CHAPTER 1

CONTEMPORARY PERCEPTIONS,
HISTORICAL PROBLEMS

FROM the Declaration of Independence and the Federalist Papers through the Voting Rights Acts of 1965 and 1970, the distribution of power has been a dominant theme in American history. Equality of power, universal participation in public affairs, a government responsive to all citizens—these are fundamental American ideals. In the nineteenth century, Europeans saw political equality as more characteristic of the United States than equality of opportunity, status, or wealth. In the years since Emancipation, political equality, at least in the minimal sense of "one man one vote," has often been seen as an essential first step in any campaign for racial equality, economic justice, or the fair treatment of women. Americans have generally accepted the distinctions, most fully developed by Max Weber, among power, wealth, and status. But in their awareness of the close connection between power and the most stubborn social problems in the United States, Americans have never been so ready as some European observers to conclude that the distribution of power matched the national ideal, objections to the excessive power of the rich, the well born, or the politically favored few have formed a continuing thread in public debate on the character of American life.

This debate has focused especially sharply on American cities. Contemporary observers from the 1870s through the First World War and again from the 1950s on, as well as political scientists and sociologists from the 1950s to the present, have argued vigorously about the distribution of power in the cities. Historians, with some notable recent exceptions, have held aloof from this debate, choosing until recently to approach the matter incidentally in the course of broader investigations, as a result
they have treated power indirectly, implicitly, and incompletely. Much of the best recent work on nineteenth-century communities has neglected power to emphasize other dimensions of social life and has sought to shift attention from the elite to the "inarticulate."

The historical neglect of power has been unfortunate. Power is as important to community life as wealth and status; many of the central issues in the history of any community concern the relationship of wealth and status to power. The powerless may face difficulties fully as unpleasant as those of the poor or the outcast. Yet as many recent works have insisted, the three conditions need not always afflict the same people: Unskilled workers, agricultural laborers, new immigrants, and even slaves, it is said, have exerted sufficient power to shape the worlds they inhabited and to justify a sense of collective pride. For the most part, they exerted power in their local communities.¹

When historians of American communities have touched on the question of power, they have usually adopted one of several competing interpretations of the history of power distribution since the eighteenth century. One group of interpretations stresses the continuing domination of elites; these interpretations differ in their accounts of the nature and unity of the elites in various kinds of communities at different times. The other interpretations all argue that power has been widely if not equally distributed, differing as they find the concentration of power in American communities unchanging, increasing, or decreasing over time.

Stated in their full detail, these interpretations are quite complex and involve, for many writers, fundamental political beliefs and commitments. It is difficult even to frame generally acceptable definitions for such terms as "power" and "community," or to devise generally acceptable methods for their study. Steven Lukes, the English student of society and politics, has insisted that power is "an essentially contested concept" for which any definition, and any research strategy, is "inextricably tied to a given set of (probably unacknowledged) value-assumptions."² Lukes puts the point very strongly, but there is no doubt that it is difficult to study power or that there is no unambiguous and generally accepted way to produce a series of coefficients for the distribution of power similar to those economists have produced for the distribution of wealth.

These difficulties should not discourage the historical study of community power, power is a difficult and controversial subject because it is important. Because it is controversial, however, and because we will need a number of studies in different places at different times before we can hope to construct a general history of community power in the United States or to test generalizations about the determinants of different distri-

butions of power, we must and methods. Since the politi-
buitions of power, we must be explicit about definitions, assumptions, and methods. Since the political and social scientists have already contrib-
uted valuable studies of power in particular communities from the 1920s on, it is appropriate to make use of the social science literature in devising a historical approach to the subject. Fortunately a few historians—most notably Estelle Feinstein, Carl V. Harris, and J. Rogers Hollingsworth and Ellen Jane Hollingsworth—have already begun this task. 3

With few exceptions, empirically oriented social scientists have accepted one or another variant of Max Weber's definition of power as "the chance of a man or of a number of men to realize their own will in a communal action even against the resistance of others who are participating in the action." 4 Under this definition, power is a relative term, and one person may be said to exert more power than another when he or she attains his or her objective, whether opposition develops or not, whether the result is achieved publicly or behind the scenes, and whether or not others regard the result as legitimate. Power may be exercised by individuals or collectivities, from families to voluntary associations to social classes. 5 The competing individuals and collectivities define their own preferences. They may compete in any institutional arena: the family, the business firm, the church, the city, the state, or the nation. Finally, power is to be distinguished from potential power. A patrician class which withdraws from civic life may possess wealth, ability, and high social standing, but it cannot be said to be powerful unless it successfully employs its resources in an effort to secure the policies or nominations it prefers. Because it clarifies issues of these kinds, Weber's definition is the most satisfactory one for empirical historical research.

This book examines the distribution of power in one community, the portion of the New York metropolitan region that lay within the State of New York during the last twenty years of the nineteenth century. Historical reality precludes the assignment of absolutely precise geographical, institutional, or temporal boundaries. The New York metropolitan region certainly extended into New Jersey, and for many purposes into Connecticut as well; its New York State portion extended well beyond the boundaries of New York City, Brooklyn, and Long Island City before 1898 and included substantial territory omitted from Greater New York after 1898. Decisions affecting the people of the New York metropolitan region were made by the Federal government in Washington, D. C., by foreign governments, by a wide variety of local governments, and by business firms located in and out of Greater New York—and abroad. In general, this study examines decisions taken by the governments and political
On the Historical Study of Power

organizations of New York City and New York State between 1886 and 1903. Because decisions made during the 1890s often had their origins in the 1880s and frequently had their greatest impact after 1900, this study places them in the context of the city's economic, social, and political history between 1880 and 1910. And it examines city and state governmental policies that were of deep concern to—and attracted the vigorous participation of—the region's business firms, churches, and charitable organizations as well as its voters in general.

New York is not America; it would make little sense to seek to generalize from New York to all American communities. But as the largest and economically most central urban community in the United States, Greater New York provides an essential locale for evaluating the conflicting interpretations of power. Although those interpretations diverge at many points, they all agree that an important turning point or crisis in the distribution of power occurred at the end of the nineteenth century, and that both the size and the degree of economic development in a community had important effects on the distribution of power within it. Since Greater New York provides the extreme case of rapid and large-scale urbanization, evidence about the distribution of power within it is essential if we are to determine the impact of urbanization on power.

Greater New York's sheer size also argues for its inclusion in any comprehensive assessment of the history of community power. During the critical period between 1890 and 1910 New York City contained one of every nine persons who lived in a place of more than 2,500 people in the entire United States, the area within forty miles of New York's City Hall contained more than one of every six. Chicago, whose rapid growth in these years is legendary, was only half as large as New York in 1910.

