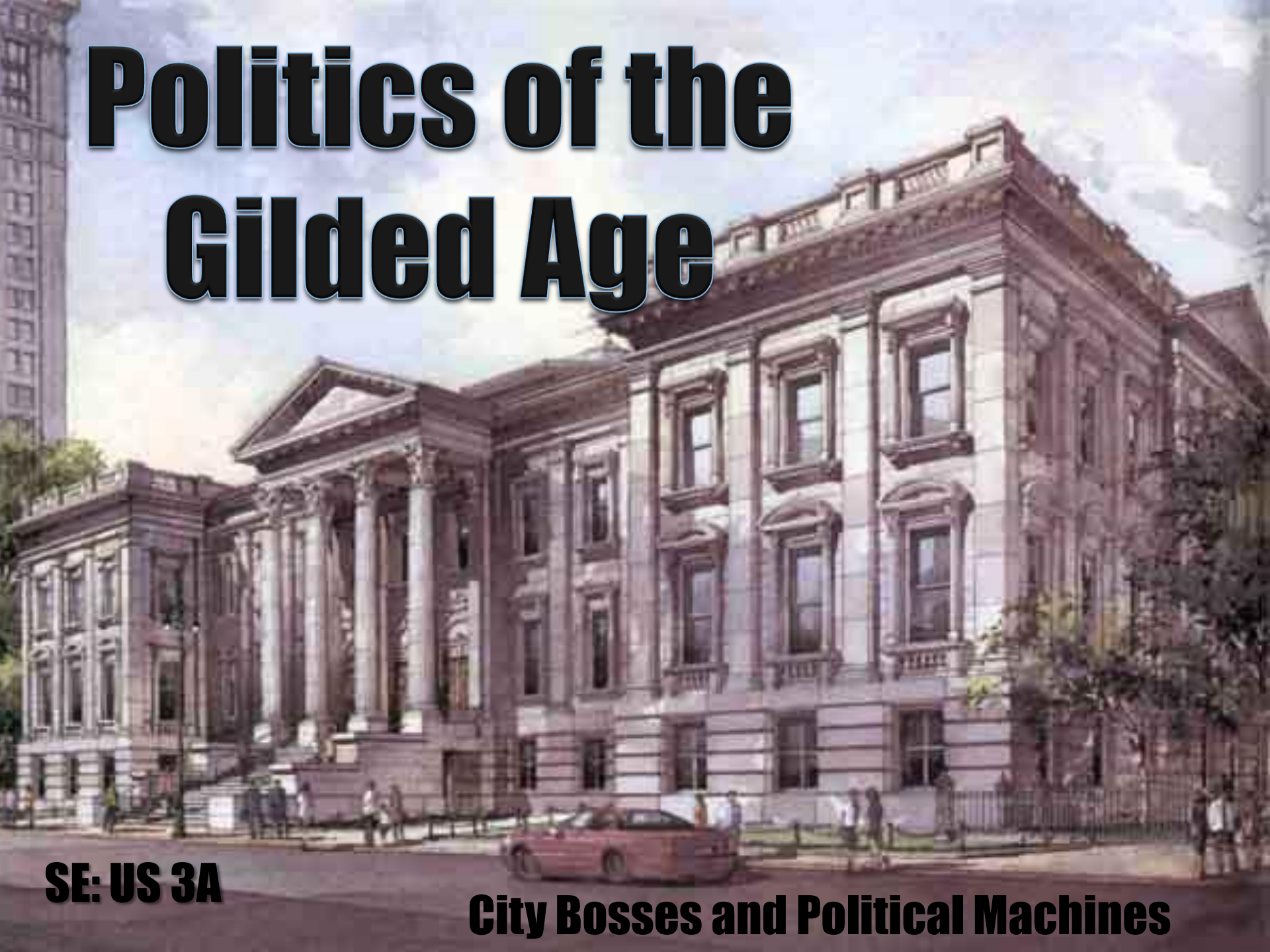
Politics of the Gilded Age



SE: US 3A

City Bosses and Political Machines

Political Machines

Political machines controlled the activities of political parties in the city.

