



American Pharaoh: Mayor Richard J. Daley - His Battle for Chicago and the Nation

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"This is Chicago, this is America." With those words, Chicago mayor Richard J. Daley famously defended his brutal crackdown on protesters at the 1968 Democratic convention. Profoundly divided racially, economically and socially, Chicago was indeed a microcosm of America, and for more than two decades Daley ruled it with an iron fist. The last of the big city bosses, Daley ran an unbeatable political machine that controlled over one million votes. From 1955 until his death in 1976, every decision of any importance -- from distributing patronage jobs to picking Congressional candidates -- went through his office. He was a major player in national politics as well: Kennedy and Johnson owed their presidencies to his control of the Illinois vote, and he made sure they never forgot it. In a city legendary for its corruption and backroom politics, Daley's power was unrivaled.

Daley transformed Chicago -- then a dying city -- into a modern metropolis of skyscrapers, freeways and a thriving downtown. But he also made Chicago America's most segregated city. A man of profound prejudices and a deep authoritarian streak , he constructed the nation's largest and worst ghettos, sidestepped national civil rights laws, and successfully thwarted Martin Luther King's campaign to desegregate Northern cities.

A quarter-century after his death, Daley's outsize presence continues to influence American urban life, and a reassessment of his career is long overdue. Now, veteran journalists Adam Cohen and Elizabeth Taylor present the definitive biography of Richard J. Daley, drawn from newly uncovered material and dozens of interviews with his contemporaries. In today's era of poll-tested, polished politicians, Daley's rough-and-tumble story is remarkable. From the working-class Irish neighborhood of his childhood, to his steady rise through Chicago's corrupt political hierarchy, to his role as national power broker, American Pharaoh is a riveting account of the life and times of one of the most important figures in twentieth-century domestic politics. In the tradition of Robert Caro's classic *The Power Broker*, this is a compelling life story of a towering individual whose complex legacy is still with us today.

American Pharaoh: Mayor Richard J. Daley - His Battle for Chicago and the Nation Details

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From Reader Review American Pharaoh: Mayor Richard J. Daley - His Battle for Chicago and the Nation for online ebook

Philip Girvan says

Mayor Daley was the last of the big machine bosses and the book does an excellent explaining what the Chicago machine was and how it worked. In a nutshell, bosses handed out patronage and those that benefited were expected to deliver cash and votes to the machine. Traditionally, the machine boss was not a politician. Part of Daley's particular genius was combining the roles of machine and political boss, and, once he secured the two, he controlled the city unlike any other boss before or since.

While the early sections of the book provide critical background, the book really gets rolling once Daley wins the mayor's race in 1955. Post-war Chicago was struggling, but unlike Detroit or Buffalo, managed to come back. And much of this success is due to Daley.

While acknowledging Daley's extraordinary ability to secure federal funding for his ambitious public works and infrastructure projects, his ability to enlist the support of the business community (who traditionally backed Republicans), and his political instincts, the book is also extremely critical. Decisions made by committees under Daley's control to keep neighborhoods and schools segregated and build massive high rise public housing projects did much to isolate and keep Chicago's African-American community in poverty. The sections that deal with Daley's dealings with Martin Luther King and the Southern Christian Leadership Conference are some of the best in the book. Daley's behavior, and that of the Chicago Police, during the notorious 1968 Democratic National Convention are also heavily scrutinized.

This is a great biography and must read for anyone interested in 20th Century American politics, race relations, and the pursuit of power.

Steven Passmore says

Jesus I don't have a review of this book in particular but I read it during a strange time in my life without a doubt. First off I took it to Florida with my mother, who is sick with cancer, and because of certain realities involving the situation of my family we had to drive back from Florida all the way to Chicago. This, of course, after flying to Florida. My first day back in Chicago was an employee party for the holidays and I am just going to bluntly say I found strangers doing cocaine off it. Later it was lost at Spybar for weeks which caused me to buy another copy but then one day a barback of the club approached me and handed my book back. That night I discussed the book with my friend who sadly passed away in July and she thought it was so funny I carried the book around with me in clubs all night. Finally I finished it and I mean the book is great too but Jesus Christ this story almost rivals that in my opinion.

