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THE ROOMS WHERE IT HAPPENED:

THE RISE, CLIMAX, AND FALL OF NEW YORK'S TAMMANY HALL POLITICAL
MACHINE

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Abstract

From 1789 to its ultimate dissolution in 1967, the political machine known as Tammany Hall waged a campaign of patronage and control over the Democratic Party in all its many forms. Waxing and waning in power across the years, the legacy of Tammany Hall is the discourse and controversy surrounding not only Tammany but the idea of machine politics. This thesis presents the two prevailing perspectives on Tammany; the opinion that Tammany Hall is a corrupt organization that forever tarnished Democratic politics in the United States, and the view that Tammany served as a type of early social welfare system in an era where the government was reluctant to extend a helping hand. Through the lens of three Presidential elections – 1828, 1872, and 1912 – the eras and historical context around the elections are discussed to identify when Tammany Hall rose to prominence, when it peaked in power, and when it began its fall from grace. Primary research of political cartoons (particularly those from Thomas Nast) and publications indicates a strong anti-Tammany sentiment, especially in the Jacksonian and Progressive Era, with some redeeming opinions of the political machine during the Gilded Age. However, historiographical research presents a much more positive attitude towards Tammany as some historians argue that Tammany Hall provided much-needed support and protection to the most downtrodden in American cities. This thesis does not aim to answer the question of which side of this controversy is correct, but rather present the sheer extent of the debate and discuss the merits and pitfalls of both the arguments surrounding Tammany Hall and of Tammany Hall itself.

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Introduction

Since the first session of the Continental Congress was called, there have been actors outside of capitol hill who wish to turn the nation's political system towards their own desires. Such organizations are often shrouded in controversy and serve as a point of debate amongst political scholars and historians alike, for they represent both the freedom to advocate for a particular cause as well as the lack of freedom that comes from rampant corruption and political machinations. Perhaps no organization in the history of the United States showcases this dichotomy more than New York's Tammany Hall Political Machine.

Founded as the Society of Tammany or the Columbian Order in the days of Aaron Burr and named after famed Lenape leader Tamanend, the political organization that would be known to so many as the infamous Tammany Hall rose to prominence with the so-called "Spoils System" of Andrew Jackson. Catapulting itself to national prominence in the 1840s by utilizing immigrant populations as political backers, Tammany became the most dominant political player in both the state of New York as well as the whole of the Democratic Party. When the Progressive Era began and the likes of Theodore Roosevelt began to look askance upon the urban political machines such as Tammany, the machine proved rather resilient and continued to stay in power at the local level until Theodore's cousin Franklin Delano Roosevelt instituted the societal reforms of the First New Deal in 1933. Through the combined efforts of Roosevelt and New York City Mayor Fiorello La Guardia, Tammany collapsed after the Seabury Commission gutted the machine's leadership and FDR stripped Tammany of its federal support. Defunded and lacking direction, Tammany Hall withered and vanished from politics.

Even amongst the rampant political machinations and organizations that have sought to influence the United States' political process, Tammany stands out among them. Political

cartoons depicting Tammany's bosses as gluttonous criminals flood US History textbooks across the nation, and research surrounding the impacts of Tammany Hall in American politics, especially when the Gilded Age is concerned, are in no short supply. It is the contention of this piece that Tammany stands out so distinctly in the national profile from other urban machines like it due to the intense controversy surrounding its practices across US history. From its origins in the Spoils System, to its national prominence during the Tweed Ring in the 1840s, to its eventual fall between the presidencies of Woodrow Wilson and Franklin Delano Roosevelt, Tammany elicited responses of high praise and deep condemnation from citizens and scholars alike.

How did Tammany Hall rise and fall? How did this organization that once dominated not only New York politics but the whole of the Democratic Party rise in power and then fade into obscurity? How did the advocates of machine politics make their case? How did its opponents argue against it? And why is Tammany Hall such a divisive political organization? To capture the historiographical controversy of Tammany Hall throughout its reign in American politics, three Presidential Elections will be used as place markers to discuss both the elections themselves but mainly the eras and historical progression around them.

The Election 1828 between Andrew Jackson and John Quincy Adams will demonstrate Tammany Hall's rise to political power through patronage and how its very inception itself came out of a practice widely heralded as egregiously undemocratic.

The Election of 1872 between Ulysses S. Grant and Horace Greeley highlights the climax of Tammany's influence in Democratic politics, particularly the rule of "Boss" William Tweed and the Tweed Ring that made Tammany's name synonymous with corruption. This election also

represents the beginning of a decline for Tammany, specifically with famed cartoonist Thomas Nast's depictions of Tweed and Greeley inspired action against both Tweed and Tammany Hall.

The Election of 1912 between Woodrow Wilson, William Howard Taft, Theodore Roosevelt, and Eugene V. Debs primarily focuses on the Democratic Convention of 1912 in Baltimore. Despite Tammany's efforts to get Champ Clark named the Democratic Party's nominee, the progressive Woodrow Wilson was nominated and promptly adopted an amendment to the Democratic Party's platform that called for the removal of political machines such as Tammany Hall from the party's future; the first time a century that Tammany did not choose the Democratic presidential candidate. The Morgan-Ryan-Belmont Amendment served as the beginning of Tammany's dissolution from American politics.

The controversy surrounding Tammany and the sheer amount of material to be discussed on either side of the Tammany Hall debate only grew the longer Tammany Hall remained a player in American politics. It is important to keep in mind what aspects of the material are to be focused on; whether it is a political cartoon, a diary entry, or a historian's account of a particular event, the controversy and clash in philosophy between those who view Tammany as warriors for change versus those who feel the organization is nothing more than a conglomeration of criminals is the primary focus of this literature review. It is not the job of historians nor scholars to answer the question of whether Tammany Hall was a fundamentally positive or negative actor in society, but rather to analyze the perspectives of those who interacted with Tammany during its existence and to draw conclusions about public opinion from them. Opinions on Tammany and its status in society begin as far back as its very inception during the Jacksonian Era, so that is where the research and analysis of Tammany's legacy will begin.

Chapter I: The Election of 1828

In 1828, the United States found itself in one of the most contentious and vicious elections the nation would ever know: a rematch between incumbent president John Quincy Adams, the Whig candidate, and General Andrew Jackson, famed war hero of the Battle of New Orleans and the Democratic-Republican candidate. With Adams and his administration marked by the shadow of what Jackson and his allies referred to as a “corrupt bargain” in 1824 where an unclear Electoral College vote led to Speaker of the House Henry Clay carrying the House of Representatives for Adams over Jackson, the fiery War of 1812 veteran was prepared to wage whatever type of war necessary to become the President. This included promising political offices and kickbacks to political supporters in a technique that would be known as the Spoils System. Shrouded in controversy, this political strategy was the foothold that allowed one of the most prolific organizations in U.S. history to gain its first foray into Democratic politics – Tammany Hall.

Founded as the Tammany Society in New York in 1789, this political machine found itself supported by the likes of George Clinton, Aaron Burr, and other Democratic-Republicans in a bid to counter the interests of Alexander Hamilton and the Federalist Society of Cincinnati¹. Fundamentally, the Federalists and Democratic-Republicans were separated by views on the power of the federal government. Federalists, such as the Society of Cincinnati, advocated for a strong central government with power over the decisions of individual states. Democratic-Republicans, such as the Tammany Society, viewed a strong central government as an avenue to tyranny and thus preferred strong state governments and the autonomy of such governments to act in the best interest of its citizens.

¹ Cost, J. (2012). Spoiled rotten: How the politics of patronage corrupted the once noble Democratic Party and now threatens the American republic. Harper Collins, 2012.

Following the Federalist view of a powerful executive and central government, the Society of Cincinnati created branches in all thirteen of the original colonies, made up primarily of former Continental Army officers looking to use the society's influence to grant veterans of the American Revolution half pay for life. Cincinnati ran into immediate opposition from farmers and much of the lower classes, who viewed their desire as an undue burden upon the pocketbooks of the general populace and generally distrusted the former officers themselves².

Tammany, following the Democratic-Republican view of strong state and local governments, situated itself firmly in New York and Pennsylvania. While not directly involved in elections nor real policy debates, the Tammany Society held regular events in social clubs across New York and Pennsylvania with the goal of expanding their membership and earning loyalty from wealthy and powerful players in the new United States as well as the common folk who they knew could be quite influential if vocal enough (Waide 2016).

