

## Document A: Lincoln Steffens

*New advances in printing technology during the 1890s made magazines and other publications inexpensive to print. Magazines became available to a broader middle-class audience. Lincoln Steffens was well known for writing magazine articles about child labor, prisons, religion and political machines*



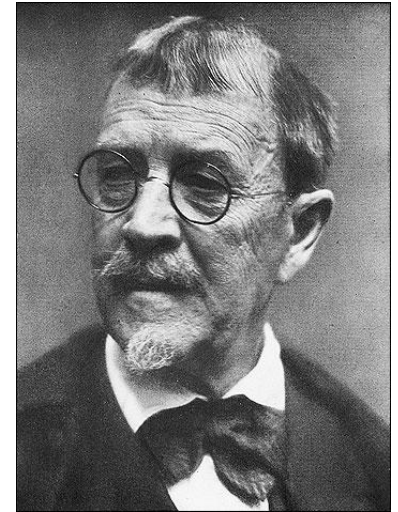
Source: CORBIS

The typical American citizen is a business man. The spirit of business is profit, not patriotism; individual gain, not national prosperity. “My business is sacred,” says the business man in his heart. “Whatever helps my business, is good; it must be. Whatever hurts it, is wrong; it must be. A bribe is bad, that is, it is a bad thing to take; but it is not so bad to give one, not if it is necessary to my business.”

And it’s all a moral weakness. Oh, we are

good—on Sunday, and we are “fearfully patriotic” on the Fourth of July. But the bribe we pay to the janitor to prefer our interests to the landlord’s, is the little brother of the bribe passed to the councilman to sell a city street, and the father of the deal made by the president of the railroad, who agrees to use air-brakes only if he is given stock in the air-brake company.

We are *responsible*, not our leaders, since we follow them. We *let* them divert our loyalty from the United States to some “party”; we let them boss the party and turn our democracies into autocracies. We *cheat* our government and we let our leaders loot it, and we let them *bribe* our sovereignty from us. We are content to let them pass bad laws, giving away public property in exchange for money.



*Source: Excerpt from a book by muckraker Lincoln Steffens, The Shame of Cities, published in 1904.*

## Document B: George Plunkitt

I’ve been readin’ a book by Lincoln Steffens on The Shame of the Cities. Steffens means well, but like all reformers, he don’t know how to make distinctions. He can’t see no difference between honest graft and dishonest graft and, consequently, he gets things all mixed up. . .

For instance, I ain’t no looter. The looter hogs it. I never hogged. I made my money in politics, but at the same time, I served the organization and got more big improvements for New York City than any other livin’ man.

The Irish was *born to rule*, and they're the *honestest* people in the world. Show me the Irishman who would steal a roof off an orphanage! He don't exist. Of course, if an Irishman had the political pull and the roof was in bad shape, he might get the city authorities to put on a new one and get the contract for himself, and buy the old roof at a bargain-but that's *hone st graft*...



One reason why the Irishman is more honest in politics than many Americans is that he is *grateful* to the country and the city that gave him protection and prosperity when he was driven by oppression from Ireland. His one thought is to serve the city which gave him a *home*. His friends here often have a good place in one of the city departments picked out for him while he is still in Ireland. Is it any wonder that he has a tender spot in his heart for old New York when he is on its salary list the mornin' after he lands?

*Source: Excerpt from a talk by George Plunkitt, a political boss in New York City. The talk was called "Honest Graft and Dishonest Graft," recorded in 1905. (Graft is another word for corruption and bribes). In this talk, Plunkitt responds to Lincoln Steffens's book, The Shame of the Cities.*

## Assignment

Part #1:

Write a dialogue between Steffens and Plunkitt in which Steffens tries to convince Plunkitt to run a more honest government. Complete for homework.

Part #2:

Dissagrement over how government functions is not a time-specific issue. What sorts of issues and debate about government and society do you see today that relate? Support at least two examples.