

First Son: The Biography of Richard M. Daley. By Keith Koeneman.
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Appendices, notes, indes. Cloth, \$30.00)

Reviewed by Andrew D. McNitt, Professor, Eastern Illinois University; Author of “Big City Mayors Business Domination and Political Specialization in the 19th and 20th Centuries.” Journal of Urban Affairs, Dec. 2011.

Power fascinates us. Consequently the mayors of Chicago and New York, who are perceived as powerful, also fascinate us. More studied than the mayors of any other major cities, their biographies entertain, shock and at times instruct us on the finer points of politics. Keith Koeneman’s biography of Richard M. Daley is the latest addition to this library of municipal leadership.

Two father son teams have governed Chicago: The Carter Harrisons at the end of the nineteenth and beginning of the 20th centuries, and the Richard Daleys (J. and M.) at the end of the 20th and beginning of the 21st centuries. Richard M. Daley became the longest serving mayor of Chicago when he retired in 2011 after 22 years of service. The combined term of service for both Daleys is even more impressive totaling 43 years in all. Most of what has been written about the Daleys has concentrated on the father’s career. One of the great virtues of Koeneman’s work is that it is the first extensive biography of the son.

Koeneman has written a balanced biography that presents the virtues, vices, successes and failures of Richard M. Daley. Koeneman characterizes Richard M. Daley as a plugger. A man who matured as his interest in public policy grew while serving in the legislature and, after his father’s death, when he committed himself to transforming Chicago into a global city. Koeneman credits Daley with promoting economic development, improving the public school system and developing the cultural infrastructure of the city. Koenneman criticizes Daley for the arrogant destruction of Meigs Field, tolerating corruption, and agreeing to overly generous union contracts and a less than lucrative privatization of parking which have proved costly to the city.

Most urban political machines disappeared in the 1950s. Richard J. Daley's Chicago was the one great exception. In the 1970s the Shackman Decrees, which severely limited the number of patronage employees in the city, were thought to have fundamentally altered the political situation in Chicago. These changes, however, did not prevent Richard M. Daley from controlling the city for an even longer period of time than his father.

Richard M. Daley was different from his father in several important ways. He was much more "socially liberal." He was the first Chicago mayor to be the grand marshal of a gay rights parade. He also made an effort to reach out to former 1960s demonstrators in a "healing" ceremony prior to the 1996 Chicago Democratic Convention. However, Richard M. Daley was also more "economically conservative." He was less supportive of organized labor and even more business friendly than his father.

Koeneman is a writer for the Huffington Post. His book is an extremely readable account of Chicago politics and Richard M. Daley's career. However, in this book "efforts were made to keep citations as concise as possible." In addition to the expected sources, the citations indicate that Koeneman's work is also based upon a series of interviews with a wide range of Chicago political figures some of whom are no longer with us. Koeneman does a good job of elucidating the connections between Richard M. Daley and individuals like, Valerie Jarrett and Rahm Emanuel, who latter were part of the Obama Administration. The major limitation of Koeneman's book is the relative lack of information about Harold Washington's administration, and Daley's relationship with Illinois Speaker of the House Mike Madigan. The Washington administration is important because Washington's election, which was the result of growing African American political power, broke the demographic base of the old Chicago machine. The relationship with Madigan is important because, unlike his father, Richard M. Daley does not have the same degree of control over the Chicago delegation in the Illinois legislature.

Consequently, Speaker Madigan has emerged as an independent source of power in the state which makes the relationship between the two of considerable interest.