Visitors to the United States after the Civil War marvelled at the nation's political institutions. However, unlike earlier visitors, they were impressed less by the majesty of democracy in action than by the prevalence of "bossism." In the Washington of Henry Adams' *Democracy* Senator Ratcliffe, the "Prairie Giant of Peoria," a sinister amalgam of Conkling and Blaine, was presented to tourists as the exemplar of American public life. The Boss, like the Robber Baron, was one of the wonders of the age and assumed to be equally powerful. Mosei Ostrogorski in his classic analysis of American parties described "the Machine" and "the Organization" as holding almost absolute dominion over both party and government. The "autocratic Machine leaders" were like "the 'tyrans' of the Greek cities"; their power "bordered on pure absolutism." James Bryce, likewise, dwelt extensively on the power of party machines. At times, as Ari Hoogenboom points out, contemporaries, and particularly genteel reformers bemoaning their own political impotence, became almost paranoid, imagining rings and conspiracies everywhere. "The whole country," wrote Charles Eliot Norton to Edwin Godkin at the height of the Grant era, "is, like New York, in the hands of the 'Ring'..." Later historians, relying largely, like Bryce, on informants of this class, have tended to perpetuate this impression in one form or another.

That such assertions are made is partly due to the tendency to treat particular periods in terms of traditional stereotypes. That of the Gilded Age still bears the imprint of Parrington and Josephson, as well as the Mugwump critics. However, more general methodological problems
arise in the analysis of political power; recent research has demonstrated that the methods employed may to a considerable degree prejudice the results. Many of the early investigations of community power relied for evidence upon certain individuals' reputation for political power. Floyd Hunter in Newburyport asked quite simply, "Who is the biggest man in town?" Critics of the so-called "reputational technique" argue that such an approach pre-supposes, but does not test, the existence of a "power elite" and induces respondents to overstate the power wielded by a few. It can be dangerous, likewise, for historians to depend uncritically on similar attributions of power by contemporary observers. It can be perilous also to seek to comprehend the power of a political machine solely by means of an inventory of its constituent parts and the resources at its command. Some of the classic treatments of boss politics do this. For example, Ostrogorski lists the "Parts of the Quay Machine," including tens of thousands of federal and state officeholders as well as the support of railroad and steel companies and Standard Oil. But did these resources belong exclusively to the machine? More crucially, could they be depended upon under adverse political circumstances and in the face of powerful opposition? The true measure of political power is the ability to influence actual political decisions and to overcome substantial resistance in doing so, and it is in these terms that it must be analysed.

It was generally acknowledged that no state, unless it was New York, was so afflicted with "bossism" as Pennsylvania under the "Cameron dynasty." The Harrisburg Patriot, a Democratic newspaper, begrudgingly admitted in 1873 that Simon Cameron was "the undisputed master of Pennsylvania." Five years later another Democratic paper, the Philadelphia Times, remarked of his son Donald that "... there is not a political leader in any State whose mandates are so implicitly obeyed as are Cameron's in Pennsylvania to-day." In his History of Pennsylvania Wayland Dunaway describes in these terms the "powerful political dynasty" that Simon Cameron founded:

In regular succession, Simon Cameron, Donald Cameron, Matthew S. Quay, and Boies Penrose served their turn as the boss of the dominant Republican party in the commonwealth... Able, adroit, masterful, and unscrupulous, they headed the majority party, which they kept subservient to their domination; controlling federal, state, and local patronage and possessing always a generous campaign fund, their power was supreme... So absolute was their sway that the only sure way to political preferment was through their favour, while to oppose them was to invite defeat. Except for
the brief intervals when insurgency raised its head in partial triumph, this powerful political machine proved to be an effective steam roller which regularly flattened out all opposition with thoroughness and dispatch.\textsuperscript{11}

That the Cameron organization possessed a reputation for great power is evident. But in order to determine the extent of that power, to determine whether its power was as supreme, its sway as absolute, as Dunaway, for example, maintains, we must look at the machine in operation. We must examine actual political decisions which were important enough and controversial enough to call upon all its resources, thereby demonstrating more clearly the ways in which it operated and testing the limits of its strength. One issue which regularly excited the Republican party faithful was the contest for the Presidency. The Camerons' efforts to control the Pennsylvania delegation to the Republican National Conventions of 1876 and 1880, and thus to influence the nomination, the methods they employed and the resistance they encountered provide a valuable case-study in nineteenth-century machine politics.

