



# Pendergast! (MISSOURI BIOGRAPHY SERIES)

*Lawrence H. Larsen, Nancy J. Hulston*

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More than a half-century after the death of Kansas City's notorious political boss, Thomas J. Pendergast, the Pendergast name still evokes great interest and even controversy. Now, in this first full-scale biography of Pendergast, Lawrence H. Larsen and Nancy J. Hulston have successfully provided—through extensive research, including use of recently released prison records and previously unavailable family records—a clear look at the life of Thomas J. Pendergast.

Born in St. Joseph, Missouri, in 1872, Tom Pendergast moved to Kansas City around 1890 to work for his brother James, founder of the Pendergast "Goat" faction in Kansas City Democratic politics. In 1911, Pendergast became head of the Goats, and over the next fifteen years he created a powerful political machine that used illegal voting and criminal enforcers to gain power. Following a change in the city charter in 1925, Pendergast took control of Kansas City and ran it as his own personal business. In the 1930s, he received over \$30 million annually from gambling, prostitution, and narcotics, putting him in the big leagues of American civic corruption. He also wielded great power in the National Democratic Party and started Harry S. Truman on the road to the presidency.

In this well-balanced biography, the authors examine Pendergast's rise to power, his successes as a political leader, his compassion for the destitute, and his reputation for keeping his word. They also examine Pendergast's character development and how his methods became more and more ruthless. Pendergast had no use for ideology in his "invisible government"—only votes counted.

In 1937 and 1938 the federal government broke the back of Pendergast's machine, convicting 259 of his campaign aides for vote fraud. In 1939 Pendergast, who was believed to be the largest bettor on horse racing in the United States, was jailed for income tax evasion, and he died in disgrace in 1945.

An insightful and comprehensive biography, *Pendergast!* will surely serve for years to come as the most thorough investigation of the life and infamous career of Tom Pendergast.

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