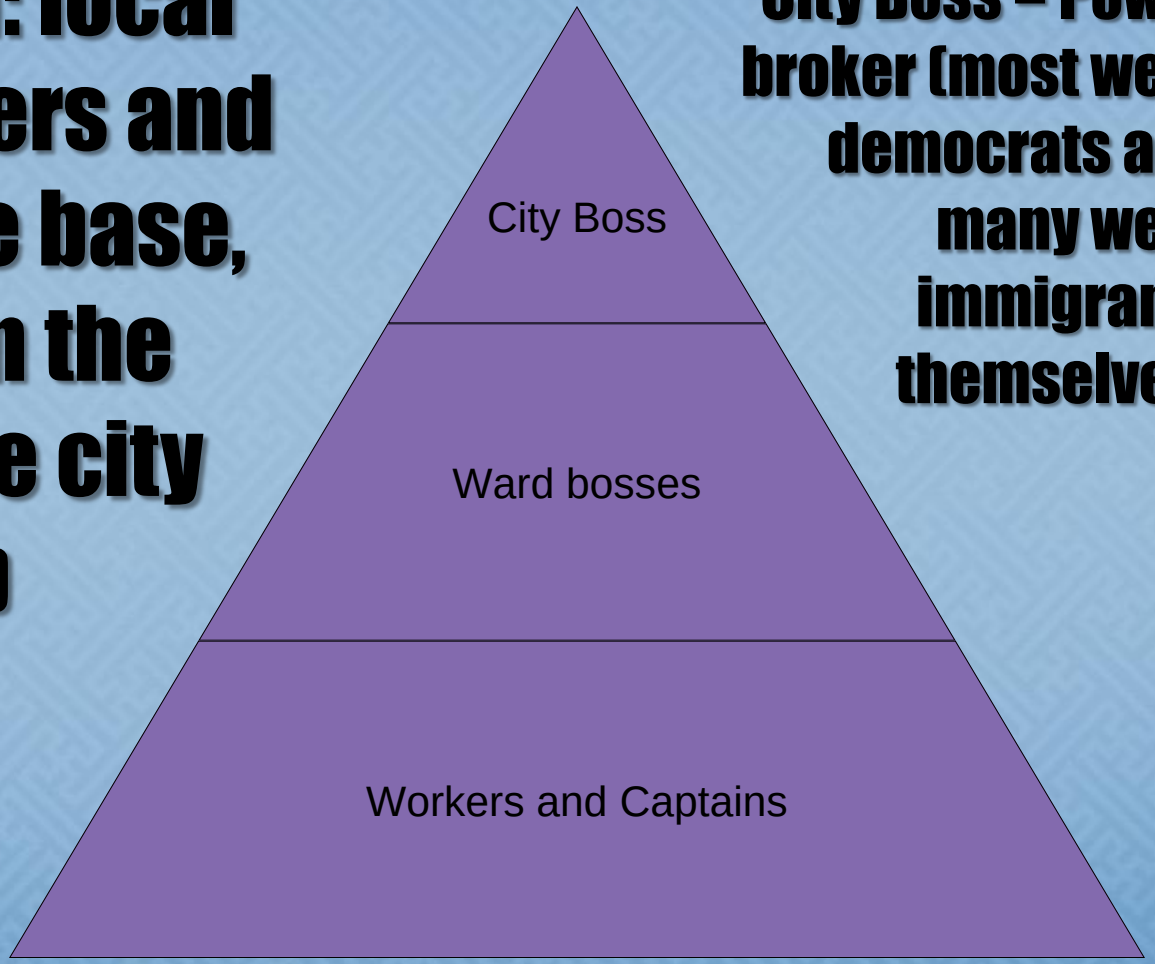
Ward bosses, precinct captains, and the city boss worked to:

1) ensure that their candidates were elected;

2) make sure that city government worked to their advantage.

