

Ward Bosses and Reformers:

An Analysis of Boston's Irish Political Machine, 1884-1914

Like other major cities, bosses organized a political machine to run Boston in the late 19th century. Being Irish-American, they created it to promote the interests of the city's burgeoning Irish population. In that respect, the machine was successful for a generation. Yet Boston's machine differed from those of other cities in terms of its brevity; the ward boss system failed a generation later. Already faltering, its death blow was the 1914 mayoral election, when James Michael Curley won by explicitly campaigning against the machine, which ended when he took office. Once there, Curley dedicated himself to the creation of his own united city machine.¹ The Curley machine defined the city for the next four decades; it was not until the early 1950s that Boston shrugged off "Curleyism" for a more modern form of city government, different from the existing machine or the prior ward boss system.² Curley's victory therefore permanently dismantled the ward boss system. In the face of a new system of patronage and vigorous reform efforts, it could never come back.

It is important to ask how this could have happened. The Irish political machines in New York and Chicago were long-standing. How could the Boston ward boss machine have weakened to the point that, after only thirty years of operation, Curley could rout it in his successful mayoral campaign? It is because the machine proved to be unadaptable. It often failed in both adequately aiding its constituents and accommodating Boston's changing demographics. As a result, the machine faced limited outreach and growing discontent among the city's citizens.

¹ Gerard O'Neill, *Rogues and Redeemers: When Politics Was King in Irish Boston* (New York: Crown Publishers, 2012), 77.

² Thomas H. O'Connor, *The Boston Irish: A Political History* (Boston: Back Bay Books, 1997), 227.

Furthermore, the death of its boss, Pat Maguire, in 1896 fractured the machine, creating a disunited system of bickering ward bosses. That lack of unity led to the machine's inability to effectively counter the newly formed Good Government Association or oppose the group's city charter reform that erased much of the machine's power. In the wake of these obstacles, Curley was able to rise up in opposition to the ward boss system and permanently dismantle it in favor of his new machine.

The 1880s was the ideal time for the bosses to create an Irish political machine. Over the previous decade, Boston's population swelled by 45% to over 360,000 inhabitants.³ The Irish, both new immigrants and first-generation Irish-Americans, were a large part of that increase; by 1880, there were over 140,000 Irish Bostonians, making up about 40% of the city's population.⁴ Those numbers gave them the opportunity for the political leverage they needed. Since the 1850s, the start of large-scale Irish immigration to Boston, they had faced contempt and suspicion in Boston. The entrenched Yankee ("Brahmin") elite decried their poverty, religion, and drinking, often explicitly excluding the Irish from housing and jobs.⁵ Furthermore, the Irish faced a shortage of basic needs, such as food, clothing, medicine, and jobs. Yet due to bigotry and spite, the Brahmins in power often denied the Irish.⁶ By the 1880s, through the sheer force of their numbers, the Irish could fend for themselves by constructing an alternative political structure. Historian Gerard O'Neill wrote that a small number of shrewd Irish upstarts formed, "a shadow government to combat the stacked deck at City Hall."⁷

³ Carrol D. Wright, *The Census of Massachusetts, 1880* (Boston, 1883), 19.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 181. Here, Irish means a citizen of Boston, either born in Ireland or in the U.S., with at least one Irish parent.

⁵ Thomas H. O'Connor, *The Boston Irish: A Political History* (Boston: Back Bay Books, 1997), 69-70.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 122.

⁷ Gerard O'Neill, *Rogues and Redeemers: When Politics Was King in Irish Boston* (New York: Crown Publishers, 2012), 18.

It was those Irish citizens who ran the shadow government as “bosses” out of their respective Boston wards. According to historian Thomas H. O’Connor, each boss was, “the recognized center of power in his particular ward and the distributor of favors to those who accepted his rule.”⁸ Rather than existing in a singular form, each ward was a mini-machine. The system was an amalgamation of powerful bosses who may have cooperated, but held separate and individual power.⁹ Bosses, O’Connor explained, headed, “fairly sophisticated political organizations complete with functioning ward committees, eager captains, obedient lieutenants, and companies of ward heelers and loyal volunteers,” through clubs such as Curley’s Tammany Club, John F. Fitzgerald’s Jefferson Club, or Martin Lomasney’s Hendricks Club.¹⁰ Each was its own sovereign, fully developed political entity.