In the 1870s and 1880s the candidate who evoked most enthusiasm among rank-and-file Republicans was the "Magnetic Man," James G. Blaine of Maine. The charismatic appeal of Blaine seems rather incomprehensible to a later age; it is hardly expressed in the rather puffy features that emerge from contemporary photographs. Yet he exerted a striking hold over a whole generation of Republicans. He was a man, apparently, of exceptional charm, persuasive, witty and likeable, with a flattering gift for remembering the name and some personal attribute of everyone he met which endeared him especially to party workers all over the country, many of whom idolised him throughout their careers. No other public figure could command such deep loyalty.\textsuperscript{12} Part of his talent lay in a skillful political opportunism, an ability to find "the precise eye of every storm" and direct it to his own advantage, combined with the eloquence and tactical skill required to bring it off. In January 1876 he converted an equable debate on an amnesty for ex-Confederates into a violent altercation over the treatment of Union prisoners in Southern jails. Not only did he flourish the "bloody shirt" for use in the coming election campaign but established his own claim to carry the standard into battle. He became, in Robert Ingersoll's phrase, the "Plumed Knight" of the Republican party.\textsuperscript{13} Blaine was an early favorite for the party's Presidential nomination. His support was durable enough to withstand the successive shocks of the Mulligan letters and his collapse
from sunstroke on the eve of the National Convention. According to the Philadelphia Times, "the fact that Blaine is still adhered to by his friends, when for thirty hours he has been prostrate upon a sick bed, with no certainty that he will ever rise from it, proves how devoted his followers are."

Not all Republicans were so enamoured. To reformers like Carl Schurz and Henry Adams, Blaine was already the "Tattooed Man" in all but name. He was objectionable, too, to the Senatorial bosses who surrounded Grant, the so-called "Stalwarts." Roscoe Conkling of New York had never forgiven Blaine for humiliating him on the floor of Congress, and to the Stalwarts in general his personal popularity posed a serious threat to their own local supremacy. Whatever the reason they were determined to prevent his nomination.

Early in 1876 machine organs began to trumpet the claims of Governor Hartranft as Pennsylvania's candidate for the Presidency. The Democratic press saw Hartranft as "the dummy, behind whom the ring managers propose to play their presidential game." So, too, some years later, did Blaine: "... worthy as Hartranft was conceded to be, the circumstances surrounding the movement for him inspired the general belief that he was brought forward less with the expectation of a serious effort on his own behalf than for the purpose of making his candidacy the means of holding the delegation in hand." The initial object of the exercise was to prevent Pennsylvania votes from going to Blaine, who was as popular in Pennsylvania as anywhere else. Cameron was expected eventually to move his forces behind a Stalwart candidate such as Morton or Conkling, although the state chairman Henry Hoyt denied that there was any substance in such rumours. There was some evidence of an under-current of feeling in favour of Hartranft, whose executive record had been creditable. He enjoyed, said the Times, "the cordial, hearty support of the sincere Republicans of Pennsylvania."

The Cameron organization controlled a substantial volume of patronage. Besides state and municipal patronage, there were at least six thousand federal offices available to the citizens of Pennsylvania, mostly at the disposal of the state's Senators and Congressmen, who, as James Garfield recognised, had become "the dispensers, sometimes the brokers of patronage." Cameron particularly, as the state's one Republican Senator, laid claim to a lion's share of the patronage. For example, the Philadelphia Customhouse, employing 214 men in 1877, was managed by Collector of the Port Alexander P. Tutton, who was identified by a local newspaper as one of Cameron's "most abject followers," and Naval Officer John A. Hiestand, whom a disgruntled Republican referred to
as "Don Cameron's pimp," while the Philadelphia Post Office, employing 444 clerks and letter-carriers, was managed by Postmaster A. Lowden Snowden, a relative of Cameron's and then, after 1878, by ex-Governor Hartranft. There were 3216 local post offices in Pennsylvania, and many of these, too, were in the hands of Cameron men. The Titusville postmaster, for example, was described by a correspondent of the Nation as "a virulent partisan of the Cameron school who had used the office for political purposes." Most of this patronage was bestowed on men who were politically useful, men like the postmaster at Altoona who was recommended by the local Congressman as "one of the best working and influential Republicans in Blair County." Such men were expected to repay their benefactors with more than gratitude. The recipients of patronage were normally expected to devote their energies and influence to the interests of their party and patron. In particular they were expected to attend to their patron's interest at primary and delegate conventions.

