



# Plunkitt of Tammany Hall: A Politician's View on "Honest Graft" in Politics (Timeless Classic Books)

*George Washington Plunkitt*

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George Washington Plunkitt

Born in 1843, George Washington Plunkitt was a long-time State Senator from New York. He was part of what is known as New York's Tammany Hall machine. Plunkitt became wealthy by practicing what he called "honest graft" in politics. He was a cynically honest practitioner of what today is generally known as "machine politics," frank in its exercise of power for personal gain. In one of his speeches in this book, he describes the difference between dishonest and honest graft: for dishonest graft one worked solely for one's own interests, while for honest graft one pursued the interests of one's party, one's state, and one's personal interests all together. The positive side of machine politics, as Plunkitt saw it, was the closeness between political bosses and their constituencies. He cites how Tammany bosses such as himself would assist the poor of New York in immediate and necessary ways (such as by providing emergency loans) while others, such as social reformers and the federal government, would only push for long-term improvements in the situation of the urban poor. Similarly, he argues that the machine listened to and defended the poor while others regarded them from a distanced, patronizing point of view. Thus, Plunkitt regarded the fragmented and independent format of machine governance to be the most perfect form of urban administration possible.

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