New York's central role in American life during these years provides a further argument for the importance of knowledge about the distribution of power within it. Its conspicuous role as the largest city in the most important swing state in every presidential election between 1876 and 1900 focused local attention on politics and power in the metropolis, placing even its local affairs in the center of the national stage. New York dominated the nation's system of cities, serving as the center of national and international networks in communication, finance, trade, business management, and the professions. As a result its distribution of power, like its other social conditions, ideas, and practices, attracted national attention and exerted the influence of warning, precept, and example over the residents of urban communities in all parts of the country.

Contemporary Perception

Genteel Decline, Patrician Government by Syr

The distribution of power we concern to New Yorkers as the nineteenth century. The Hall, increasingly dominant in New York was inevitably at the government. Opinion leaders in pal government as the one great. Nor was the debate over was attracted to New York as publicize his ideas about the New York City that Samuel G can Federation of Labor in l sought to launch an American

Contemporary New Yorker: distribution of power in the m opinion survey to determine tributed among the city's ec evidence suggests that opinion v lines. Few late nineteenth-century numerous wealthy individuali cations were powerful. But u universal manhood suffrage i nomic elite. Political leaders i best to respond to all constitu and well educated, however power to a diverse aggregation and the most able, and assert power by failing to exert the virtue of local government, b leave political offices to prol eeds through lobbying. The New Yorkers may well have dom more than it reflected t that beliefs affect actions, pe power.

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Genteel Decline, Patrician Elitism, Economic Elitism, Government by Syndicate, and Other Perceptions

The distribution of power was a matter of absorbing, even passionate, concern to New Yorkers as to other Americans during the last third of the nineteenth century. The city of the Tweed Ring and of Tammany Hall, increasingly dominant in investment banking, publishing, and law, New York was inevitably at the center of the national debate on municipal government. Opinion leaders in these fields repeatedly turned to municipal government as the one great unsettled—and unsettling—national question. Nor was the debate confined to the economic elite. Henry George was attracted to New York as the place where he could most effectively publicize his ideas about the urban problem. And it was from a base in New York City that Samuel Gompers finally gained control of the American Federation of Labor in 1896 and that Morris Hillquit and others sought to launch an American socialist party.

Contemporary New Yorkers held a wide variety of opinions about the distribution of power in the metropolis. We cannot conduct a retrospective opinion survey to determine exactly how the various views were distributed among the city’s economic and social groups, but our best evidence suggests that opinion varied, then as now, largely along economic lines. Few late nineteenth-century New Yorkers doubted that their city’s numerous wealthy individuals and increasingly numerous wealthy corporations were powerful. But many among the wealthy complained that universal manhood suffrage imposed real limits on the power of the economic elite. Political leaders indirectly agreed, arguing that they did their best to respond to all constituents. Most of those who were both wealthy and well educated, however, attributed at least potentially dominant power to a diverse aggregation of the rich, the well born, the best educated, and the most able, and asserted that such “best men” limited their own power by failing to exert themselves. Less concerned about the abstract virtue of local government, business leaders were increasingly willing to leave political offices to professional politicians and to seek their own ends through lobbying. The distribution of power perceived by various New Yorkers may well have reflected expectations and conventional wisdom more than it reflected reality. But to the very considerable extent that beliefs affect actions, perceptions did shape the real distribution of power.

Some prominent members of New York’s economic elites disliked the limits which they believed poor voters imposed on their power. By the
On the Historical Study of Power

1860s wealthy merchants no longer dominated the city council. At first, the professional politicians who replaced them attracted widespread criticism. George Templeton Strong, the famous diarist, protested as early as 1868 that "the New Yorker belongs to a community worse governed by lower and baser blackguard scum than any city in Western Christendom, or in the world." Three years later Strong intemperately denounced the city's "blackguard Celtic tyrants" as members of a "race not remarkable for its love of other people's liberties." Charles Loring Brace insisted that life and property, not mere liberty, were under threat. In The Dangerous Classes of New York, he asserted in 1872 that "the 'roughs' who sustain the ward politicians, and frighten honest voters [were] ready for any offense or crime, however degraded or bloody." Invoking the still fresh image of the Paris Commune, Brace wrote ominously.

All these great masses of destitute, miserable and criminal persons believe that for ages the rich have had all the good things of life, while to them have been left the evil things. Capital to them is the tyrant. Let but Law lift its hand from them for a season, or let the civilizing influences of American life fail to reach them, and, if the opportunity offered, we should see an explosion from this class which might leave this city in ashes and blood.

During the great depression of the nineties still another alarmist quoted housing reformer Jacob Riis to the grim effect that New York City's tenements "hold within their clutch the wealth and business of New York, hold them at their mercy in the day of mob-rule and wrath."

A large portion of the wealthy New Yorkers active in municipal affairs from the 1870s through the 1890s objected to universal manhood suffrage not because it fostered a dangerous democracy, but because, in their view, it permitted unsavory bosses, often in league with upstart plutocrats, to push aside gentlemen of the old school and take control of the city's public offices. As E. L. Godkin, the most widely read exponent of this theory of Genteel Decline, put it during the reform campaign of 1894, New York City was "governed today by three or four men of foreign birth, who are very illiterate, are sprung from the dregs of foreign population, have never pursued any regular calling . . . and who now set the criticism of the intelligent and educated classes at defiance." One of Godkin's subthemes, announced in 1890 and employed more and more widely in reform campaigns over the next twenty years, was the charge that the city's politicians, especially those in Tammany Hall, prospered through a corrupt alliance with the most immoral of criminals: receivers of stolen goods, illicit sellers of liquor and narcotics, pimps and prostitutes, professional gamblers.

Contemporary Perception

Godkin would also have argued that during the last two decade boss, "Mr. Platt [.] ruled the not the legislature, it was not. Critics increasingly accused Plxisurance, and other corporatigroups and tumble themselves, successful politicians were by restock. Thomas C. Platt, though born, Yale-educated Protestant politician.

In fact, Godkin's version of a pessimistic elaboration of a vision in the 1870s and 1880s. Sin attorney, developed the most to the Tweed Ring scandal. It time a decentralized portion of a cooperative organization of private property," Sterne argue failure to recognize this dilemma. Although the citizens at police and the public health, the management of public who suffrage indiscriminately to the as well as to governmental fund has been created in American and unthrifty inhabitants relating to property, in which but no direct pecuniary interdignity of the tax eaters."

