URBAN POLITICS: MACHINES AND REFORMERS

NEW YORK STATE SOCIAL STUDIES CORE CURRICULUM, GRADES 7/8:
UNITED STATES AND NEW YORK STATE HISTORY

UNIT SEVEN  An Industrial Society
Chapter II: Changes in the Social Structure Altered the American Scene

These questions and documents can be used in conjunction with the New York State Education Department core curriculum for grades 7/8 Social Studies: United States and New York State History. This lesson can also be used with Unit Eight: The United States as an Independent Nation in an Increasingly Interdependent World. Students will be able to discuss immigration patterns to the United States with an emphasis on New York City’s ethnic neighborhoods.

FOCUS QUESTION
What was the political scene in New York in the early 1900’s? How did people get power and how did they use that power?

MATERIALS
Brief history of New York in the early 1900’s
Chapter excerpts from Plunkitt of Tammany Hall
La Guardia’s “Spoils System” speech
“Mayorally Battle Page” articles

INTRODUCTORY ACTIVITY
Teacher gives the students the following scenario and writing assignment:

• “You are the mayor of your city. Many of your friends helped you during your campaign, and you got the job partly through their efforts. It is time to hire people for prominent city positions. Do you hire your friends, who now need jobs, or do you hire people who are possibly more qualified? Explain your answer.” Students write independently in their notebooks.
• Students discuss in pairs.
• Class discussion. (If the class splits pretty evenly between the two answers, then teacher can split class into two sections based on answers. Students who said they would hire friends will be the Political Machine, and students who would hire people who seem more qualified will be the Reformers. If class does not split pretty evenly, teacher may split class.)

PROCEDURE
• Teacher gives brief overview/historical content of the time period.
• Class breaks into two sections — one is the Reformers; one is the Political Machine. Students will be creating a two-minute campaign speech for their political party and its candidate.
• Reformers get La Guardia speech “Tammany and the Spoils System.”
• Political Machine gets Plunkitt book excerpts.
• Each student reads independently. Students take notes and use information out of their excerpt that would persuade others to vote for their party.
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- Students share information with partner about their excerpts and add to their own notes.
- All students read their opponent’s section of Mayoralty Battle Page, which was published regularly in the Daily News in the month before the 1937 mayoral election. The submissions came from the campaigns of the two candidates. Read why others are against your candidate and take notes on why others would be opposed to their party, so that they can refute the charges.
- Again, students share information with partner and add to their own notes.
- Students independently write a two-minute speech, extolling their party’s virtues and defending their party against negative things that others have said.
- Teacher chooses even number of students from each side to give speeches. Students vote for the candidate/party they like best.

REFLECT

Students answer the following questions in their notebooks:

1. What does it mean for a government to be corrupt?
2. Who benefits from corruption in government? Who loses?

DISCOVERING HISTORY IN TODAY’S NEW YORK TIMES

Descriptions of historic events in textbooks are often based on the original newspaper accounts. These questions help you compare the past with current reports in The New York Times.

1. Graft still occurs today. Find an article in The New York Times about a person in government who behaved improperly. Make a list of ways this specific example of corruption hurts others.

2. One of the jobs of reporters is to find out wrongdoing in government. Reporters get the facts by asking people (sources) to tell them what they know. Circle the words in a Times article about graft that tell you sources of facts.

3. Politicians capture the loyalty of voters by doing favors for them. Read several articles about politicians in current issues of The Times. Identify favors granted by politicians and the people who received these favors. Discuss what happened as a result. Express your opinion about this by writing an editorial. Study editorials in The Times as models for your writing. Use facts from the news reports in The Times to support your opinion.
Tammany Hall and Mayor Fiorello H. La Guardia

In the 1840’s, American cities were growing rapidly. In New York, the city’s population in 1830 was over 197,000. It grew to almost 313,000 in 1840, and by 1850 had increased to about 460,000. There was an expansion in trade and business in cities across the nation, and the ships carrying products from Europe also carried people. America had jobs to offer, which drew many people to our shores. Many immigrants, like the Irish, were poor and had to struggle to make a living in their native land and so they came to America for economic opportunities. Some political groups in these growing cities saw a way to shape local politics: They offered jobs, money or food to the immigrants and their families, or helped get them out of any trouble they might be in, if the immigrants voted for that group’s candidates. These groups became known as political machines because, like machines, they manufactured votes and power. In New York City, the political machine was known as Tammany Hall, which dominated the Democratic Party in New York City. This was the central building where the politicians conducted business. However, most of their actual business was with the people in the streets of New York.