Bookish says

Never has one family ruled a modern major American city for so long, and it all began with Richard J. Daley. His family's rise, recounted through the prism of Chicago, is as much the story of a meat-packing town, the ward politics that kept Daley in power, and how much clout one can build off of broad shoulders

and chits. —John R. Bohrer (<https://www.bookish.com/articles/book...>)

Hugh says

Anyone in Chicago should read this book - it tells the story of how Chicago got to be what it is through a really fascinating character: Daley. Its easy to read but also very informative. It will make you mad and the history you learn will inform the way you look at the city today.

Sara says

Sure, I'll give it 5 stars because "it was amazing." Amazing that a bigoted thug like this could run a city for decades. My family is from Chicago, I now live in the 'burbs, and every weekend, you can see this man's legacy play out with the body counts reported on the west and south sides of the city. His racist housing policies destroyed families and lives. The political/patronage machine ensured corruption in every level of government, from street sweeper all the way up to presidential elections. How about the shoot to kill order he gave police against his city's own citizens? I mean, every bit of this mayor's reign was shocking and disgusting. I could feel my blood pressure raising with every turn of the page. If you want to know why Chicago is the way it is, read this book.

Rebecca says

A very comprehensive biography of Daley, and at times too comprehensive. I found the intricacies of the various politicians to be a bit boring, but the chapters on MLK's campaign in Chicago and the '68 Democratic Convention were really interesting. The authors spent a lot of time building up the setting before Daley's reign but didn't remark on what happened in Chicago after his death; I would've liked a chapter on the after-effects, as it ends rather bluntly after his death.

Scott Smith says

Everything you need to know about why Chicago is the city it is, exists within these pages. Not just because the younger Daley is in office now, but because his father's legacy, good and bad, is around every corner.

Karin says

I've read this a few times now. It's one of the best Chicago books you'll get your hands on.

Kirsti says

Richard Daley was an only child, a rarity in his Irish Catholic neighborhood in the early 1900s. Apparently he was the only kid in the neighborhood who owned pajamas. One neighbor described the Daleys as the kind of people who had fruit in the house even if nobody was sick.

This book taught me about four-legged voting, which happens when a ward heeler [political worker:] accompanies a voter into the booth to supervise. If a voter took more than a few seconds in there, the ward heeler knew that the voter was not voting the straight Democratic ticket because doing that took only one lever pull. I guess that's why straight-ticket voting is no longer allowed.

I also met Tubbo, tagged "The World's Richest Cop" by the newspapers, and a vote-fixer known as Short Pencil.

Reading about the Airport Homes riots just about broke my heart. That's a part of Chicago history that most people don't talk about.

Cohen and Taylor are also clear-eyed about Chicago politics: "Daley's success in the black wards was at least in part a quiet rebuke to the Chicago Freedom Movement and a reminder of the power of a political spoils system to deliver the votes of the poor. The goals of the Freedom Movement did not always speak to the immediate needs of poor blacks. Many did not aspire to move into hostile all-white neighborhoods or to put their children onto buses to attend schools in white neighborhoods. Daley's precinct captains, in contrast, offered things that did make a difference in their daily lives: getting welfare and public housing; assistance in navigating a confusing government bureaucracy; and, most of all, patronage jobs. Daley had relied on machine politics to overcome idealism among black voters, and the election returns showed that, at least this time, his strategy had worked."

The authors aren't afraid to allow their opinions to show through: "Many cities had been torn by rioting in the wake of King's assassination, but Daley was alone in advocating that his citizens be fatally shot."