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Godkin would also have agreed with Elihu Root, who asserted in 1915 that during the last two decades of the nineteenth century the Republican boss, "Mr. Platt[,] ruled the state. . . . It was not the governor, it was not the legislature, it was not any elected officers, it was Mr. Platt." Critics increasingly accused Platt of corrupt dealings with great railroad, insurance, and other corporations. As active participants in the political rough-and-tumble themselves, both Godkin and Root understood that successful politicians were by no means always of impoverished immigrant stock. Thomas C. Platt, though of modest family background, was a native-born, Yale-educated Protestant. But Platt was also a consummate machine politician.

In fact, Godkin's version of the theory of Genteel Decline was largely a pessimistic elaboration of a view widely expounded by American lawyers in the 1870s and 1880s. Simon Sterne, a remarkable New York City attorney, developed the most vigorous statement of this view in response to the Tweed Ring scandal. Insisting that "a city is at one and the same time a decentralized portion of the general government of the state and a cooperative organization of property owners for the administration of private property," Sterne argued in a widely cited article that the American failure to recognize this distinction lay at the basis of the municipal problem. Although the citizens at large did have a legitimate interest in the police and the public health, as he put it, they had no such interest in the management of public works. "In applying the doctrine of universal suffrage indiscriminately to the management of mere property interests as well as to governmental functions," he concluded, "a state of affairs has been created in American cities by which the great mass of nontaxpayers and unthrifty inhabitants obtain the control of all these expenditures relating to property, in which they have, it is true, a remote interest, but no direct pecuniary interest, and which puts the taxpayers at the mercy of the tax eaters." Hermann E. von Holst, the distinguished German writer on American law and government, made the same point in 1887 when he wrote that as municipal officers came to be "elected directly by the people, the vote of the lowest scamp counted just as much as that of the greatest merchant prince." The result, as Sterne observed, was to give "the handling of vast sums of money (in the city of New York upwards of $30,000,000 a year) to the political organizations. . . ." Sterne, like his fellow members of the influential 1876 Tilden Commission on municipal government in New York, urged that the best solution was to give taxpayers an effective veto over municipal expenditures. In the absence of a taxpayer veto, the courts, influenced by legal commentators who
shared Sterne's outlook, themselves frequently imposed limits on municipal activities and expenditures, not only in New York but in other states as well during the thirty or forty years after 1870.20

The view that venal bosses controlled urban politics was not limited to those who identified with a declining elite of gentlemen or with property owners who felt especially hard-pressed. Henry George, the popular advocate of radical tax reform, said much the same thing in his classic, Progress and Poverty. As he quoted himself during his 1886 campaign for the New York mayoralty:

In all the great American cities there is today as clearly defined a ruling class as in the most aristocratic countries of the world . . . . Who are these men? The wise, the good, the learned—men who have earned the confidence of their fellow-citizens by the purity of their lives, the splendor of their talents, their probity in public trusts, their deep study of the problems of government? No, they are gamblers, saloon-keepers, pugilists, or worse, who have made a trade of controlling votes, and of buying and selling offices and official acts. . . . It is through these men that rich corporations and powerful pecuniary interests can pack the Senate and the Bench with their creatures.21

Others deprecated the power of the bosses even further, asserting that rich individuals or rich corporations—increasingly toward the end of the century—ruled the city and ruled it quite directly. Conrad Carl, a New York City tailor, informed a committee of the United States Senate in 1883 that "the millionaire corrupts the courts and legislation. . . . The dangerous classes are not to be found in tenement houses . . . but in mansions and villas."22 Henry George, whose 1886 Labor party campaign attracted by far the largest vote of any mayoral campaign organized from the left in those years, declared that his was a movement of "the masses against the classes." To judge from contemporary interviews with his followers and accounts of his campaign, his views on the distribution of power were widely shared by his supporters.23 He certainly aroused the enthusiasm of a notable coalition whose leaders included advocates of his single tax idea, of the Irish Land League, of socialism, and of "pure and simple" trade unionism. George himself asserted that American workers were rapidly giving up their traditional belief that republican political institutions gave them sufficient power to protect their interests. By 1879, he insisted, workers had come to understand that the unequal distribution of private property in land produced "all the injustices which distort and endanger modern development . . . , rear the tenement house with the palace . . . and compel us to build prisons as we open new schools."24

Contemporary Percepti

During the late 1870s an Gompers largely shared the phrase recalled that he had "the greater part of the int the capitalist for t he man upon the capitalist for to the man among the capi the way businessmen really run the now, this view was no h his defeat in the 1886 mayor out of elective office—wrote he "would like above all cities, impossible, especially with s

The belief of both rich and powerful corporations over the bidder, derived to a large extent has been widely held in the Un cording to this view, organi served not to represent leg leaders and candidates for where there should be unity to shape perceptions of loc Strikingly, most well-do- it can tell, not only accepted it provided an adequate acc Templeton Strong and Cha E. L. Godkin and Henry rights of property offered that New Yorkers who paid close years of the century believe nated their city, or could fullest and most influential
During the late 1870s and well into the 1880s labor leader Samuel Gompers largely shared George’s views. In later years Gompers usually refrained from sweeping generalizations about power and society because he preferred to deal with one concrete issue at a time. But in his autobiography he recalled that he had helped draft an 1875 statement attributing “the greater part of the intellectual, moral, and economic degradation that afflicts society” to “the present degraded dependence of the working man upon the capitalist for the means of livelihood. . . .” Gompers supported George’s 1886 Labor party campaign out of outrage at political and judicial support for capital, and devoted his entire career to the creation of an effective economic and political bargaining unit for workers.25 It seems likely that in late nineteenth-century New York, just as in the midwestern towns recently studied by sociologists William H. Form and Joan Rytina, the workingmen who had the fewest years of formal education and received the lowest wages were the most likely to believe that “big businessmen really run the government in this country.”26 Yet then as now, this view was by no means confined to the poor. Three years after his defeat in the 1886 mayoral election, Theodore Roosevelt—at the time out of elective office—wrote to his close friend Henry Cabot Lodge that he “would like above all else to go into politics . . ., but that seems impossible, especially with such a number of very wealthy competitors.”27

The belief of both rich and poor that the political machines had illegitimately usurped power over the city or had sold the city out to the highest bidder, derived to a large extent from the antiparty sentiment that had been widely held in the United States since the eighteenth century. According to this view, organized, permanently established political parties served not to represent legitimate interests and to develop responsible leaders and candidates for office, but to introduce faction and discord where there should be unity and harmony. The antiparty view continued to shape perceptions of local politics through the nineteenth century.28 Strikingly, most well-to-do and well-educated New Yorkers, so far as we can tell, not only accepted this view as an ideal, but also believed that it provided an adequate account of reality. Despite the alarm of George Templeton Strong and Charles Loring Brace, the well-turned arguments of E. L. Godkin and Henry George, and the reasoned concern for the rights of property offered by Simon Sterne and H. E. von Holst, most New Yorkers who paid close attention to public affairs in the last twenty years of the century believed that a small, wealthy, patrician elite dominated their city, or could dominate if it chose.29 This view found its fullest and most influential statement in James Bryce’s classic The Ameri-
On the Historical Study of Power

can Commonwealth, first published in 1888. Bryce interpreted modern conditions in terms far more favorable to the rights of property than did von Holst. In Bryce’s view, the experience of Western Europe since the Roman Republic had shown that

when in a large country . . . the sphere of government widens, when administration is more complex and more closely interlaced with the interests of the community at large . . . [then] the business of a nation falls into the hands of men eminent by rank, wealth, and ability, who form a sort of governing class, largely hereditary.30