While the Tammany Hall system helped many people, some felt it was dishonest and should be stopped. These reformers believed that people who wanted city jobs should compete and the most qualified should win. The city should be run by honesty, not graft. (Graft means getting money or advantages dishonestly.) One such person who fought hard to end Tammany Hall politics was Mayor Fiorello La Guardia. La Guardia was mayor of New York City for three terms, from 1934 to 1945.

When La Guardia was a boy growing up in Arizona, he heard stories about Tammany Hall. Later he wrote about his reactions in his autobiography:

The papers were then filled with stories of startling crookedness on the part of the police and the politicians in New York. . . . I could not understand how the people of the greatest city in the country could put up with the vice and crime that existed there. A resentment against Tammany was created in me at that time, which I admit is to this day almost an obsession. But I did not become cynical or lose faith in government. I was certain that good people could eliminate bad people from public office. . . .

The cartoon below was drawn by the famous political cartoonist Thomas Nast. The cartoon shows “Boss” William Marcy Tweed. Boss Tweed was the leader of Tammany Hall from 1860 to 1871. He was a man of great power who made millions of dollars by cheating the city. At the same time, Tweed took care of the people who voted for his candidates. He provided jobs for his poorer voters so that they could feed their families, and he gave money to schools and hospitals.

Many New Yorkers trusted Tweed because of his generosity, but he was dishonest in the way he carried out city business. For example, at election time he was known to change the number of votes so that the candidate of his choice was sure to get elected. How was he able to do this? The cartoon shows Tweed standing by a ballot box at election time. Today in New York City, votes are registered by machines. In fact, the first voting machine — the Meyers Voting Machine — was introduced in the 1892 election at Lockport, New York. But in the earlier years
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of voting, and in some places to this day, people used a special container called a ballot box. A voter placed a piece of paper (the ballot) with the name of the candidate he was voting for in the ballot box. At the end of the election, all the papers were taken out and counted and the candidate who had the most votes won. One of the problems with this system was that dishonest politicians, like Tweed, could easily either throw away ballots for candidates they didn’t like or add ballots for candidates they liked.

"THAT'S WHAT'S THE MATTER."

Boss Tweed, “As long as I count the Votes, what are you going to do about it? say?”
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It's YOURS--
Not THEIRS

MACHONEY has finally come out firmly on two BIG issues:

1. He is in favor of good weather.
2. He thinks well of Abraham Lincoln.

We're for Abraham Lincoln, too. Abraham Lincoln was the government OF the people, BY the people, FOR the people. Just what does Machoney know about a PEOPLE's government? We know, and everybody in town knows, that the Tammany kind of government is government OF the Leaders, BY the District Leaders, FOR the District Leaders. That's Tammany's record and there's no argument about that.

Machoney has given government OF the people, BY the people, FOR the people. There are NO DISTRICT LEADERS BETWEEN MACHONEY, LA GUARDIA, AND THE PEOPLE. Their ALWAYS were District Leaders between the Tammany Mayors and the people.

When District Leader Machoney talks about government FOR the people, he's talking strongly, Don't Hesitate, Sir.

Machoney, as you know, comes from the people. He is OF the people--he is FOR the people. He was--and WILL be again--elected by the people.

He has PROVED that his brand of government is a government FOR the people. He has shown it by the humanitarian services of his city administration.

The people of New York have seen Mayor LaGuardia's brand of humanitarian and social government at work. They have seen it in the hospitals, in the clinics, in the health centers, in the parks, in the playgrounds, in the playgrounds. At the beaches. At the swimming pools. ALL OVER THIS CITY OF NEW YORK.