Lomasney, the leader of Ward 8 and arguably the most powerful ward boss, ran his club with a firm, dictatorial hand. His rule remained unquestioned and unchallenged. In the cutthroat world of politics, this is no easy feat. Lomasney could only hold power through a finely organized system of influence and vote buying. His biographer, Leslie G. Ainley, summarized the club’s operation to show how he could manage this:

His organization was broken down so that he had a competent leader in every precinct. That leader had a dozen lieutenants... It was the job of each to see to it that every voter on his street went to the polls on election day and, what was more important, voted for the Lomasney candidates.

Lomasney would accept no excuses from a precinct leader or a lieutenant. If a street had fifty votes on it, he wasn’t satisfied with a count of forty-nine.¹¹

This description of the club’s organization reflected O’Connor’s interpretation of Boston ward-boss politics. Curley ran Tammany and Fitzgerald ran Jefferson the same way. This was how the

⁸ Thomas H. O’Connor, *The Boston Irish: A Political History* (Boston: Back Bay Books, 1997), 121.

⁹ Steven P. Erie, *Rainbow’s End: Irish-Americans and the Dilemmas of Urban Machine Politics, 1840 – 1985* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), 19.

¹⁰ Thomas H. O’Connor, *The Boston Irish: A Political History* (Boston: Back Bay Books, 1997), 148.

¹¹ Leslie G. Ainley, *Boston Mahatma* (Boston: Bruce Humphries, Inc. Publishers, 1949), 56.

ward-boss system was effective in delivering votes for machine-friendly candidates. Those candidates, once elected, would then kick support and patronage back to the ward bosses and their constituents, keeping the system running.

Lomasney may have been the standard for other ward bosses, but that is not to suggest that Boston's machine was truly unified. Historian Steven P. Erie, in his exhaustive examination of Irish political machines across the country, outlined characteristics of "mature" machines that existed in cities such as New York and Chicago. One was the control of the entire machine under a single, undisputed boss, which Boston did not manage to do.¹² Bosses looked to their own interests, their power extending within the boundaries of their wards. Though the pioneering Irish politician Pat Maguire loosely oversaw the entire machine, he was not the sole head of ward-boss system; Boston's machine was unique in its factionalism when compared to a system such as New York's Tammany Hall.¹³

It is worth mentioning that the bosses had one other way to ensure electoral supremacy: fraud. In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, this was relatively simple to perpetrate Irish machines across America threw votes away (as in New York in 1886, when ballot boxes filled with votes for an anti-Tammany were seen floating down the Hudson for days after the election) and often registered the dead as well.¹⁴ The latter was a common trick in Boston. Naturally, it was Lomasney who was famed for his ability to deliver the votes of deceased citizens.¹⁵

This power was built on patronage. Granting the Irish money, food, and jobs allowed them to rise out of poverty into the middle class. By the early 20th century, Irish families were

¹² Steven P. Erie, *Rainbow's End: Irish-Americans and the Dilemmas of Urban Machine Politics, 1840 – 1985* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), 19.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 19; Thomas H. O'Connor, *The Boston Irish: A Political History* (Boston: Back Bay Books, 1997), 112.

¹⁴ Steven P. Erie, *Rainbow's End: Irish-Americans and the Dilemmas of Urban Machine Politics, 1840 – 1985* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), 11.

¹⁵ Jack Beatty, *The Rascal King: The Life and Times of James Michael Curley (1875-1958)*, (Reading, Massachusetts: Addison-Wesley Publishing Company, 1992), 86.

able to move out of the slums and become teachers, nurses, and employees for the gas company.¹⁶ The city government also began to reflect the city's increasingly Irish demographics. The relative number of Irish municipal employees in Boston rose from 5% in 1870 to 32% in 1900.¹⁷ As a result, the Irish came to comprise a respectable bloc of the city. Furthermore, their increased participation in city government gave the Irish the opportunity to take control of the Boston's political structure and dismantle the existing system of discrimination.

