William “Boss” Tweed is famous for being the head of New York’s Tammany Hall, the name given to the city’s Democratic Party of the mid- to late 1800s. Corruption is also associated with his name. Gouging taxpayers by rewarding huge building contracts in exchange for kickbacks was a favorite trick of Tweed’s. Irish immigrants learned that they could find a job and a place in a tenement in exchange for giving Tweed’s candidate their vote—sometimes multiple times in the same election. Although never an elected official, Tweed became the most powerful man in the city until the political cartoons of Thomas Nast were published in Harper’s Weekly. A campaign against Tweed’s fraud was waged by Nast in his cartoons that depicted the political boss as a vulture, an obese man larger than the police, a man with a money bag for a head, and an all-around bully. Between 1870 and 1871 the attack grew stronger and the public tired of Tweed’s chicanery. The Democratic incumbent lost the mayoral election of 1871. Boss Tweed was arrested and charged with fraud in 1873. "My constituents don't know how to read," Tweed once lamented, "but they can't help seeing them damned pictures."

Although never elected to political office, William “Boss” Tweed ran New York’s Democratic Party (Tammany Hall) in the mid- to late 19th century until Thomas Nast exposed the corruption of his political machine. As part of his corruption, Tweed’s officeholders/politicians gouged taxpayers by rewarding lucrative building contracts to developers who gave kickbacks to the party and Tweed. To help get his candidates elected, Tweed exchanged jobs and accommodations with Irish immigrants.