These Things Are YOURS

Under LaGuardia, New Yorkers have encouraged the people to use their own health, welfare, relief and recreational facilities. No one--NO ONE--has the right to "steal" a leader's public services from the people. Any New Yorker is entitled to a matter of right. NO ONE has the right to "steal" a leader's public services from the people. Any New Yorker is entitled to a matter of right. NO ONE has a right to ask for a Favor.

Under Tammany it was different. Tammany's whole stock in trade was "See your leader first." Under LaGuardia, the Tammany's means the District Leader. Under Tammany you found poor, worried mothers, going around to District Leaders to get "visiting cards" to get into hospitals and baby health stations! All these mothers wanted to bring their sick babies to hospitals and baby health stations. The District Leader didn't tell her it was NONE of HIS BUSINESS. He wanted her to believe she needed--must have--his help--all his help--all his help.

Thousands of men and women in this town who have been ignored by Tammany District Leaders in this way KNOW WHAT WE'RE TALKING ABOUT.

Under LaGuardia, any New Yorker who has LEGITIMATE business with any municipal department--no matter how trivial--can walk in "cold" and get service. The door is open, and NO LETTERS OF INTRODUCTION ARE REQUIRED.

The government of New York City, as LaGuardia has proved to all of us, is the personal property of ANY MAYOR, and certainly NOT the property of any political machines selling city services for votes or money. It is YOUR government. It belongs to you. It is in your right to go to any District Leader.

When a mother wants to bring her baby to a health station today she doesn't have to "know" any one or "be" any one. And that goes down the line, in every department under the Mayor.

That's the idea. That's the idea. And, ask yourself whether you like Tammany service or HUMANIZED SERVICE. It comes back to...

THE SAME OLD ISSUE: Good Government or Bad

MACHONEY OR TAMMANY

DAILY NEWS, FRIDAY, OCTOBER 15, 1932

"I TOLD YOU I WOULD DO IT! HERE IT IS!"

Mayor LaGuardia's rash claim to credit for all the PWA and WPA improvements carried out in New York City under the supervision of the Democratic Administration in Washington is an audacious example of Fusion ballyhoo.

Informed persons stand amazed at LaGuardia's claim to credit for such typical PWA and WPA projects as the Triboro Bridge, slum clearance, public playgrounds, new parks and scores of similar Federal financed and Federal directed improvements.

We heard him say at the opening of the West Side highway the other day:

"I told you I would do it! And here it is! It's old stuff. Down through the ages it reads the same. For example, this reenacted monument which all New Yorkers may be familiar with."

LaGuardia Dedicates the Great Pyramid

The Great Pyramid

La Guardia dedicates

PIPA'S LEANING TOWER

The Tower of Pisa-Leaning to Left

The Eiffel Tower

THE EIFFEL TOWER

Paris, Oct. 14, 1932 (Special to Reuters).--Parisians will today [1932] dedicate the new Eiffel Tower "Abit," he added with his usual invective, "here it is."

The structure of the latest creation and a duplication of two floors has been completed.

THE TOWER, which is 985 feet high, 985 feet high, will be 985 feet high and was 985 feet high.

La Guardia dedicates the Eiffel Tower.

History repeats itself down the years.
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It's YOURS--Not THEIRS

Mahoney has finally come out firmly on two big issues:

1. He is in favor of good weather.
2. He thinks well of Abraham Lincoln.

We're for Abraham Lincoln, too. Abraham Lincoln was for government OF the people, BY the people, FOR the people. Just what does Mahoney know about a PEOPLE'S government? We know, and every one in town knows, that the Tammany kind of government is government OF the District Leaders, BY the District Leaders, FOR the District Leaders. That's Tammany's record and

THERE'S NO ARGUMENT ABOUT THAT

Mayor LaGuardia has given government OF the people, BY the people, FOR the people. There are NO DISTRICT LEADERS BETWEEN MAYOR LaGUARDIA AND THE PEOPLE.

There ALWAYS were District Leaders between the Tammany Mayors and the people.

When District Leader Mahoney talks about government FOR the people, he's talking through Jimmy Hines' hat.