Tammany's first foray into national politics came in the Election of 1800 where, with Aaron Burr running the society's campaign in New York state, incumbent President John Adams lost both New York and the presidency to the Tammany-supported Democratic-Republican; former Secretary of State Thomas Jefferson. However, the controversy surrounding Tammany Hall began practically immediately after its inception as it quickly found enemies in the Clinton family, George Clinton, vice president under Thomas Jefferson, and George's nephew Dewitt. As George served in the White House, Dewitt launched a campaign on the ground in New York state to push Tammany out of the state's political realm. A Federalist and ardent hater of Aaron Burr, Dewitt used his post as Mayor of New York City to crack down on Tammany's actions and promote Federalist candidates who stood in opposition to the Democratic-Republican Tammany

² Davies, W. E. (1948). The Society of the Cincinnati in New England 1783-1800. *The William and Mary Quarterly*, 5(1), 3-25.

Society. Enough of the voter base was swayed against Tammany by Clinton's campaign that between 1806 and 1809 the city's Common Council underwent an investigation of Tammany for embezzling funds and illegal use of land. These investigations found that multiple members, including New York City Comptroller Benjamin Romaine, used their political power to seize land without making payments for it³. This investigation resulted in Federalists seizing control of New York and made two things quite clear to Tammany's leadership: First, that the Federalist opposition to them was just as strong if not stronger than their Democratic-Republican supporters. Second, if they were going to rise to the level of influence they sought, they needed to beat the Federalists at the highest level they possibly could. They needed a President.

Tammany found its President in the fiery General Andrew Jackson. Defeated by vote in the House of Representatives during his first bid for office in 1824, Jackson was determined to win the Presidency and avenge what he saw as a "corrupt bargain" that led to John Quincy Adams holding the office instead of him⁴. During Jackson's second bid for office in 1828, leaders of Tammany Hall met with Jackson and promised to campaign on his behalf if Jackson would agree to deliver federal jobs to certain Tammany members if elected. With the first true deal of the Spoils System complete, Jackson – in no small part due to Tammany's help – swept the vote and defeated the incumbent Adams. Making good on his promise, Jackson appointed some Tammany members into federal offices. While Tammany were certainly not the only to benefit from the Spoils System, they certainly benefited immensely. Finally having an opportunity to seize power from the very top of the political ladder, Tammany Hall quickly became the city affiliate of the Democratic-Republican party for the state of New York meaning

³ Myers, G. (1901). History of Tammany Hall. United States: University of Michigan Library.

⁴ Sellers, C. G. (1958). Andrew Jackson versus the Historians. *The Mississippi Valley Historical Review*, 44(4), 615-634.

that they were now the top political agency acting in the state of New York⁵. As the city affiliates of the newly formed Democratic Party, the Tammany Society served as the eyes, ears, and if necessary, arms of the party in New York City. Being granted such a position of power in the state of New York by President Jackson signaled a massive victory for Tammany, one that would carry them to the top of the political ladder soon.

The process by which Jackson awarded his political supporters with favors and government jobs would become known as the Spoils System, and Tammany would be whipped up into the controversy of the Spoils System just as they overcame a serious public inquisition just a few decades earlier. The Spoils System was highly controversial, and as such inspired supporters and dissenters to voice their opinion on the matter publicly. Among those that would voice their disdain at the Spoils System were members of the new Whig Party, a primarily anti-Jackson coalition which advocated against Jackson's expansion of executive power. Among those who supported the Spoils System were members of the Democratic Party as well as party-politics advocates, as they saw political patronage to strengthen not only the party but also the party's hold upon government offices well after the end of a term. The most common way for people to praise or curse the Spoils System became political cartoons, as images such as these could get around the barrier of illiteracy in the United States.

A political cartoon depicted Andrew Jackson riding atop a pig with bags of money tied to it, titled *To the Victors Belong the Spoils*. This image, penned by prolific cartoonist Thomas Nast, is a scathing critique of the Spoils System which painted Andrew Jackson as nothing more than a common criminal who propped up his presidency with fraud, bribery, and cheating⁶. This represents one side of the controversy surrounding Tammany during the early period in the

⁵ Golway, T. (2014). *Machine Made: Tammany Hall and the Creation of Modern American Politics*. United Kingdom: Liveright, 2014.

⁶ Nast, T. (1877). *To the Victor Belong the Spoils*. *Harper's Weekly*. cartoon, Harper's Weekly. See Appendix Figure 1.

nation's history, whereby their very association with Andrew Jackson and the fact that they were rewarded so heavily by the Spoils System they were the subject of intense public scorn from Federalists and opponents of Jackson's brackish and bombastic style of leadership. Andrew Jackson was a very new type of President in America's history; most of the presidents up to that point had seen the office more as "clerk in chief - merely executing the will of Congress rather than proposing their own policy"⁷.

Jackson, on the other hand, saw his role in the White House as the final word on decisions made in the country on everything from succession to the National Bank to who occupied which jobs on the Capitol. This gross change of philosophy garnered praise from those who wished for a stronger presidency but also from the likes of Tammany who used it as their steppingstone into political domination but drew criticism from those who saw Jackson and his policies as draconian and corrupt. Historian Anton Chaitkin wrote of Jackson's character and ego: "President Jackson broke down the nation's power over credit, tore down the tariffs protecting U.S. industry and wages, and blocked national expansion of canals and railroads."⁸.

Along with this perceived abuse of his power came the patronage of the Spoils System, which drug Tammany down into the gutters of controversy as well. Even well after the days of Andrew Jackson, politicians and scholars wrote of the deplorable nature of political patronage. In 1881, William Clarke wrote of the corruption that had dominated the political sphere of the US and had led to a hapless would-be bureaucrat by the name of Charles Guiteau assassination President James Garfield. Clarke argued that the "bestowing of government patronage" was responsible for the murky state of politics in the United States, and that the long road to the assassination of a president began with President Andrew Jackson rewarding men like Guiteau

⁷ Nelson, M. (2018). *The Presidency and the Political System*. United States: SAGE Publications.

⁸ Chaitkin, A. (2007). Andrew Jackson as A Treason Project. *EXECUTIVE INTELLIGENCE REVIEW*, 34(50), 50.

for their support with government offices⁹. The cause of Tammany's rise and the political corruption that followed was not a recent discovery nor a new topic of discussion – it was on the minds of Americans in the early days of Tammany as well.

At the same time, Jackson, and his contemporaries such as Martin Van Buren, were lauded in other political cartoons and publications for fighting on behalf of the so-called “common man” and using their officers to elevate those who resonated with the Democratic-Republican Party. Representing this positive attitude towards Jackson and his policies was illustrator Alfred Hoffy, who spent most of his career drawing fruit. Hoffy penned a cartoon titled *General Jackson Slaying the Many-Headed Monster*, which encapsulated how supporters of President Jackson and his band of followers viewed both the Spoils System and Jackson himself¹⁰. In this piece, Andrew Jackson is seen with direct beneficiaries of the Spoils System, such as Van Buren, triumphing over a vicious hydra-esque monster that represented the Second National Bank. In Jackson's eyes, a powerful federal institution such as a National Bank would trample on state's rights by “putting too much power in the hands of too few private citizens”.

Each head of the monster represents a different state which opposed his measures, the largest head belonging to Pennsylvania's Nicholas Biddle and Van Buren wrestling with former president John Quincy Adams. To make matters relate even more to the Spoils System, John Quincy Adams was a vocal advocate of meritocratic appointment and detested Jackson's use of political patronage, stating that as president he would never dispose of qualified bureaucrats for his own political supporters. Combing all of these factors, *General Jackson Slays the Many-Headed Monster* is a perfect example of how Americans who supported Jackson saw both the

⁹ Clarke, W. (1881). THE "SPOILS" SYSTEM IN AMERICAN POLITICS. *The Contemporary Review*, 1866-1900, 40, 633-650.

