benefits to local residents, but also—often by methods that shocked "good government" reformers—managed to deliver necessary city services with unprecedented efficiency. In 1905, William Riordon, a New York reporter, conducted lengthy interviews with George Washington Plunkitt, one of the bosses of the notorious Tammany Hall machine. In this excerpt from Riordon's book, Plunkitt explains what fueled the urban political machine and how it worked for the benefit of all concerned.

Consider:

1. The special appeal Plunkitt's values and methods might have had to recent immigrants;
2. Whether the machine was really beneficial to immigrants;
3. How Plunkitt's approach compares with the way a political leader should function in a representative government.

There's only one way to hold a district: you must study human nature and act accordin' . . .

To learn real human nature you have to go among the people, see them and be seen. I know every man, woman, and child in the Fifteenth District, except them that's been born this summer—and I know some

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