Although he quickly learned that the “best men,” as he called the members of the “governing class,” usually did not hold office in American cities, Bryce found a way to reconcile American facts with his European expectations. Following the views of leading lawyers, university administrators, journalists, and wealthy reformers in New York and a dozen other cities, Bryce developed a Patrician Elitist account of power that can be summarized in five points:

1. American cities of the late nineteenth century contained two powerful elites: the new capitalists, and the established social, economic, and educated elite Bryce called the “best men.”
2. These elites were the true rulers, political party leaders and officeholders were subordinate to them.
3. Both the capitalists and the best men exerted influence on every issue they deemed important; the capitalists, however, were concerned only with a narrow range of issues that directly affected their own economic interests, while the best men often opted out of political life because they understood neither their duty nor their highest self interest.
4. The capitalists sought to rule in their own economic interest, but the best men pursued the general interest of the community as a whole.
5. Serious conflict occurred between the best men and the capitalists; the bosses had no independent base of power, the poor, the immigrants and the blacks were ciphers. If the best men would only exert themselves, they would gain the support of “well-conducted men of small means” and of the politically active poor, and would take power in America’s cities.31

Bryce’s account was not merely his own invention. He conducted an astonishingly voluminous and comprehensive correspondence with well-educated and well-informed professional men in New York (as well as other cities) during the 1880s and 1890s, and his description of power largely reflected their views. With the single exception of Godkin and one or two of his older associates on The Nation, Bryce’s New York informants agreed that the “best men” could gain and hold power if they would do the necessary work. Even Godkin was cautiously optimistic

Contemporary Percepti

on this point during the 188 Loring Brace agreed.32 And Gilder, two of the most influential into the 1890s. Most of Bryce’s best informed, moreover, even more secure a “men” could rule New York had rejected “the ‘tyranny that The American Comm show,” he wrote Bryce in 1891 is also generally good. Thus the front others, we have good it are all gentlemen—club men Hamilton, a Van Rensselaer the least difficulty, no machine. . . .33 A few yea A fall political scientist, concluded has a moral sense which is outraged is strong enough today, and governed sp Commerce.”36 Edward P. C. had added, in 1896, that on the ‘ignorant foreign v properly belong to it.”37 Eva Columbia University Presi an ‘‘inspiring faith in poli as an independent, Low w spirit and civic pride in the thing that has been known it is not too much to hoq aside the strong appeal of good government in the election as mayor of New York. The Patrician Elitist appeal among well-edu at the end of the century, Elitists shared with those cline the notion that Ne established elites whose
on this point during the 1880s; despite his worries about the mob, Charles Loring Brace agreed. And George William Curtis and Richard Watson Gilder, two of the most influential of the genteel editors, remained cheerfully confident into the 1890s.

Most of Bryce’s best informants, especially the younger ones, were, moreover, even more secure than he himself in the belief that the “best men” could rule New York. Theodore Roosevelt was pleased that Bryce had rejected “the ‘tyranny of the majority’ theory,” but disappointed that The American Commonwealth did not go further. “You do not show,” he wrote Bryce in 1888, “that in good city districts the ‘machine’ is also generally good. Thus in our three N.Y. districts, the ‘brownstone front’ ones, we have good machines . . . the assemblymen and aldermen are all gentlemen—club men, of ‘Knickerbocker’ ancestry, including a Hamilton, a Van Rensselaer, etc., etc. In none of these districts is there the least difficulty, now, in a decent man’s getting into the machine. . . .” A few years later Frank J. Goodnow, already a prominent political scientist, concluded “that even in New York the community has a moral sense which is capable of being outraged and which when outraged is strong enough to drive our corrupt politicians out of office.”

By 1897 Albert Shaw, the brilliant young editor of the widely read American Review of Reviews, could claim that “we are governed in this city today, and governed splendidly, by the New York Chamber of Commerce.” Edward P. Clark, one of Godkin’s assistants at The Nation, had added, in 1896, that “our ‘intelligent classes’ have been saddling on the ‘ignorant foreign vote’ a responsibility for our ills that did not properly belong to it.” Even after his defeat in the 1897 mayoral election, Columbia University President Seth Low retained what Bryce had called an “inspiring faith in political progress.” Describing his strong showing as an independent, Low wrote, “We have awakened an amount of civic spirit and civic pride in the people of this metropolis which exceeds anything that has been known here. If 10 righteous men could save Sodom, it is not too much to hope that 150,000 men who were ready to turn aside the strong appeal of party for the city’s sake will yet bring about good government in the City of New York.” Four years later, Low’s election as mayor of New York seemed to vindicate his optimism.

The Patrician Elitist account of power was accepted more widely than any other among well-educated and well-to-do men in New York affairs at the end of the century, but it did not go unchallenged. The Patrician Elitists shared with those who accepted the inevitability of Genteel Decline the notion that New York, like other American cities, possessed established elites whose virtue was as unquestioned as their “wealth,
rank, and ability.’’ But not everyone was willing to accept such a notion. Moisei Ostrogorski, who visited New York City when Bryce’s *American Commonwealth* was at the height of its fame, devoted much of his shrewd study, *Democracy and the Organization of Political Parties*, to an implicit critique of Patrician Elitist theory and the pretensions of the “best men.” On the basis of conversations with a number of leading men as well as wide reading and direct observation, Ostrogorski adopted the skeptical view that American politics, city politics above all, was simply “a business in the ordinary sense of the word,” and that it was difficult if not impossible to identify a general interest.\(^{39}\)

Ostrogorski did agree that the “best men” should govern, but he asserted that such men were rare in the United States. “The eminently materialistic spirit that animates the prosperous and wealthy classes,” he wrote, disqualified lawyers, newspaper editors, and other professional men from conducting themselves as disinterested patricians concerned for the welfare of their city as a whole.\(^{40}\) In his view, municipal reform candidates were not successful in bridging the gulf between the people and the rich.” Indeed, “reform clubs were only ‘bourgeois associations’” that often “aimed deliberately” to exclude the poor from membership. The reformers “tried to bind together the ‘classes,’ not exactly against the ‘masses’ as such, but against the masses who, [by supporting] plundering politicians... allowed serious injury to be inflicted on the propertied classes.”\(^{41}\)