Although the procedures by which the parties nominated their candidates for elective office theoretically gave each party voter an equal part in the decision, in practice the very complexity of the nominating machinery, as Morton Keller points out, tended to discourage popular participation. Very small proportions of the party's voters, rarely as many as ten per cent, turned up at primary elections. The management of complicated political apparatus was regarded as full-time work, to be undertaken by professional politicians who, like George Washington Plunkitt, believed that, "when a man works in politics, he should get something out of it." Hence party primaries and conventions tended to be dominated, like those in Philadelphia, by "the friends, dependents and beneficiaries of the clique of office-holders." At the 1881 Republican city convention 123 out of 199 delegates were city employees. At state conventions too the "familiar voices" were those of "postmasters, revenue officials, custom house waiters and peripatetic government agents," who often comprised a majority of delegates. Whoever commanded government patronage could command the services of many of those who performed the "actual work" of party management.

The skeleton of the machine was the hierarchy of state and county committees which provided the continuity between conventions. The state committee and most of the county committees were dominated by loyal followers of Cameron. The state committee, as "an organ of the last Convention," had the responsibility of making arrangements for the next, which, in effect, gave it considerable influence over the composition and disposition of the convention. It had, in particular, the task of
drawing up a roll of delegates entitled to take their seats in the convention and to vote on the election of a permanent chairman and, most crucially on the adjudication of contests. Any convention faced contests, either real or fictitious, sometimes involving a large part of its membership. The convention itself was "the judge of the election of its own members." In practice the judgement was made by the delegates on the preliminary roll. Thus, in making judgements on whether or not a contest warranted the removal of an accredited delegate from the roll, the state committee itself went a long way towards settling the contests, and hence the composition of the convention.

The simple act of calling the convention had considerable tactical possibilities. One of the standard techniques of party management was to call a "snap" convention at an unexpectedly early date, thereby denying opponents the necessary time to make combinations against the machine "slate." Cameron frequently resorted to such tactics. Thus in 1876 only two months separated the call for the state convention which was to select delegates to the National Convention from the date of its meeting. In most counties this proved insufficient to permit the calling of a county convention. Where a county convention was called, as in Chester County, instructions for Hartranft were in most cases defeated. Elsewhere the county committees made the choice. As usual, in 1876 the state convention was called to meet at Harrisburg, the favourite venue of the machine politicians, who found the ambience of the state capital peculiarly favorable to political machinations. The Philadelphia Times observed how the atmosphere of the place acted "like a mildew" upon the independence and moral purpose of the delegates. Here the professional politicians were on their home ground.

As a result of such preparations the state convention proved fairly tractable. A loyal Cameron man, William H. Koontz, was made temporary chairman, and, in accordance with a pre-arranged plan, the main business, the selection of delegates to the National Convention at Cincinnati, was entrusted to a hand-picked committee of nine, whose report was then pushed through on the convention floor. Resolutions were adopted instructing the Pennsylvania delegation to vote as a unit for Hartranft. Thereupon the convention, generally acknowledged to have been "the smoothest working bit of political machinery ever seen in Pennsylvania," adjourned. The delegates chosen were all favourable to the governor, on the grounds that this was the sense of the meeting. Prominent in the delegation were Don Cameron and such loyal organization men as Robert Mackey and State Chairman Henry Hoyt. By such means a mild sentiment for Hartranft was converted into a unanimous delegation.
Although Blaine had much support in Pennsylvania, his friends had had little time to convert it into delegate strength. Nevertheless, it was believed that at least thirty of the fifty-eight delegates to Cincinnati were sympathetic to Blaine and might be his on the second ballot. Blaine urged Harry Bingham and Morton McMichael, editor of the Philadelphia *North American*, to canvass the delegates on his behalf, and it appears that McMichael at least made some efforts in this direction.

Both, however, were friends of Cameron. Bingham in a letter to the Senator, earnestly denied that he was engaged in canvassing delegates for Blaine and explained:

... I am sincerely for Blaine because I feel he can win the country and can carry Penna. ... I want Donald to go into the next Cabinet and hold its highest honor. I am clear that Penna’s vote in the Convention can be more easily controlled for Mr. B. than any other candidate. I want Donald to get all the credit for this vote and its control.

In the light of subsequent events it becomes clear that Bingham, like many others, was reluctant to take his attachment to Blaine to the point of open revolt against the organisation to which he looked for political advancement.

