A Politician Describes Honest Graft and Dishonest Graft

About the Selection  George Washington Plunkitt was a long-time boss in New York’s Tammany Hall, the Democratic political machine that ran New York City by using graft, bribes, and patronage to stay in power. In this selection, Plunkitt differentiates between “honest” graft and “dishonest” graft and justifies his use of the former to enrich himself.

Guided Reading
1. What does Plunkitt say is dishonest graft?
2. What does Plunkitt believe to be honest graft?

   Everybody is talking these days about Tammany men growing rich on graft. But nobody thinks of drawing the distinction between honest graft and dishonest graft. There’s all the difference in the world between the two. Yes, many of our men have grown rich in politics. I have, myself. I’ve made a big fortune out of the game, and I’m getting richer every day. But I’ve not gone in for dishonest graft—blackmailing gamblers, saloonkeepers, disorderly people, etc.—and neither has any of the men who have made big fortunes in politics. There’s an honest graft, and I’m an example of how it works.

   I might sum up the whole thing by saying: “I seen my opportunities and I took ’em.”


Analyzing the Reading
1. How was Plunkitt privileged to get inside information about public improvements?

2. How does Plunkitt justify his type of graft?

CRITICAL THINKING
3. Drawing Conclusions  What kinds of problems might a society face if it condoned Plunkitt’s approach: “I seen my opportunities and I took ’em”?

Copyright © by The McGraw-Hill Companies, Inc.
The Native American Question

About the Selection  Carl Schurz was secretary of the interior from 1877 to 1881. His department included the Bureau of Indian Affairs, and Schurz did much to clean up corruption in the bureau. In 1881 he wrote a magazine article calling for fairer treatment of Native Americans. Ironically, his call for greater justice came at a time when most Native Americans were being restricted to reservations. Moreover, much of the Schurz solution to the “American Indian Problem”—which foreshadowed the later Dawes Act—did not appeal to many Native Americans.

Guided Reading
1. How does Schurz feel about the government’s dealing with Native Americans?
2. Why are the Native Americans running out of places to live?

That the history of our Indian relations presents, in great part, a record of broken treaties, of unjust wars, and of cruel spoliation [plundering] is a fact too well known to require proof or to suffer denial. But it is only just to the government of the United States to say that its treaties with Indian tribes were, as a rule, made in good faith, and that most of our Indian wars were brought on by circumstances for which the government itself could not fairly be held responsible.

Of the treaties, those were the most important by which the government guaranteed to Indian tribes certain tracts of land as reservations to be held and occupied by them forever under the protection of the United States, in the place of other lands ceded by the Indians. There is no reason to doubt that in most, if not all, of such cases those who conducted Indian affairs on the part of the government, not anticipating the rapid advance of settlement, sincerely believed in the possibility of maintaining those reservations intact for the Indians, and that, in this respect, while their intentions were honest, their foresight was at fault.

The Western country is rapidly filling up. A steady stream of immigration is following the railroad lines and then spreading to the right and left. The vacant places still existing are either worthless or will soon be exposed to the same invasion. The plains are being occupied by cattle raisers, the fertile valleys and bottomlands by agriculturists, the mountains by miners. What is to become of the Indians?

What we can and should do is, in general terms, to fit the Indians, as much as possible, for the habits and occupations of civilized life by work and education; to individualize them in the possession and appreciation of property by allotting to them lands in severality [individual possession], giving them a fee simple title individually to the parcels of land they cultivate, inalienable for a certain period, and to obtain their consent to a disposition of that part of their lands which they cannot use, for a fair compensation, in such a manner that they no longer stand in the way of the development of the country as an obstacle, but form part of it and are benefited by it.

But we should not indulge in the delusion that the problem can be solved by merely conferring upon them rights they do not yet appreciate and duties they do not yet understand. Those who advocate this seem to think that the Indians are yearning for American citizenship, eager to take it if we will only give it to them. No mistake could be greater. An overwhelming majority of the Indians look at present upon American citizenship as a dangerous gift, and but few of the more civilized are willing to accept it when it is attainable. And those who are uncivilized would certainly not know what to do with it if they had it. The mere theoretical endowment of savages with rights which are beyond their understanding and appreciation will, therefore, help them little. They should certainly have that standing in the courts which is necessary for their protection. But full citizenship must be regarded as the terminal not as the initial point of their development.