Though Ostrogorski criticized Patrician Elitism, he did not object to its elitist elements. He assumed that the propertied, especially the very wealthy, held power, but he did not deny a place to those who possessed “rank and ability” in addition to wealth. What he did deny was the claim that the wealthy could be divided into the “best men” and the “capitalists,” and the further claim that since such “best men” would govern in the common interest, they would win the support of the poor in a fair election. Whereas Bryce insisted on the independent power conferred by social standing, virtue, and ability, Ostrogorski asserted that in the United States power was exclusively a function of wealth. His own account, which was almost a pure statement of Economic Elitism, can be stated in four points:

1. A capitalist elite ruled America’s cities at the end of the nineteenth century. The established social and professional elite was employed by, allied with, led by, and effectively part of the capitalist elite.
2. Political party leaders and officeholders were subordinate to this elite but could not easily be displaced.
3. The capitalist elite exerted influence on every issue important to its economic interest, which did not often reflect the public interest.

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**Contemporary Perception**

4. The bosses mediated between voters were not ignorant of between the propertied class to prevent this conflict from propertyless, the propertied nomic interests.\(^{42}\)

Bryce and his New York cc account of American parties was that “he combines a profound personal knowledge of living pol gorski knew “the Platt mach Republic.\(^{43}\) Democracy and the disturbing challenge to the con Commonweal th.

We know much less about C Bryce’s. Since his papers have which contain the usual referr of elite political and profession indicating that he spoke dire including several whom Bryce approach to politics provoked a reviewers, but by the 1890s h anticipated by hardheaded busi These men saw the emergence of professional politicians to ta wealthy merchants as aspects that was coming to characterize wished to be effective, they ar order in which some men speci in business management or the In an extraordinarily sophis for example, Daniel Greenleaf l ing American exponent of Her that the Democratic machine p ent by syndicate” that it ne “is a business combination for b both to the voters who demand businessmen who sought “comm and social advancement thm Thompson concluded, that “an
Contemporary Perceptions, Historical Problems

4. The bosses mediated between the capitalists and the masses of voters; the voters were not ignorant of their own self interest. Potential conflict was between the propertied classes and the propertyless. When bosses failed to prevent this conflict from breaking out or allied themselves with the propertyless, the propertied classes successfully rallied to protect their economic interests.42

Bryce and his New York correspondents objected that Ostrogorski's account of American parties was too grim and one-sided. But they admitted that "he combines a profound knowledge of political philosophy with a personal knowledge of living politicians." According to The Nation, Ostrogorski knew "the Platt machine" as thoroughly as he knew Plato's Republic.43 Democracy and the Organization of Political Parties offered a disturbing challenge to the comfortable Patrician Elitism of The American Commonwealth.

We know much less about Ostrogorski's informants than we do about Bryce's. Since his papers have been lost, we must rely on his footnotes, which contain the usual references to The Nation and comparable journals of elite political and professional opinion, and on scattered bits of evidence indicating that he spoke directly with many well-informed Americans, including several whom Bryce did not meet.44 Ostrogorski's clear-eyed approach to politics provoked a cool response from his genteel American reviewers, but by the 1890s his leading ideas had already been widely anticipated by hardheaded business leaders and lawyers in New York.

These men saw the emergence of the political machine and the tendency of professional politicians to take over public offices previously held by wealthy merchants as aspects of the increasingly fine division of labor that was coming to characterize American society as a whole. Those who wished to be effective, they argued, must accept and adapt to the new order in which some men specialized in politics just as others specialized in business management or the professions.

In an extraordinarily sophisticated 1893 defense of Tammany Hall, for example, Daniel Greenleaf Thompson, a successful lawyer and a leading American exponent of Herbert Spencer's social Darwinism, argued that the Democratic machine provided New York City with the "government by syndicate" that it needed. "The syndicate," he pointed out, "is a business combination for business ends," and as such was responsive both to the voters who demanded respect and representation and to the businessmen who sought "commercial prosperity."46 Ambitious for wealth and social advancement themselves, Tammany leaders were well aware, Thompson concluded, that "any movement materially disturbing the so-
cial order would result in the disintegration of the organization itself: Any serious attempt to disturb the existing status by revolutionary methods would be thwarted at once."46 Though an Amherst graduate and a respectable member of literary and legal society in New York, Thompson left no room in his scheme for the "best men" or for a belief that American politics might realize an elevated notion of the general interest, and his work was received by the genteel press with a stony silence.47

But Thompson was by no means an isolated eccentric.48 Ignored by the political and religious weeklies, his Government by Syndicate ideas were quickly picked up by the city's business and trade papers. In 1894 the Real Estate Record and Builder's Guide insisted that only a tough, possibly even high-handed oligarchy or "directorate," similar to the one that ran the Pennsylvania Railroad, could effectively manage New York City.49 Two years later the New York-based Banker's Magazine suggested that "even the system of bosses in politics...has its usefulness and reason for being." Mercenary though they were, bosses simply responded to the needs of the propertyless citizens for employment and a friend in court, and to the need of "financial corporations" for the protection of "a Rob Roy who could control the legislative marauders."50 Thompson had argued that in large cities, "there is more governing to be done, and it pays better," and "with a heterogeneous population and with everybody busy with his own affairs, there is greater apparent need of someone who will make a specialty of administration of public affairs."51 Citing the special personal qualities necessary for public leadership, the Banker's Magazine agreed. Neither businessmen, professional men, nor college professors, it argued, possessed the personal qualities of a successful politician. Success in politics required that one apply his forces "cunningly, quietly, in a manner to give least offense," that he seek to lead men by "appeals to their self-interest or by protracted argument," and that he "must always seem to follow rather than to lead."52

The professional politicians themselves, though they did occasionally admit to "working for my pocket all the time" or to taking advantage of "opportunities," also insisted on this interpretation of their role. Tammany district leader George Washington Plunkitt made the point with cynical indirection when he asserted that if a leader wished to hold his district, he had simply to "study human nature and act accordin'."53 Paul Leicester Ford, the best-selling contemporary novelist, gave a very different emphasis to the point in his widely read novel The Honorable Peter Stirling, when he asserted that a successful politician had only to be a good Christian: "Christ enumerated the great truth of democratic government when he said, 'He that would be the greatest among you,
shall be the servant of all." 54 Thomas Gilroy, a key Tammany organization man and one-term mayor of New York, is said to have exclaimed of the political parts in *Peter Stirling*. "Isn't it all damn so!" 55 Writing of New York City in particular, journalist Henry Jones Ford put this standard defense of the party system most directly: "So far as the appearance of representative character in party organization is concerned, it is generally greatest when its subjection to professional management is greatest." 56