Machine Organization

Like a pyramid: local precinct workers and captains at the base, ward bosses in the middle, and the city boss at the top



City Boss = Power broker (most were democrats and many were immigrants themselves)

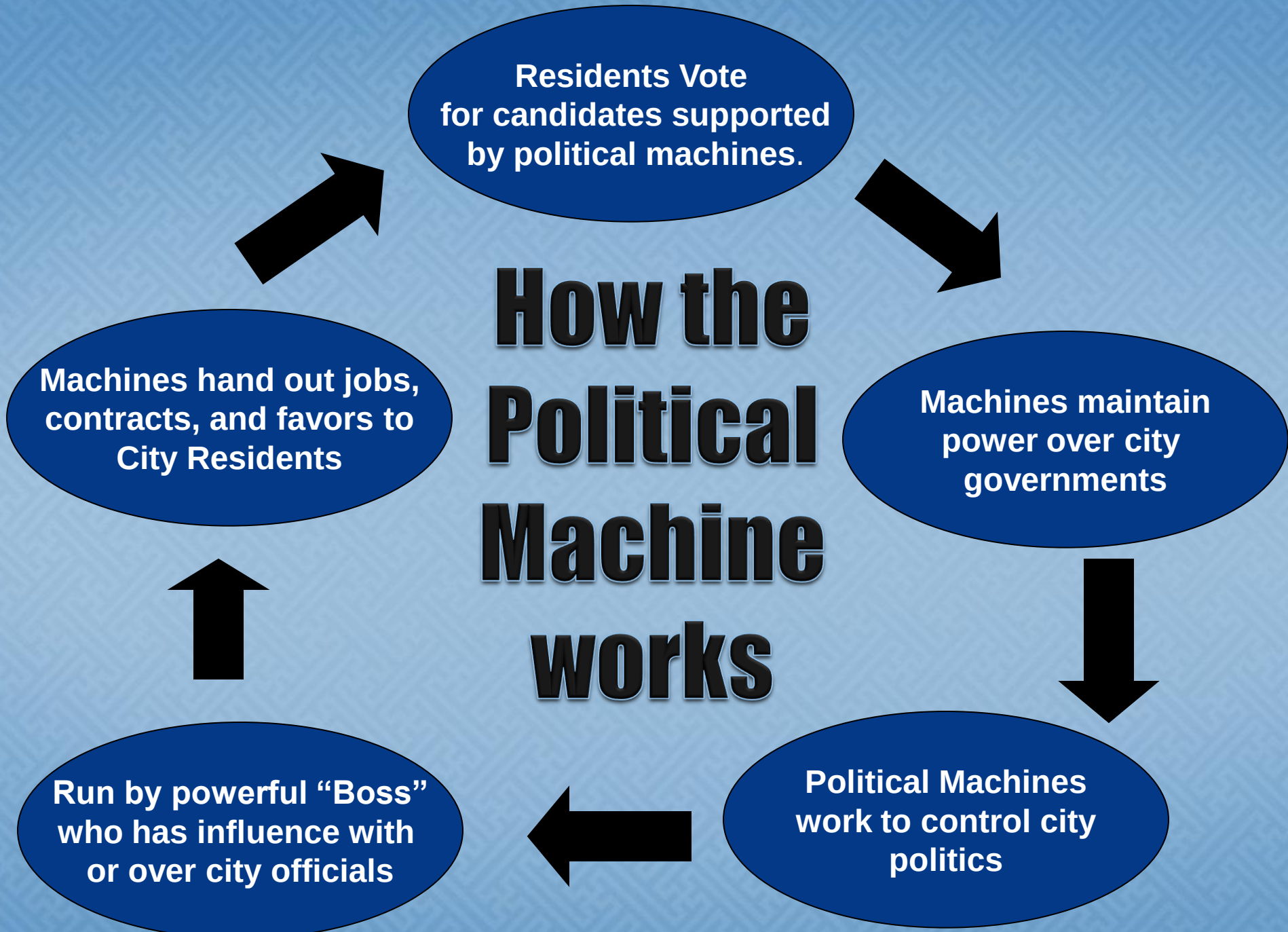
Role of the Political Boss

- *The "Boss" (typically the mayor) controlled jobs, business licenses, and influenced the court system.*