¹⁰ Hoffy, A. (1836). *General Jackson Slaying the Many Headed Monster*. cartoon, New York City, New York; Henry R. Robinson. See Appendix Figure 2.

system and those who benefited from it (such as Martin Van Buren) as warriors fighting for the will of the people, while opponents of the system (such as Adams and Biddle) were monsters in need of being slain. In this way, Tammany Hall could be viewed as one of those crusaders that rose from the feet of Jackson to serve the people of New York instead of the elite Federalists who possessed a stranglehold on New York before Jackson elevated the Tammany Society to city affiliate status.

Individuals such as Alfred Hoffy as well as the cartoon's lithographer Henry Robinson were among those during Jackson's time in office that supported him and his style of political patronage, and historians almost two hundred years later still disagree on the merits of Jackson and the Spoils System. When it comes to Tammany Hall specifically there is limited scholarship that exists defending patronage and Tammany's rise to political power during the Jacksonian Era, but there is a wealth of publications condemning the Spoils System and by extension Tammany itself. Jay Cost, a journalist and political historian, takes a critical look at Tammany and the origins of its political power. "Tammany Hall", Cost wrote, "took patronage to a whole new level than what Jackson intended...for Tammany, patronage was the whole point of government."¹¹ It should be noted that Cost is an ardent conservative and critiques many aspects of the Democratic Party, both modern and historical, so his analysis of the party's history and corruption could be politically motivated.

However, Cost's points about Tammany taking patronage from the hands of Jackson and turning it into a system to control an entire state is far from unreasonable. While the Spoils System under Jackson was certainly pervasive and a chief motivator for political support, Tammany Hall turned the very idea of patronage into the basis for a takeover of Democratic

¹¹ Ibid 20.

politics into the state of New York. By spinning their webs around local officials, judges, and bureaucrats, Cost argues that votes became “about what you can gain by voting from Tammany” as opposed to voting on ideology or values¹². While Tammany Hall may not have created the Spoils System nor even the idea of political patronage, it is the opinion of scholars such as Cost that Tammany changed patronage so much that it fundamentally corrupted what it meant to participate in the United States’ political process.

A like-minded scholar to Cost would be Gustavus Myers, and a twentieth century journalist and historian who frequently published pieces critiquing the gross accumulation of wealth in an egalitarian society. While the height of his research was in the early twentieth century, his writings on Tammany Hall and the effects of patronage on American politics in 1901 titled *The History of Tammany Hall* were republished and made available to the modern American masses in 2012. Myers asserts in his publication that Tammany grew out of the Spoils System to be nigh invincible, starting with the presidency of Martin Van Buren in 1837. Tammany, who lobbied quite heavily to have Jackson choose Van Buren as his running mate in 1832, was an ardent supporter of Van Buren and largely allowed him to determine their policy during his time in office.

Under Van Buren’s leadership in the 1830s, Myers writes, Tammany worked to expand the vote to all white men in the state of New York. While on the surface this may appear a positive aspect of Tammany’s work in the early days of the American republic, and in many ways it is, it also allowed for Tammany’s style of private political clubs and favor-mongering to expand to poor, rural white men who flocked to Jackson’s side during his bids in both 1824 and 1828¹³. This allowed the members of Tammany Hall to control state elections by not only

¹² Ibid 22.

¹³ Ibid 65.

backing their preferred candidates, but by promising both land-owning and non-land-owning white men money, jobs, or other various political favors in exchange for votes. With Tammany's influence pervading the electoral process on all fronts, Myers contends that Tammany Hall arose from the presidencies of Jackson and Van Buren as a "jubilantly invincible" organization that came to dominate Democratic politics across New York¹⁴.

Whether Tammany Hall rose to power due to a corrupt system of political cronyism or a just way to ensure that Federalist elites did not control all American politics, it is undeniable that the Society of Tammany catapulted itself to political power in the state of New York through the actions of President Andrew Jackson and the Spoils System that marked his presidency as well as the support of President Martin Van Buren. With Tammany transforming from a foil to the Society of Cincinnati into the dominant player in Democratic politics within the span of two presidencies, the organization would soon find itself faced with another series of challenges that could either solidify control of New York for the political machines or threaten to undo everything that they had created. Whatever the trials and tribulations that stood ahead for Tammany, one thing stood clear at the end of the Jacksonian Era: Tammany Hall formed out of divisive and controversial means but was poised to stand atop the political ladder in the coming decades.

¹⁴ Ibid 59.

Chapter II: The Election of 1872

In the aftermath of the American Civil War, the United States was a nation in need of healing. The country had gone to war against their brothers and sisters, leaving much of the south destroyed and six hundred thousand Americans dead. As the United States engaged in the Reconstruction to rebuild and reunify after the war, many across the United States were still left forgotten. Immigrants and the poor laborers who found themselves without friends in the cities, factory workers with no labor protections, and families who had the blade of rent and mortgages at their throats constantly are just a few of the desperate masses longing for a helping hand. In the aptly named Gilded Age some of these individuals found their opportunity in what would become one of the most prolific and controversial organizations in the history of the United States: Tammany Hall.

Using the appointments and political powers granted to them by the Jackson Administration years earlier, Tammany began targeting a relatively weak but rapidly growing population to strengthen their already tight grip on New York politics: immigrants. Between the 1840 and 1855, more than one and a half million Irish immigrants came to the United States – many of them to seek refuge from the growing famine which began in 1846¹⁵. Tammany saw in these immigrants an opportunity to forge a new coalition for the Democratic Party, one that could use its sheer volume to stomp out the Whig Party from New York. Tammany was quick to offer aid to immigrants upon their arrival in New York City, with services that could be compared to a type of social welfare system. Food, shelter, employment, and legal aid were just a few of the ways that Tammany Hall went about buying the loyalty of Irish immigrants in the

¹⁵ Thornton, J. (2003). *The Irish Potato Famine: Irish Immigrants Come to America, 1845-1850*. The Rosen Publishing Group, Inc.

city, but the most lucrative and impactful strategy of Tammany in relation to immigrants was naturalization.

Defined as the process by which a non-citizen legally becomes a citizen of a country, naturalization opens a multitude of opportunities that are not available to non-citizens; the most important of which to Tammany being voting. To ensure that the Irish immigrants they aided would be naturalized and able to vote for candidates that Tammany Hall supported, the organization and its leaders, referred to as “party bosses”, used their wealth of resources and connections across the city to bribe justices to speed through the naturalization process for their immigrant members. This process was known as the naturalization mill, and it nearly doubled the franchise in New York state from seventy-one thousand to one hundred thirty five thousand between 1850 and 1855. Naturalization mills proved fruitful for Tammany Hall, as by 1855 more than a third of voters in New York City were Irish Catholic males. Not only did this process succeed for them in terms of the number of voters, but also in the number of votes for their preferred candidates. During the 1868 mayoral election in New York City, the Tammany candidate A. Oakey Hall received five times the votes of the Republican candidate¹⁶.

With the Irish immigrant vote as well as most of the voter base in New York City within their clutches, Tammany soon took on a much more sinister appearance in the eyes of its opponents; mainly in the eyes of the new Republican Party founded in 1854. The Republican party was a coalition of former Whigs, Free Soilers, and those opposed to the expansion of slavery. The Whig influences in the Republican Party contributed lingering anti-Tammany and anti-Jacksonian sentiment to the party, which put it in direct opposition to the Democratic Party of New York City. In the years directly preceding the Civil War Tammany found itself led by a

¹⁶ Erie, S. P. (1990). *Rainbow's End: Irish-Americans and the Dilemmas of Urban Machine Politics, 1840-1985*. United Kingdom: University of California Press.

rather terrifying man who promised to bring Tammany to a place of undisputed power; William Maeger Tweed. The son of Scottish immigrants and a former US House Representative, Tweed quickly rose to prominence in 1858 when he was elected to a County Board of Supervisors. From this position Tweed filled up appointments with his political backers, much in the style of the Spoils System of Andrew Jackson¹⁷. When a party wins an election, they typically have control over the appointments in their offices and units. In this way, by elevating Democratic candidates to public office, Tweed could hand select who received positions in the bureaucracy, the judiciary, and even the offices of the Mayor and the Governor. The individuals Tweed appointed were varied; they could be the child of a prominent business owner that donated to a Democratic campaign, or a down-on-their-luck New Yorker who exchanged a government job for following Tammany's orders while in office, or a recently naturalized immigrant who turned out voters in their town and is being rewarded with a job. Those are only three of the types of people Tammany could appoint, but one thing remained constant among them: they all owned something to Tammany Hall.

