A GROUP OF VULTURES WAITING FOR THE STORM TO "BLOW OVER."—"LET US PREY."

"Let Us Prey." "A Group of Vultures Waiting for the Storm to 'Blow Over' - 'Let us Prey.'" Thomas Nast, cartoon in *Harper's Weekly,* September 23, 1871. William Tweed and his associates are shown as vultures, having picked clean the bones labeled as city treasury, law, justice, liberty, and rent. *Source:* Thomas Nast (1871), *Harper's Weekly* 15 (769), September 23, p. 889. Public domain image, via U.S. Library of Congress.

City Political Machines
Urban Studies 200, *Cities*
Elvin Wyly

"Nast's cartoons helped to fix one image of machine bosses ... corrupt, incompetent characters concerned primarily with taking money from the public treasury to feather their own nests. But there is also a contradictory image ... the city machine as friend -- even family -- to the poor and powerless ..."[1]

"Unlike parliamentary forms of government, which are controlled by a cabinet of reasonably like-minded people -- or at least of people who are members of the same political party -- councils are sometimes referred to as 'groups of anarchists held together by a common parking lot.' If councils are to become real policy-making bodies, they will have to learn to function in a more coordinated way. Canadians have traditionally resisted having political parties in local government (although Vancouver and Quebec's larger cities could be considered an exception to this generalization), and there are some sound arguments against local parties; but if local councils start to become policy-making bodies, there might be more pressure to develop parties."[2]

"Minneapolis has cleaned up, Pittsburgh has tried to, New York fights every other election, Chicago fights all the time. Even St. Louis has begun to stir ... and at its worst was only shameless. Philadelphia is proud; good people there defend corruption and boast of their machine. My college professor, with his philosophic view of 'rake-offs' is one Philadelphia type. Another is the man, who, driven to bay with his local pride, says, 'At least you must admit that our machine is the best you have ever seen.'"[3]

"The U.S. made a unique contribution to urban politics: the city machine."[4]

The Machine Metaphor

The word 'machine' commonly appears in discussions of city politics. The metaphor is evocative and fascinating, and usually conjures images of ruthless efficiency, hierarchical discipline, or well-engineered decisions and outcomes. The word is often associated with notions of enforced party discipline. A few years ago, Jeremy Searle, a popular member of Montreal's city council, left Mayor Gerald Tremblay's party because of frustration with the tension between party loyalty and independent-minded council votes; Searle subsequently launched a 'party lite' intended "to make it easier for non-machine candidates to succeed."[5] The word often equates with ideas of well-oiled mechanical efficiency. Not long ago, the *Ottawa Citizen* began a piece on Mayor Bob Chiarelli, Ottawa's 'Teflon Mayor,' with this parallel:

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[1] E. Barbara Phillips (1996). *City Lights: Urban-Suburban Life in the Global Society, Second Edition.* Don Mills, ON: Oxford University Press, p. 367.
[2] Edmund P. Fowler and David Siegel (2002). Introduction, *Urban Policy Issues: Canadian Perspectives.* Don Mills, ON: Oxford University Press, pp. 13-14.
[3] Lincoln Steffens (1904). *The Shame of the Cities.* New York; reprinted in Charles N. Glaab (1963). *The American City: A Documentary History.* Homewood, IL: The Dorsey Press, p. 375.
[4] E. Barbara Phillips (2009). *City Lights: Urban-Suburban Life in the Global Society, Third Edition.* New York: Oxford University Press, p. 482.
[5] Henry Aubin (2005). "Councillor is No Party Animal." *The Gazette*, February 24, p. A25.

"Mayor Bob Chiarelli's office is located, appropriately, in the west wing of Ottawa City Hall. It shares many of the attributes of the popular television drama of that name. The office has committed operatives scurrying around with their portfolios, making deals. And for years, like the TV show, the Chiarelli machine ran frenetically and efficiently."[6]

City politics is often described with the metaphor of a "machine." The machine metaphor implies order, discipline, and efficiency. Critics use the term as an epithet, to suggest waste and corruption. But the term is also used as a sign of respect for the ability to achieve well-engineered outcomes.

The word is often used as an epithet. Peter Kent, a former news anchor making a play for a federal Conservative Party seat in St. Paul's, a riding in midtown Toronto that had gone Liberal for four straight elections, told a reporter for *Macleans*, "Our years in the wilderness have allowed a certain conditioning by both the Liberal machine in the city and the Liberal media apologists" that portray Conservative fringe elements as the mainstream.[7]

Yet despite the intense negative connotations of the word, critics often use the 'machine' epithet with a certain degree of respect for its strength. Several years ago, Vancouver-based commentator Gordon Gibson reacted to the candidacy of Christy Clark for the Non-Partisan Association (NPA) mayoral nomination with frustration at "another muscular, organized effort to steamroll a proven, popular councilor, Sam Sullivan, who has paid his dues on council for 12 years." Gibson praised Sullivan for a willingness to "go against the flow in the interests of what is right and bring others to that view," and went on to argue that "Machine politics can deny such individuals a nomination among machine-dominated party members, but the general voter knows what is going on and will react."[8]

Sullivan won that election and served as Mayor from 2005 to 2008. More recently, Sullivan's former Chief of Staff Daniel Fontaine used the machine metaphor when criticizing housing activists for holding the center-left Vision Vancouver to a lower standard compared with the

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[6] The Ottawa Citizen (2004). "Gaffes Left More than a few Scars on Ottawa's 'Teflon' Mayor." *The Ottawa Citizen*, December 27, p. C1.