We can attribute this social climb to the ward bosses for two reasons. The first is that the political elite had no interest in helping the poor, Irish or not. The ward boss system was a result of the Gilded Age's indifference to poverty. It was an era, historian Doris Kearns Goodwin argued, when, "public services on behalf of the poor were not yet considered legitimate functions of government."¹⁸ Second, the ward bosses acted out of self-interest by helping the Irish. It was a symbiotic relationship: the people's need fed the bosses power, and the bosses met the people's needs. Lomasney based his political philosophy on this principle: "The great mass of people is interested in only three things – food, clothing and shelter. A politician in a district like mine sees to it that his people get these things. If he does, then he doesn't have to worry about their loyalty and support."¹⁹ Good bosses made sure that their supporters were fed, clothed, and employed. The latter was through some grifting; bosses managed to win highly inflated contracts to give to their constituents.²⁰ Few were above skimming off the top for themselves, yet the Irish patronage recipients did not seem to mind so long as all the wheels were greased.

¹⁶ Thomas H. O'Connor, *The Boston Irish: A Political History* (Boston: Back Bay Books, 1997), 223.

¹⁷ Steven P. Erie, *Rainbow's End: Irish-Americans and the Dilemmas of Urban Machine Politics, 1840 – 1985* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), Table 7, 60.

¹⁸ Doris Kearns Goodwin, *The Fitzgeralds and the Kennedys: An American Saga* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1987), 93.

¹⁹ Leslie G. Ainley, *Boston Mahatma* (Boston: Bruce Humphries, Inc. Publishers, 1949), 59.

²⁰ Gerard O'Neill, *Rogues and Redeemers: When Politics Was King in Irish Boston* (New York: Crown Publishers, 2012), 39.

The best example of the generosity of the ward boss system is the story of John F. Fitzgerald, leader of Ward 6 and Mayor of Boston, 1906-1908 and 1910-1914. When Fitzgerald was 18, his father Thomas died, leaving the large family desperate.²¹ Fitzgerald, ignoring the advice of his parish to split his brothers and sisters up among his aunts, looked to his ward boss, Matthew Keany, for help. Keany gave Fitzgerald money and hired him as an assistant and protégé.²² This was Fitzgerald's start in politics and the decision that kept his family united. For a generation, the ward boss system helped citizens like Fitzgerald and his family. It was the foundation of the Irish climb from poverty.

However, as the 20th century began, the ward boss system began to face major obstacles that it could not overcome, eventually leading to its demise in the 1914 municipal election. The first was the machine's outreach. To remain successful, ward bosses needed a clear coalition; enough voters had to be willing to vote the way they were instructed to keep the system in place. That arrangement required those voters to feel they were benefiting from the machine. As the years went by, their opinions on the matter started to shift.

To start with, the machine was always blatantly pro-Irish. From the 1880s to the early 20th century, this was an ideal arrangement. The Irish were numerous, needy, and registered to vote at a much higher rate than the non-Irish (60 percent to 37 percent, respectively.)²³ For that reason, the bosses tampered with the system to benefit the Irish at the expense of the non-Irish. They used their influence as a way to punish and weaken rivals. Since many judges and city hall employees were machine-appointed, they denied permits and business licenses to labor

²¹ Doris Kearns Goodwin, *The Fitzgeralds and the Kennedys: An American Saga* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1987), 68.

²² *Ibid.*, 69-72.