Having much of New York City's local government in his pocket, the election of John Hoffman, a Tammany member and longtime ward of Tweed, as governor all but guaranteed that Tammany would be able to snake its way into every aspect of life in New York. Further consolidating power, Tweed and his supporters targeted New York City's finances as their next step to dominating New York's political sphere. Joining forces with Mayor A. Oakey Hall and Governor John Hoffman, the Board of Audit was created which, according to an amendment to the city's Tax Levy known as the Tweed Charter, deemed that all spending by the city government shall be audited by "the Mayor, the Comptroller, and the Board of Supervisors"¹⁸.

¹⁷ Hill, A. T. (2015). *The Second Bank of the United States*. Federal Reserve History. Retrieved February 27, 2023,

¹⁸ Lynch, D. T. (1927). "Boss" Tweed: The Story of a Grim Generation. United States: Boni and Liveright.

Tweed not only served on the Board of Supervisors, but now was appointed head of the Board of Audit by Governor Hoffman. With the governor, mayor, municipal government, and now the finances of the city of New York under his thumb, the so-called “Tweed Ring” was born.

Under the leadership of William “Boss” Tweed, Tammany led several public works projects in the city of New York. Construction began on the Brooklyn Bridge and the Metropolitan Museum of Art, as well as an unprecedented number of orphanages, almshouses, and charity organizations. Indirectly, the funds that Tammany pumped into social services provided both by the state and by non-state charities grew exponentially. Of course, this was not a purely philanthropic endeavor. The expansion of Tammany into these new areas of New York life brought extreme wealth to the Tweed Ring, as through their access to government contracts and insider information of land grants and land availability, Tammany Hall became the owners of large swaths of land across the city. These additions to New York’s infrastructure are not discounted or ignored by modern historians and scholars. In fact, in 2013 the Landmark Preservation Commission of New York heralded these achievements, speaking highly of Tweed and the work that Tammany did in promoting social works across the city¹⁹:

“Tweed appointed first-rate professionals to oversee the new civic improvements. Initially, these policies won broad support both from the working classes who benefitted from the new construction jobs and improved facilities and the business leaders who benefitted from the resulting real estate boom and made money investing in bonds to finance the new infrastructure.”

While individuals such as the working-class folk and business leaders who the Landmark Commission claims supported Tammany’s efforts, along with these social services and public works projects came serious concerns about the corruption that had propagated during the Tweed

¹⁹ Borough of Manhattan, & Harris, G. (2013). Landmark Site: Tammany Hall. New York City, New York; Landmark Preservation Commission.

regime. Certain people in both New York and the United States did not see Tammany as philanthropic developers of the city, but rather descendants of the Spoils System who stuffed ballot boxes, bribed immigrants for their votes, and lined their pockets while filling political appointments with their cronies.

One such critic was political cartoonist Thomas Nast; a scathing social reformer who made it his personal mission to bring down Boss Tweed. Nast took the same approach to depicting Tammany as he did to depicting Jackson, highlighting their greed and corrupt political practices to sway the public against them. Nast published several cartoons aimed at persuading public officials to take action against William Tweed, one such cartoon being titled *Boss Tweed Holds Reins of Democratic Party*. Published in 1872, this cartoon depicted an obese Boss Tweed alongside weak sycophants brutally driving a carriage where a horse labeled “Democrat” was shackled and driving²⁰. This cartoon highlighted Nast’s critiques of Tammany, being that one man and one political organization was the driving force behind an entire party in American politics. Granted, there were more political machines than just Tammany active in the United States during the 1800s, but Nast focused in on the largest and most egregiously powerful of those machines.

Despite Nast’s proclivity for depicting Tweed and Tammany Hall as gluttonous, greasy, and sinister in appearance – as well as a derogatory depiction of Irish Catholics as drunken hoodlums – perhaps the most striking and influential of Nast’s cartoons was published in 1871 titled *New York Under Tweed’s Thumb*. Nast illustrated the state of New York quite literally being crushed by the incredibly massive thumb of William Tweed, with the subtitle: “Well, what

²⁰ Nast, T. (1872). *Boss Tweed Holds Reins of Democratic Party*. New York City, New York; Harper's Weekly. See Appendix Figure 3.

are you going to do about it?”²¹. Nast often used his cartoons to inspire action and protest amongst his readers, but none were so obviously a call for action than *New York Under Tweed's Thumb*. He viewed Tammany Hall and Boss Tweed as a virus in need of being flushed out of the United States' system and used the text on his cartoon to directly ask the American people how they were going to respond to Tammany's corrupting of the American republic. Would they sit idly by and let the political machines turn politics into a game of bribery and patronage? Or would they stand up and oppose Tammany's involvement in national politics?

Nast's cartoons brought the controversy of Tammany Hall to the masses of both New York and across the United States, many of whom were illiterate but could see the cartoons and understand that Nast believed Tweed to be a villain. According to historians John Adler and Draper Hill, Nast was quite possibly the single most influential non-government actor in the war against Boss Tweed. Had Nast not published his over one hundred sixty cartoons attacking Tammany Hall, “greater attention to the misdeeds and abject monopoly that Tweed possessed over New York may never have been paid at all”²². The political cartoons combined with Tweed's failure to control the Irish Catholic mob during the Orange Riots, a series of marches by Irish immigrants in which Tammany asserted they were able to control the Irish population of New York but decidedly could not, led to investigations into William Tweed and his eventual arrest in 1872 on the charge of stealing an estimated twenty-five million dollars from New York taxpayers. While not convicted until 1877 and having escaped prison in an attempt to flee to Spain in 1875, Tweed's influence on Tammany Hall was significantly halted by his presence in a jail cell.

²¹ Nast, T. (1871). *New York Under Tweed's Thumb*. New York City, New York; Harper's Weekly. See Appendix Figure 4.

²² Adler, J., & Hill, D. (2008). *Doomed by cartoon: how cartoonist Thomas Nast and the New York Times brought down Boss Tweed and his ring of thieves*. Morgan James Publishing.

In the same year as Tweed's arrest, Tammany faced a brutal election for the most powerful office in the country. Civil War hero and incumbent President Ulysses S. Grant found himself faced by a rather famous opponent: founder and editor-in-chief of the New York Tribune Horace Greeley. Greeley was supported by Tammany as the Democratic Party officially endorsed the Liberal Republican Party candidate, believing him to be their only hope of unseating General Grant. Coming off the heels of Tweed's arrest, Thomas Nast was this time aided by the New York Times in attempting to ensure that another one of Tammany's candidates did not rise to national prominence after Tweed's defeat. To do so, the two media powerhouses capitalized on Tammany's support of Greeley to cast a shadow over his entire campaign.

The New York Times published an article calling the relationship between Tammany Hall and Horace Greeley an "Infamous Alliance"²³, and Nast published a cartoon entitled *They Are Swallowing Each Other*. Nast's cartoon depicted an ouroboros of Greeley as well as a figure in prison clothing labeled "Tammany" and "KKK" swallowing each other²⁴, making the argument that Greeley was inseparable with Boss Tweed as well as the Ku Klux Klan. For Republicans, this was entirely discrediting. Members of the Ku Klux Klan in the Reconstruction South often waged campaigns of intimidation and violence against Republican leaders in southern states, so the idea that a presidential candidate would be so closely associated with the KKK sparked serious concern over Greeley's qualifications. Additionally, President Grant in 1871 suspended the writ of *habeas corpus* in nine South Carolina counties to allow federal troops to arrest and put members of the Ku Klux Klan on federal trial in an event known as the Great South Carolina Trials²⁵. Pitting Grant against someone allegedly so close to the KKK

²³ The New York Times. (1872). *The Infamous Alliance; "Tammany responds to Greeley." hands clasped across Tammany Hall. New-York Greeley's chief supporters. under criminal indictments.* The New York Times.

²⁴ Nast, T. (1872). *They are Swallowing Each Other.* Harper's Weekly. cartoon, Harper's Weekly. See Appendix Figure 5.

