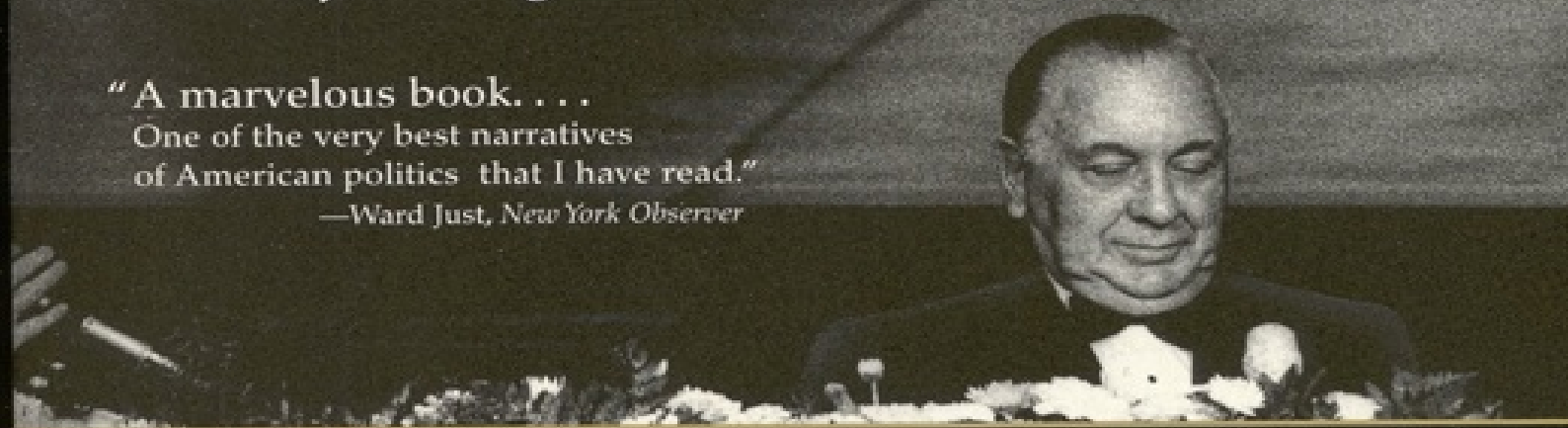




AMERICAN PHARAOH

MAYOR RICHARD J. DALEY
His Battle for Chicago and the Nation

"A marvelous book. . . .
One of the very best narratives
of American politics that I have read."
—Ward Just, *New York Observer*



ADAM COHEN AND ELIZABETH TAYLOR

Extraordinary acclaim for
American Pharaoh

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

by Adam Cohen and Elizabeth Taylor

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“This is a myth-shattering portrait of Mayor Daley the elder.... *American Pharaoh* is an eye-opening work that enthralls the reader from page 1.”

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“This fine biography speaks to our time as well as to memory.... Cohen and Taylor know Chicago, byways and all, and they tell a good story. Their detailed account of personalities and events never lets us forget the grander drama of Daley’s public life, its bright successes shadowed by elements of tragedy.”

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“Cohen and Taylor’s book stands as the one indispensable source on Daley, the argument-starter and the argument-settler.... *American Pharaoh* accomplishes the odd feat of leaving its readers with a more positive impression of Daley than they probably used to have while also being, page by page, quite anti-Daley.... A fascinating and admirably complete biography.”

— Nicholas Lehmann, *New Republic*

“Until now, the definitive chronicle of Mayor Richard J. Daley’s two-decade reign over Chicago has been Mike Royko’s *Boss*, published in 1970, when Daley was still very much in power. The intervening years have permitted the authors of this hefty new biography a cooler perspective. Cohen and Taylor hit all the high points while also sketching a compelling social history of mid-century Chicago.”

— *The New Yorker*

“A fascinatingly detailed civic biography.... Through the prism of the public housing issue and

throughout *American Pharaoh*, the authors do an excellent job of exposing the tragic racial history of postwar America. . . . Cohen and Taylor have written history as it did unfold, clear-eyed and astringently.”

— David C. Ward, *Boston Book Review*

“Superb.... Daley’s story is vividly told by Cohen and Taylor in what is not only the best full-scale investigation of the Daley reign but one of the finest political biographies of recent years. . . . Highly recommended.”