²³ Steven P. Erie, *Rainbow's End: Irish-Americans and the Dilemmas of Urban Machine Politics, 1840 – 1985* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), 33.

organizations, socialists, and insurgent ethnic groups (especially Jews and Italians.)²⁴

Furthermore, bosses gave patronage on a purely ethnic basis. They were open about this fact; throughout the 19th century, Lomasney made it clear that the Hendricks Club would always give jobs to the Irish first.²⁵

Yet in the long run, this decision proved to be disastrous. As the 19th century came to a close, other immigrant groups began to make up sizable portions of Boston, even overtaking the Irish in certain parts of the city. Citizens of non-Irish foreign parentage took wards for themselves. By 1905, Wards 6 and 8 (Fitzgerald and Lomasney) were no longer majority Irish among the citizens of foreign parentage – 65% of Ward 6’s immigrant and first-generation population was Italian, and 58% of Ward 8’s was Russian.²⁶ Since the bosses had snubbed these groups for a long time and actively worked against them, they had created enemies and limited their outreach. Many non-Irish citizens, both immigrants and the Brahmins, could be counted on to vote against the machine.

The bosses may have been able to weather the rise of non-Irish ethnic voters for long enough to diversify, if not for their negligence to some Irish citizens. There were Irish Bostonians who also began to feel neglected by the machine. And just as there was one boss and future mayor who represented the triumphs of the ward boss system, there was another who stood for its shortcomings. Like Fitzgerald, James Michael Curley came from poverty. His father, Michael, died suddenly at the age of 34 in 1884, when James was 10.²⁷ The difference between Curley and Fitzgerald, however, is how their ward bosses reacted to their tragedies.

²⁴ Ibid., 11.

²⁵ Leslie G. Ainley, *Boston Mahatma* (Boston: Bruce Humphries, Inc. Publishers, 1949), 50.

²⁶ *Census of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, 1905: Population and Social Statistics*, vol. 1 of *Census of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts* (Boston: Wright & Potter Printing Co., 1909), xcvi-xcviii.

²⁷ “Obituary,” *Boston Daily Globe*, October 2, 1884.

Whereas Keany took Fitzgerald under his wing, Curley maintained that his boss, Ward 17's P.J. (Pea-Jacket) Maguire, left them with nothing.²⁸

Curley, a ward boss who preferred to remain an outsider, was often at odds with the machine. Even his ascension to leading Ward 17 was the result of defiance. In 1914, he told *The Boston Daily Globe* that the machine had cheated him years earlier. Curley insisted that he had won the election in 1901 to head the ward by seven votes, but the opposition outmaneuvered him to deny him the position, so he founded the Tammany Club to take the ward.²⁹ Whether or not the story of Pea-Jacket's indifference and the bosses cheating Curley are true is irrelevant – he seized upon a growing characterization of the ward bosses. Rather than the image of the neighborhood angels, he denounced the other bosses as corrupt and greedy crooks, more interested in personal gain than in helping their neighbors. Curley portrayed Boston as thoroughly corrupt. He was not alone. *The New York Times*, in a 1903, series of reports on municipal corruption, dedicated an article to Boston. It denounced “practically all” of City Hall's employees as “grafters,” charging that legislative seats were bought, and that taxpayers were overcharged on possibly unfulfilled contracts that were lining the bosses' pockets.³⁰ *The Boston Daily Globe* concurred in an editorial, claiming that in all major cities, Boston included: “there are public service corporations to be serviced and to be bled; there are franchises worth millions to be given away by councilmen and aldermen; there are millions to be spent annually; there are contracts to be made. In all and through all there is ‘graft’ and ‘rake-off.’”³¹

Furthermore, part of the machine's outreach problem was sudden decentralization. The machine, O'Connor argued, only ever had one real machine leader, Patrick J. Maguire (not to be

²⁸ Joseph Dineen, *The Purple Shamrock: The Hon. James Michael Curley of Boston* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1947), 22.

²⁹ “Life Story of Mayor-Elect Curley Told by Himself,” *The Boston Daily Globe*, January 14, 1914.

³⁰ E.H. Talbot, “Municipal Reform in Typical American Cities,” *The New York Times*, August 21, 1903.

