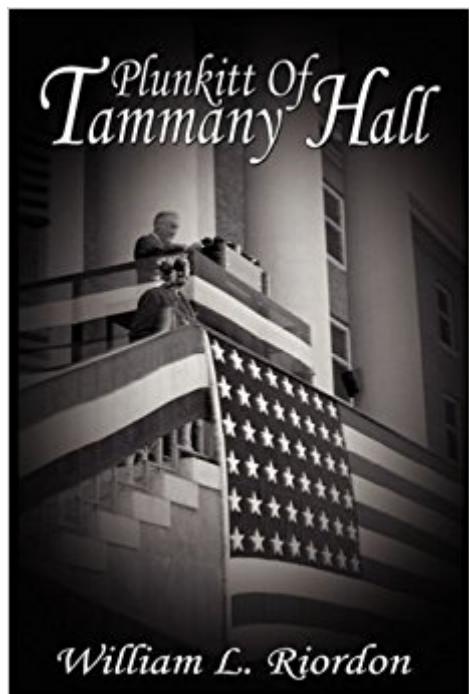


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# Plunkitt Of Tammany Hall



## Synopsis

Plunkitt of Tammany Hall A Series of Very Plain Talks on Very Practical Politics, Delivered by Ex-senator George Washington Plunkitt, the Tammany Philosopher, from His Rostrum-the New York County Court House Bootblack Stand Recorded by William L. Riordon

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

George Washington Plunkitt (1842-1924) was a long-time State Senator from the U. S. state of New York, representing the Fifteenth Assembly District, who was especially powerful in New York City. He was part of what is known as New York's Tammany Hall machine. He was a cynically honest practitioner of what today is generally known as "machine politics," patronage-based and frank in its exercise of power for personal gain. In one of his speeches, quoted in Plunkitt of Tammany Hall (1905), he describes the difference between dishonest and honest graft as working solely for one's own interests and working for the interests of one's party, state, and personal interest whenever they can. Plunkitt was also a big party man, believing in appointments, patronage, spoils, and all of the corrupt practices that were curtailed by the civil service law. He saw such practices as both the rewards and cause of patriotism. He hated the civil service system that he believed would be the downfall of the entire United States governmental system. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

Plunkitt of Tammany Hall is a great book that shows how a group of openly corrupt politicians can stay in power using a system of apprenticeship and personal favors. It is as important to understanding the United States in the early 20th century as The Prince is to understanding the renaissance. However, it is difficult to find a decent edition of the book. The edition that this review should be attached to from BN Publishing, ISBN 1607960125, is cheap, but completely awful. It was apparently prepared for print by running an older edition through a scanner and then was not edited afterwards, leaving so many typos that it is practically unreadable in places. Read the book; it is fantastic. Just don't waste your money on this edition.

Fantastic book, if you're willing to laugh about partisan politics.

Very informative and well written.

Anyone who loves U.S. history and politics should have a copy of Plunkitt. This edition is handsome, with easy to read print.

Plunkitt of Tammany Hall  
George Washington Plunkitt (1842-1924) was one of the powers of Tammany Hall in the late 19th century. Plunkitt was born in a shantytown called Nanny Goat Hill and died wealthy and renowned. Newspaperman William L. Riordan recorded his conversations and preserved them. Most other leaders were cold reticent men who had little to say (p.ix). Tammany Hall, the name of a civic society, controlled the Democratic Party in New York city. They knew how to get power and hold on to it by getting people to vote for their candidates. Political power leads to personal wealth. Tammany governed NY from 1854 to 1934. The New Deal reforms of welfare and public housing socialized the benefits that had come from the patrons of Tammany Hall. The "Introduction" by Arthur Mann is faulty. Mann claims "no room for machines" (p.xi) any good history book will tell how churches or other organizations controlled or influenced local municipal elections earlier. Ruling classes reflect the reality that the many can be influenced by the few through advertising or other propaganda. Most people in a church are influenced by their preacher, and those in a tavern can be influenced by an orator who tells them what they want to hear. The alternative is rule by an aristocracy or corporation through attorneys who act against the people to benefit the rulers. Professional politicians exist on state and federal level since Washington's time. Do they control the educational system to teach students to accept this and distrust challengers? The bias against Tammany Hall came from the wealthy gentry

who were defeated by upstarts who best served popular opinion (p.xiv). Tammany Hall educated millions of immigrants about representative government (p.xix). The *Preface* by William L. Riordan provides a short biography of G. W. Plunkitt. Plunkitt the politician introduced bills to create parks, the Washington Bridge, additions to the Museum of Natural History, and many important public improvements. Did Plunkitt's business benefit from this? Every public improvement benefits some business, directly or indirectly. Else we would have dirt roads and no sewers as in many rural areas today. The problem comes from unneeded improvements (*œgraft jobs*) where tax money is spent to benefit the few. Plunkitt explains what is usually censored in the press, or distorted for special interests. These 22 chapters vary in quality. One chapter explains why reformers don't last. Politics is a regular business that needs experienced people. Plunkitt seldom discusses political issues but only the benefits of government. He is not an idealist (a type of emotion). Plunkitt complains that New York is taxed to provide benefits to the rest of the state. [Has that changed?] Each political party cooperates with the other. Civil Service was created to undermine the political parties and their organizations. [It makes them dependent on corporate support to this day.] Municipal ownership of utilities would benefit a city [lower rates]. Plunkitt compares a political organization to churches; both need money to exist. A candidate for office needs money for campaign expenses. [That still goes on even if a candidate gets the money from others.] A successful politician, like a saloon owner, does not drink. Political bosses prevent turmoil and squabbles. [They are opposed by those who wish to gain their power.] High taxes on saloon keepers creates lower cost competition from *œbucket shops* that sell bootleg whiskey. [Prohibition, which was supposed to reduce crime and increase prosperity, did just the reverse.] Tammany Hall built a huge building just before it went out of business. This recalls C. Northcote Parkinson's comment that a grandiose building usually marks the end of an entity.

I read this book when I was in college in the 60's and I was never quite sure if it was real or satire. Many years later I was watching an interview of Pat Brown, former governor of California, and when the interviewer asked him what advice he might offer to young people interested in entering politics, he spoke as he were quoting directly from the chapter of Plunkitt devoted to "The Curse of Civil Service Reform." In other words, it is not satire. It provides an entertaining if somewhat discouraging description of why politics is driven by money and why reformers are merely a flash in the pan. Another topic covered in the book, "The difference between honest graft and dishonest graft" is equally alive and well among modern politicians. A modern politician accused of exactly the type of

real estate speculation Plunkitt uses as his example of "honest" graft occurred just a few years ago. The politician sat on a committee that determined the site of government project and bought up the land before the project was revealed to the public. When confronted his response was, "I didn't break any laws." As Plunkitt would have said, he was only practicing honest graft.

Forty-two years ago this book, or what was then titled "Honest Graft and Dishonest Graft" by George Plunkitt, was assigned reading for me as an undergraduate political science major. I recall it as the reading highlight of my early academic career. In short, this thing is a real hoot. Plunkitt was a crony of the infamous William M. "Boss" Tweed who created and presided over a Democrat, ward based patronage form of government in the City of New York in the mid to late 19th century referred to then as and now "Tammany Hall". Plunkitt was one of his side-kicks who participated in all of the perks of office and had the ability to discuss his "work" with justifications worthy of the best wit of Mark Twain. It is no coincidence that this little jewel of amateur literature has remained in print for over 100 years.

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