History of Chicago’s Corruption
Quotations about Chicago

“Loving Chicago is like loving a woman with a broken nose.”
- - - Nelson Algren

“No realistic, sane person goes around Chicago without protection.”
- - - Saul Bellow

“In most places in the country, voting is looked upon as a right and a duty, but in Chicago it's a sport. In Chicago not only your vote counts, but all kinds of other votes--kids, dead folks, and so on.”
- - - Dick Gregory, Dick Gregory's Political Primer, 1972

“Chicago is unique. It is the only completely corrupt city in America.”
- - - Charles Merriam, unsuccessful mayoral candidate in 1911
What Made Chicago Vulnerable to Corruption

• The Political Machine invites corruption
  – Patronage System
  – Naiveté of the immigrants

• Chicago has never had a powerful reform-minded mayor
The Early Vice Districts

- From the start, Chicago vice districts emerged in Chicago.
- The Sands—just north of the Chicago River along the Lake (1850s)
  - Mayor Long John Wentworth ordered the burning down of the district in May 1857.
Streeterville

- The Sands later became known as “Streeterville” after George Wellington Streeter
  - He was a circus performer who ran his boat aground on the beach
  - Paid construction companies to dump their excess dirt and junk where he was marooned
  - Claimed that the newly formed 168 acres were his!
  - He held onto the property until after WWI
The Importance of Taverns/Saloons in the Political Corruption

• Social hangouts
• Chicago initially had no limit on the number of liquor licenses that were distributed
• When the city started charging for licenses, many saloons just didn’t pay (“blind pigs”)
• Free public bathrooms
• Precinct centers— where people were recruited to vote and participate in the political machine
The Police

- In the late 1800s, there were 1 policeman per 20,000 residents
- The police became tied to the city government – when City Hall changed after elections, so did the police
- Bribery was accepted especially since the police were underpaid
- Al Capone claimed that he had 60% of Chicago police working for him
- Prostitutes often just “registered” with the police
The Expansion of the Vice Districts

• Black vice district was known as the “Black Hole”
  – Noah’s Ark
  – The Library
  – 25 cents or 35 cents
• Badlands (Van Buren and 12th)
• Hell’s Half Acre ((Polk, State, Taylor, and Plymouth Streets))
• The 1871 Fire led to Mayor Joseph Medill trying to close down the vice districts— it didn’t work
Michael Cassius McDonald—Organized Chicago’s First Crime Syndicate

- Owned a gambling house
- Became a leader of the Cook County Democratic Party Organization
- His saloon “The Store” became the unofficial City Hall
- Coined the phrase: “There’s a sucker born every minute”
- Basically arranged the election of Carter Harrison as mayor
- McDonald’s crime organization lasted 30 years
“Hinky Dink” Kenna and “Bathhouse” John Coughlin

- Took over the crime syndicate after McDonald died in 1907
- Big Jim O’Leary (son of Mrs. O’Leary) was also involved
- Established the “Levee” Vice District on the near South side
- 200 brothels and bordellos were in this district
- The Everleigh Club was the most famous brothel in the world until it closed in 1911
Vote Early; Vote Often

- Hinky Dink usually paid 50 cents per vote
- Tramps and bums were recruited to vote
- They were taken from polling place to polling place to vote
- Fictitious names and dead people were used to vote
- “Vote Early, Vote Often” became the election day slogan
Attempts at Reform

• Many people expressed outrage against prostitution—calling it “white slavery”
• William T. Stead blasted Chicago’s vice in his book *If Christ Came to Chicago (1894)*
  – The book claimed that 66 out of Chicago’s 68 alderman were crooked
• The Church Federation of Chicago and the Women’s Christian Temperance Union tried to pressured Mayor Busse to from the Vice Commission in 1910—nothing much came of it
• Police and politicians were content to keep the vice districts segregated from the rest of the city
• Mayor William Dever did enforce Prohibition and forced Al Capone out of the city during the mid 1920s
The Black Hand

- The Black Hand traces its origins to Italy
- It refers to a practice where corrupt businessmen extorted immigrants (usually Italian) for money
- In the winter of 1911, 38 people were killed by Black Hand assassins
- The leader of the Black Hand, Anthony D’Andrea, was murdered in 1928
The Emergence of Italian Mafia

- Diamond Jim Colosimo, a horse manure picker, was brought in to the “Organization” by Hinky Dink and Bathhouse John.
- Colosimo brought in Johnny Torrio from New York to fight the Black Hand.
- Torrio brought in Alphonse Capone to murder Colosimo after they had a falling out.
Major Chicago Scandals

• 1919 Chicago Black Sox Scandal
  – Organized crime bought off members of the team to “throw” the World Series against the Reds

• Summerdale Scandal (1960)
  – Police officers kept stolen property or sold it and kept the cash

• Presidential Election (1960)
  – The Daley Machine was accused of inventing votes to help John F. Kennedy win Illinois and carry the presidential election against Richard M. Nixon

• Operation Greylord (1980s)
  – Federal government busted a program where lawyers were bribing Chicago judges

• Current Daley Machine (2004-present)
  – Over 30 political officials have recently been indicted for fraud in hiring and City Hall contracts