The day after Daley's shoot-to-kill comments, Daley's press secretary commented, "They [the press:] should have printed what he meant not what he said." This would be funny except that Daley's comments occurred shortly before the police riot at the 1968 Democratic National Convention. I'm sad that Chicago was the place where the term "police riot" was coined.

And as for Daley the Younger? "If I can't help my sons then they can kiss my ass," Daley the Elder said.

In short, an excellent read for anyone interested in Chicago and/or power. I only wish the authors had found a better copyeditor--the first edition I have has loads of misplaced commas and some glaring typos.

Hadrian says

"to wound the autumnal city.
So howled out for the world to give him a name
The in-dark answered with wind."
-Samuel Delany, Dhalgren, opening lines

"Every time I go to Chicago, I leave with scars."
-Hunter S. Thompson, Fear and Loathing on the Campaign Trail '72

The dynastic name, Richard Daley, inspires a sort of Pharaonic reverence and scorn. His public works and urban projects and sheer power manifest are contrasted with those who hated him. Of course, unlike the mythic Pharaohs of old, he did not make his projects with slave labor. Instead, he tacitly favored the marginalization of blacks and a system of segregation against which the Civil Rights movement struggled for years.

He was an Irish Catholic, in a city where the European immigrants identified by their ethnicity, and the Catholics by their parishes. He once worked in the Jungle of stockyards, and kept his accent all his life. His style was not that of raw youthful charisma like Kennedy, but of the slow momentum and determination that committee work requires. Never forget a face. Always remember favors. Give them back. Gifts to the loyal constituents, from donuts to larger project work.

The patronage system of American cities was not invented by him, but he was one of its last and most illustrious practitioners. He was first able to do the drudge work that few others would try, and was adept at building multi-ethnic coalitions, and a 'black submachine' (term used by the author). Cohen builds a remarkable history of the early machine, to serve as a backdrop to his political ambitions.

His tenure as mayor, second-longest in the city's history, is studded with public works projects. The (once) busiest airport in the world, North America's largest convention center, North America's tallest building. With the tools of a democracy, he sculpted the city in ways petty totalitarians only dreamed of. Subways, universities, apartment blocks.

His tenacious campaigning helped deliver Illinois to Kennedy in 1960. There are still rumors that he stuffed ballot boxes and delayed votes to win his party ally the state. one wonders what might have happened if Nixon was around instead for the Cuban Missile Crisis. If he was in Dallas.

Daley was kingmaker, a prize of the party and the nation.

Then we see 1968.

It was supposed to be his showcase. Showing off this gleaming new city for the convention, which had avoided the ignominy of the Rust Belt, which was still a shining American beacon. Had avoided the white flight of the other Midwest cities and still grew.

And then Martin Luther King the prophet was shot. And the country disintegrated a little further and there was no one left to fight Nixon and there was fear and war. He had no idea what the people wanted. It remains uncertain if he ordered the police in, and Fred Hampton was shot to death, but Daley's people, his collectors and machine men, may have, and someone may have given the order to open fire and then-

Nixon won his day. But Daley survived. Was mayor until he died.

His son was mayor for longer than he was, but on a smaller scale. His nephew and other relative worked for Clinton and Obama. And his city is still strong, segregation and projects notwithstanding (although they still stand barely, and East Chicago still fights).

Daley stands, not wanting money as his associates did, but only more power to shape the city. Scandals may have gotten his associates, but not himself. He stands as an archetype of American mayors, good and bad, and one certainly not to be ignored.

Julia says

A must-read for anyone who is interested in politics, not just Chicago politics.

Karen says

More than a biography, this book gives an in depth history of Chicago, including the politics, social policies and social movements that shaped it. The in depth history of machine politics gives me a greater appreciation for the people who have worked to have an independent government.

I would recommend it to anyone who wants to learn more about how Chicago became the city it is today. I wish I'd read it as soon as I moved here.