²⁵ Ibid 310.

continued the momentum of the trials in the minds of Grant supporters, framing the election as a continuation of the fight against the Ku Klux Klan.

Whether these allegations against Greeley had any merit was of little importance in the election, as regardless he was unable to rally enough popular support to overcome this two-pronged media attack. Greeley was defeated by Grant in a landslide with thirty one out of thirty-seven electing Grant as their President. To add insult to injury, Horace Greeley passed away on November 29th, 1872, well before the Electoral College ever cast its votes. So, officially, Tammany's candidate received zero Electoral College votes. It had appeared that in one year Tammany lost both its most prolific leader and its chance at regaining the Presidency after the Civil War, both at the hands of Thomas Nast.

Despite the failures of Tammany during the Reconstruction Period, Tammany established itself as not simply a child of Andrew Jackson but a force to be reckoned with during the mid-1800s. With this advancement in station came much deeper probes into them and their behavior, as opposed to the broad criticism about the Spoils System which was the predominant scholarship in the early days of Tammany Hall. Unlike during the Presidential Election of 1828 and the Jacksonian period of Tammany Hall, the climax of Tammany Hall during the mid-1800s and early-1900s saw a publication of works in support of Tammany not only in their actions but also as an institution itself.

One such piece of work is a self-described "very plain treatise on practical politics" written by George Washington Plunkitt entitled *Plunkitt of Tammany Hall*²⁶. Plunkitt, a former New York state senator and high-ranking member of Tammany Hall, published his political opinions and autobiography in 1905, but he was fully embroiled in the Tweed Ring and

²⁶ Plunkitt, G. W., & Riordon, W. L. (1905). *Plunkitt of Tammany Hall*. Popular Classics Publishing.

Tammany during Tammany's mid-1800s climax of power. He provides a cynical view of machine politics that argues Tammany was simply providing services that the federal government could not, but not without a benefit to themselves. Plunkitt makes this case by defining what is acceptable criminal activity versus unacceptable criminal activity, which he defines as honest graft and dishonest graft. "For dishonest graft," Plunkitt argues, "one works solely for one's own interests. For honest graft, one pursues, at the same time, the interests of one's party, state, and person"²⁷. In summary, dishonest graft were criminal or corrupt actions taken only for one's own benefit, while honest graft were those same actions that benefited not only oneself but also one's friends, hometown, and maybe even society.

Honest graft, by Plunkitt's definition, could include the countless orphanages, alms houses, hospitals, and public works that Tammany funded as well as construction of the Brooklyn Bridge since this objectively helped the population of New York but also lined the pockets of Tammany officials. After all, Tweed and other Tammany officials owned quite a bit of bridge stock and appointed themselves to a committee overseeing the bridge's finances. This allowed them to not only profit directly from the creation of the bridge, but also skim money from the committee's finance pool as well. Additionally, the assistance to Irish immigrants in their bid for naturalization could also be considered honest graft since it boosted the social status and work opportunities of New York's Irish population, but also provided Tammany with a reliable voter base that could be bribed with social welfare help. Plunkitt did not view his job as philanthropic, even writing that all he did was see opportunities and take them regardless of morality²⁸. However, Plunkitt's account and argument represent the side of Tammany's controversy that views it as not necessarily an organization worthy of moral praise but rather not

²⁷ Ibid 9.

²⁸ Ibid 41.

worthy of the amount of scrutiny directed towards it both during its time in the sun as well as in the modern day.

Despite its obvious manipulation and consolidation of power in New York through corrupt and monopolistic means, Tammany provided an opportunity for both immigrants and impoverished Americans to find work and create a new life for them and their families. For immigrants, naturalization assistance and work opportunities were the name of the game. But for natural-born Americans, this extended to positions in the bureaucracy, loans to start businesses, helping loved ones get released from prison, support in running for public office, etc. While each of these examples benefited Tammany through either monetary kickbacks or political favors, the positive effects on the lives of those Tammany supported cannot be ignored.

Whether the underlying motivation being their own personal gain discredits their actions is a personal question of morality and not one that historical evidence can answer, but historians such as Terry Golway have attempted to separate Tammany's corrupt philosophy from their positive public works to potentially rehabilitate Tammany's image. In his book *Machine Made: Tammany Hall and the Creation of Modern American Politics*, Golway asserts that Tammany's status as a synonym for the worst of American politics is undeserved. He writes that during the laissez-faire era of United States history where little of the public services we expect in the modern era was offered by federal or state governments, "Tammany often functioned as a rudimentary public welfare system and a champion of crucial social reforms benefiting its constituency...also fighting for the only power [immigrants] had—the vote"²⁹. If Thomas Nast represents the side of the Tammany controversy that saw the organization as wholly corrupt and

²⁹ Ibid 161.

harmful to the country, individuals such as George Washington Plunkitt and Terry Golway offer a positive spin on Tammany's memory in American history.

Despite suffering mighty blows at the hands of Thomas Nast, having their most prolific leader arrested and losing the presidency in 1872, Tammany was far from out of the political game. Under the leadership of "Honest John" Kelly, Tammany-backed candidates surged to victory in 1874 and delivered political control of New York City back to Tammany in the years following Tweed's arrest, himself serving as City Comptroller and fighting vigorously against the anti-Tammany administration of Governor Samuel J. Tilden. Even with their nigh unbreakable hold on New York City politics returned to them, the following decades would prove Tammany's biggest challenge yet as progressives from both sides of the aisle looked to stomp out the brotherhood once and for all.

Chapter III: The Election of 1912

At the Democratic Convention of 1912, progressivism was the name of the game. From 1901 to 1909, the country saw itself transformed by President Theodore Roosevelt, who made it a central focus of his agenda to break up what he saw as corrupt organizations such as Tammany Hall as well as monopolies in industries such as oil. There of course was much more to progressivism than simply trust-busting and breaking apart political machines – such as labor reform and environmentalism -- but Tammany Hall found itself faced against those two aspects of progressivism. Three years after Roosevelt’s second term, his successor President William Howard Taft found some of his own constituents flocking to Roosevelt once again. Roosevelt declared his candidacy for a third term under the progressive Bull Moose Party who sought to continue the Progressive Era started by Roosevelt on the national stage. For the Democratic Party, it was more important than ever that they be unified and steadfast in their electoral strategy. Having not held the White House since 1896, the democrats saw an opportunity to take advantage of the Republican Party’s split between Taft and Roosevelt. However, the democrats were experiencing an identity crisis themselves. The Democratic Party was fundamentally split between progressive reformers and machine politicians working for the likes of Tammany Hall. With the White House within their reach once again, New York’s most infamous political society went into the convention determined to keep their party out of the hands of those who would attempt to rid the Democratic party of machine politics once and for all.

Progressivism in United States history is defined as a political and social movement that brought major changes to American government during the first two decades of the twentieth century³⁰. Progressives – made up of certain Republican officeholders, Democrats fed up with

³⁰ Milkis, S. M. (2023). *progressivism*. *Encyclopedia Britannica*.

the corruption of Tammany, journalists, sanitation reformers, academics just to name a few – sought to fix the issues in the United States caused by the urbanization and industrialization of what Mark Twain referred to as “The Gilded Age” (the period between 1877 and 1896 named so for the extreme wealth of business leaders and extreme poverty of workers and those living in cities). During the Gilded Age, progressives saw families in tenement apartments sharing dark, cramped, pest-ridden rooms with upwards of seven other families. They saw wealth become concentrated in the hands of a few business owners who controlled their entire industry, a process known as monopolization. They saw organizations such as Tammany Hall control entire political parties through a seemingly infinite number of favors and bribes to be doled out. Progressive reformers rose and demanded change in the United States, working from the 1890s to the 1920s in a period known as the Progressive Era.

Two decades after the arrest of William Tweed in 1872, the Progressive Era took aim at Tammany Hall. In the span of nine years, Tammany faced three investigations in New York state: the Fassett Committee (1890), the Lexow Committee (1894), and the Mazet Committee (1899). The first investigation, named after Republican committee chair Jacob Sloan Fassett, looked specifically into allegations of bribery by the then-Tammany-Boss Richard Croker and New York Mayor Hugh Grant. Richard Croker’s brother-in-law, Patrick McCann, alleged seeing Grant and Croker exchanging bribes to one another on multiple occasions, some exceeding sums of \$180,000. Despite the witness testimony by McCann, the investigation brought no charges or indictments against Croker nor Tammany Hall as an institution³¹. The first of three investigations into Tammany during the Progressive Era had produced no results.

