

Political Machines

Political Machines

- Developed in the early 19th century often as social clubs.
- **Unofficial organizations designed to keep a particular party or group in power.**
- In return for coordinating the needs of business, immigrants and underprivileged they asked for people's votes.
- Usually a single, powerful political boss presided over them
- Led to Corruption / Spoils System

History of the Spoils System

- Practice of giving appointed offices as reward from the successful party in an election.
 - Became official when Andrew Jackson took office.
 - Jackson argued that, “rotation in office” would prevent a small group of wealthy people from controlling the government.
 - Became standard practice in political machines

Role of Immigration

- Immigrants settled in cities
- Many people thought that the immigrants lack of education and sophistication made them vulnerable to corrupt political practices.
- In reality, the machines served as a crude form of welfare.
- Political machines help them settle often finding jobs and housing & citizenship and helping in hard times in hopes of getting vote.

Urban Growth / Problems

- Overcrowded cities had many problems
 - Services (Fire, Police)
 - Sanitation
 - Tax Collection
- Called for organization. Political machines provided this.
- Often brought modern services to the cities.

Problems

- Successful party bosses knew how to manage the competing social, ethnic and economic groups in the city.
- Although the machines often provided many services, they could be greedy as well
- Often stole millions from taxpayers in the form of graft and

fraud.

William Marcy “Boss” Tweed Tammany Hall – New York City

- Corrupt political leader who controlled TH, the club that ran NY city’s democratic party.
- Often used corrupt means to guide wealth to himself.
 - Once gained access to the city treasury in 1870, he used various illegal methods to plunder it.
 - Used his power to persuade businesses to pay him for nonexistent services.
 - Estimated 65% of public building funds found their way into the pockets of Boss Tweed and his cronies.

Pendleton Civil Service Reform Act

- The Pendleton Civil Service Reform Act was established in January of 1883 and was the answer to The Spoils System.
- This measure established a system of standards for various federal jobs.
- It also barred political candidates from soliciting campaign contributions from government workers.

Downfall of “Boss” Tweed

- After the Tweed Ring milked the city with false leases, padded bills, false vouchers, unnecessary repairs, and over priced goods; The Ring finally crumbled in 1871.
- Thanks to the brilliance of German immigrant cartoonist, Thomas Nast, he helped bring Tweed down by exposing his methods to the public.
- William Marcy Tweed was sent to jail in 1873 for extortion and fraud; and later on died there.

Other Reforms

- 17th Amendment (1913)
 - Direct election of senators
 - Reduced influence of business over politics
 - Offered greater democratic participation