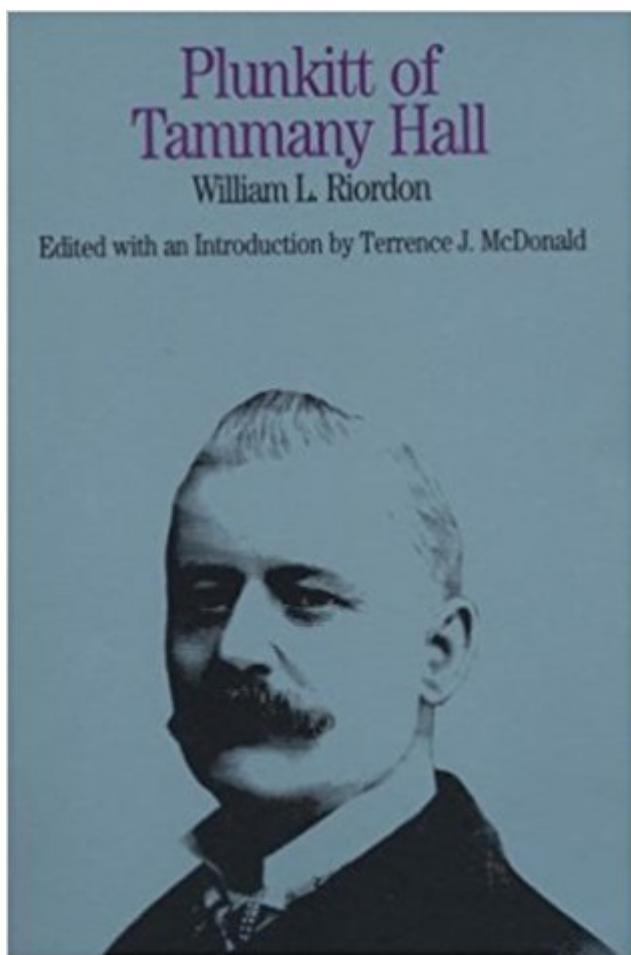


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# Plunkitt Of Tammany Hall: A Series Of Very Plain Talks On Very Practical Politics (The Bedford Series In History And Culture)



## Synopsis

Since its publication in 1905, Plunkitt of Tammany Hall has given generations of students a passport into the world of controversy, conflict, corruption, and color that surrounded urban political machines at their zenith. The full text of William Riordon's book is supported here by nine primary documents that place both the book and its subject into context.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

"This is a model of how teaching materials should be crafted. It is the clearest, most comprehensive, and most interesting discussion of Plunkitt that I have ever read."

Terrence J. McDonald is professor of history at the University of Michigan. His book, *The Parameters of Urban Fiscal Policy: Socioeconomic Change and Political Culture in San Francisco, 1860 to 1906*, won the 1987 Allan M. Sharlin Memorial Award of the Social Science History Association and the 1988 J. S. Holliday Award from the California Historical Society. He is a member of the board of editors of the *Journal of Urban History and Studies in American Political Development*, and he has published essays in those journals as well as in *Social History*, *Historical Methods*, the *History Teacher*, and *Reviews in American History*. His research on George Washington Plunkitt is part of an ongoing project on the image of the urban political machine and American liberalism entitled "Inventing Urban Politics: The City and the State in American Political

Development, 1880-1980."