Mayor LaGuardia comes from the people. He is OF them—he is one of US. He was—and WILL BE again—elected BY the people. He has PROVED that his brand of government is FOR the people. He has shown it by the humanized services of his city administration.

The people of New York have seen Mayor LaGuardia's brand of humanized government. In the hospitals. In the clinics. In the health centers. In the parks. In the playgrounds. In the relief stations. At the beaches. At the swimming pools. ALL OVER THE CITY OF NEW YORK.
These Things Are YOURS

Mayor LaGuardia has encouraged the people to use THEIR OWN health, welfare, relief and recreational facilities. No one—NO ONE—has to “see” a Leader to get city services that any New Yorker is entitled to as a matter of right. NO ONE has to ask for a FAVOR.

Under Tammany it was different. Tammany’s whole stock in trade was “See your leader first.” Tammany tried to educate the people to “See your leader first.” Tammany MEANS the District Leader.

Under Tammany you found poor, worried mothers, going around to District Leaders to get “visiting cards” to get into hospitals and baby health stations! All these mothers wanted was to bring THEIR sick babies to THEIR baby health stations. The District Leader didn’t tell her it was NONE OF HIS BUSINESS. He wanted her to believe she needed—must have—his help—his card of introduction.

The thousands of men and women in this town who have been hum-bugged by Tammany District Leaders in this way KNOW WHAT WE’RE TALKING ABOUT.

Under LaGuardia, any New Yorker who has LEGITIMATE business with any municipal department—no matter how trivial—can walk in “cold” and get service. The doors are open, and NO LETTERS OF INTRODUCTION ARE REQUIRED.

The government of New York City, as LaGuardia has proved to all of us, is not the personal property of ANY MAYOR, and certainly NOT the property of any gang of tin-horn politicians selling city services for votes or money. It is YOUR Government. It belongs to you. It is there to serve YOU—not any District Leader.

When a mother wants to bring her baby to a health station TODAY she doesn’t have to “know” any one or “see” any one. And that goes straight down the line, in every department under the Mayor.

Think back a bit. Think back to Tammany days, and ask yourself whether you like Tammany service or HUMANIZED SERVICE.

It comes back to

THE SAME OLD ISSUE

Good Government or Bad

LaGUARDIA OR TAMMANY
"I TOLD YOU I WOULD DO IT! HERE IT IS!"

Mayor LaGuardia's rash claim to credit for all the PWA and WPA improvements carried out in New York City under supervision of the Democratic Administration in Washington is an audacious example of Fusion ballyhoo.

Informed persons stand amazed at LaGuardia's claim to credit for such typical PWA and WPA projects as the Triboro Bridge, slum clearance, public playgrounds, new piers and scores of similar Federal financed and Federal directed improvements.

We heard him say at the opening of the West Side Highway the other day:

"I told you I would do it! And here it is!"

It's old stuff. Down through the ages it reads the same.

For example, there's this yellowed parchment which antiquarians may be familiar with:

La Guardia Dedicates the Great Pyramid

Gizeh, Egypt, Oct. 14, 3000 B.C. (By Fusion Post Service).
—Fiorello H. LaGuardia, known as Cheops, King of the 4th Dynasty, today dedicated Fusion Project 1 UP—the Great Pyramid.

With becoming modesty, he said:

"I told you I would do it! And here it is!"

Some grumbling was heard in the ranks of the 100,000 slaves who had toiled 20 years on the project. The farmers and serfs who had supplied the tithes and taxes to finance it, whispered:

"Doesn't any of the credit go to us?"

The Little King's soldiery quickly silenced these ungrateful murmurings.

King Fiorello declared the monument dedicated today is but one of seven wonders of the world that now or before election, he will take credit for. The list includes the nearby Sphinx, the Hanging Gardens of Babylon, the Temple of Diana, the Statue of Jupiter Olympus, the Tomb of Mausolus, the Pharos of Alexandria and the Colossus of Rhodes.