- *Precinct captains and ward bosses, often 1st or 2nd generation immigrants, helped new immigrants with jobs, housing, and naturalization in exchange for votes.*

Boss Tweed ran NYC

How the Political Machine works



Role of Immigrants

- Immigrants were the workers who ran the political machine.
- They offered their loyalty and votes in exchange for favors and solutions to their problems.

Graft and Scandal

- ***Some political bosses were corrupt and their political machines practiced election fraud by using fake names and voting multiple times to ensure victory.***
- ***Bribes were common and construction contracts often resulted in kick-backs. Because the police were hired by the boss, there was no close scrutiny.***

What is Graft?

- Graft is the illegal use of political influence for personal gain.

How did the bosses use graft for their own personal gain?

- To win elections
- To make themselves richer
- To finance the operations of the political machine

What are kickbacks?

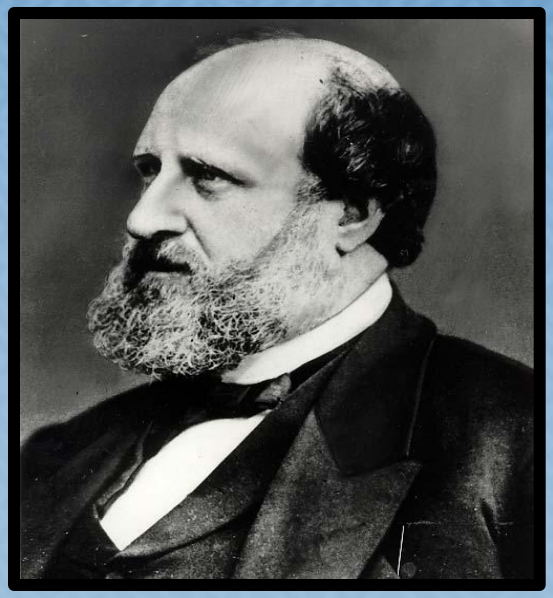
- A Kickback is the illegal practice of getting contract workers hired by the bosses to overcharge the city for their services. Then the overpayment would be split between the city boss and the contract-worker

How did the bosses use kickbacks for their own personal gain?