³¹ Lui, A. (1995). The Machine and Social Policies: Tammany Hall and the Politics of Public Outdoor Relief, New York City, 1874–1898. *Studies in American Political Development*, 9(2), 386-403.

The second committee investigation, named after another Republican committee chair Clarence Lexow, probed the extent of Tammany's influence within the New York City Police Department. However, unlike the Fassett Committee, the Lexow Committee produced tangible results and changes within the New York political landscape. It was revealed through the testimony of former officers that New York's police chief, William Devery, offered promotions in exchange for pricey bribes, a portion of which he paid back to Tammany to ensure he maintained his position as chief of police. Journalist Robert C. Kennedy, who compiled an editorial on the event some years later in 1902, wrote of the startling revelations brought forth from the committee: "The Lexow Committee," Kennedy wrote, "uncovered police involvement in extortion, bribery, counterfeiting, voter intimidation, election fraud, brutality, and scams."³² One officer in fact reported that Devery offered him the rank of captain for \$12,000, but a Tammany district representative later informed him that the price had increased to \$15,000 due to "the popularity of the offer"³³.

After the Lexow Committee's findings were released to the public, Tammany Boss Richard Croker left the United States and stayed in his European residences for three years. While potentially unrelated to the scandals uncovered by the committee, the optics of fleeing the country after being implicated in a pay-to-play policing scheme did not bode well for the memory of Croker. Mayor Grant, who served as a focus of the Fassett Committee four years prior, chose not to run for reelection in 1893, leaving the office to his campaign manager Thomas Gilroy who found himself investigated by the Lexow Committee for his involvement in the police scandal. While not the singular catalyst, the Lexow Committee's findings of widespread

³² Kennedy, R. C. (1902). *On September 6, 1902, Harper's Weekly featured a cartoon about William Devery, the corrupt police chief of New York City. The New York Times.*

³³ *Ibid* 2.

police corruption aided by Tammany allowed for reform-minded Republican William Strong to seize the Mayorship on a platform of removing all Tammany Democrats involved in the Lexow Committee's reportings from public office.³⁴

Just five years later in 1899, Tammany found itself investigated for yet another corrupt practice in the eyes of reformers in New York City: gambling. The Mazet Investigation was spurred by the actions of the so-called Committee of Fifteen, an organization of predominantly Protestant private citizens who sought the elimination of both gambling and prostitution from New York City. One method by which the Committee of Fifteen hoped to bring about these changes in New York was by eliminating Tammany Hall from the city by, as historian Jeremy P. Felt writes, "constantly publicizing the relationship between Tammany, the police, and vice."³⁵ At the urging of newly elected Governor of New York Theodore Roosevelt, a reform Republican, an assemblyman from Roosevelt's party by the name of Richard Mazet launched an investigation into Tammany alongside chief counsel Frank Moss – a veteran of the Lexow Committee proceedings five years earlier. While revealing no significant criminal actions regarding gambling or prostitution, the Mazet Investigation did discover that the total revenue of metered water sold in New York City was reported by the water registrar, a Tammany-controlled office, as just above seven million dollars. The total revenue was just above eleven million dollars.³⁶

Despite the Mazet Investigation producing no indictments or charges, the investigation served as an important reminder for Tammany Hall. This was a new era in New York City; one that they would now have to navigate differently than they had done in previous decades. The

³⁴ Ibid 4.

³⁵ Felt, J. P. (1973). Vice Reform as a Political Technique: The Committee of Fifteen in New York, 1900-1901. *New York History*, 54(1), 24–51.

³⁶ Ibid 31.

reform Republicans and newly-formed progressive movement proved across their three investigations that they would not let Tammany go without a fight, and the success of the Consolidation Movement – the combining of the disparate boroughs and cities of New York into “Greater New York” – in 1899 demonstrated the persuasive power that these reform groups could have on politics in the city. Now with one consolidated Borough of New York instead of the many disparate boroughs that existed before, Tammany’s local, neighborhood-based method of controlling politics had a city-sized wrench thrown in its way. For the next twelve years, Tammany changed from a citywide political machine into borough-based organizations that could work the politics of the city in less noticeable ways, thus avoiding much public scrutiny.

Taking the role of Tammany leader in 1902, the new boss Charles Murphy was quiet and unremarkable in his demeanor but continued to lead Tammany to victory at the local level in New York. In 1903, Murphy led George B. McClellan Jr. to victory in the Mayor Election over famed editor-in-chief of the *New York Journal* William Randolph Hearst. Additionally, Murphy secured the governorship in 1910 by defeating the preferred candidate of now former president Theodore Roosevelt.³⁷ It is important to note that Tammany itself embraced a form of progressivism in 1911 following the infamous Triangle Shirtwaist Factory fire, where one hundred forty-six people died because of poor working conditions and manager neglect. Tammany used progressivism as an advocacy tool for the laborers in New York, and through this newfound political activism and his unassuming persona Murphy kept Tammany alive in the wake of three scathing investigations and the rise of the reform movement in New York. However, their greatest challenge would come in 1912 when Tammany sought to prove themselves in control of not just New York’s Democratic Party, but all Democratic politics.

³⁷ Brigham, D. (2013). *Politics in graphic detail*. Charles Francis Murphy | exhibits.hsp.org.

In 1912, the Democratic Party had their first real opportunity to secure the presidency since William McKinley took office in 1897. For fifteen years the Presidency had passed through the hands of three consecutive Republican presidents: first McKinley, then his vice president Theodore Roosevelt, then Roosevelt's vice president William Howard Taft. However, a rift had formed in the Republican party. Roosevelt, an aggressive progressive reformer, hoped that Taft would follow in his footsteps of trust-busting, environmental conservationism, and political reform. William Howard Taft's administration, however, broke with much of Roosevelt's policies, especially those relating to the environment and tariff reform. This inspired Theodore Roosevelt to run for the nomination yet again against the incumbent Taft in 1912, but he failed to secure the nomination against the incumbent. So instead of running on the Republican presidential ticket, Roosevelt created his own party that represented the progressive reformers of the United States, called the Progressive Party or, as it is more commonly referred to by Roosevelt aficionados, the Bull Moose Party.

The Republican party was split. Roosevelt and the radical reform Republicans on one side, and Taft with the classical Republicans on the other. At the same time, the Democratic Party was going through its own transformation as well. So-called "Bourbon Democrats" – or those members of the Democratic Party who preferred laissez-faire business policies and tended to shy away from significant reform efforts – had been routinely defeated in Democratic primary elections since 1896, when populist William Jennings Bryan secured the Democratic nomination for president three times (1896, 1900, and 1908)³⁸. Tammany Hall aligned much more strongly with those "Bourbon Democrats" due to their stances on free business practice and states' rights, even though some of these Democrats campaigned against Tammany. When the time came for

³⁸ Kazin, M. (2007). *A Godly Hero: The Life of William Jennings Bryan*. United States: Knopf Doubleday Publishing Group.

the Democratic Party to choose its candidate for President against Taft, Roosevelt, and the Socialist Eugene V. Debs, Tammany hoped to elevate their preferred candidate to power and win back the national power that had dwindled in the wake of the three city investigations into the organization.