Accepting the fact "that in our great cities, with their unorganized masses of voters, a political oligarchy has grown up," and that "government is at least as complicated as a business, and requires at least as much attention as the making of hats or of shoes," two of New York City's most prominent legal publicists had anticipated Thompson's Government by Syndicate views as early as the 1880s. 57 In 1884 J. Bleeker Miller devoted a long and learned treatise to the proposition that the city's labor, property owners', "trade, business, and professional organizations need, and before long will surely have representation in our city, state, and national legislatures," as well as guild-like "self-government and control over their own members." To judge from their current efforts to lobby the state legislature, he added, such organizations had "been every year taking a more direct interest in legislation." 58 Simon Sterne, who often served as a lobbyist for such leading business organizations as the Chamber of Commerce of the State of New York and the New York Board of Trade and Transportation, pushed Miller's proposal a step further in an 1885 address before the Constitution Club. The medieval guilds, he argued, had provided "a sort of Chamber of Commerce government." New York City might "get back to something of that kind" if its citizens would "stop organizing on the basis of arbitrary population and organize on the basis of interests, and let the elected few or the chosen few, who are at the top of those interests, ipso facto, go into government." 59

Sterne was not happy about the fact that "the division of labor has created a politician class," and he believed that the politicians were generally men who had been unsuccessful in business and who had unjustifiably displaced successful businessmen in public office. Like J. Bleeker Miller he also believed that prosperous business and professional men were able to achieve their objectives by other means. The Government by Syndicate theory led Thompson, Sterne, and Miller to views very much like those of Ostrogorski. Certainly their lack of concern for the morality of municipal policy, their view that the professional politician was merely a broker, and their confidence that the wealthy could indeed gain their ends without
holding office themselves all resembled Ostrogorski's views more than Bryce's. Perhaps because Thompson, Sterne, and Miller were so closely involved with New York's local affairs, they differed from Ostrogorski only in their insistence on the view that the city's wealthy men were deeply divided by conflicting economic interests.

The study of attitudes cannot tell us all we want to know about the actual distribution of power. Attitudes, after all, are only indirect evidence, often supplied by those who may be relying on hearsay or conjecture or who may be repeating statements they know to be false. The opinions quoted in the previous pages were all written for particular purposes, under particular circumstances. Differing assessments of the distribution of power may in fact have reflected the observers' unstated definitions of power, yet we cannot now be certain how any of the observers actually defined power.

Despite these difficulties, both the views of contemporaries and the theories elaborated by Godkin, George, Bryce, Ostrogorski, and Thompson raise some important questions about the distribution of power in late nineteenth-century New York. Very few contemporaries doubted that the city's wealthy men could dominate local affairs when they cared to do so. Yet much of the evidence seems to indicate that effective power was widely distributed. The poor apparently tended to believe that the rich had their own way, but the rich—or at least the relatively well-off—seem to have disagreed widely among themselves. Many of them, especially in the 1870s and early 1880s, found in their experience some reason to fear the power of the mob, the labor unions, and the politicians. In their public statements, at least, many politicians and journalists agreed that officeholders and party leaders did play important roles, that they took into account the interests of the poor as well as the rich, and that they did not neglect their own interests. Union organizers were similarly confident of their potential ability to exercise power. Yet to the considerable extent that they shared Bryce's Patrician Elitism, men of inherited wealth, culture, and professional attainments insisted that family, education, and ability—as well as money—served as sources of power. Other members of the city's economic elites endorsed Ostrogorski's bald-faced Economic Elitism. Conceivably all these observations reflected real experiences. The poor, although less powerful than the rich, did have the vote; the rich had diverse interests and several distinct bases of power.

Accurate or not, these beliefs had consequences. Sterne, von Holst, and other lawyers, law writers, and jurists successfully sought to enhance the power of property owners by insisting that property owners had in

Contemporary Perceptions

fact lost power to "tax eating" shod constituents. Henry C. H. into the hands of the grasping rally cry to mobilize voters' effective use of his belief group of skilled workers. But they remained content with a division. But the men of every Elitist account of power also. Confident in their fundamental they were encouraged to see confident enthusiasm than t as if they were powerful, they forward when no one else wealthy may also have discou believed that wealth conferred on them from acting. It was they lacked power to avoid escaped clear-cut defeat, and

In an age that witnessed | and successful Tammany can Reform, many voters and proclamations to social and cultural edged the Patricians' continuo last word about the disti is incomplete, somewhat inc does raise interesting question assumed that wealth and sta concerned about the power of the the attitudes of the immigrant elites all suggest, at the least, without exerting themselves.

Power

Historians of New York and have generally adopted one or of power. The first generation Schlesinger, Allan Nevins, an
fact lost power to "tax eating" politicians and their irresponsible, impoverished constituents.\textsuperscript{42} Henry George used his claim that power had passed into the hands of the grasping few as part of a remarkably successful rallying cry to mobilize voters for his mayoral and reform crusades. Com- pers effectively used his beliefs about power to forge an influential interest group of skilled workers. Businessmen who accepted Thompson's analysis remained content with a division of labor that left politics to the professionals. But the men of wealth and education who shared the Patrician Elitist account of power also possessed a valuable intellectual resource. Confident in their fundamental power as well as in their righteousness, they were encouraged to seek power more frequently and with a more confident enthusiasm than they would otherwise have done.\textsuperscript{43} Acting as if they were powerful, they sometimes shaped events simply by stepping forward when no one else took the initiative. The confidence of the wealthy may also have discouraged potential opponents; when opponents believed that wealth conferred power, that belief itself must have discouraged them from acting. It was only prudent for those who believed that they lacked power to avoid conflict, they thus avoided giving offense, escaped clear-cut defeat, and left the degree of their weakness untested.

In an age that witnessed both Henry George's formidable challenge and successful Tammany campaigns based on the slogan "To Hell With Reform," many voters and politicians clearly disregarded the patricians' claims to social and cultural superiority. Nevertheless, many acknowledged the Patricians' continuing power. The evidence of opinion is not the last word about the distribution of power in Greater New York: It is incomplete, somewhat inconsistent, and of uncertain import. But it does raise interesting questions. The wealthy and well-informed usually assumed that wealth and status conferred power. But their persistent concern about the power of the electorate, the roles of the political parties, the attitudes of the immigrants, and the virtue of the various economic elites all suggest, at the least, that the wealthy could not simply dominate without exercising themselves.