[7] Jonathan Gatehouse (2005). "A Case of Sinking Outside the Box?" *Maclean's*, October 24, p. 17.

[8] Gordon Gibson (2005). "The Liberal Machine Comes to City Hall." *Vancouver Sun*, September 16, p. A19. A few weeks later, Jeff Lee offered a closer consideration of the machine metaphor as applied to the NPA: "The NPA, with two exceptions in the 1970s and 1980s, has controlled city hall for nearly 70 years. It was formed originally as a right-of-centre business party to counter the growing influence of the CCF, the forerunner of the New Democratic Party. It grew moribund in the 1980s and was taken over by Gordon Campbell, who reformed it into a more inclusive political force before he moved on to provincial politics. People such as the openly gay Gordon Price and Sandra Wilking, the city's first female Chinese councillor, found themselves sitting in the same caucus as George Puil, the acerbic businessman and teacher and Philip Owen, the old-monied son of the lieutenant-governor, Walter Owen. Despite that inclusiveness, the NPA gained a reputation as a relatively closed-door organization controlled by a small group of business people with such power that to get an endorsement was regarded almost as a ticket to council chambers. Candidates didn't insist on their own scrutiny of the party; if the machine worked, it was best not to disturb it." Jeff Lee (2005). "NPA Struggles to Find Identity for Party." *Vancouver Sun*, October 24, p. B1.

center-right NPA. "Protesters seem almost nervous about upsetting the Vision Vancouver machine," Fontaine remarked.[9]

Finally, the word 'machine' invariably connotes a sense of fraud, graft, and corruption. In a study of the politics of urban and suburban development in what is now known as the Greater Toronto Area, Christopher Leo tells a story of

> "*Big-city machinations* ... The *Globe and Mail* documented a 'loan' of $80,000, which was not repaid, from a developer to a company owned by an official in the region; it was followed by approval of an industrial development proposal that had been filed by the company that gave the 'loan.' There were also stories of a cheque for $4,000 from a developer to a 'senior municipal official' and at least two cases of envelopes containing several thousand dollars in cash delivered on behalf of a developer to a councilor."[10]

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[9] Daniel Fontaine (2011). "Have Housing Activists Been Neutered Under Vision Vancouver?" *City Caucus*, March 6.

[10] Christopher Leo (2002). "Urban Development: Planning Aspirations and Political Realities." In Fowler and Siegel, *Urban Policy Issues*, pp. 228-229.

Meanings and Mechanisms

What is a city political machine, and how does it work? A city machine is a structured, hierarchical urban political organization that is based on party discipline and organizational loyalty. The fundamental goal of the machine is to get candidates elected to public office, and thus it is organized to allow local, neighborhood-level officials or candidates to make promises to get votes while ensuring overall consistency and coordination at higher levels of the system. Block captains report to precinct captains, who must answer to ward bosses, who in turn report to some sort of central committee. "Loyalty, trust, and discipline bind the lower and upper levels together,"[11] and the networks of influence and trust never appear anywhere in a city's formal organization chart. Instead, the machine operates to provide services and benefits to its supporters in un-bureaucratic, informal ways. The classic form of the city political machine appeared in the growing industrial cities of the late nineteenth century, especially in the United States.

A city political machine is a structured, hierarchical organization based on party discipline and organizational loyalty. The goal of the machine is to get candidates elected to public office, and thus it is organized to allow local, neighborhood-level officials to make promises and dispense favors in return for votes -- while ensuring overall consistency and coordination at higher levels of the system. The higher and lower levels of the system are bound together by loyalty, trust, and discipline.

"At the street level, where voters deal with machine operatives, contacts are face-to-face and unbureaucratic. This lack of red tape and bureaucratic rigidity were appealing features of immigrants in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. These newcomers feared or could not understand city hall, settlement houses, and private charities that were supposed to be tending to their needs."[12]

City political machines evolved through a combination of political mobilization, historical accident, and a context of rapid urban growth driven in large part by the arrival of large numbers of poor immigrants from Ireland and later from Poland, Italy, Russia, and other parts of Southern and Eastern Europe. Once a machine achieved power in a city, it was able to consolidate its power in two main ways.

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[11] Phillips, *City Lights, Second Edition,* p. 368.
[12] Phillips, *City Lights, Second Edition,* p. 368.

First, the machine provided critically important and popular benefits to *the poor and working classes.* In return for party loyalty and support in elections, ward bosses and precinct captains were able to give out city jobs; help residents in times of crisis or unemployment; and ensure that the neighborhood got its fair share of city services.

