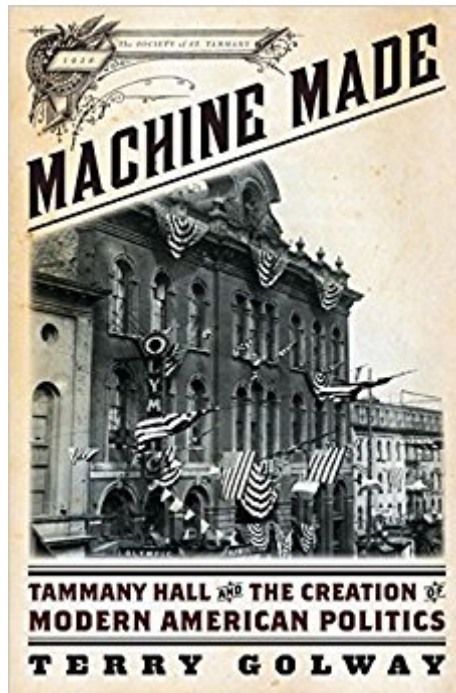


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Machine Made: Tammany Hall And The Creation Of Modern American Politics



Synopsis

A major, surprising new history of New York's most famous political machine—Tammany Hall—revealing, beyond the vice and corruption, a birthplace of progressive urban politics. For decades, history has considered Tammany Hall, New York's famous political machine, shorthand for the worst of urban politics: graft, crime, and patronage personified by notoriously corrupt characters. Infamous crooks like William "Boss" Tweed dominate traditional histories of Tammany, distorting our understanding of a critical chapter of American political history. In *Machine Made*, historian and New York City journalist Terry Golway convincingly dismantles these stereotypes; Tammany's corruption was real, but so was its heretofore forgotten role in protecting marginalized and maligned immigrants in desperate need of a political voice. Irish immigrants arriving in New York during the nineteenth century faced an unrelenting onslaught of hyperbolic, nativist propaganda. They were voiceless in a city that proved, time and again, that real power remained in the hands of the mercantile elite, not with a crush of ragged newcomers flooding its streets. Haunted by fresh memories of the horrific Irish potato famine in the old country, Irish immigrants had already learned an indelible lesson about the dire consequences of political helplessness. Tammany Hall emerged as a distinct force to support the city's Catholic newcomers, courting their votes while acting as a powerful intermediary between them and the Anglo-Saxon Protestant ruling class. In a city that had yet to develop the social services we now expect, Tammany often functioned as a rudimentary public welfare system and a champion of crucial social reforms benefiting its constituency, including workers' compensation, prohibitions against child labor, and public pensions for widows with children. Tammany figures also fought against attempts to limit immigration and to strip the poor of the only power they had—the vote. While rescuing Tammany from its maligned legacy, Golway hardly ignores Tammany's ugly underbelly, from its constituents' participation in the bloody Draft Riots of 1863 to its rampant cronyism. However, even under occasionally notorious leadership, Tammany played a profound and long-ignored role in laying the groundwork for social reform, and nurtured the careers of two of New York's greatest political figures, Al Smith and Robert Wagner. Despite devastating electoral defeats and countless scandals, Tammany nonetheless created a formidable political coalition, one that eventually made its way into the echelons of FDR's Democratic Party and progressive New Deal agenda. Tracing the events of a tumultuous century, Golway shows how mainstream American government began to embrace both Tammany's constituents and its ideals. *Machine Made* is a revelatory work of revisionist history, and a rich, multifaceted portrait of roiling New York City politics in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. 8 pages of illustrations

Book Information

Hardcover: 400 pages

Publisher: Liveright; 1 edition (March 3, 2014)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0871403757

ISBN-13: 978-0871403759

Product Dimensions: 6.5 x 1.4 x 9.6 inches

Shipping Weight: 1.2 pounds (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.3 out of 5 starsÂ Â See all reviewsÂ (41 customer reviews)

Best Sellers Rank: #440,727 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #238 inÂ Books > History >

Americas > United States > Immigrants #427 inÂ Books > Politics & Social Sciences > Politics &

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Customer Reviews

"The benefits that Tammany Hall brought to New York and to the United States outweigh the corruption with which it is associated.", according to Terry Golay who gives a more sympathetic view of the political machine of the Democratic Party in New York. The book explains the origins of the organization in the late eighteenth century, "The Society of Saint Tammany" by Aaron Burr et al. and how it evolved into the controlling cabal of New York city politics for over a century. It was supposedly named after Chief Tamanend, William Penn's friend. He was suggested as a candidate for sainthood for his efforts to promote peace and friendship between the settlers and the natives, and is often referred to as the "Patron Saint of America"; but he was never beatified/canonized by the Catholic Church. Tammany Hall was ruled by a succession of opportunistic, self-serving corrupt politicians such as the legendary William "Boss" Tweed (1823 -1878) who sold city contracts and patronage jobs and "enormous rents the city was paying for facilities linked to Tweed and his friends -- including a portion to Tammany Hall." and extracted a 15% "overcharge/tax" from businessmen plying their trade. The Times gave details of corruption "which even Tweed's harshest critics could not have imagined." He was estimated to have amassed \$25 to 45 million by the time of his arrest, now believed to be almost \$200 millions. He died in prison at age 55 years. Richard Croker, Sr (1843-1922) was born in Ireland and came to New York as a child. An ambitious hard working lad, he got himself an education and a city job. Eventually Croker became part of Tammany Hall and ended up running the "Machine" for several years.

I have just finished Reading this very interesting book, and congratulate T. Golway for producing a highly readable and well-documented history , and also helping clear up the origins and evolution of an institution looked down upon by many. Having landed as an Irish immigrant myself in New York in the 70s, I identified with the characters portrayed in the book and it gave me great insight into the history of my forefather's journey to that great city in the previous century. New York has always been special for the Irish; as former president McAleese said: "it was the next parish". Golway describes only too well what it meant to be a second-class citizen in the Anglo-Protestant world from which these immigrants came, and how that experience contributed to their desire to exercise to the full in their new home, the rights which they had been denied in their native land, above all that of political power. This was even more so as they confronted the same anti-Catholic Anglo-Protestant bigotry in the New York to which they arrived. (The author describes this last aspect very well, and above all, the very Calvinist view these NY elders had of poverty, its causes and remedies) Golway points out the manner in which these impoverished immigrants took over the Society of St Tammany and the seat of the Democratic Party in Manhattan, and the breadth and depth of political structure and organization they set up, in the days before mass media, polling, TV debates and the like. No other group achieved anything close to it, and Malcolm X, in the days before the Civil Rights legislation, lamented that if only the black people had something like Tammany, their story in America would have been very different.

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