When delegates and candidates alike arrived in Baltimore in 1912, the nomination was chiefly contested between two front-runners: Missouri native and Speaker of the House Champ Clark, and New Jersey Governor Woodrow Wilson. Clark appeared as the frontrunner in the early rounds of the convention, receiving four hundred forty votes compared to Wilson's three hundred twenty-four, but the two-thirds majority rule for the Democratic Party's presidential nominee meant that despite winning more votes, Clark could not yet be named the nominee.³⁹

In the eyes of some at the convention, this election was a referendum on the future of progressivism within the Democratic Party. Would the Bourbon Democrats retake the party and serve as the foil to reform Republicans such as Roosevelt? Or would the party create a progressive sector of their own and challenge the likes of Roosevelt and Debs (a socialist) in the arena of progressivism? William Jennings Bryan, who was not on the Democratic ballot for the first time in sixteen years, hoped that major candidates embracing progressive reform within the Democratic Party would force out what he viewed as corrupt elements such as Tammany and Charles Murphy. In his memoir of the event, *A Tale of Two Conventions*, Bryan wrote of his desire to see Clark and Wilson announce themselves as progressives and rebuke the interests of Murphy. "If either Mr. Clark or Mr. Wilson," Bryan wrote, "will announce his willingness to

³⁹ Hart, W. O. (1916). *The Democratic Conventions of 1908, 1912, 1916: Republican Conventions of 1912, 1916, and Progressive Convention of 1912, with Other Political and Historical Observations*. United States: Priv. print for the author.

rely entirely upon the progressive vote...and not to accept the nomination if given by Mr. Murphy, there is no reason why the convention should not agree.”⁴⁰

Tammany greatly preferred Clark as the nominee. While Woodrow Wilson was far from a solid progressive like Roosevelt, the New Jersey Governor campaigned on his plan to create new economic opportunities in the United States through aggressive and decisive government action. Named the “New Freedom” plan, Wilson wrote that reform in both the economic and social sphere was needed to preserve traditional American liberties in a new American landscape transformed by progressivism. As he penned: “the old political formulas do not fit the present problems.”⁴¹

Champ Clark had progressive beliefs of his own, such as the idea that federal banks should not be concentrated in northern urban centers where corporations tended to consolidate power, but there was one defining feature of Clark that made him the preferred candidate for Tammany: he had the support of Irish immigrants. Of polled Irish immigrants registered with the Democratic party, mainly in New York, fifty one percent of Irish voters cast their votes for Clark in their state primaries⁴². With Irish immigrants still a primary point of support for Tammany, Charles Murphy saw Clark as Tammany Hall’s path to victory in an election where the Republicans were tearing themselves apart. After eight ballots where neither Clark nor Wilson received the necessary two-thirds majority of delegates, Tammany Hall officially endorsed Champ Clark on the ninth ballot and instructed their delegates to put their support behind the former Speaker of the House.

⁴⁰ Bryan, W. J. (1912). A tale of two conventions: being an account of the Republican and Democratic national conventions of June, 1912, with an outline of the Progressive national convention of August in the same year. London: Funk & Wagnalls Company, 1912.

⁴¹ Wilson, W., Hale, W. B. (1918). The New Freedom: A Call for the Emancipation of the Generous Energies of a People. United States: Doubleday, Page.

⁴² Marks, G., & Burbank, M. (1990). Immigrant support for the American Socialist Party, 1912 and 1920. *Social Science History*, 14(2), 175.

Tammany hoped that their endorsement of Clark would be enough to propel him over the two-thirds threshold and put another Tammany Hall Democrat on the road to the White House, but their support had the exact opposite effect. Tammany's support of Clark outraged populist Democrats such as William Jennings Bryan, who saw Tammany Hall's involvement in the convention as their attempt to gain back control of the party. This angered Bryan so much that he made a speech at the convention denouncing Clark, calling him "the candidate of the special interests and Wall Street" now that Tammany endorsed him⁴³. William Jennings Bryan entered the convention as a delegate from Nebraska in support of Champ Clark's bid, but after the endorsement by Tammany he publicly announced his support for Wilson instead and encouraged his fellow delegates to do the same. Painted by Bryan as a moderate reformer standing against the corrupt interests in the party, Woodrow Wilson garnered enough votes to break the two-thirds threshold and secure the Democratic nomination for president on the forty-sixth ballot.

Tammany had once again failed to elevate one of their Democrats to the national stage. To make matters worse for Tammany, Wilson and his supporters were determined to ensure that the Democratic party itself was united in the fight against the likes of Tammany Hall. When the 1912 Democratic Party platform was revealed during Wilson's acceptance speech, an amendment had been added following Wilson's nomination. It was called the Morgan-Ryan-Belmont Amendment, named after three prominent American financiers, whom progressives viewed as symbolic of the problems plaguing the American people: J. Pierpont Morgan, Thomas Ryan, and August Belmont. The amendment, titled in the platform as *Rule of the People*, reads as follows:

⁴³ Engel, B. (2020). *Champ Clark's presidential ambitions dashed*. Pike County News.

“We direct attention to the fact that the Democratic party's demand for a return to the rule of the people expressed in the national platform four years ago, has now become the accepted doctrine of a large majority of the electors. We again remind the country that only by a larger exercise of the reserved power of the people can they protect themselves from the misuse of delegated power and the usurpation of government instrumentalities by special interests. The Democratic party offers itself to the country as an agency through which the complete overthrow and extirpation of corruption, fraud, and machine rule in American politics can be affected.”⁴⁴

Corruption, fraud, and machine rule are referring to Tammany Hall and the hold they had on the Democratic Party during the Gilded Age and on the more classical liberal wing of the Democratic Party even in 1912. Upon this platform being released with the Morgan-Ryan-Belmont amendment added in, Tammany Hall now had a physical document that claimed that they were unwelcome in Woodrow Wilson’s Democratic Party. In the span of twenty two years, Tammany Hall faced three investigations by the state of New York and had their party publicly rebuke them and promise to fight against their influence in politics.

How did Tammany face so much backlash in such a short span of time? Why after ruling the Democratic Party in New York for so long was there now national repudiation? The answer, according to former attorney and politician Martin Littleton, lies within the very nature of the Progressive Era itself. Littleton writes a brief biography of Charles Murphy and outlines his thoughts and actions leading up to the Democratic National Convention in his book, *The Democratic Party of the State of New York*. Littleton asserts that despite Murphy keeping Tammany Hall afloat in the early days of the Progressive Era through his decisive actions and calm demeanor, Murphy’s strategy still fundamentally reflected the old style of politics that Tammany Hall had come to know and trust. The politics of laissez-faire business policies,

⁴⁴ Peters, G. (1912). *1912 Democratic Party Platform*. 1912 Democratic Party Platform | The American Presidency Project.

backroom deals, and patronage were the stones upon which Tammany Hall was built, and it was the monument of the old party that the likes of Wilson and Bryan were determined to tear down.⁴⁵ Simply put, the times were changing, and Tammany Hall could not keep up.

While Tammany Hall was not completely gone from American politics following 1912, their power was severely diminished. After achieving no great strides after the election of Woodrow Wilson and subsequent United States involvement in the First World War from 1917 to 1918, Charles Murphy passed away six years after the end of the war in 1924. Without the leader who had led them through their three state investigations and back into power in New York – if only for a short time – a power vacuum gripped Tammany Hall. New Boss George Olvany vied for leadership against Mayor Jimmy Walker, a fiery young politician who viewed Tammany as his to conquer. However, the squabbles amongst Tammany leaders to see who the next Tweed or Murphy could be were rendered insignificant upon the election of a new reform-minded governor in 1928 who would become one of the most influential politicians of the modern era in terms of fighting corruption and increasing the government's power to regulate: Franklin Delano Roosevelt.

⁴⁵ Littleton, M. W.(1905). *The Democratic Party of the State of New York: A History of the Origin, Growth, and Achievements of the Democratic Party of the State of New York, Including a History of Tammany Hall in Its Relation to State Politics*. United States: United States History Company, 1905.

Conclusion

Upon the election of Franklin Delano Roosevelt to the governorship of New York, Tammany Hall entered a severe downward spiral. The political machine hoped to return to the days of pre-Murphy bribery of police officers and packing of political offices across the city, but in 1929 the stock market crashed sending hundreds of thousands of Americans into deep poverty. This would become known as the Great Depression. With Roosevelt in office as governor during the early years of the Great Depression in New York, he embarked on an activist agenda determined to keep New Yorkers' heads above water. Part of this strategy was holding those who enabled the stock market crash accountable, starting with the public officials who, in Roosevelt's eyes, turned a blind eye to the suffering of New Yorkers in exchange for kickbacks. While not wholly responsible for the Depression, Roosevelt saw corruption in the public sector as a symptom of a more systemic issue of greed and abuse of power, but one that could be treated swiftly and with relative ease.⁴⁶

Between the years of 1930 and 1932 Roosevelt kept his promise of reforming the civil service of New York and the way government was conducted in the state of New York by launching three investigations into what he called “corruption and degradation in New York City”⁴⁷. These committees, named the Seabury Investigations after lead investigator Samuel Seabury, sought primarily to uncover the extent of monetary schemes such as bribery and extortion within the police and the courts in New York. What they found was a web of schemes and patronage facilitated by Tammany Hall, with some judges paying upwards of \$200,000 to maintain their office or even to have other justices removed from their offices. In the wake of the Seabury Investigations, the New York judiciary and bureaucracy was gutted of Tammany

⁴⁶ Goodwin, D.K. (2018). *Leadership in Turbulent Times*. IntroBooks.