The first necessity, therefore, is not at once to give it to them but to fit them for it. And to this end, nothing is more indispensable than the protecting and guiding care of the government during the dangerous period of transition from savage to civilized life.


American History: The Modern Era Since 1865  ★ 13 ★ Primary and Secondary Source Readings
Analyzing the Reading
1. According to Schurz, how do Native Americans feel about American citizenship?

________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

2. What does Schurz mean by making Native Americans “fit” for citizenship?

________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________

CRITICAL THINKING
3. Evaluating Information What does Schurz propose should be done regarding land for the Native Americans? How does he show insensitivity toward Native American cultural values?

________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
________________________________________________________________________
What the Wealthy Should Do with Their Money

About the Selection  Andrew Carnegie came to the United States in 1848 at the age of 12. He was a millionaire by the time he reached 30, largely due to his success with railroads and the telegraph. He went on to become one of the wealthiest men in the world by founding the Carnegie Steel Company, a business he sold to the United States Steel Company in 1901 for nearly a half billion dollars. Carnegie then retired and devoted the balance of his life to philanthropy. In this article he discusses the obligation of men like himself to administer wealth to improve society.

Guided Reading
1. What does Carnegie list as the three ways to dispose of excess wealth?
2. What image must the wealthy man present to the poor?

The problem of our age is the proper administration of wealth, so that the ties of brotherhood may still bind together the rich and poor in harmonious relationship. The conditions of human life have not only been changed, but revolutionized. . . .

The contrast between the palace of the millionaire and the cottage of the laborer with us to-day measures the change which has come with civilization.

This change, however, is not to be deplored, but welcomed as highly beneficial. . . . Much better this great irregularity than universal squalor. . . . The "good old times" were not good old times. Neither master nor servant was as well situated then as today. A relapse to old conditions would be disastrous to both—not the least so to him who serves—and would sweep away civilization with it . . .

The poor enjoy what the rich could not before afford. What were the luxuries have become the necessities of life. The laborer has now more comforts than the farmer had a few generations ago. The farmer has more luxuries than the landlord had, and is more richly clad and better housed. The landlord has books and pictures rarer, and appointments more artistic, than the King could then obtain. The price we pay for this salutary change is, no doubt, great. We assemble thousands of operatives in the factory, in the mine, and in the countinghouse, of whom the employer can know little or nothing, and to whom the employer is little better than a myth. . . . Rigid castes are formed, as usual, mutual ignorance breeds mutual distrust . . .

The price which society pays for the law of competition, like the price it pays for cheap comforts and luxuries, is also great; but the advantages of this law are also greater still, for it is to this law that we owe our wonderful material development, which brings improved conditions in its train. . . .

We start, then, with a condition of affairs under which the best interests of the race are promoted, but which inevitably gives wealth to the few. Thus far, accepting conditions as they exist, the situation can be surveyed and pronounced good. The question then arises,—and if the foregoing be correct, it is the only question with which we have to deal,—What is the proper mode of administering wealth after the laws upon which civilization is founded have thrown it into the hands of the few? . . .

There are but three modes in which surplus wealth can be disposed of. It can be left to the families of the decedents [deceased]; or it can be bequeathed for public purposes; or, finally, it can be administered during their lives by its possessors. . . . The first is the most injudicious [unwise]. . . .

As to the second mode, that of leaving wealth at death for public uses, it may be said that this is only a means for the disposal of wealth, provided on us by opening their doors and taking us in, together with helping with our keep.

Analyzing the Reading
1. What is Carnegie's vision of an ideal state?

2. How does Carnegie support his statement that the "good old times" were not good?

CRITICAL THINKING
3. Analyzing Information What is Carnegie's view of the rich as compared to the poor?