³¹ Fred O. MacCartney, “Corruption Greatly Distributed,” *The Boston Daily Globe*, March 22, 1903.

confused with Pea-Jacket.) Maguire, in concert with the ward bosses, worked to elect numerous Irish citizens to the Board of Aldermen and Common Council, then oversaw the 1884 election of Boston's first Irish mayor, Hugh O'Brien.³² The machine possessed at least a measure of central authority with Maguire at the head. His sudden death in 1896, from a severe cold that had progressed into rheumatism, threw the machine into crisis.³³ With no heir apparent, the most powerful ward bosses pounced. The favorite to assume control over Boston was Lomasney, so the other bosses conspired against him. Fitzgerald, East Boston's Patrick Joseph Kennedy, Charlestown's James Corbett, and the South End's James Donovan allied. Together, they could control the machine's gains from the city and thus cut Lomasney out.³⁴ It is unclear whether their antipathy to Lomasney was personal or each man simply desired more power for himself. Whatever the case, from then on, the machine's balanced confederacy descended into chaos, with the most influential bosses constantly pushing and fighting for supremacy over the other.

In the wake of this disunity, a new enemy, determined to clean up the graft and corruption formed in 1903. The Good Government Association (G.G.A.), an organization of businessmen, vowed to find appropriate men to fill city posts, rather than the many already there who the G.G.A. claimed were, "incompetent or unscrupulous."³⁵ Despite the purity of the G.G.A.'s declared motivations O'Connor argued that they had a sinister regressive desire to play ethnic politics against the Irish population, that they were determined, "to support candidates for public office who possessed breeding, education, experience, and integrity. They believed in their duty to oppose the type of Irish politician who was more interested in jobs, contracts, and

³² Thomas H. O'Connor, *The Boston Irish: A Political History* (Boston: Back Bay Books, 1997), 117-21.

³³ "Patrick Maguire Dead," *The Boston Daily Globe*, November 29, 1896.

³⁴ Thomas H. O'Connor, *The Boston Irish: A Political History* (Boston: Back Bay Books, 1997), 159.

³⁵ "For Better Rule in the City," *The Boston Daily Globe*, October 12, 1903.

personal favors than in good, honest government.”³⁶ The G.G.A. were a formidable enemy of the ward boss system – a well-funded organization that could mold the anti-ward boss and anti-Irish sentiments of much of the city.

Six years later in 1909, the G.G.A. tested the ward bosses’ unity. Through the ballot, they sought to change the way Boston’s government was organized. Since becoming a city in 1822, the Common Council and Board of Aldermen made up the Boston legislature.³⁷ The Common Council was a sort of House of Representatives for the city – each ward elected three members (as the city grew, so did the Council, swelling from 48 to 75 members by 1876), while the Board of Aldermen was comprised of twelve at-large members.³⁸ The Common Council was a starting office for an aspiring Irish politician, while the Board of Aldermen was a prestigious position. Since the bosses vested much of their power in both bodies, the G.G.A. focused their attention on them in the 1909 City Charter. Recommended by the Financial Commission to the state legislature, the charter proposed drastic changes to the city government’s structure through one of two plans. Plan 1 would maintain a two-year mayoralty term and create a single legislative body of 27 district representatives and nine at-large, while Plan 2 would extend the mayoralty to a four-year term (subject to recall after two years) and create a single body of nine at-large members – both would abolish the Common Council and Board of Aldermen.³⁹

Either way, the bosses would have to adjust to a new city structure, one that threatened their power. The G.G.A. advocated for Plan 2. An advertisement taken out in *The Boston Herald* proclaimed that Plan 2 would reform Boston, make its elections more democratic, and replace the corrupt, tax-wasting officials with honest candidates. For these reasons, the advertisement

³⁶ Thomas H. O’Connor, *The Boston Irish: A Political History* (Boston: Back Bay Books, 1997), 176.

³⁷ Thomas H. O’Connor, *The Boston Irish: A Political History* (Boston: Back Bay Books, 1997), 36.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 115-16.