> *The machine consolidated power by providing benefits to*
>
> *1. The **poor and working classes**: patronage jobs, help in times of unemployment or crisis, and small gifts or informal assistance.*
>
> *2. The **politically connected**: patronage jobs for loyal machine operatives and their families, city contracts for businesses, and inside information for land speculators.*

"Like family, the machine could be counted on. It could bail you out of jail, get you a job when work was hard to find, supply you with free railroad passes, remember you with a gift for your wedding, and generally help you when you needed help."[13]

Second, the machine was efficient and effective in distributing benefits to the *politically connected.* The machine controlled patronage jobs not only for the poor, but for block captains and precinct captains, and often their friends and family. The machine also handed out city contracts to its supporters; gave favored insiders the kinds of tips and advance information that would allow lucrative land speculation; helped supporters in disputes with competitors who did not support the machine; and sometimes helped operatives avoid prosecution by exerting pressure on machine-controlled city attorneys. All of these benefits increased the attractiveness of supporting the machine: they intensified the competition amongst the most talented and creative operatives seeking various positions in the machine's hierarchy, and they also led powerful business interests to support the system.

Masters of the Machine: Tammany Hall

In the years immediately after the American Revolution, a few members of a benevolent association -- the Tammany Society -- formed a political wing that eventually became known as Tammany Hall (named for the place where it met in Manhattan). When political parties began to emerge in the nineteenth century, Tammany Hall seized the opportunity to become an aggressive, creative local wing of what would eventually come to be known as the Democratic Party. The first New York City mayor clearly linked to Tammany Hall was Fernando Wood (elected in 1854); but Tammany is actually best known for the excesses of a behind-the-scenes power broker who never even ran for Mayor. William Marcy Tweed (1840-1902) controlled a ring involving the mayor, the city controller, key aldermen, and numerous ward-level operatives from 1866 to 1871, looting the city of hundreds of millions of dollars. Tweed's machine was built on a hierarchical system of control and loyalty, and it was sustained by the votes of hundreds of thousands of poor immigrants as well as deals with the increasingly powerful White Anglo-Saxon Protestant (WASP) industrial robber-barons. In its heyday,

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[13] Phillips, *City Lights, Second Edition*, p. 369.

The first true city political machine: New York City's Tammany Hall, best known for the regime run by William Tweed between 1866 to 1871.

"Tammany expanded and solidified its political base by espousing the cause of the huge numbers of immigrants flooding into New York. It helped them get settled, found them jobs (many wound up working for the machine itself) and gave them aid when they were in need -- all in return for their votes. In due course, the largest bloc of newcomers -- the Irish -- took over the Hall and made it their own." And "Because Tammany not only reached down into the community to be involved in the everyday life of New Yorkers but boasted good friends on Wall Street as well, it survived downturns in its fortunes that would have wiped out a lesser organization."[14]

The Original Master of the Machine. William Marcy Tweed (1840-1902), more widely known as Boss Tweed. *Source:* Public domain image, from U.S. Library of Congress.

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[14] Oliver E. Allen (1993). *The Tiger: The Rise and Fall of Tammany Hall.* Don Mills, ON: Addison-Wesley, p. x.

Perhaps the most vivid account of the life of a district leader in the Tammany machine comes from George Washington Plunkitt, who gave a series of interviews to a court reporter, William Riordan, describing his job and his view of the entire Tammany system. Plunkitt observed,

> "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 heart 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."[15]

Deputy in the Machine. George Washington Plunkitt (1842-1924) worked as a district leader in Tammany Hall. This photograph was taken sometime between 1910 and 1915, when Plunkitt was serving in the New York State Senate. Source: public domain image, from U.S. Library of Congress.

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[15] William L. Riordan (1905). *Plunkitt of Tammany Hall*. New York, reprinted in Glaab, *Documentary History*, p. 384.

In the end, Plunkitt's comparatively low position in the Tammany hierarchy served him well. His diaries attest to hard work as much as conniving political corruption. Plunkitt died in 1924 a millionaire.

But at the highest levels of the Tammany system, the spoils were greater -- but so were the risks. Boss William Tweed's tight control of the machine lasted through 1870, but beginning in the Summer of 1871 the press began to expose the magnitude of the Ring's corruption, and its costs. Patronage jobs, plum contracts at inflated prices, and heavy spending on pet projects led to a tripling of New York City's municipal debt from 1869 to the end of 1871. Tweed was eventually indicted, arrested, put on trial in which the jury deadlocked amid allegations of payoffs; re-tried ten months later, resulting in a verdict of guilty on 204 of the 220 counts of the indictment; released after a successful appeal of a harsh sentence; and rearrested on a civil action as the State of New York sought to recover stolen funds. Tweed was given certain privileges while in prison awaiting trial, and so in early December, 1874 he took an opportunity to escape, and was tried and found guilty in absentia. He fled to Cuba and then to Spain because there was no extradition treaty with the United States. The Spanish allowed U.S. authorities to capture him on arrival, however, and by late 1876 he was back in the Ludlow Street Jail. His assets seized and depleted to pay for legal expenses, he died with nothing in April, 1878. Total estimates of the net cost of Tweed's years of machine control are equivalent, in today's dollars, to more than half a billion dollars.[16]