Don Cameron, as chairman of the delegation, had some difficulty in holding his fifty-eight votes for Hartranft. The state convention had passed a resolution ordering the delegation to vote as a unit, but on the second ballot J. Smith Futhey of Chester, followed by three other delegates, rose contesting the unanimous vote for Hartranft announced by Cameron and demanded that his vote be recorded for Blaine. Henry Oliver and others, speaking “in the interest of peace and harmony” (often a euphemism for loyalty to the machine), argued that “It has been the rule in Pennsylvania that the state convention, and not the separate districts, should send the delegates to the national convention.” Hence the delegates should obey the instructions of the state convention. This Futhey denied: “We owe no allegiance to the state convention, and we recognize no right of that convention to say how we shall vote. We claim the right to represent our own constituents.” At stake was not only the unit rule, but also the power of the state convention to bind delegates. This was a clear test of Cameron’s control. The chairman of the National Convention, Edward McPherson, himself a Blaine man from Pennsylvania, ruled that “it is the right of any and of every member equally, to vote his sentiments in this convention,” and after a protracted debate, his ruling was narrowly sustained by the convention, with Blaine men generally supporting the chair.
Yet, their individual prerogative having been established, most of the delegates continued tamely to vote as a unit. Indeed, only Futhey voted to sustain the chair’s ruling against the unit rule. Although a majority was believed to favour Blaine, he received only a handful of votes from Pennsylvania until the last two ballots when the delegation split, thirty votes eventually going to Blaine and twenty-eight to Hayes. Many wondered why the Blaine men had not broken earlier. “This blunder alone,” claimed the Philadelphia Times, “is sufficient to account for Blaine’s defeat.” According to Alexander McClure, Cameron persuaded the dissenters to remain with Hartranft so long as his total vote was rising and negotiated with Morton for one or two extra carpetbag delegates on each ballot. Indeed, Hartranft’s vote did increase slightly up to the fifth ballot, and the accessions to his strength did come from the South. The conclusion is irresistible, however, that the delegates were simply afraid to stand out against the machine. John Hay assured Blaine that he had enjoyed “the cowardly good will of the Ohio and Pennsylvania delegations, three-fourths of whom would have voted for you, if they had dared defy the machine lash.” But there is another side to this question. The factiousness of his followers prevented Cameron from leading his troops into camp, knowing as he did that some of them would desert to Blaine, and forced him to cling to the Hartranft standard that he had brought to Cincinnati, supposedly only for purposes of trade. There is at least some irony in this.

“The news of Hayes’ nomination was like a wet blanket on our Republicans, who were enthusiastic for Blaine,” wrote a Chester County Democrat to Sam Randall. Many Republican newspapers were equally lukewarm. Disappointed and resentful, Blaine’s followers resolved that he should not be denied again. His candidacy gathered momentum during the period of the Hayes Administration, with much flourishing of the “blood shirt” and “twisting the lion’s tail.” Yet once more, in 1880, the Stalwart leaders were instrumental in thwarting his ambitions.

When General Grant departed on his world tour in May 1877, Simon Cameron reportedly promised that he should be returned to the White House. Thoroughly disgusted with the Hayes Administration, the Stalwart leaders, including Donald Cameron, who had succeeded his father as director of the Pennsylvania Republican organisation, turned once more to the hero of Appomattox, hoping that with time the nation would forget the scandals that had disfigured his Administration and remember him only as the military leader, the “strong man” that was needed to stem the tides of “communism” and “secessionism.” Their
strategy was that Grant should return shortly before the convention to a hero's welcome that would sweep him irresistibly towards the Republican nomination in June 1880. Unfortunately, Mrs. Grant being homesick, the hero disembarked at San Francisco somewhat prematurely, in September 1879, thus setting the “boom” in motion ahead of time. His triumphant progress across the nation could not be protracted indefinitely, and by the spring the “reception tide” had begun to recede. Nevertheless, “manufactured and fabricated” though it might in part have been, Blaine and his friends rightly saw the Grant “boom” as a “real threat,” not least because of the considerable popular feeling for the general, which Conkling was to exploit so ably at Chicago.

Numerous polls and surveys during the winter showed great enthusiasm among Republicans for a third term for Grant, so much so that many felt his nomination inevitable. “All men are fools, except Grant, who seek the Presidency,” wrote Charles Henry to Garfield.