³⁹ “Plans One and Two,” *The Boston Daily Globe*, October 31, 1909.

argued, “No. 2 is OPPOSED by machine politicians and local ward bosses, whom it will put out of business.”⁴⁰ Meanwhile, at rallies, Plan 2 advocates explicitly pitched the charter vote as, “a battle between the people and the bosses.”⁴¹ This was only partially true; it suggested that the bosses were united in opposition to Plan 2. If they had been, it would have been possible for them to deliver a victory for Plan 1. However, the bosses came to different conclusions about how to adapt to a new city charter. They were split, and in fact had initially supported Plan 2. In the final days before the charter vote, Lomasney (Ward 8), Curley (Ward 17), and Joseph P. Timilty (Ward 18) all switched their support to Plan 1, perhaps realizing the implications of Plan 2.⁴² However, Fitzgerald (Ward 6) did not go along with this change. When told of Lomasney’s switch to Plan 1, *The Boston Daily Globe* reported, “Fitzgerald laughed heartily... but he still professed loyalty to plan 2.”⁴³

By holding out, Fitzgerald proved to be a spoiler. Boston opted for Plan 2 on November 3rd by a narrow margin of 3,869 votes out of a total 74,481 cast.⁴⁴ The reformers were overjoyed at their success. With Plan 2 confirmed, the bosses had the rug pulled from under their feet. *The Boston Post* crowed that, “The consequences of the adoption of Plan 2 are far reaching since under it neither the Republican city committee nor the Democratic city committee will have any standing,” meaning, “the Good Government Association comes to the front as the most powerful political organization in the city.”⁴⁵ Meanwhile, the President of Boston’s Chamber of Commerce, Bernard J. Rothwell, triumphantly told *The Boston Daily Globe* the day after the vote that, “The every-day citizen who does his own thinking and who only desires that the

⁴⁰ “Men of Boston, Control Your Own City: Vote for Plan No. 2,” *The Boston Herald*, November 1, 1909.

⁴¹ “Plan 2 Urged in Faneuil Hall Meeting,” *Boston Daily Evening Transcript*, October 28, 1909.

⁴² “Lomasney Turns from Plan 2 to 1,” *The Boston Daily Globe*, November 1, 1909.

⁴³ “Lomasney Turns from Plan 2 to 1,” *The Boston Daily Globe*, November 1, 1909.

⁴⁴ “Plan 2 Adopted by 3869 Majority,” *The Boston Herald*, November 2, 1909.

⁴⁵ “Pelletier and Plan Two Win,” *The Boston Post*, November 3, 1909.

government of the city shall be honest and capable has overthrown the local and professional politicians and ward bosses.”⁴⁶ In short, the reformers were telling the city that it had defeated the ward boss system and removed corruption from Boston forever.

In truth, the G.G.A. was not as influential as their members may have believed. Plan 2 was largely successful because the ward bosses could not mount a true defense against it. Each boss delivered their votes as they had promised. Wards 8, 17, and 18 voted for Plan 1 at rates of 72%, 60%, and 73%, respectively. Meanwhile, Fitzgerald had split the North End, with every ward voting for Plan 2, but with slim margins, essentially cutting the vote in half.⁴⁷ Given Plan 2’s slight victory, if the ward bosses had united behind Plan 1, they most likely could have delivered it and kept their machine under a city plan that was more favorable to them. But by that point, the system was so fractured, each boss too desperate for the lion’s share of the spoils to cooperate, that it was unable to do so.

Fitzgerald’s motivation for supporting Plan 2 remains unclear, but it was most likely a power play. He had already announced he was running for mayor, having previously served from 1906 to 1908, and may have considered a four-year term and a simple city council more advantageous to his desire for power. Following the passage of the new charter, the 1910 election turned into another test for the ward bosses. In the wake of their loss in November, could the bosses still elect their candidate in January of 1910? They proved that they could; Fitzgerald was elected over opponent James Jackson Storrow by the razor-thin margin of 1,145 votes out of 95,358 cast, gathering 49% of the vote, not even a full majority.⁴⁸ Though their candidate lost, the G.G.A. saw promise in this result. The ward bosses’ grip on the voters had

⁴⁶ “On the Victory for Plan No. 2,” *The Boston Daily Globe*, November 3, 1909.