Boss Tweed was eventually indicted, arrested, put on trial, re-tried, and finally found guilty on various corruption charges. After appeals and new indictments, he escaped from prison, fled to Cuba and Spain, and was re-captured and brought back to New York.
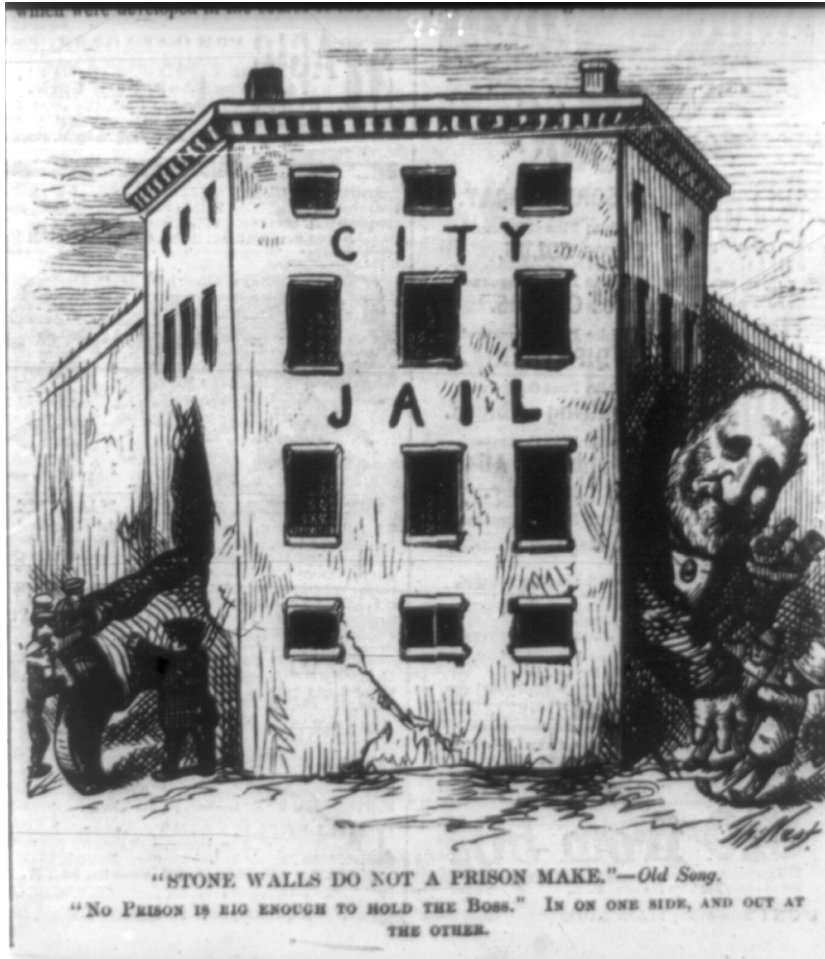
Estimates of the total net costs of Tweed's machine are equivalent, in today's currency, of about a half a billion dollars. But Tweed died with nothing left, in April, 1878.

Plunkitt and Tweed are two of the most familiar icons of the urban political machine at its most powerful. Plunkitt is famous for

"drawin' the distinction between honest graft and dishonest graft. There's all the difference in the world between the two. Yes, many of our men have grown in politics. I have myself. I've made a big fortune out of the game, and I'm getting richer every day, but I've not gone in for dishonest graft -- blackmailin' gamblers, saloon-keepers, disorderly people, etc. -- and neither has any of the men who have made big fortunes in politics." [17]

[16] Oliver E. Allen (1993). *The Tiger: The Rise and Fall of Tammany Hall*. Don Mills, ON: Addison-Wesley, pp. 139-142.
[17] Riordan, *Plunkitt*, p. 386.

"STONE WALLS DO NOT A PRISON MAKE."—*Old Song.*

"NO PRISON IS BIG ENOUGH TO HOLD THE BOSS." IN ON ONE SIDE, AND OUT AT THE OTHER.

"No Prison is Big Enough to Hold the Boss." *Source:* Public domain image, from Thomas Nast cartoon, *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper*, January 6, 1872, p. 13, via U.S. Library of Congress.

For Plunkitt, honest graft was the fair reward for succeeding in politics and serving his constituents. The details of his diary -- the "Strenuous Life of the Tammany District Leader" -- document how hard the work really was. For his part, Boss Tweed was made famous by the political cartoons of Thomas Nast, often regarded as the leading force behind the emergence of modern political cartoons. Nast's portrayals took direct aim at Tweed and other members of the Ring, and drew widespread public attention to the terrible corruption of the machine.

Yet it is important to remember that much of the machine's success was due to its ability to deliver services to those who needed them. The machine provided considerable help to the city's hundreds of thousands of poor immigrants, even while enriching those at the peak of the party machinery. In *The Tiger: The Rise and Fall of Tammany Hall*, Oliver Allen provides a concise summary of the durability of the machine:

The machine was corrupt, but it performed an important role by distributing resources and benefits to the urban poor and working classes, most of them recent immigrants who would otherwise have been completely disenfranchised.