“Do not give yourself any uneasiness about my position on the Grant question,” wrote Don Cameron, rather redundantly, to a friend. Matthew Quay, rather more cynically, declared, “I am not a Grant man but recognize the popular sentiment and the necessities of the times.” He assured his confidant “that Grant will receive the unanimous vote of the Pennsylvania delegation” and outlined the strategy that would be followed, namely “to hold our State Convention in February or January and instruct for him and so settle the matter.” This was, in fact, done. A quiet autumn canvass, “at a period long before the masses of the party gave any thought to the subject,” made sure of the reliability of county committees. Then a state committee consisting largely of substitutes, with machine politicians from Philadelphia representing such bucolic localities as Bradford, Tioga and Clarion Counties, met on New Year’s Eve to call the state convention for the early date of 4 February.

The ploy of calling a “snap” convention was not altogether successful. Although the early date was intended to forestall the growth of sentiment for Blaine, by January 1880 a majority of the Republican newspapers in the state had declared in his favour. “The overwhelming sentiment of this state is for Blaine for President,” declared one Republican. Although the early date was also intended to curtail, even more severely than in 1876, the time available in which to arrange county conventions, some thirty counties held them. Of these, nine passed instructions for Blaine, and five elected “out-and-out Blaine men” as delegates to Harrisburg; none recommended the nomination of Grant. Only where devious tactics were employed was an outcome favourable to the machine obtained. In Westmoreland Blaine men
constituted a majority of the county convention but were persuaded of the inexpediency of passing instructions, permitting the selection “on the sly” of delegates favourable to Grant. Elsewhere, as in Allegheny, county committees “packed for Cameron” chose delegates pledged to Grant. In Lancaster County the dominant “Bull Ring” did so in flagrant disregard of the local party rules demanding a county primary election, an infraction which troubled the Cameron-dominated state convention very little.

It was believed, as the delegates assembled at Harrisburg, that a majority was favourable to Blaine, and 110 attended the caucus of his friends on the eve of the convention. However, a majority were also Cameron men, including many of those pledged to Blaine. A Fayette County Republican told McPherson, “Our delegation are all instructed for Blaine but 2 of them are toadies of Cameron.” “The talk of bargain here is open,” A. M. Gibson of the New York Sun telegraphed William E. Chandler, Blaine’s principal manager, “and by those who pretend to be for our friend there will be no fight because those who have authority to speak say that they are instructed not to antagonize.” Blaine himself, it appeared, had requested Harry Bingham and other Pennsylvania supporters not to oppose Cameron outright in the hope that Blaine might be accepted as the second choice of the state delegation to the National Convention, but Chandler urged McPherson to make “an unmistakable demonstration” at Harrisburg. “If you don’t Cameron will coax, bribe or frighten enough delegates before June to give him a majority. It is immensely desirable to end the Grant movement now.” The followers of Blaine were evidently in some disarray.

Few imagined that, under these circumstances, Cameron would attempt to pass instructions for Grant. Yet this he proceeded to do by means identical to those employed in 1876. Following a pre-arranged programme, one Cameron lieutenant offered the following “blunt resolution”: “That the delegates elected to the Republican Convention from this State are hereby instructed to support General U. S. Grant for the Presidential nomination and to vote as a unit on that and all questions that may come before the convention.” This was passed by the narrow margin of 133–113. Another moved the appointment of a committee of nine to draw up a list of delegates to Chicago, which was also adopted. The committee, “all Cameron men without a reservation,” named four delegates-at-large acceptable to the machine but found it prudent in most other cases to confirm the choices made by the districts themselves. Once more the Camerons had mobilised all their resources to win over enough delegates to push their programme through,
sometimes in the face of the delegates' and their constituents' wishes. At
least four delegates instructed for Blaine voted for the Grant resolutions,
together with thirteen whose counties had passed resolutions in his
favour. 63

The reaction in Pennsylvania was almost uniformly hostile; only two
Republican papers endorsed the actions of the convention. The Bucks
County Intelligencer expressed the general mood: “Mr. Cameron has
made a mistake—perhaps a fatal mistake. He has defied the people and
has treated their wishes and preferences with contempt.” 64 The national
press displayed a similar distance for Cameron's “bull-dozing” tactics. 65

This time the reaction took a more positive form. The Republicans of
Chester County issued a call for a state-wide meeting of “all Republic-
cans who believe in the honest expression of the will of the people, who
are opposed to the enforcement of the unit rule as a gag-law appliance,
who detest the methods that have been used in our State Convention to
foist upon the party a third-term candidate, and who believe it is time to
throttle the one-man power in Pennsylvania politics.” 66 Thus the
opposition to Grant became directed against the Cameron machine,
which had rashly staked its power and prestige in an unpopular cause.
Whereas a majority of active Republicans might be well disposed
towards the machine, many baulked at the nomination of a third-term
candidate, whose election seemed to threaten the balance of the Consti-
tution and whom they therefore believed certain to lose. 67 A majority of
party workers in Pennsylvania were also pro-Blaine, as a Tribune
survey suggested. Blaine, they believed, was bound to win. 68