- The bosses would enrich themselves as well as the machine

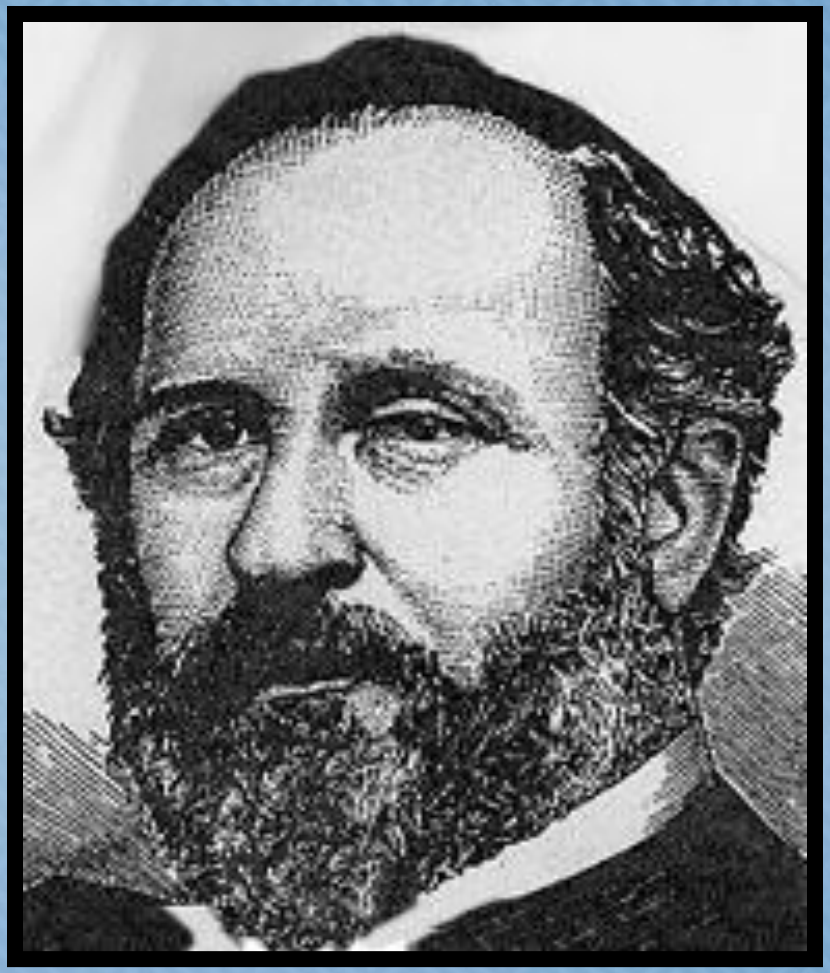
Boss Tweed, Tammany Hall

- ***William M. Tweed, known as Boss Tweed, was head of Tammany Hall, New York City's powerful Democratic political machine.***
- ***Between 1869-1871, he led the Tweed Ring of corrupt politicians in defrauding the city.***
- ***Convicted of 120 counts of fraud & extortion, he was sentenced to 12 years in jail, but released after one. Rearrested, he escaped to Spain.***



Boss Tweed

"Stop them damn pictures. I don't care what the papers write about me. My constituents can't read. But, damn it, they can see the pictures."



William "Boss" Tweed
Tammy Hall Party Boss

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ONDAY JUNE 15 1857.

THE POLICE.

Great Excitement in the Eleventh Ward.

Collision Between Members of the Old and New Police.

Two Men Supposed to be Fatally Wounded.

Policemen of the Eighteenth Ward Coming Over to the New Board—Dr. Kimball Dismissed, &c.

The Eleventh Ward was in a state of great

Discovery EDUCATION

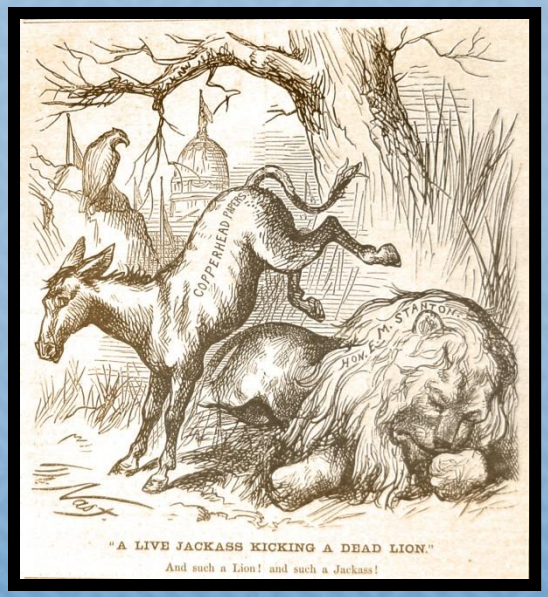
New_York_City__Five_Points_Neighborhood_and_Tammany_Hall (1)

Thomas Nast

As a political cartoonist for <u>Harper's Weekly</u>, Nast attacked the Tammany Hall (Democratic) political machine that ran New York City in the late 1800s .

Along the way, Nast created the Democratic Donkey (he did not like the Democrats), and the Republican Elephant symbols, the Tammany Tiger, and even Santa Claus.

Republican Elephant



Democratic Donkey

Tammany Tiger

THE TAMMANY TIGER LOOSE—"What are you going to do about it?"

Coming up Next...

The Birth of Unions