— Karl Helicher, *Library Journal*

“A masterly biography.... Indeed, the patronage and favoritism afforded by big-spending government at all levels (and the waste and corruption it entails) drive the rhythm of this book: an insistent ostinato of greed and power.”

— John Lilly, *American Spectator*

“Worth the attention of anyone interested in big-city politics.”

— Larry King, *USA Today*

“Cohen and Taylor are fastidiously fair to the famous mayor and do not take sides. No edge and no attitude adorn this encyclopedic saga of the fifty wards. Like their subject, the authors take Chicago very seriously. To anyone interested in America or its cities, Chicago is fascinating. Art, commerce, political power, and race are part of the city’s story, especially race.... *American Pharaoh* is fast-paced, comprehensive, and written well enough to evoke the sights and sounds of a great city in turbulent times.”

— Martin F. Nolan, *Washington Monthly*

“Engrossing and massively detailed. . . . *American Pharaoh* is a vital and necessary work that students of American political history are likely to consult for decades to come.”

— Andrew O’Hehir, *Salon.com*

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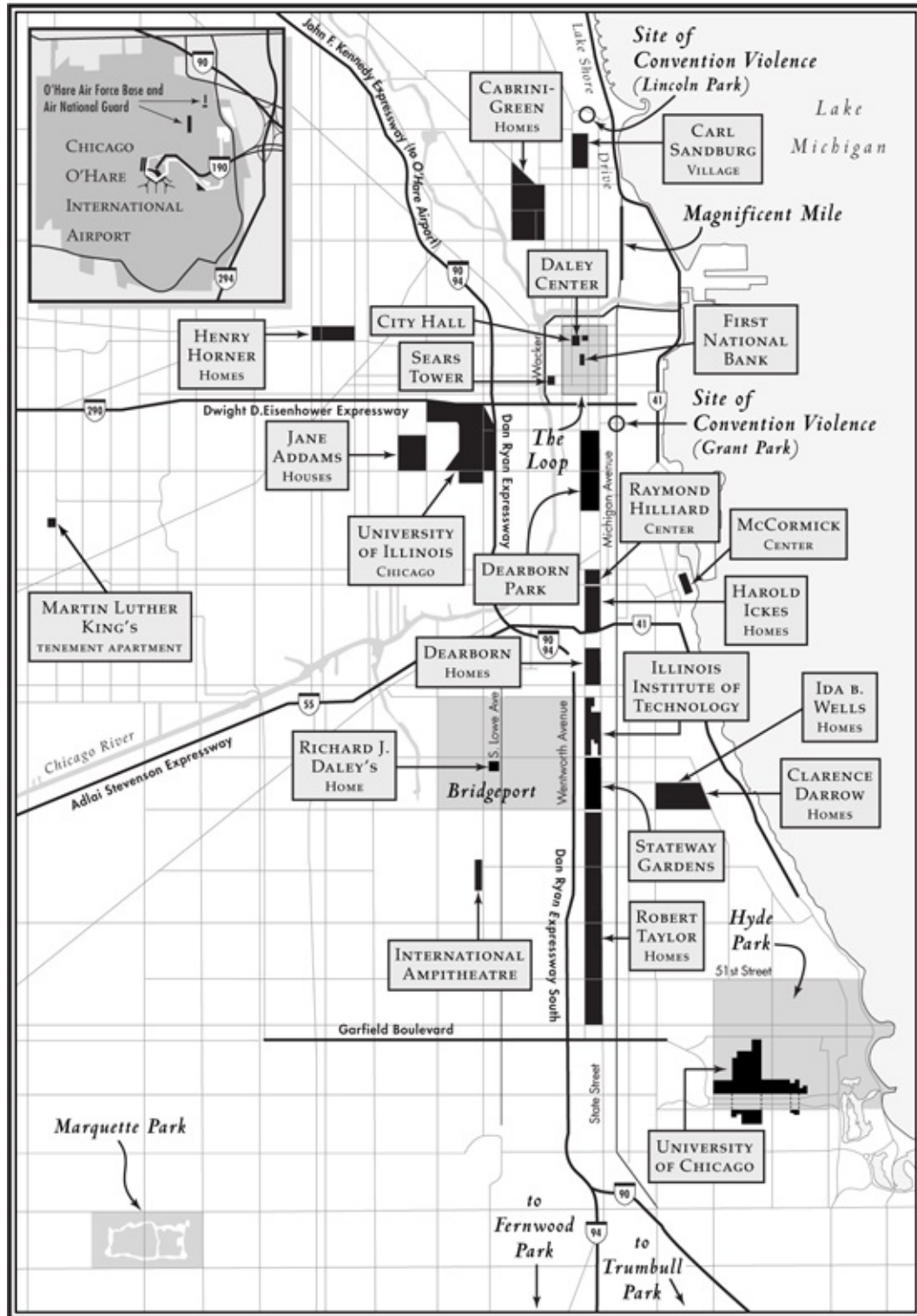
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Beverly Cohen and Stuart Cohen

