

The fight to reform the urban political system involved a broad-based alliance that included wealthy industrialists and other members of the upper class, well-educated members of the middle class, and middle-class voters. Andrew Carnegie and John D. Rockefeller initially financed the New York City Bureau of Municipal Research, founded in 1906. The U.S. Chamber of Commerce provided office space and paid the executive secretary of the City Managers Association for several years. Civic clubs and voters' leagues generally contained names from elite social directories, and the professionals involved in reform tended to be the most prestigious members of their professions. They succeeded in selling their message to growing numbers of middle-class voters.

OUTTAKE

Municipal Reform was Aimed at Immigrants

The municipal reforms of the early nineteenth century were designed to undercut the electoral influence of working-class and immigrant voters. Virtually all machine politicians came from working-class, immigrant origins. Most machine bosses, like their followers, had little formal education; typically they had started out in politics by carrying messages and working on Election Day. Reformers were at the other end of the social spectrum. Most of the prominent reformers of the Progressive Era were upper-class people, and many, in fact, were wealthy industrialists, with names like McCormick, du Pont, Pinchot, Morgenthau, and Dodge. Most of them had a college education in a day when this fact marked a very select social stratum.

Machine politicians, ethnic voters, and working-class groups usually opposed reform because they correctly perceived that these were designed to make it more difficult for working-class candidates to win public office. In the big cities where they exerted a commanding electoral presence, immigrant voters were generally successful in opposing key features of the reform agenda, but elsewhere the reformers were generally successful in reducing the political influence of those they called the Great Unwashed. The reformers' aims were laid bare in the 1938 municipal elections in Jackson, Michigan. The local chamber of commerce persuaded voters to approve a charter that replaced wards with an at-large election system. Working-class and immigrant candidates now had to compete for votes outside their own neighborhoods; no longer could they win a council seat simply by winning enough votes in their own wards. The slate of candidates sponsored by the chamber of commerce swept into office. The new mayor and the council members celebrated with a reception in the Masonic hall, which excluded Catholics from membership, and once in power they dismissed most of the city's Roman Catholic employees.

Sources: George Mowry, *The Era of Theodore Roosevelt, 1900-1912* (New York: Harper & Row, 1955); James Weinstein, *The Corporate Ideal in the Liberal State, 1900-1918* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1968).