He said:

"Some of these things don't exist yet. But I'm a great believer in reincarnation. I'll get around to them some day as long as there are WPA funds to finance them and WPA engineers to build them. I am the PWA. I am the WPA. I am Fiorello the First—all things to all men."
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"Then there's a more recent item:"

LAGUARDIA DEDICATES PISA’S LEANING TOWER

Pisa, Italy, Oct. 14, 1154 (Reprinted from Borgia Bugle).—The Due de LaGuardia, always one for a Pisan joke, declared as he broke a bottle of Milanese Chianti over the new Tower of Pisa:

"I told you I would do it! And here it is!"

He had scarcely ceased speaking when the Tower started to lean—to the left!

Romano Pisano and William of Innsbruck who did all the work on the tower were somehow lost in the shuffle at the dedicatory exercises. The Due de LaGuardia was the principal figure, as always.

The Duc was overjoyed at the listing of the Tower to port. He shouted lustily:

"If I cannot make towers, I can at least make them bend to my will."

(The Tower, which history came to know as the Leaning Tower of Pisa, is 188 feet high and wound up 16 feet out of the perpendicular. Fusionists often visit it, even in modern times for a classic example of how an unbalanced budget would look in stone.)

A still more recent item:

LAGUARDIA DEDICATES THE EIFFEL TOWER

Paris, France, Oct. 14, 1889 (By La Fusion Puff Service).—"I told you I would do it," said F. H. LaGuardia, Mayor of Paris, dedicating the new Eiffel Tower today. "And, he added with his usual savoir-faire, "here it is!"

The parties of the Left cheered and a Republican or two flung his hat in air. The Rights held on to theirs.

The tower, a most daring bit of construction, is 985 feet high. French engineers are inclined to pass a bit of credit for its construction to Alexander Eiffel, engineer and bridge-builder, and to the Republic which footed the bill. Not so Monsieur LaGuardia, however.

The parties of the Left hailed the day as a triumph for the Mayor who was elected just in time to cut the ribbon, officially opening the World’s Fair and the Tower.

Bands played shrilly. The Left Wing claque gave its leader resounding applause. When the Mayor referred to the Tower as "My tower" a provocateur shouted: "It is Eiffel’s work with government money!"

"Throw that man out!" screamed Mons. LaGuardia.

"He does not understand good government."

Gendarmes rushed in with swords and gave the provocateur what was later to become known as the “bum’s rush.”

History repeats itself down the years.
Speech on Tammany and the Spoils System

Speech Material {Family Tree}

Let's get down to brass tacks on this question of Tammany and the spoils system. Tammany is giving high salaries to its own favorites because it has the power to take the money out of your pocket. Maybe you think that a Tammany leader's high salary does not concern you. If you do, let me put a test to you.

How many people in this audience get $11,000 a year, Won't you raise your hands, please.

All right; you can put them down now-I don't see anybody. McCooey himself, you know, is the Boss of Brooklyn, and he is so well-to-do that he does not need any city salary at present. For many years he got $10,000 a year as Chief Clerk of the Surrogate's Court. Then he acquired a family tree and other people made money for him. His sister, Margaret McCooey, is Associate Superintendent of schools and she gets $11,265. His son, John H. McCooey, Jr., is a judge of the Supreme Court and gets $22,500. One of his other sons, Herbert McCooey, sells bonds to Public Works contractors--and how! He has a new firm and it broke into the big money just recently by underwriting 20 per cent of the sixty-seven million dollar fire insurance for the B.M.T.

It pays to be the son or a relative of a Tammany district leader.
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whole thing by sayin': ‘I seen my opportunities and I took ‘em.’

‘Just let me explain by examples. My party’s in power in the city, and it’s goin’ to undertake a lot of public improvements. Well, I’m tipped off, say, that they’re going to lay out a new park at a certain place.

‘I see my opportunity and I take it. I go to that place and I buy up all the land I can in the neighborhood. Then the board of this or that makes its plan public, and there is a rush to get my land, which nobody cared particular for before.

‘Ain’t it perfectly honest to charge a good price and make a profit on my investment and foresight? Of course, it is. Well, that’s honest graft.

‘Or, supposin’ it’s a new bridge they’re goin’ to build. I get tipped off and I buy as much property as I can that has to be taken for approaches. I sell at my own price later.