Chandler, seeking to rally Blaine's support in Pennsylvania, urged
his friends to put pressure on the delegates. 69 Conventions were called
for this purpose in several counties and primaries held in Cumberland
and Lancaster, most of which gave their delegates to Chicago instruc-
tions contrary to those issued by the state convention. 70 In the Seven-
teenth Congressional District, for example, William H. Koontz was
able to report at the end of May that “three out of the four counties” had
instructed their delegates “to oppose the unit rule and vote for Blaine.” 71
A Meadsville Republican informed Chandler that the delegates from his
district had given “positive pledges” to the same effect. 72 Since these
conventions were not always initiated by the official county committees
they sometimes lacked formal authority. In York, for example, many
townships refused to send representatives to what they regarded as an
irregular meeting. 73 Nevertheless, these proceedings carried weight as a
clear indication of the mood of Pennsylvania Republicans and placed
many of the delegates to the National Convention in a distinctly embarrassing situation, caught as they were between the conflicting claims of the people of their districts and the state machine.

While Chandler and his agents in Pennsylvania were busy fanning grass-roots sentiment for Blaine, Cameron strove to keep the delegates in line. “A system of bulldozing has commenced in order to get as many for Grant as possible,” wrote William Kemble, himself a leading figure in the Republican machine, to Chandler. “Something should be done towards getting the Blaine men together. I have seen a great many and am doing what I can towards pulling back some—but a prospect of success will do more than all the talk.” The Blaine men should stand together, he insisted, and make clear their intention to vote for him on the first ballot.\(^7\) Otherwise the danger was that many Blaine men would allow themselves to be browbeaten as in 1876.

The key to the struggle was the Philadelphia delegation. The Philadelphia city machine, by virtue of its control of the enormous municipal patronage, possessed a much greater degree of independence than other local organisations. At Harrisburg the city delegation had voted for the Grant resolutions en bloc, even though it was believed that only one member really favoured his nomination.\(^5\) A number of Philadelphia Republicans of a reforming persuasion, members of the National Republican League, had bitterly opposed Grant from the start, although they had serious misgivings about Blaine, too.\(^6\) Now they found common cause with Jim McManes, the city boss. Wharton Barker and others urged McManes to declare openly his refusal to abide by the unit rule, which he agreed to do, though evidently not for the same reasons as the reformers. Barker saw McManes’s espousal of Blaine as an assertion of his own political power and prestige as against Cameron’s.\(^7\) A more likely motivation, however, was a fear of defeat at the polls if Grant were nominated, with the consequent loss of federal patronage, and perhaps of the city government if the Democratic tide proved strong. Whatever the reason, McManes’s announcement provided the “prospect of success” that Kemble had desired. A number of country delegates could now be persuaded to follow suit. In April Barker was in a position to inform Garfield that there would soon be “a public declaration on the part of Mr. McManes, the whole Philadelphia delegation and of many country delegates to the Chicago convention, say more than half of the whole delegation from Pennsylvania, that the Republican party in this state are opposed to the nomination of Genl. Grant.”\(^8\) He overstated the number of rebels, but by the time the delegates set off for Chicago it was clear that at least twenty-three were openly opposed to Grant and the unit rule. That number put their
names to a circular pledging them to vote against Grant, "knowing that
the sentiment of the Republicans of said State is largely against the
nomination of General U. S. Grant for President."

Despite the growing dissension in the ranks, the Stalwarts still hoped
to nominate Grant through their control of the party machinery. Don
Cameron as chairman of the National Committee would call the
convention to order and preside over the election of the temporary
chairman, in which vote he would rule that state delegations should cast
their votes as a unit. The Grant men could count on three hundred votes.
The application of the unit rule would add the votes of sixty-three
dissident members of the New York, Illinois and Pennsylvania delega-
tions, whereupon only a handful more would be required for a majority.
If they could elect a friendly temporary chairman, he in turn would
apply the unit rule to the votes on contested seats and the election of a
permanent president. By such means they hoped to dominate the
convention. But their opponents got wind of the scheme. Led by
Chandler, the anti-Grant members of the National Committee com-
bined to outnumber the Stalwarts and forced Cameron to climb
down.80
His acquiescence prefigured the eventual defeat of Grant. The "Faith-
ful 306" held on staunchly and finally "went down with their colors
nailed to the mast" when the opposition united on the thirty-sixth ballot
to nominate Garfield.81 Once more, however, the intransigence of
Cameron and his allies had frustrated the presidential aspirations of
James C. Blaine.