⁴⁷ “Boston’s Vote for Lieut Governor, District Attorney and Charter Plans,” *The Boston Daily Globe*, November 3, 1909.

⁴⁸ “Fitzgerald Wins by 1415: Gets 47,172, Storrow 45,757, Hibbard 1816, Taylor 613 in Record Vote,” *The Boston Daily Globe*, January 12, 1910.

loosened and remained tenuous at best. After four years under the new system, the G.G.A. was confident it could force the bosses out entirely in the 1914 city election.

Ultimately, the G.G.A. faltered as well. Sensing the machine's imminent failure, a dark-horse candidate stepped forward in 1913 to grab the reins of the city from the hands of the reformers and the bosses alike. Curley, by then a congressman, announced that he would run for mayor. His campaign lacked institutional support; determined to reelect Fitzgerald, the bosses held a meeting and voted, 19 to one, to try to coerce Curley to withdraw.⁴⁹ The G.G.A. too stood against Curley, denouncing him as corrupt. In response, Curley dismissed all of his opposition, referring to the bosses' Democratic City Committee, as, "a collection of empty eggshells incapable of delivering for anybody."⁵⁰ He further aimed vitriol at the G.G.A., contemptuously calling them, the "Goo-Goos," a nickname that would haunt them.⁵¹ Curley worked to exploit his enemies' weaknesses. He forced Fitzgerald out of the race by threatening to reveal to the city the allegations of an extramarital affair.⁵² This tactic, unscrupulous and dishonorable, angered the ward bosses, who remained resolute against Curley, who they were determined to keep out of City Hall.

To do so, the bosses formed a highly unlikely alliance. Together with the G.G.A., they put up Thomas J. Kenny, president of the new City Council, to run against Curley.⁵³ The 1913 election became a struggle for the future of Boston. It called into question who could run the city. To ensure his victory, Curley appealed to the voters who, like him, felt excluded by the

⁴⁹ "Machine Asks Curley to Quit," *The Boston Herald*, November 27, 1913.

⁵⁰ James Michael Curley, *I'd Do it Again: A Record of All My Uproarious Years* (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1957), 111.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 114.

⁵² Alfred Steinberg, *The Bosses: Frank Hague, James Curley, Ed Crump, Huey Long, Gene Talmadge, Tom Pendergast – The story of the ruthless men who forged the American political machines that dominated the twenties and thirties* (New York: The Macmillian Company, 1972), 147-48.

⁵³ Gerard O'Neill, *Rogues and Redeemers: When Politics Was King in Irish Boston* (New York: Crown Publishers, 2012), 75-76.

bosses and the G.G.A. He sought the votes of the Irish who were critical of the Brahmin G.G.A.'s ethnic bigotry and immigrant voters discriminated against by the G.G.A. and the bosses.⁵⁴ This proved an effective strategy. When the votes were counted on January 13, 1914, the bosses saw their defeat. Curley had won by 5,720 votes. To add insult to injury, he had won all but one of the wards the bosses had delivered for Fitzgerald four years earlier, plus two of Storrow's.⁵⁵ There was no coming back; the election was a stunning rebuke to the supposed power of both the G.G.A. and the bosses. *The Boston American*, which had strongly editorialized for Kenny, blamed the election on the "Goo-Goos", claiming the organization's lack of populist appeal depressed voter turnout among potential Kenny supporters.⁵⁶ Meanwhile, Curley made it clear that he would not forget the bosses' animosity. He was determined to shape Boston under his own rule, the way Pat Maguire had done a generation earlier. *The Boston Daily Globe* glumly acknowledged: "the new Mayor will proceed to build up a political machine of his own, with the old Tammany Club of Ward 17... as a nucleus."⁵⁷

The Boston Daily Globe was right. The 1914 election marked the death of the ward-boss system in Boston. Curley dismantled the machine by outperforming the bosses. From City Hall, he dispensed patronage across the city, thus removing the very basis of the machine's power. Though Lomasney still had influence as a boss, the rest "simply withered on the vine."⁵⁸ Curley was in and out of power in Boston too often over the next few decades for the bosses to resurrect or for the G.G.A. to realize their stated goal of curing the city's corruption and unstated goal of removing the Irish from the government.