Bill Manzi says

A masterpiece that not only serves as a biography of Richard Daley, but shows us how the City of Chicago came to be what it is today. There have been some serious power brokers that have served as Mayors in America, but Richard Daley, in terms of acquiring and holding power, must rank at the top of that group. The book is detailed, but for those looking to see how municipal government works this might not be the book for you. In Chicago if Daley wanted it done it was done. Not a lot of grass roots organizing involved in getting decisions made and executed. The book properly focuses on how Daley's perch as Chair of the Cook County Democratic machine was just as valuable to him, in many respects, as the Mayors job, allowing him to exert control not only in Chicago, but across the entire State of Illinois. The Democratic Convention of 1968 is covered very well, and is a history that many of us are familiar with. What I learned beyond my prior understanding was how official and conscious government acts by Daley contributed to the segregated housing landscape that existed in Chicago at that time. He molded the City, and his vision did not include integration of housing. Daley, due to these policies, had to try to face down Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., who came to Chicago to bring the civil rights movement to the urban north. Daley did not choose to overtly resist, but chose tactics that obfuscated his goals, promised progress, but delivered little.

A fascinating book that should be read by all those interested in the acquiring and holding of power. Daley, from that perspective and on a smaller scale, rivaled LBJ as a power politician. The book honestly depicts some of the awful things he did, but does its best to give Daley some credit where it might have been due. Having just read the Tom Menino book I think it could be fairly said that Daley predated Menino in putting forward malapropisms. A couple of great ones: "Gentlemen, get this thing straight once and for all. The policeman isn't there to create disorder. The policeman is there to preserve disorder." "Today the real problem is the future."

This book is highly recommended.

Maggie Needham says

Not only did I learn a huge amount about Chicago history, but I am now motivated to learn more about

Chicago history. Definitely recommend to anyone who lives in Chicago or is from Chicago. This provided to much perspective on how the city has been run and how it's been structured, both in terms of government and layout/geography. If anyone has any recommendations of Chicago history books, hmu.

Will says

"With the national press streaming in, Daley tried to project an image of a busy city executive calmly leading a world-class metropolis. John Swearingen, chairman of Standard Oil of Indiana, came to City Hall to announce plans to build a \$100 million office building downtown. Daley also found time on August 20 to appear in person at the dedication of the first eight low-cost prefabricated homes being built for Chicago's poor. The new homes were, he said, 'symbolic of the spirit of Chicago.' He urged his audience to 'build, not burn,' and to 'construct, not riot.' But the first violence of the convention came from the Chicago police. One August 22, just four days before the convention opened, Dean Johnson of Sioux Falls, South Dakota, one of the young people who had thronged to Chicago for the excitement, was shot to death by the police. They said they shot him after he fired a .32 caliber revolver at them. Of more concern to Daley, several Blackstone Rangers were arrested after appearing as witnesses in an investigation of an alleged plot to disrupt the convention. Their plan, according to a jailed gang member, was to assassinate Vice President Humphrey and Senator McCarthy, the leading contenders for the nomination. Thomas Foran, the U.S. attorney for Chicago installed by Daley, launched a secret probe of the charges. Evidence of the 'plot' was extremely thin. Initially, Foran called the story 'completely unjustified,' but a few days later he ordered a grand jury investigation, citing 'new information.' Nothing ever came of the inquiries, which seemed designed to justify oppressive levels of convention security. In the days leading up to the convention, Warsaw Pact troops were marching into Czechoslovakia to crush the liberal reforms that had been ushered in by Prague Spring. Daley denounced the invasion as a 'dastardly act of suppression of freedom and liberty.' To Daley, it was a Cold War lesson in the evils of communism. He failed to see any parallels between how the Soviets had used force to crush liberal young Czechs, and how he was planning to unleash the Chicago police and Daley dozers on liberal young Americans. Asked by a reporter what effects the events in Prague would have on the convention, Daley said, 'I think it will affect a lot of doves that are flying around here.'"