⁴⁷ Burstein, D. J. (2019). *Samuel Seabury*. Historical Society of the New York Courts.

supporters; the Mayor, Deputy City Clerk, Sheriff, a State Senator, and twenty-eight judges within the city of New York were removed from office by Governor Roosevelt.⁴⁸

However, Roosevelt was not finished with Tammany Hall even after removing most of their members from state offices. When the reform-minded Roosevelt brought his progressive ambitions to the national state in 1932, he was elected over incumbent president Herbert Hoover to bring his solutions to the Great Depression to the country. Part of this so-called “New Deal” with the American people was continuing to reform the civil service to prevent individuals from holding office who, in Roosevelt’s mind, would not have the best interest at heart and lead the nation towards another Depression. To this end, Roosevelt backed an energetic liberal Republican in his run for the Mayorship of New York City; his name was Fiorello La Guardia.

A first generation American, La Guardia made it his personal mission to reorganize how the business of politics was conducted in New York City. The first order of business was taking away the opportunities that Tammany Hall had for skimming money from government projects by creating a new city administration that required nearly seventy-five percent of all government job seekers to pass a civil service exam, as well as instituting policies of meritocratic promotion such as salary tiers based upon years of experience. With Tammany mainly filling up appointments with supporters by the power of the mayor – who was almost always in their pocket – their ability to stuff the bureaucracy with unqualified political backers became severely limited by losing the mayor’s office as well as needing their would-be appointees to pass the civil service exam.⁴⁹ La Guardia also put those government projects that Tammany led, such as the construction of orphanages and other public works, under the new meritocratic agencies,

⁴⁸ Ibid 1.

⁴⁹ Perry, E. (2004). *The Great Mayor: Fiorello La Guardia and the Making of the City of New York*.

stripping Tammany of the ability of its members direct government contracts to organizations in which they owned stock. Devoid of the mayorship and its ability to fill up city offices with political cronies, Tammany Hall fell out of favor and into obscurity.

While unable to achieve anything of significance in the Democratic Party, Tammany Hall did not officially dissolve until 1961, when a potential resurgence of the organization by organized-crime-connected politician Carmine DeSapio was halted by the denunciation of DeSapio by Eleanor Roosevelt, Franklin Delano Roosevelt's wife, and New York Representative Ed Koch. By 1967, Tammany Hall ceased to be a formal organization and its assets were liquidated.⁵⁰ In one hundred seventy-two years, Tammany Hall was created, granted opportunities by a U.S. President, grew to become the most powerful political organization in the state of New York, and went on a fifty-year downward spiral until collapsing at the beginning of the Civil Rights Era.

The question of this thesis remains: Is Tammany Hall a fearsome organization that should be remembered as corrupt criminals bent on warping our institutions to their own desires? Or are they misunderstood philanthropists who used underhanded tactics to achieve great public works and aid both underprivileged populations and the greater populace of New York? As demonstrated in this thesis, historians during Tammany Hall's existence and in the contemporary era exist along both ends of the spectrum, making Tammany a particularly controversial organization in the realm of historical debate.

While this thesis cannot and should not answer this question, as it is an intensely subjective one that relies heavily upon the morals of the analyst, a point can be made on the analysis of primary and secondary evidence regarding Tammany Hall. Political cartoonists such

⁵⁰ Ibid 229.

as Thomas Nast, historians such as Gustavus Myers and Jay Cost, and political theorists such as Michael Nelson and Doris Kearns-Goodwin tend to take a rigid stance on the personality of Tammany Hall. They are either wicked villains, such as in the eyes of Myers or Kearns-Goodwin, or they are social crusaders, such as in the eyes of Terry Golway. While Golway is more apologetic and honest about the undemocratic nature of Tammany Hall, his contemporaries on the opposite side of the debate are mostly unwilling to accept any positive qualities that Tammany Hall may possess. The question is posed as thus: Must Tammany Hall be one or the other? Can they not be both crusaders and criminals at the same time?

For this point, the best advice might just come from George Washington Plunkitt and his writings on “honest” and “dishonest” graft.⁵¹ For if action is taken that is one’s best interest, but that action is benefiting the wider society as well, is that not both greedy and philanthropic? When Tammany Hall provided naturalization assistance to Irish immigrants in the wake of the Irish Potato Famine, it provided Tammany with a reliable voter base while also giving new immigrants to the United States a strong chance at achieving their American dream. When they provided legal aid to someone who could not afford it, they had that person in their debt but also assisted someone in their time of need. When the Brooklyn Bridge was constructed, it may have given the Tammany stockholders in the New York Bridge Company a source of additional income from their government contracts, but it also opened New York City to new trade, travel, and commerce opportunities.

While scholars and historians tend to pick one side in the Tammany controversy, more attention might need to be paid to the overlap in this debate. Such a polarizing organization may be able to live on the line between the two perspectives on the controversy, exhibiting the traits

⁵¹ Ibid 18.

of both a corrupt political machine and a philanthropic social welfare network. As history progressed, more and more individuals spoke out in opposition to Tammany Hall until they were forced out of the Democratic Party in a steady stream of condemnations between 1912 and 1961, but does that mean the opinions of those who heralded Tammany's social and infrastructure victories are wrong? Tammany Hall can and should be remembered not as either wholly benevolent or wholly tyrannical, but as the complex and somewhat contradictory organization that it was. Only when scholars and historians recognize the inherent controversy present in Tammany's history and present the narrative of Tammany Hall in this way can the whole story of an organization as storied and influential as Tammany Hall be told.

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Appendix

Figure 1: *To the Victors Belong the Spoils* (Thomas Nast, 1877).



Figure 3: *Boss Tweed Holds Reins of Democratic Party* (Thomas Nast, 1872)



Figure 4: *New York Under Tweed's Thumb* (Thomas Nast, 1871)



Figure 5: *They Are Swallowing Each Other* (Thomas Nast, 1872)



THEY ARE SWALLOWING EACH OTHER.

Academic Vita

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Education

Pennsylvania State University, Schreyer Honors College – Graduated: Spring 2023

- Bachelor of Science in Social Studies Secondary Education
- Honors in History
- Thesis Title: “The Rooms Where It Happened: The Rise, Climax, and Fall of New York’s Tammany Hall Political Machine

History Teaching Experience

Student Teacher, Mifflin County Junior High School — August 2022 - December 2022

- Planned both individual lessons and entire units for a Modern American History class, teaching from Reconstruction to World War I.
- Graded assignments and logged grades in a gradebook to track student achievement, ending student teaching with no students failing.
- Designed classroom simulations and games to engage students in hands-on interactive learning.
- Contacted parents consistently for both congratulatory and disciplinary reasons.
- Supported student development in both academic and non-academic contexts, holding one-on-one tutoring sessions and attending student extracurricular activities.
- Implemented principles of DEI into the classroom, cultivating a safe and respectful space for students.

Non-Teaching Education/History Experience

UELIP Associate, Urban Education Leaders Internship Program, DC Public School District — June 2021 - August 2021

- Worked as a member of the Social Studies Content Team to design and deliver the 2021 BLISS (Building Literacy and Inquiry in Social Studies) Institute summer program.
- Assisted the Social Studies Team in revising and transitioning the DCPS Social Studies curriculum to in-person/hybrid learning.
- Delivered professional development sessions to DCPS teachers on the use of Canvas, OneDrive, and Google Drive.
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Certificates

Collaborative Discussion, The Interactivity Foundation — December 2021

- Demonstrated advanced aptitude in effective communication, rhetoric & argumentation, active and analytical listening, and problem solving.

Youth Mental First Aid Certification, National Council for Mental Wellbeing — May 2021

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