HONEST AND DISHONEST GRAFT

‘EVERYBODY is talkin’ these days about Tammany men growin’ rich on graft, but nobody thinks of 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 rich in politics. I have myself. I made a big fortune out of the game, and I’m gettin’ 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.

‘There’s an honest graft, and I’m an example of how it works. I might sum up the
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Guess that they would be bought up for water purposes later by the city.

"Somehow, I always guessed about right, and should n’t I enjoy the profit of my foresight? It was rather amusing when the condemnation commissioners came along and found piece after piece of the land in the name of George Plunkitt of the Fifteenth Assembly District, New York City. They wondered how I knew just what to buy. The answer is — I seen my opportunity and I took it. I have n’t confined myself to land; anything that pays is in my line.

"For instance, the city is repavin’ a street and has several hundred thousand old granite blocks to sell. I am on hand to buy, and I know just what they are worth.

"How? Never mind that. I had a sort of monopoly of this business for a while, but once a newspaper tried to do me. It got some outside men to come over from

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Brooklyn and New Jersey to bid against me.

"Was I done? Not much. I went to each of the men and said: ‘How many of these $30,000 stones do you want?’ One said 90,000, and another wanted 15,000, and another wanted 10,000. I said: ‘All right, let me bid for the lot, and I ’ll give each of you all you want for nothin’.

"They agreed, of course. Then the auctioneer yelled: ‘How much am I bid for these $30,000 fine paving stones?’

"‘Two dollars and fifty cents,’ says I.

"‘Two dollars and fifty cents!’ screamed the auctioneer. ‘Oh, that’s a joke! Give me a real bid.’

"He found the bid was real enough. My rivals stood silent. I got the lot for $8.50 and gave them their share. That’s how the attempt to do Plunkitt ended, and that’s how all such attempts end.

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I’ve told you how I got rich by honest graft. Now, let me tell you that most politicians who are accused of robbin’ the city get rich the same way.

"They did n’t steal a dollar from the city treasury. They just seen their opportunities and took them. That is why, when a reform administration comes in and spends a half million dollars in tryin’ to find the public robberies they talked about in the campaign, they don’t find them.

"The books are always all right. The money in the city treasury is all right. Everything is all right. All they can show is that the Tammany heads of departments looked after their friends, within the law, and gave them what opportunities they could to make honest graft. Now, let me tell you that ’s never goin’ to hurt Tammany with the people. Every good man looks after his friends, and any man who does n’t is n’t likely to be pop-

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lar. If I have a good thing to hand out in private life, I give it to a friend. Why should n’t I do the same in public life?

"Another kind of honest graft, Tammany has raised a good many salaries. There was an awful howl by the reformers, but don’t you know that Tammany gains ten votes for every one it loses by salary raisin’?

"The Wall Street banker thinks it shameful to raise a department clerk’s salary from $1,500 to $1,800 a year, but every man who draws a salary himself says: ‘That’s all right. I wish it was me.’ And he feels very much like votin’ the Tammany ticket on election day, just out of sympathy.

"Tammany was beat in 1901 because the people were deceived into believin’ that it worked dishonest graft. They did n’t draw a distinction between dishonest and honest graft, but they saw that some Tammany men grew rich, and supposed they had been rob-
TO HOLD YOUR DISTRICT
Fifteenth District, except them that’s been born this summer — and I know some of them, too. I know what they like and what they don’t like, what they are strong at and what they are weak in, and I reach them by approachin’ at the right side.

“For instance, here’s how I gather in the young men. I hear of a young feller that’s proud of his voice, thinks that he can sing fine. I ask him to come around to Washington Hall and join our Glee Club. He comes and sings, and he’s a follower of Plunkitt for life. Another young feller gains a reputation as a base-ball player in a vacant lot. I bring him into our base-ball club. That fixes him. You’ll find him workin’ for my ticket at the polls next election day. Then there’s the feller that likes rowin’ on the river, the young feller that makes a name as a Waltzer on his block, the young feller that’s handy with his dukes — I rope them all in by givin’

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would n’t deny it under oath. What do I mean by that? Never mind. You can guess from the sequel, if you ’re sharp.