"It was able to operate as brazenly as it did for so long, despite repeated outrages, because, at least in its halcyon days, it actually performed a service to society. It flourished because, in a sense, it was needed. Tammany's minions, its far-flung network of ward heelers, block captains, and district leaders, provided a visible, personal link between the poor immigrant and the otherwise faceless city government, parceling out jobs, helping newcomers cope with the mysterious requirements of the bureaucracy, even functioning as a kind of private welfare service. Whatever its faults, which

were many, and no matter how it enriched itself and its leaders, Tammany Hall was above all a personal organization. People knew their local leader and were confident he could help them, which he almost always did. He might even loan them money to tide them over a difficult time. Today that element has largely gone from the scene. In big cities at least, government has become distant and impersonal, and surely less responsive. No wonder there are still people around who long for the days when good old Tammany was around."[18]

Challenge and Collapse: The Fall of the Machines

The fall of Boss Tweed is often viewed as the beginning of the end of the urban political machine. In the 1880s, a movement gathered momentum to challenge the entrenched corruption of municipal politics, and over the next generation the "good government" alliance -- often dubbed the "goo-goos" -- succeeded in persuading cities and states to adopt a wide-ranging series of governmental reforms. The reforms advocated by the goo-goos eventually came to be known as the Progressive Era, from the 1880s to about 1920.

The goo-goos were a curious mixture of different people and institutions. The WASP elite were angry at the power that machines had accumulated by catering to poor immigrants from Southern and Eastern Europe. College and university professors were eager to apply new scientific theories of organization and management to the real-world problems of city administrations and bureaucracies. Journalists were making their reputations as aggressive "muckrakers" for exposing the corruption of machines. Middle-class social workers were hopeful and optimistic that reformed city governments would treat the poor better than the machine's benevolent paternalism: the machine was often like family, but that meant that a machine could be inconsistent, dysfunctional, or abusive.

Urban legacies of the "goo-goo" reformers of the Progressive Era: direct primary elections, non-political civil service systems, at-large elections, and provisions for recalls, ballot initiatives, and referenda.

But the goo-goos also worked to change the rules of the game to disqualify immigrants and the poor from voting.

The Progressive Era changed urban politics in fundamental ways. The movement succeeded in its push for direct primary elections, where voters got more say in the selection of candidates previously put forward by party bosses. Patronage jobs were replaced by transparent, professionally-oriented civil service systems: to get hired, city workers had to demonstrate skills and credentials rather than political connections. Ward systems -- in which a city was divided into separate districts, each with its own elected representative -- were replaced by "at large" systems, where a group of candidates compete for votes across an entire city. (Vancouver's ward system was replaced by an at-large system in 1936). City and state laws were changed to provide for recall elections, ballot initiatives, and

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[18] Oliver E. Allen (1993). *The Tiger: The Rise and Fall of Tammany Hall*. Don Mills, ON: Addison-Wesley, p. xi.

referenda: for certain types of issues, voters were given a direct role in specific decisions, beyond the usual role in electing representatives to make decisions. All of these changes are now viewed as dramatic improvements upon the corruption of the old machines. And yet a key part of the Progressive Era alliance was a shared hostility to the poor and recent immigrants who were the power base of the city political machines. Reformers pushed through a wide range of changes in state and city laws to make voting or registration more difficult for the poor and working classes and recent immigrants.

"The Builders," painted by John Innes. *Source:* Major James Skitt Matthews (1956). *Early Vancouver*, Vol. 7. Vancouver: City of Vancouver Archives, p. 17. © 2011 City of Vancouver, reproduced by permission.

City Hall. Meeting of the first Vancouver City Council in September, 1886, a few months after the Great Fire destroyed much of the new city. *Source:* Major James Skitt Matthews (1933). *Early Vancouver*, Vol. 2. Vancouver: City of Vancouver Archives, p. 244.   © 2011 City of Vancouver, reproduced by permission.

Why did city political machines decline?

1. Higher levels of government began to provide the services the old city machines once offered.

2. As journalists exposed corruption, business groups began to fear being associated with city machines.

3. Competing non-governmental organizations -- labor unions and single-issue political movements -- began to take on some of the functions of the machine.

4. Progressive Era reformers succeeded in changing the rules of the game, often by going to higher levels of government to change laws and regulations.

Although the goo-goo reformers played a crucial role in challenging the corrupt big-city machines, broader structural changes were also remaking the landscape of city politics. Several major shifts in the first two decades of the twentieth century made machine politics more difficult, making it easier for Progressive Era reformers to change the rules of the game.

First, higher units of government began to provide many of the services that city machines once delivered in return for loyalty and votes. The growth of formal benefit systems for the unemployed and destitute -- both at the state/provincial and federal government levels -- weakened the entire social contract upon which the city machine was built.

Second, business groups began to find the city machine more of a liability than it was worth. The growth of 'muckraking' journalism exposed the corruption of big-city machines, and sometimes revealed the complicity of big business. At the same time, the expanding geographical scale of consolidating corporate empires meant that business elites were less interested in securing privileges from a single big-city machine, and much more interested in a) currying favor from state governments or federal agencies, and b) encouraging cities to compete amongst themselves for corporate investment. The business association with the city machine weakened after the turn of the twentieth century, and at the same time, corporate alliances with the Progressive Era goo-goos strengthened.

