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*Dapper Dan Flood: The Controversial Life of a Congressional
Power Broker* (review)

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tourist itinerary again. *How New York Became American* is a well-written and engaging book that offers readers an insightful overview of how the city was marketed as a tourist destination from the 1890s to the mid-1920s.

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William C. Kashatus. *Dapper Dan Flood: The Controversial Life of a Congressional Power Broker*. (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2010. Pp. xiii, 350. Illustrations, notes, bibliography, index. Cloth, \$29.95.)

Historians often relate tales of bizarre organizations and individuals who tried to restrict their access to archival documents. Until I read *Dapper Dan Flood*, however, I never imagined a situation in which witnesses to historical events were reluctant to speak because they feared criminal prosecution by the U.S. Department of Justice. It is a tribute to William Kashatus's perseverance that he soldiered on to chronicle the career of one of America's most ethically flexible twentieth-century politicians.

To a generation schooled in the 24/7 news cycle of corrupt politicians, Congressman Dan Flood's alliances with mobsters, and his ardent pursuit of questionable pork barrel projects for his eastern Pennsylvania district, would seem mundane. Indeed, to callow youths the only remarkable aspect of Flood's life would be the fact that he avoided sexual scandals. The historian, however, realizes that former Democratic vice-presidential nominee John Edwards is irrelevant. Studying Dan Flood, the "Grandfather of Congressional Pork," is the true path toward understanding the socioeconomic crisis of postindustrial America. Flood's life also illuminates the pressures that a growing public sector has placed on business and the federal budget in the twenty-first century. Kashatus's saga begins in a Pennsylvania congressional district that used federal projects to make up for the lack of a viable private economy, and ends decades later with entire states—such as West Virginia, Illinois, New York, and California—following suit.

Flood represented a coal-mining district that encompassed Wilkes-Barre. Ironically, while the national economy rebounded from the Great Depression

during World War II, Wilkes-Barre became the proverbial “canary in the coal mine” for the coming of the postindustrial age. Where the U.S. unemployment rate in 1944 stood at 2 percent, the jobless number in Flood’s district was 19 percent. There were better sources of fuel than anthracite coal available in the United States. Moreover, in the emerging service- and knowledge-based economy, Wilkes-Barre brought little to the labor pool other than Mafia-controlled United Mine Workers locals. This mixture of obsolete resources, unskilled workers, and a culture of corruption did not make the region attractive to the private sector.

If Flood had allowed free-market forces to render their stern judgment, farm fields and woodlands would have regained their once-preeminent positions. Such devolution, however, posed a problem, which Flood knew he had to address. The urban, industrial, and unionized portion of Flood’s district was also the most Democratic. Rural, farming Pennsylvania was Republican turf. Democrats had only become competitive in the district since the New Deal and their position remained precarious. Bringing federal projects, bureaus, and employment to the region not only created jobs—subsidized by taxpayers outside the district—but it also solidified the Democratic Party’s electoral power. As sociological studies of the past sixty years have illustrated, public-sector employees are far more likely to vote Democratic than Republican. It is a measure of Flood’s genius that he was among the first politicians to have these calculations figured out and implemented.

So what did Flood do for his district? He brought in Veterans’ Administration (VA) medical facilities, acquired Defense Department contracts, and rerouted an interstate highway to make sure it went through his district. Flood also used his horse-trading skills in Congress to compel U.S. military bases in Europe to heat their buildings with coal from his district. There were, however, problems with these initiatives. The VA infrastructure he created was greater than the need. Defense-related work could have been done more effectively and less expensively elsewhere. The rerouting of the interstate made no logistical or economic sense. Finally, the American military could have saved taxpayers millions by converting to other fuels or purchasing German coal, which did not have to be shipped across the Atlantic. Ultimately, Wilkes-Barre gained federally subsidized jobs at the expense of economically dynamic regions.

Kashatus tells this tale of pork barrel politics well. One might quibble with his contention that Flood was a Cold Warrior on patrol against Soviet aggression. I could not shake the suspicion that Flood saw the Department of Defense as a jobs machine rather than as an instrument of national security. And it is at

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this point where the difference between Franklin Roosevelt and the children he spawned—Daniel Flood, Lyndon Johnson, John Murtha, and Robert Byrd—emerged. President Roosevelt sold U.S. rearmament in the 1930s as a jobs program because he knew congressional isolationists would not vote to build more ships if they believed such vessels would serve a combat purpose. Roosevelt talked one way and acted in another. So did his heirs, but with a different agenda.

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