Power and the Historians

Historians of New York and other cities in the late nineteenth century have generally adopted one or another of the contemporary interpretations of power. The first generation of urban historians—including Arthur M. Schlesinger, Allan Nevins, and many of their students—mostly followed
James Bryce and his American friends in adopting the Patrician Elitist view. Richard Hofstadter, Frederic C. Iaher, Stow Persons, and others who have relied heavily on the evidence of intellectual history have been more impressed by Godkin's perception of an ineluctable Genteel Decline. Gabriel Almond, Gabriel Kolko, and James Weinstein have adopted various versions of Ostrogorski's Economic Elitism. All of these interpretations stress the effect of social and economic change on the power of the rich and well-born. They differ from one another largely on one question: Did economic change reinforce the power of established groups, or did it generate distinctive new elites to challenge those who inherited their wealth and position?

Other historians, often on the basis of cities smaller than New York, have argued by contrast that great wealth and high social standing were not the only sources of power, and that small businessmen, middle-class home buyers, immigrants, skilled workers, and adherents of certain religious persuasions exercised significant power on issues of great importance to themselves. Business historians from Robert K. Lamb to Charles Glaab and Julius Rubin have been at pains to show that entrepreneurial elites were limited by other business and community interest groups. Oscar Handlin, Herbert Gutman, and others who stress the solidarity of immigrant or laboring communities have often found such groups capable of exercising considerable power. Most students of local politics have assumed that power over local nominations and policies was quite widely dispersed. Some have further agreed with Robert K. Merton (and Daniel Greenleaf Thompson, Henry Jones Ford, and Lincoln Steffens) that the political machine served important functions for the poor and the immigrants as well as for businessmen and the consumers of vice. Others have followed Richard C. Wade's hypothesis that the machine was the product of class conflict between poor urban centers and their wealthy peripheries. And recent interpretations of the "ethno-religious" basis of nineteenth-century voting patterns have suggested that Lutherans, Catholics, and evangelical Protestants all successfully insisted that local political organizations listen to their demands.

Most of those who detect some diversity among the holders of power in late nineteenth-century cities do not speculate as to the impact of increasing urbanization and economic development on the distribution of power. One of the few who has written on this problem is Samuel P. Hays. According to Hays, the last half of the nineteenth century saw "the decentralization of urban life into an ever-increasing number of subunits, each with relatively autonomous institutions and each with a separate political voice in urban government." The result was a continu-

ous increase in the diversity of the city's political structure. In his view the "vertical integration of the city's political structure" with the "reform movement" has been dominated by economically centralized power in the order of business and community interest groups. Many other historians still believe that the city's urban communities as well as the local political organizations were characterized by a relatively equal distribution of power among competing elites and of an unpreeminently the local population.

According to these writers, in cities that were not dominated by large size, greater social and economic diversification was often characterized by smaller monopolies or oligopolies, and the political organizations that emerged from these relationships were often characterized by relatively equal distribution of power among competing elites and of an unpreeminently the local population.

The Analys
ous increase in the diversity of power wielders in most cities. But in his view the “vertical integration” of American society since about 1890 together with the “reform movements of the twentieth century” which have been dominated by economic and professional elites, have increasingly centralized power in the upper third of the “social and political order.”

Many other historians still believe that the municipal reforms of the Progressive Era, like many aspects of the New Deal and even the Great Society, have had the effect of distributing power more widely in the urban communities as well as at other levels of American society. In this view, industrialization, rural-urban migration, immigration, and the increasing scale of organization in American life, together with a series of reforms in the political process, left ordinary people not only with grievances but also with opportunities to organize and gain an increased share of power. Similarly a number of political and social scientists, notably Terry N. Clark, John Walton, and Michael Aiken, have suggested that the social transformations associated with urbanization and economic development in the twentieth century have encouraged a more “pluralistic” distribution of power in which, as Nelson Polsby and Wallace Sayre put it,

participation in decision-making is limited to a relatively few members of the community, but only within the constraints of a bargaining process among competing elites and of an underlying consensus supplied by a much larger percentage of the local population, whose approval may be difficult to secure.

According to these writers, in the years since World War II such a pluralistic distribution of power most frequently has been found in cities characterized by large size, greater social heterogeneity, more economic diversity, absentee ownership of local economic enterprises, a larger number of voluntary associations, and a higher level of citizen participation in local politics, as well as by nonreformed local political institutions.

The Analysis of Major Decisions

The several interpretations of power in New York and other late nineteenth-century American cities conflict at many points: Which of them best fits the facts? If we define power in Max Weber’s terms as “the chance of a man or of a number of men to realize their own will in a communal action even against the resistance of others who are participat-
On the Historical Study of Power

ing in the action," the best approach is that suggested by political scientist Robert Dahl: the "careful examination of a series of concrete decisions." The study of decision making requires the direct observation of the exercise of power, other methods measure power more indirectly. By comparing several decisions, we can determine whether the persons or groups that dominate one decision have any power over others, and we can draw conclusions about the "scope" of their power. The fact that a decision is made assures that alternatives, some possibly preferred by members of the community, were rejected. Analysis of decisions thus permits conclusions about the relative ability of participants to overcome opposition—conclusions about the "strength" and "extent" of their power. Finally, the analysis-of-decisions approach makes few assumptions about the central problem of community power research, namely the relationships between power and such resources as wealth, occupation, status, or knowledge.

Since no historian can study all decisions taken in a large community during even a limited period of time, it is necessary to be selective. The most efficient approach requires the choice of major decisions. While there will always be room for discussion as to which decisions are "major," several criteria seem appropriate. A major decision affects a relatively and absolutely large number of people, either by affecting the distribution of a large quantity of valued resources, by changing the way policies are established and administered, or by affecting the values, beliefs, and information that constitute the climate of opinion within which proposals are considered. A major decision is one viewed as unusually important by contemporary and later experts, by reputedly powerful groups in the community, or by large segments of the community's population. A major decision takes several years to resolve. It is not necessarily resolvable within the community's local government or even within the community itself. The most important decisions may be "non-decisions" which keep significant ideas off the public agenda.