Third, competing non-governmental organizations -- labor unions and certain kinds of single-issue political groups -- began to serve some of the functions of the old machine, chipping away at its monopoly on political patronage and influence.

Fourth, higher units of government began to take more active roles in monitoring city politics. In some cases, this was a reactive move, with higher levels of government intervening when machine-based corruption was exposed. But the more significant changes were structural, with

Modern Machine Man. Richard J. Daley, left, shaking hands with U.S. President Richard M. Nixon in 1970. Daley was Chicago's Mayor from 1955 until his death in office in 1976. Much of Daley's success as a machine politician came from his ability to secure federal resources to pursue the local goals of his city machine. *Source:* Public domain image, from National Archives and Records Administration, via U.S. Library of Congress.

Progressive Era reformers working to change the rules of the game. In jurisdictions that had not yet become fully urbanized with entrenched political structures, reformers were more successful in getting laws and regulations changed. Recall that the Progressive Era reformers were mostly middle-class professionals who had forged alliances with business elites. By working in state legislatures and the courts, reformers were able to outflank the machine politicians whose power base was among the poor and working-class immigrants. Reformers "were able to win where they could shape the electorate by disenfranchising their opponents" and then rewriting the rules of the game, especially on suffrage (voting rights).[19] Two prominent urban political scientists summarize this long struggle this way:

> "Municipal reformers and other advocates of regulating suffrage shared three motivations: opposition to corruption in politics, ethnocentrism, and antipathy to poorer voters. Vigorous efforts to regulate and restrict voting met with widespread success in state legislatures. Registration was the most frequently adopted requirement. In its least inhibiting form, registration was permanent, but

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[19] Amy Bridges and Richard Kronick (1999). "Writing the Rules to Win the Game: the Middle-Class Regimes of Municipal Reformers." *Urban Affairs Review* 34, 691-697, reprinted in Elizabeth A. Strom and John Mollenkopf, eds. (2007), *The Urban Politics Reader.* New York: Routledge, 67-75, quote from p. 69.

in many states, the more burdensome requirement of periodic registration was enacted. Literacy tests were another popular innovation .... some states provided that anyone currently in jail (even for vagrancy or other misdemeanors) lost the right to vote."[20]

The city political machine is not just an historical curiosity: the concept, and the reality, remains relevant today.

1. The 'classical' political machines survived much longer than expected.

2. Some leaders, in some cities, are able to work around reforms and regulations to create new kinds of machines.

3. Immigration and new coalitions of race, ethnicity, and class create the possibility for new kinds of machines.

4. City machines have been re-spatialized: there are plenty of machines, they are just spread out across varied levels of government, and sometimes hard to see inside a single city.

Historians and political scientists have explored the implications of these structural changes for city politics, while also considering the legacy of the reform movements. There is no complete agreement on the reasons for the gradual disappearance of machine politics, but there is a consensus that genuine machines are now relatively rare; the political networks are simply much more difficult to create and sustain in today's economic, legal, and political environment. And yet, despite the odds, some city administrations bear a striking resemblance to the old machines.

Tammanies Today

The machine is "a political model that has present-day applications" and "newer-style machines are still alive." In many cities "politics is organized on a machinelike basis or has surviving elements of party machinery."[21] Some cities still have ward bosses who play the role of marshalling votes in return for implicit (and sometimes explicit) promises for jobs, contracts, and favors. And so one of the more fascinating intersections between political journalism and political theory today involves the debate over the existence, durability, and implications of machine politics. Four considerations are crucial as we consider the implications of this debate.

First, the "classical" political machines survived far longer than most analysts have recognized. Although William Tweed's Ring was dismantled in the 1870s, the political party system that created it was not. Tammany Hall retooled itself to achieve power in subsequent elections; Tweed's successor was known as "Honest John," and he managed to strengthen the machine's power while eliminating the worst instances of blatant (and thus publicly

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[20] Bridges and Konick, "Writing the Rules," p. 71.
[21] Phillips, City Lights, Second Edition, p. 367.

revolting) types of corruption. Tammany Hall survived well into the twentieth century, until a Tammany-backed Mayor, Robert F. Wagner, decided in 1961 to run for re-election for a third term, choosing an "anti-Boss" strategy that led to the downfall of Wagner's patron.

Machine, Jr. Richard M. Daley (right), son of the legendary Richard J. Daley, was first elected Mayor of Chicago in 1989. He was re-elected six times, eventually surpassing the 21-year tenure of his father. Daley was often referred to as "Son of Boss." *Source:* Public domain image, from U.S. Navy Mass Communication Specialist 1st Class Chad J. McNeeley (2007), via U.S. Library of Congress.