⁵⁴ Gerard O'Neill, *Rogues and Redeemers: When Politics Was King in Irish Boston* (New York: Crown Publishers, 2012), 76.

⁵⁵ "Curley Wins by 5720 Majority," *The Boston Daily Globe*, January 14, 1914.

⁵⁶ "Goo-Goos' are Blamed for Kenny Defeat," *The Boston American*, January 14, 1914.

⁵⁷ "Curley Wins by 5720 Majority," *The Boston Daily Globe*, January 14, 1914.

⁵⁸ Thomas H. O'Connor, *The Boston Irish: A Political History* (Boston: Back Bay Books, 1997), 189.

From its inception in the early 1880s to its death 30 years later, the Boston Irish ward-boss machine lived out a great arc of success, then failure. At its beginning, it succeeded in the dispensation of patronage and deliverance of votes. Supported by the machine, the oppressed Irish rose from the slums of Boston into the middle and upper-class, slowly winning more influence over the city government. The ward-boss system provided the support for a Boston defined by Irish advancement, rather than anti-Irish oppression. Yet, it collapsed under itself. As Boston ethnically diversified, the machine's outreach shrank due to its Irish-first policy. Furthermore, in the wake of Pat Maguire's death, it fell to disunity and inter-machine squabbling as no boss managed to hold the machine together as Maguire had. This bickering allowed for the devastating 1909 city charter that profoundly weakened the workings of the ward-boss system. From there, James Michael Curley entirely dismantled it. His campaign for the mayoralty played to the very factors that had damaged the ward-boss system. Running against the machine and the reformist G.G.A., he united enough of the city, disgusted by the corruption and failings of the ward-boss system, to claim victory. It was these factors that brought the death of the machine and the rise of Curley's Boston, as it would be known on and off for another generation, changing the city's very nature.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Primary Sources

Books

Census of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, 1905: Population and Social Statistics. Vol. 1 of *Census of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts*. Boston: Wright & Potter Printing Co., 1909.

Curley, James Michael. *I'd Do it Again: A Record of All My Uproarious Years*. Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1957.

Wright, Carrol D. *The Census of Massachusetts, 1880*. Boston, 1883.

Newspapers

The Boston American

The Boston Daily Evening Transcript

The Boston Daily Globe

The Boston Herald

The Boston Post

The New York Times

Secondary Sources

Ainley, Leslie G. *Boston Mahatma*. Boston: Bruce Humphries, Inc. Publishers, 1949.

Beatty, Jack, *The Rascal King: The Life and Times of James Michael Curley (1875-1958)*. Reading, Massachusetts: Addison-Wesley Publishing Company, 1992.

Dineen, Joseph. *The Purple Shamrock: The Hon. James Michael Curley of Boston*. New York: W.W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1947.

Erie, Steven P. *Rainbow's End: Irish-Americans and the Dilemmas of Urban Machine Politics, 1840 – 1985*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988.

Goodwin, Doris Kearns. *The Fitzgeralds and the Kennedys: An American Saga*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1987.

O'Connor, Thomas H. *The Boston Irish: A Political History*. Boston: Back Bay Books, 1997.

O'Neill, Gerard. *Rogues and Redeemers: When Politics Was King in Irish Boston*. New York: Crown Publishers, 2012.

Steinberg, Alfred. *The Bosses: Frank Hague, James Curley, Ed Crump, Huey Long, Gene Talmadge, Tom Pendergast – The story of the ruthless men who forged the American political machines that dominated the twenties and thirties*. New York: The Macmillian Company, 1972.