“Well, election day came. The Citizens’ Union’s candidate for Senator, who ran against me, just polled five votes in the district, while I polled something more than 14,000 votes. What became of the 400 or 500 Citizens’ Union enrolled voters in my district? Some people guessed that many of them were good Plunkitt men all along and worked with the Cits just to bring them into the Plunkitt camp by election day. You can guess that way, too, if you want to. I never contradict stories about me, especially in hot weather. I just call your attention to the fact that on last election day 395 Citizens’ Union enrolled voters in my district were missin’ and unaccounted for.

“I tell you frankly, though, how I have captured some of the Citizens’ Union’s

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young men. I have a plan that never fails. I watch the City Record to see when there’s civil service examinations for good things. Then I take my young Cit in hand, tell him all about the good thing and get him worked up till he goes and takes an examination. I don’t bother about him any more. It’s a cinch that he comes back to me in a few days and asks to join Tammany Hall. Come over to Washington Hall some night and I’ll show you a list of names on our rolls marked ‘C. S.’ which means, ‘bucked up against civil service.’

“As to the older voters, I reach them, too. No, I don’t send them campaign literature. That’s rot. People can get all the political stuff they want to read — and a good deal more, too — in the papers. Who reads speeches, nowadays, anyhow? It’s bad enough to listen to them. You ain’t goin’ to gain any votes by stuffin’ the letter boxes

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with campaign documents. Like as not you’ll lose votes, for there’s nothin’ a man hates more than to hear the letter-carrier ring his bell and go to the letter-box expectin’ to find a letter he was lookin’ for, and find only a lot of printed politics. I met a man this very mornin’ who told me he voted the Democratic State ticket last year just because the Republicans kept cramm’lin’ his letter-box with campaign documents.

“What tells in holdin’ your grip on your district is to go right down among the poor families and help them in the different ways they need help. I’ve got a regular system for this. If there’s a fire in Ninth, Tenth, or Eleventh Avenue, for example, any hour of the day or night, I’m usually there with some of my election district captains as soon as the fire-engines. If a family is burned out I don’t ask whether they are Republicans or Democrats, and I don’t refer them to the

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Charity Organization Society, which would investigate their case in a month or two and decide they were worthy of help about the time they are dead from starvation. I just get quarters for them, buy clothes for them if their clothes were burned up, and fix them up till they get things runnin’ again. It’s philanthropy, but it’s politics, too — mighty good politics. Who can tell how many votes one of these fires bring me? The poor are the most grateful people in the world, and, let me tell you, they have more friends in their neighborhoods than the rich have in theirs.

“If there’s a family in my district in want I know it before the charitable societies do, and me and my men are first on the ground. I have a special corps to look up such cases. The consequence is that the poor look up to George W. Plunkitt as a father, come to him in trouble — and don’t forget him on election day.

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GLOSSARY

civil relating to citizen of the state; relating to the general public; to be polite (adjective).
favoritism preferential treatment (noun).
graft illegal or unfair gain (noun).
municipal public; having local self-government (adjective).
nonpartisan unbiased; impartial; unprejudiced (adjective).
parochial confined or restricted; limited in range or scope (adjective).
patronage the power to make appointments to government jobs (noun).
permeate to pass through; to diffuse; to saturate (verb).

PEOPLE/PLACES TO KNOW

Tammany Hall The political machine in New York City that dominated the Democratic Party. It used its power to provide jobs and favors to its supporters, but its leaders often used corrupt means to get elected and to enrich themselves.

George W. Plunkitt Tammany Hall leader from the West Side of Manhattan in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Known as the “sage of Tammany Hall” because of the ideas he laid out in Plunkitt of Tammany Hall.

Fiorello H. La Guardia As mayor of New York City from 1934–1945, he ran an administration that opposed Tammany Hall patronage and political corruption. He used his power as mayor to reform New York City’s government and rebuilt New York City’s infrastructure, creating millions of jobs for the unemployed during the Great Depression.