Second, key elements of the goo-goo reforms can be co-opted by machine politics, even while dynamic and talented leaders are often able to remake machines in ways that adapt to the limits imposed by structural economic and organizational circumstance. In other words: sometimes the four factors cited above for the machine's decline align in ways that allow a powerful leader to create a new kind of machine. Richard J. Daley, who served as Chicago's mayor from 1955 to 1976, is a prime example. Chicago in these years enjoyed a turbulent period of economic growth and polarized racial and ethnic politics, and Daley's political skills allowed him to resuscitate the

city's old machine -- a system that grew out of the city's horrendous experience in the Great Depression -- and to adapt it to the new realities. One of these new realities included a rapid expansion in federal governmental functions and expenditures; Daley became a master at attracting federal projects and funds to the city. A generation later, Richard M. Daley, son of Richard J., had to work even harder to build and maintain a city political machine in an age of professionalization and legal accountability. But there was no question Daley the son succeeded: he was re-elected six times.

Against the Machine. Harold Washington was the first African American to be elected Mayor of Chicago, in 1983. He won re-election in 1986, but he died in office only a few months later, in 1987. *Source:* Public domain image, Richard C. Grant (1986), U.S. Navy, via Wikimedia Commons.

Third, new racial, ethnic, and class coalitions have created the possibility for new kinds of machines. In the late 1970s and early 1980s, the major urban political shift involved a growing mobilization in U.S. cities for African-American leadership. This movement succeeded in getting Black mayors elected in many U.S. cities, but the constraints facing these new administrations were formidable. Black mayors are often only able to win when a city's black population is relatively large, and such victories were often followed by tense political climates in which white middle-class residents and powerful business interests threatened to flee to the suburbs or other cities. Harold Washington achieved victory in Chicago in 1983 as an anti-machine candidate, and became the city's first African American mayor and its first true reform mayor in half a century. But he inherited a city in deep economic crisis, and of course he faced the burden of proving that patronage and corruption were things of the past. This meant, however, that the mobilization of African American voters that brought Washington to power

would not give those voters the same benefits granted to previous ethnic blocs: Washington described his administration as "fairer than fair," and not all Blacks were happy about this.

North American urban politics have evolved in fascinating ways in the last generation, as increasing numbers of racially diverse immigrants, and long-settled racial-ethnic minorities, mobilize for representation and political power on the city scene. Drawing any kind of neat summary of these changes is exceedingly difficult, because of the fundamental importance of urban context. Many cities have elements of the old political machine, run by European-origin Whites whose power base comes from middle-class homeowners, professional employees, and corporate business interests. In other cities where middle-class and entrepreneurial immigration makes it possible, this Anglo White growth machine has become more inclusive of East Asian, Latino, and South Asian elected officials. In other cities, comparatively low levels of immigration have left late twentieth century racial and class divisions largely unchanged; and where these old divisions separated working-class African Americans from middle-class Whites, the new machines are controlled by those able to marshal sufficient voter registration and support or cooperation with powerful business elites.

The city political machine never really died. It just became a more diffuse, flexible, and spatially complex operation, dominated by regional, national, and transnational connections.

But the **fourth** key factor for anyone involved in city politics is the changed spatiality of the entire machine. In contrast to the highly localized story of city machine politics in the late nineteenth century, and in contrast to the local-national connections forged by Mayor Richard J. Daley in the 1950s and 1960s, today's urban political machine involves selective but crucial connections to individuals, institutions, and processes far beyond the confines of the city. And so the city political machine has become interwoven with machinations at very different spatial scales. There are plenty of machines, they're just spread out and hard to see within the confines of a single city. In some cases these outside connections are relatively formal, as in the case of Canadian cities' links to Ottawa, U.K. urban connections to London, or U.S. urban relations with Washington. Sometimes the resulting machine is particularly colorful and corrupt. Here is Hendrik Hertzberg's assessment of the convicted Washington lobbyist Jack Abramoff:

> "Abramoff was the apotheosis of the 'K Street Project,' a highly successful, years-long effort to turn the capital's 'lobbying community' into a Republican auxiliary, by pressuring lobbying firms and trade associations to support a broad conservative agenda, hire only Republicans, and give money overwhelmingly to Republican politicians. In some ways, the K Street Project is a national, and grander, version of the big-city political machines of old. But those machines, corrupt as they were, had their Robin Hood aspects. The pols got the graft and the diamond-stickpin boys got the contracts, but the poor got turkeys, jobs, and, sometimes, genuinely useful public programs. The K Street Project is strictly Sheriff of Nottingham. K Street, by its nature, promotes the interests of the rich,

especially the well-organized corporate rich: they're the only ones who can afford its services."[22]

In other cases, the city political machine has significant linkages to mobile transnational corporations, investors, or other types of organizations. In recent years, for example, the

In recent years, some city political machines have been influenced by the growing competition to host high-profile "mega-events" like the Olympic Games. In these cities, parts of local politics have been transnationalized.

competition amongst cities hoping to host the Olympic Games has become ever more intense: business and government leaders from Beijing to Vancouver to Sao Paulo to dozens of other cities hope to attract the global attention and potential investment and tourist wealth that comes with these "mega-events." Bidding for the Olympics requires major investments of money, time, and creativity -- and thus the bid itself has become a sign that a city is a serious player on the national or international stage. And for those cities that win the right to host the Olympics, there are additional major investments to build "world-class" facilities and plan all the details of what is perhaps the single largest periodic spectacle. All of these investments -- and all the coalitions and cooperation required to pull off these mega-events -- do have effects on local city politics. One recent study of Vancouver's bid and planning process for the 2010 Winter Olympic Games summarizes the process:

> "Our case study of the bid, planning, and development stages for the Vancouver-Whistler 2010 Winter Games embodies an instance of a selectively transnationalized local growth machine; its primary function is to balance the traditional political power of locally-based growth coalitions with the need to respond to extra-territorial actors and coalitions -- a *growth machine diaspora*. We thus characterize this growth machine as neither purely localized nor as placeless and hyper-global, but as a group of dispersed actors in various selected locales that is bound together through common interests and beliefs in specific forms of urban growth and development -- beliefs made more attainable through the vehicle of the mega-event."[23]

Elsewhere, in cities with large numbers of recent immigrants from countries that permit dual citizenship or that permit expatriates to vote in local or national elections, a local city political machine can be shaped by appeals to an electorate with enduring transnational connections.

Meet the New Boss, "Son of Boss"

> "Is the Chicago machine dead? Not quite. At least not yet. After Harold Washington died in office during his second term, Daley's son Richard M. Daley was elected and reelected Mayor. *Newsweek* ... called young Daley a 'genius at

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[22] Hendrik Hertzberg (2006). Comment: Abramoffed. *The New Yorker*, January 16, 25-26, quote from p. 26.
[23] Björn Surborg, Rob VanWynsberghe, and Elvin Wyly (2008). "Mapping the Olympic Growth Machine: Transnational Urbanism and the Growth Machine Diaspora." *City* 12(3), 341-355.

creating [his] own dynasty.' Even so, the future of Chicago's machine is far from assured, for the Chicago governed by Rich Daley is not the growing, prosperous city his father ruled." [24]

It is important to consider the terrible experience of deindustrialization, job losses, poverty, and outmigration that hit cities like Chicago in the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s. And yet in the years since, Chicago's downtown office district has boomed, thanks to increasingly strong connections to the national and transnational service economy. Chicago's poor neighborhoods have certainly been hit hard by these economic transformations, and it is clear that the predominantly working-class 'white ethnic' support that formed the basis of Richard J. Daley's machine has been supplanted by middle- and upper-class business and professional interests (still mostly white) supporting Richard M. Daley. But 'Son of Boss' is still widely viewed as a master of the machine, and his survival skills proved remarkable through six re-election campaigns. In September, 2005, a lawyer appointed by a judge to monitor city hiring "released the initial findings of her inquiry. Among them: that city jobs are -- shocking! -- handed out like candy in exchange for political favors." *U.S. News and World Report* offered a harsh assessment:

> "Though Daley's tenure has hit a few bumps before, his once sky-high ratings have plummeted as the feds have indicted scores of city workers on charges ranging from hiring political pals to taking bribes to running a heroin ring. His reign is eclipsed only by that of his legendary father, Richard J. Daley, and the younger Daley has taken pains to distance himself from the old man's iron-fisted machine politics. ... Two years ago, he won re-election with a stunning 80 percent of the vote and swept all of the city's 50 wards. But now his father's ghost hovers..." [25]

with abysmal poll figures and the prospect of U.S. Attorney Patrick Fitzgerald going after "Da Mayor's inner circle." [26]

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[24] Phillips, City Lights, Second Edition, p. 369.
[25] Eric Ferkenhoff (2005). "The Untouchable? A Mayor and His Windy City Scandals." *U.S. News & World Report*, September 19, p. 22.
[26] Ferkenhoff , "The Untouchable?," p. 22.

Back to the Machine. Rahm Emanuel (left), with U.S. President Barack Obama, on Obama's first day in office, January 21, 2009. Emanuel had served as a senior advisor to President Bill Clinton from 1993 to 1998, and was elected and re-elected to Congress, representing part of Chicago from 2003 to 2009. He served as White House Chief of Staff from 2009 until October, 2010, when Richard M. Daley announced that he would not run for re-election as Chicago Mayor. Emanuel entered the race and was elected Mayor of Chicago in February, 2011. *Source:* Public domain image, White House photo (Pete Souza), via Wikimedia Commons.

In late February, 2007, Richard M. Daley won re-election as Mayor. Towards the end of his term, he surpassed the legendary 21-year reign of his father.[27] In 2010, Daley announced that he would not seek re-election in the February, 2011 election, prompting a sudden scramble amongst contenders for the powerful Mayor's office. Rahm Emanuel, the White House Chief of Staff, announced his intention to come back to Chicago and run for Mayor. He won, after a short but tense court battle in which opponents questioned whether Emanuel's time in Washington, DC rendered him a "non-resident" for purposes of election law. Emanuel won the court challenge and then won the election. Chicago's machine grows and changes, but it certainly lives on. With a state political structure that gives mayors considerable power, Chicago is one of the few places where a political opening at City Hall can be viewed as a logical step upward for an ambitious and powerful candidate.

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[27] Susan Saulny (2007). "Daley Easily Wins Re-Election, Setting a Record in Chicago." *New York Times*, February 28, A12.