There is a long tradition of American politicians using their offices to barter power and influence and to enrich themselves. I know what you're thinking I am about to launch into a tirade about Donald Trump. No, actually, he is by no means the most famous such politician. He isn't the most famous such New York politician. For who can possibly beat Tammany Hall? Tammany Hall is shorthand for the political machine that controlled New York democratic politics for 150 years. Ed Koch is the man most often credited with ending their mafia-like reign in 1960. You have probably heard of how Tammany Hall stole elections, intimidated political antagonists and shook down businessmen. You have probably read about the Boss Tweed's antipathy to African-Americans, Hispanics and Jews. (Indeed, it is this antipathy that may at least partially explain Trump's own discrimination against those same groups—he was a New York contractor after all.) But Tammany Hall survived for as long as it did not because it hated people but because it provided for them. If you gave Tammany your vote, you could count on social services and a job at a time when the poor had no services and there was no unemployment insurance or a safety net. Tammany Hall provided that safety net in exchange for your vote. And in a series of frank and disarmingly charming, informal lectures of sorts, Plunkitt revels in this corruption. Plunkitt may or may not be book-educated (in any event, he takes a dim view of people who are) but he does understand people very well. He understands that when you ostentatiously help someone when they're in a poor way indeed they will remember you at the polls. That (he explains) is why it's so important to chase fire engines and ambulances. And it's important to be there when people celebrate life events: from weddings to funerals. That too will get you a vote. And sure, Plunkitt made money off the deal and he provided jobs for his friends (why would he provide jobs for people who were political ingrates?). But as he saw it, there was nothing wrong with that. After all, his business was politics and, since people depended on him doing well in his business (and he did; he did quite well) and people rely on him doing well for their livelihoods, the people's interests and his interests coincide. What is wrong with that, he repeatedly asks in his disarming and funny way? The fact that Tammany Hall lasted for 150 years and that we have now elected Trump (who asks that exact same question often in exact same words Plunkitt uses) indicates that we have yet to come up with a good answer to that question. Are you OK with political corruption if you get something out of it too?

If you want to understand the absolute basics of American urban politics at any time in our nation's history, you MUST read this book. George Washington Plunkitt was a Tammany wheelhorse -- district leader, State Senator, and organization man. In a series of speeches from his favorite rostrum, the New York County Courthouse Bootblack Stand, he explained how an urban politician operates and becomes both politically and personally successful. Everything he says in his speeches is as deadly accurate today as it was more than 100 years ago -- build up a following. Know human nature and act accordingly. Do not violate the penal code. See your opportunities and take advantage of them. Do not wear a dress suit to meet with the people. Do not drink to excess. Support the organization. Make friends across the aisle to push through policy. Reward your supporters. Do not hesitate to make deals that advance yourself and the organization. Maintain the party organization. Be there for your constituents in their times of trouble. Empower your constituents and reward their loyalty. Show patriotism. Every one of those points is absolutely applicable to any political race today. And he said all that back in the 1880s and 1890s. All of these concepts are still being done in modern politics. Every time a new intern comes on board my shop in the City of Newark (I do the city's press releases), I lend my copy to that intern, and tell them to read it. Sometimes they ask me to purchase it for them, which I do. A few weeks ago, I got a copy for an intern working for a big wheel in the government, and the big wheel got a look at it ahead of the intern. A few days later, the big wheel asked me to get her a copy, too...she'd never read it. She said it was absolutely accurate about what she was dealing with. If you want to be in government and politics in the United States, you MUST read this book. I don't say that about too many books -- I'm more of a Hegelian, but "Plunkitt of Tammany Hall" is an absolute necessity for the young person who wants to enter politics. Buy it. Read it. Keep it on your desk. Re-read it. Memorize it. Then act upon it.

Awesome book with an insider's prospective on machine politics. It reads like a series of how-to essays that let you know what it takes to be a political boss. Of course most of the stuff in the book is now illegal. As a bonus, it is very short and quick to read. I'd recommend it to anyone interested in history, politics, or local government.

This is not to review the work "Plunkitt Of Tammany Hall" by William L. Riordon, but this particular edition. First of all, this work has no editor or publisher listed, which is very strange. It has (very) numerous typos and stylistic errors (e.g. four instances where a line or two was continued unnecessarily on to a new page). But most disturbing of all (besides the fact that an "author/editor" -

not Riordon - is listed above in the listing, but nowhere in the book) is that at the very end of the book, on the last page facing the inside cover, is a barcode, and the following: "Made In The USA; Lexington, KY; 13 April 2012." Mind you: I \*ORDERED\* this book late on 12 April 2012. You may imagine my total confusion at this point. Did they receive my order and print this book the next day? I was dubious at first, but I'm beginning to think they did! For \$5.99, next time I'll order ten! They should just READ the text before they print it, for goodness sake. Periods and commas are easy things to get right!

Excellent and eminently readable!

What a wise and insightful book, one that raises questions with special resonance in 2016, when our political system has delivered a presidential race matching a crook against a nut. Plunkitt might have had it right, and "reformers" since him might have had it wrong. Lots to think about here.

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