Analysis of decisions of this sort, from three or four distinct areas of community life (for example, decisions that are primarily political, economic, and cultural), permits conclusions to be drawn as to the existence or absence of a single, unified, dominant power elite. No power elite could ignore or permit itself to be excluded from such important decisions. At the same time, because major decisions evoke the widest participation and produce the fullest historical sources, they provide the best opportunity to evaluate the power of rising elites and non-elite groups. Since this approach makes no assumptions about the powers of officials or the significance of government forms and boundaries, a series of studies carried

out on these lines would permit communities with differing lo

Recently some contrasting n widespread support. Several v Baratz, Matthew Crenson, are sharply on the decision-making of the distribution of power. through institutions and value while others are organized ou scenes techniques to manipulate the situation" so as to supps and even persuade people to Harris has recently observed th give some political actors specia insisted, even well-established visible form of power when the the anticipated reactions of the aspects of power must certainly them are incomplete and likel power constitute in effect a se useful in particular circumst be sought through the analysis

Other social scientists have decision-making process to its and expenditure. Fiscal data a New York and other nineteenth lingsworth and Ellen Jane Holli and put on a comparative basis. best-laid plans often go awry. its author's intent, to shift att outcomes is to abandon the s man may act so as to harm h complexity of social relations will benefit from a particular de from historic or institutionalize than powerful. Indeed, they m inherit conspicuous privilege on

In another approach, several h to use the holding of public or v of power. But while it is true t to one who seeks to exert power
pattern of social prestige were unusually complicated by the presence of many large ethnic groups.

Taken together with the various contemporary and historical views described above, these facts suggest a series of questions about the distribution of power in the metropolitan region. Was there a single economic elite, able to work out a common program and put it into effect? Or were there several competing elites in constant conflict with one another? Did one of these elites consist of "best men," or the "cultivated classes?" Was there a clear distinction between the *nouveau riche* and the established rich? If the economic elites were divided along lines of economic interest or cultural allegiance, how was power distributed among them? What role did experts play in the city's affairs? Did experts enjoy any independent power, or were they clearly subordinate to the economic elites? Did less wealthy businessmen, those concerned with strictly local markets, have an independent share of power? To what extent did the mayor and other officeholders dominate? How much power did party leaders enjoy, and whose interests did they serve? How was power distributed among such other groups as homeowners, middle-class neighborhood associations, organized labor, municipal employees, unorganized labor, the poor? How did ethnic and religious affiliation affect the distribution of power in the middle and lower economic ranks?

This book approaches these questions by examining the behavior of participants and non-participants in four sets of major decisions. Using census data and a variety of other statistical and literary information, chapters two and three identify and assess the resources of the metropolitan region's increasingly diverse economic and social groups. Emphasizing the relatively well-documented distribution of economic resources in Greater New York's population, these chapters also consider the distribution of cultural, organizational, and political resources. Subsequent chapters then consider whether these economic and social groups sought to exert power in local affairs and assess their relative success in realizing their preferences in major political, economic, and cultural decisions.

Between 1886 and 1903 the irregular, interrupted, yet extremely large increases in the New York metropolitan region's population and prosperity produced deeply felt doubts and severe conflicts. In response, several of the region's elites sought to persuade local and state agencies to adopt a series of new policies and governmental arrangements designed to bolster New York's economic position and to moderate hostility between classes and cultural groups. Economic elites in particular sought to use government agencies to improve the city's facilities for trade and transportation;
to bring order to the metropolitan markets for mortgages, municipal bonds, and real estate; to improve the living conditions and the training of workers; to discourage tendencies toward socialism, tax reform, and cultural diversity; and to increase the efficiency and effectiveness of local government for dealing with major social and economic problems. Some economic and political elites were concerned above all with the course of national policy on matters such as the tariff, the gold standard, and international expansion, and sought to use New York State's large share in the Electoral College to influence presidential elections. Other economic and political elites objected to each of the policies proposed. And political, religious, ethnic, small business, civil service, and labor leaders responded to the economic and social elites' initiatives with efforts to protect themselves and their constituents, and even to turn the elites' initiatives to their own advantage. In the resulting controversies, New York City assumed the physical dimensions and much of the institutional shape it has retained to the present.

Three of the most important controversies began in the late 1880s and led to sets of major decisions between 1894 and 1900. These decisions included the creation of Greater New York, the planning and financing of the first rapid transit subway line, and the centralization of the public school system in Manhattan and the Bronx. Economic elites (including groups of wealthy individuals, corporation owners and officers, leaders of business and professional associations, and the philanthropists behind organized charity), assisted in each case by experts, worked out the proposals that led to these decisions. But local and state government actions were also required in each case. The city's mayors were rarely innovators or leaders in the formulation of policy, but they did play important political and administrative roles. The nomination of candidates for the eight mayoral elections between 1886 and 1903 thus constitutes a fourth set of major decisions during these years.

Together, these decisions significantly affected the distribution of economic, political, and cultural resources, and rearranged the institutions through which future decisions would be made. Each decision took about ten years to complete, received a great deal of publicity, and became an issue in electoral politics. To develop the evidence needed for conclusions about the distribution of power, each chapter dealing with these decisions presents a narrative that establishes the decision's impact on the city's various economic and social groups, the preferences developed by each group at each stage in the decision-making process, the economic, social, and cultural resources each group brought to bear, and the chronological sequence of events. The narratives demonstrate that a few individuals played leading roles in the opinion box but their decision-making role was not the result of economic, social, or political pressures. Local political development satisfactory history of them had a major role in the book are devoted to major.

The evidence suggests that local region's power was strong of competing economic and so although their membership of economic elites were so numerous one another, that other groups also able to exert significant influence on party organizations were the rich but on occasion others — inclu the Catholic Church, organize labor and school teachers — who used their influence to defend their own interests.

We have no comparable study of 1870s, but our best evidence's concentrated in the hands of years. Wallace Sayre and Her in New York during the 1950s more widely dispersed. Compe of the nineteenth century may distribution of power among wealthy pressure groups in the
played leading roles in the making of each decision. But biographical sketches also demonstrate that each of these individuals gained his or her decision-making role through membership in one or more of the competing economic, social, or political groups. Because of the complexity of local political developments during these years and the fact that no satisfactory history of them has yet laid a ground-work, three chapters of the book are devoted to mayoral nominations.

The evidence suggests that in the late nineteenth century the metropolitan region’s power was strongly concentrated in the hands of a number of competing economic and social elites. These elites are distinguishable, although their membership fluctuated and sometimes overlapped. The economic elites were so numerous, and so frequently in conflict with one another, that other groups, less wealthy but well organized, were also able to exert significant influence on their own behalf. The political party organizations were the most notable of these less wealthy groups, but on occasion others—including neighborhood economic associations, the Catholic Church, organized Jews and Protestants, and even organized labor and school teachers—were able to gain their own ends or at least to defend their own interests.

We have no comparable study of New York in the 1830s, 1850s, or 1870s, but our best evidence suggests that power was still more strongly concentrated in the hands of the very wealthy during the antebellum years. Wallace Sayre and Herbert Kaufman’s study of decision making in New York during the 1950s argues that by then power was much more widely dispersed. Competition among the very wealthy at the end of the nineteenth century may very well have opened the way to a wider distribution of power among well organized though individually less wealthy pressure groups in the twentieth century.