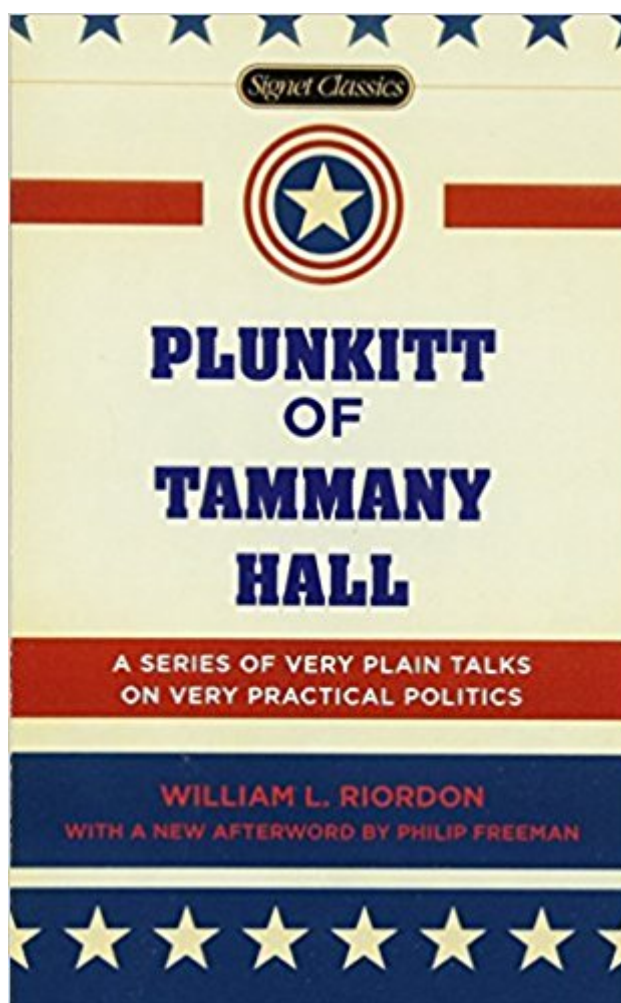


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Plunkitt Of Tammany Hall: A Series Of Very Plain Talks On Very Practical Politics (Signet Classics)



Synopsis

Plunkitt of Tammany Hall A Series of Very Plain Talks on Very Practical Politics William L. Riordan

“Nobody thinks of drawing the distinction between honest graft and dishonest graft.” This classic work offers the unblushing, unvarnished wit and wisdom of one of the most fascinating figures ever to play the American political game and win. George Washington Plunkitt rose from impoverished beginnings to become ward boss of the Fifteenth Assembly District in New York, a key player in the powerhouse political team of Tammany Hall, and, not incidentally, a millionaire. In a series of utterly frank talks given at his headquarters (Graziano’s bootblack stand outside the New York County Court House), he revealed to a sharp-eared and sympathetic reporter named William L. Riordan the secrets of political success as practiced and perfected by him and fellow Tammany Hall titans. The result is not only a volume that reveals more about our political system than does a shelfful of civics textbooks, but also an irresistible portrait of a man who would feel happily at home playing ball with today’s lobbyists and king makers, trading votes for political and financial favors. Doing for twentieth-century America what Machiavelli did for Renaissance Italy, and as entertaining as it is instructive, Plunkitt of Tammany Hall is essential reading for those who prefer twenty-twenty vision to rose-colored glasses in viewing how our government works and why. With an Introduction by Peter Quinn and a New Afterword

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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." --This text refers to the Paperback edition.

George Washington Plunkitt was born into poverty in New York in 1842. He had only three years of formal schooling, but this lack did not hinder him from becoming one of the most powerful men in New York City politics. He died in 1924, a renowned civic leader and a millionaire. William L. Riordan, a newspaperman for the New York Evening Post, interviewed George Washington Plunkitt and preserved his philosophy for posterity. He recognized in Plunkitt an exceptional frankness that set him apart from his fellow political bosses. In Plunkitt of Tammany Hall Riordan admits readers into an area of life that mystified middle-class Americans at the turn of the twentieth century. Peter Quinn is a former speechwriter for Mario Cuomo and the author of *Banished Children of Eve: A Novel of Civil War New York*.

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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