In many ways this narrative illustrates both the strengths and the
limitations of late nineteenth-century political machines. The passage of
resolutions favouring Hartranft in 1876 and Grant in 1880 in face of a
general preference for Blaine demonstrated the facility with which the
party machinery could be manipulated and the formidable personal
capital that a boss like Cameron had accumulated over the years through
the distribution of patronage and other favours. But, in 1880 at least,
this disregard for the sentiment of the rank and file produced a powerful
reaction. Delegates and local leaders came under pressure to reverse
their stance. So great was their enthusiasm for Blaine and their
antipathy to Grant's nomination that they came to fear for their own
position, threatened alike by internal revolt and electoral defeat. Con-
vinced that to nominate Grant would be both unpopular and suicidal,
many of their number deserted his cause. In doing so they were
couraged by the action of the Philadelphia machine, whose indepen-
dent sources of patronage and graft gave it what amounted to a kind of
countervailing power.

The lesson was brought home immediately to Cameron. The follow-
ing winter a group of independents blocked the election of Cameron’s candidate for the Senate, Henry Oliver, forcing Cameron to accept a compromise choice. In 1882 a sizeable number of Independent Republicans bolted the party ticket, and a Democratic governor was elected, the first since 1860. Not for some years was the machine restored to its former strength, this time under the more supple leadership of Matthew Quay. He for one profited from the lessons of 1880.82 One lesson to be learned from these events was the “fundamental contradiction” noted by Robert Marcus “between state power and success in nominating a President.”83 The issues and personalities of national politics could easily disturb the unity of the party organisation, thereby weakening its grip on the state. A party machine whose objective was the control of state politics entered the national arena at its peril. It is significant that Quay chose not to oppose Blaine’s nomination in 1884.

Perhaps it is wrong to look upon an American political machine of the late nineteenth century as a highly-centralised organisation and to overstate the power of the boss. Certainly he wielded great influence, but he himself relied heavily upon the advice and assistance of local leaders and party workers and therefore needed to be highly sensitive to their needs and problems. This was the quality for which William Barnes, himself a prominent New York machine politician, praised Thomas Platt: “He was called the ‘Easy Boss.’ He led only in the direction the party was willing to go. . . . He never forced upon it his opinions against its will.”84 Though this statement doubtless contains a measure of diplomatic understatement appropriate to what was, in fact, a valedictory address, it nevertheless iterates an important truth about party management in the Gilded Age. It was a truth which Matthew Quay had also learned. James A. Kehl, in a recently-published biography, shows how Quay’s success in building a stable and powerful political organisation stemmed from his capacity to learn from his predecessors’ mistakes. Whereas Donald Cameron placed himself in untenable positions by his “uncompromising insistence on complete loyalty” from his followers, Quay exhibited a more pragmatic readiness “to win by adapting to prevailing circumstances.” “He understood that for a party’s continued vitality its leadership must identify and respond to ground swells among the rank-and-file.”85 Bryce and others have described machine politics as a kind of American feudalism because of the clientship relationships generated by the bestowal of patronage. To Bryce “the bond between the party chiefs and their followers” was akin to that which bound vassals to their lord in the Middle Ages. “They render a personal feudal service which their suzerain repays with the
BLAINE AND THE CAMERONS

gift of a livelihood." The analogy is in many respects close. Feudal society, it must be remembered, was founded on a set of reciprocal obligations: not only was the vassal obliged to serve his lord in return for his fief, but the lord also had a duty to extend aid and succour to those who had kissed his hand. Feudal vassals frequently rebelled against a tyrannical lord. So too did American party politicians against an arrogant or headstrong leader who forced them into difficult and uncomfortable situations.

NOTES

7. Ostrogorski, II, 398–400. The list was drawn up by the Philadelphia merchant John Wanamaker, a prominent adversary of Quay’s.


15. See, for example, Carl Schurz to L. A. Sherman, 3 May, 1876, *Speeches, Correspondence, Political Papers* (F. Bancroft, ed., New York, 1913), III, 239.

