

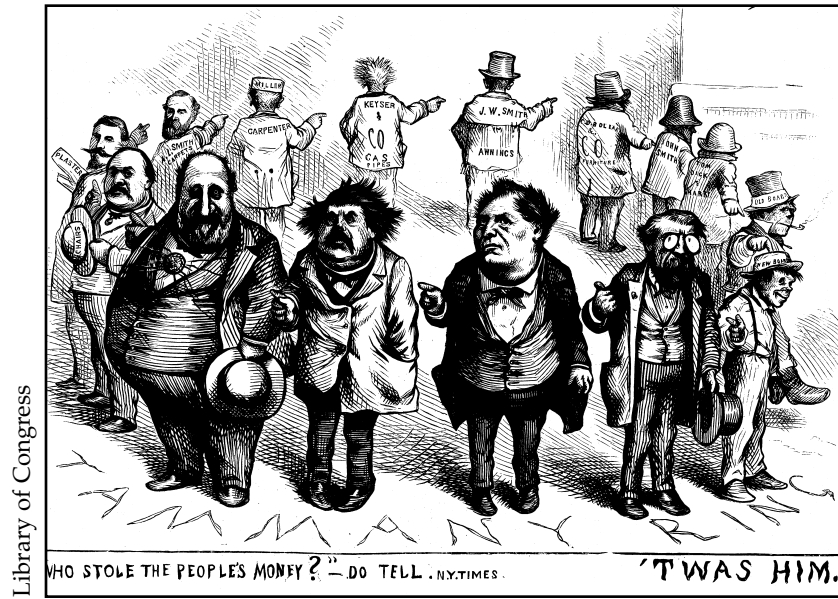


Name _____ Class _____ Date _____



AMERICAN HISTORY POLITICAL CARTOONS

Tammany Hall



UNDERSTANDING POLITICAL CARTOONS

Study the political cartoon, and then answer the questions that follow.

1. How does the cartoon illustrate the idea of “pass-the-buck”?

2. Which figure is most likely to represent Boss Tweed?

3. How does this cartoon illustrate a political machine at work?

ACTIVITY

Imagine that you are a newspaper reporter and your editor has assigned you to write an article about finding where “the buck stops” in a political machine. Write an article that traces a bribe from contractor to politician, using images from the cartoon.

Discussion Guide

The rapid growth of U.S. cities in the late 1800s due to immigration and migration from rural areas combined with the increasing rise of urban industrialism created huge problems for city governments and their ability to deliver services. As a result, municipal politicians controlled the valuable contracts for building the new transportation systems, bridges, and firehouses. They also controlled access to city services, jobs, housing, and education.

In order to keep the wealth flowing to themselves and their allies, politicians had to remain in office. They did so by doing favors for people, such as awarding contracts or providing access to city services. In turn, citizens promised politicians that they would vote for them.

Some politicians developed and ran sophisticated organizations—known as machines—to win votes and to secure personal wealth. In each city ward, or political district, a machine representative, known as the ward boss, controlled city jobs, contracts, and favors. When businesses secured contracts with the city, they typically added the cost of the bribe into the contract. Thus, businesses and politicians prospered while the taxpayers paid the bill.

In the late 1800s the most famous political machine in the country was New York City's Democratic Party, known as Tammany Hall. Headed by William Marcy "Boss" Tweed, a senator in the New York legislature, the Tammany Ring, (or the Tweed Ring as it was also called), is thought to have swindled millions of dollars from the people of New York City. Indeed the city almost went bankrupt before the ring was busted up in 1872. Some people estimate that between \$30 million and \$200 million was stolen from New York City.

Thomas Nast drew this political cartoon. It illustrates the corruption of political machines and shows that politicians often refused to admit they were stealing the people's money. They were, in turn, "passing the buck."

Answers

UNDERSTANDING POLITICAL CARTOONS

1. The ring symbolizes how contractors and politicians rewarded each other with bribes.
2. Tweed is the large, bearded man on the left. His size indicates that he is the boss and that he is the last politician in line before the figures that represent contractors.
3. Trades and businesses pay Democratic bosses who then pay politicians.

Activity

Students' articles should include examples of contractors receiving large contracts from the city. In addition, students can use examples of bribes and arrangements between ward bosses and voters.