16. The Conkling-Blaine incident took place in 1866 and has been recounted many times. A fairly full account is to be found in David M. Jordan, *Roscoe Conkling of New York* (Ithaca, N.Y., 1971), pp. 67–81. No such personal animosity existed between Blaine and the Camerons. *New-York Times*, 4 February, 1880; Muzzey, p. 165n. H. Wayne Morgan sees the Republican factionalism of the period as rooted in policy differences as much as personality. See *From Hayes to McKinley*, pp. 69–70.


19. Hoyt to Edward McPherson, 10 April, 1876, McPherson MSS; Henry W. Oliver to Blaine, 18 April, 1876, Blaine MSS, Library of Congress.


24. Jacob M. Campbell to Simon Cameron, 9 February, 1877, Cameron MSS, Library of Congress.


28. Newspapers like the *Philadelphia Times* received election-day reports from the chairmen of county committees all over the state. Many names recur year after year.

29. Frederick W. Dallinger, *Nominations for Elective Office in the United States* (New York, 1897), pp. 69–70. For further discussion see Harrison, pp. 238–54.

30. Dallinger, pp. 121 and 132.
31. Philadelphia Times, 15 March, 1876; Evans, Pennsylvania Politics, p. 252. Accounts of county conventions and committee meetings can be found in the Philadelphia Times, February to March, 1876.
32. Ibid., 16 May, 1876.
34. Philadelphia Times, 10 April, 1876.
36. Bingham to Simon Cameron, 31 May, 1876, Cameron MSS, Library of Congress. Many other leading Blaine men enjoyed close political relations with the Cameron organisation, including most notably John Cessna, William H. Kemble, William H. Koontz and Henry W. Oliver.
38. Blaine received four Pennsylvania votes on the second ballot, three on the third and fourth, five on the fifth, fourteen on the sixth, and thirty on the seventh and final ballot.
41. Hay to Blaine, 17 June, 1876, Blaine MSS, Library of Congress.
42. Joseph Hemphill to Samuel J. Randall, 18 June, 1876; John J. C. Harvey to Randall, 19 June, 1876, Randall MSS, University of Pennsylvania.
43. See the press comment quoted in the Philadelphia Times, 19 June, 1876.
45. Frank B. Evans, “Wharton Barker and the Republican National Convention of 1880,” Pennsylvania History, xxvii (1960), p. 28. But Cameron the previous year had spoken most unflatteringly of Grant’s abilities: “Men say he is unfit to be a political leader great as he was as a military one.” Cameron to Wayne MacVeagh, 15 March, 1876, MacVeagh MSS, Historical Society of Pennsylvania.
47. Grant’s reception can be traced in New-York Times, September–December, 1879. See also Oberholtzer, IV, 64–5.
49. Quoted in James D. Norris and A. H. Shaffer, eds., Patronage and Politics in the Gilded Age: The Correspondence of James A. Garfield and Charles E. Henry (Madison,
On the popularity of Grant see *Nation*, xxviii, pp. 314–5 (8 May, 1879); Morgan, *From Hayes to McKinley*, pp. 61–2.


53. Ibid., 12 and 16 January, 1880.


58. Ibid., 2 and 4 February, 1880; *New-York Times*, 4 February, 1880. The number of Cameron men present was reported to be 150.


60. Gibson to Chandler, 3 February, 1880, Chandler MSS, Library of Congress.


62. Ibid., 5 February, 1880; *Philadelphia Times*, 5 February, 1880.

63. Ibid., 10 March, 1880. Five Blaine men were also ejected as a result of contests. On the behaviour of the Schuylkill County delegates see Luther P. Sherman to Edward McPherson, 9 February, 1880, McPherson MSS, Library of Congress.

64. Quoted in *Philadelphia Times*, 9 February, 1880.


68. The survey included 2600 Republican committee members in Pennsylvania, of whom 1051 replied, with 812 expressing a preference for Blaine, 188 for Grant and 14 for John Sherman. *Nation*, xxx, p. 127 (19 February, 1880).


70. *Philadelphia Times*, 11, 14, 17 and 26 March, 3 and 12 April, 23 and 24 May, 1880.


75. Philadelphia Times, 4 February, 1880.

76. Several items in the J. Lapsley Wilson Scrapbook in the Historical Society of Pennsylvania relate to the activities of the National Republican League during January and February 1880. See also Philadelphia Times, 1 and 3 February, 1880.


83. Marcus, p. viii.


85. Kehl, pp. 53-4 and passim. Kehl's conclusions regarding the nature of machine politics in the Gilded Age very closely match those of this author, as will be evident to the reader.