and

Barbara Taylor and James, William, and Caroline Kaplan



Daley's Chicago

Daley's Chicago

“This is Chicago, this is America.”

—Richard J. Daley, press conference, August 29, 1968

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As Chicago mayor Richard J. Daley prepared to talk to Walter Cronkite on August 29, 1968, a CBS News camera panned across the empty floor of the Democratic National Convention. The news reports from the convention so far had been grim and bloody, filled with footage of the Chicago police charging into crowds of unarmed anti-war demonstrators, swinging clubs and breaking heads. The elderly, the young, and innocent bystanders of all kinds had been attacked by Daley's army in blue — some were teargassed, others had their skulls cracked, and still others were shoved through plate-glass windows. Daley, the wily machine boss who ruled Chicago like a feudal preserve, was being portrayed in the national media as a homegrown American tyrant: just the night before, Senator Abraham Ribicoff of Connecticut had stood at the podium and decried, to a nationwide television audience, the “Gestapo tactics” being used on the streets of Chicago.

But as the CBS camera scanned the International Amphitheatre, it found no sign of this tyrannical Daley. The protest signs that filled the streets were absent from the hall: all the camera picked up were banners, lovingly hung from the rafters by machine foot soldiers, praising Chicago's embattled leader. “World's Greatest Mayor! Richard J. Daley,” exclaimed one, signed “14th Ward Regular Democratic Organization, Edward M. Burke, Committeeman.” Nor could the camera find any of the thousands of demonstrators who were loudly denouncing Daley and the Chicago police for engaging in unprovoked violence. The only nondelegates admitted to the galleries were precinct captains and patronage workers, who waved American flags and held placards reading “We love Mayor Daley” and “Police Keep Up the Good Work.” ¹

Against this carefully crafted backdrop, Daley arrived in the CBS anchor booth and took a seat beside Cronkite. Like most of the media covering the convention, Cronkite had been outraged by the violence of the past week, and had been vocal in his criticism of the Chicago police. In the next few minutes, before a television audience of millions, it seemed that Daley would be gently torn apart by America's most beloved newsman. As the TV camera rolled, the two men warily exchanged pleasantries. Cronkite declared that CBS had received hundreds of telegrams and “a lot of phone calls taking Daley's side over the recent violence. “I can tell you this, Mr. Daley, that you have a lot of supporters around the country as well as in Chicago,” Cronkite said. Daley assured Cronkite that, through his nightly news broadcasts, he was a “constant visitor” in the Daley home. Then Daley brought the casual conversation to an abrupt halt. Accustomed to being in control, the mayor produced a typewritten statement and — defying the traditions of the on-air interview — began reading an uncompromising defense of the Chicago police and of himself. ²

The anti-war demonstrators who had converged on Chicago were nothing less than terrorists, Daley said sternly. “They came here equipped with caustics, with helmets, and with their own brigade of medics,” he read, his voice a mixture of midwestern flatness and working-class rough edges. “They had maps locating the hotels and routes of buses for the guidance of terrorists from out of town.” The truth was, it had been the demonstrators who had been violent and the police who had been the victims, Daley insisted — the media were just too biased to report the clashes fairly. “How is it that you never showed on television, Walter, the crowd marching down the street to confront the police?” Daley asked. “You show it after ... it happens. Is the television industry interested in this violence? I”

like to have them show the fifty-one policemen who were injured, some of them severely.” Cronkite offered up a hesitant defense of his news-gathering colleagues. “Maybe the police take care of their own and get them out of the way when they’re wounded,” the newsman suggested. “They don’t take care of them,” Daley snapped. “They’re lying on the street like everyone else.” ³

Daley was not finished putting his gloss on the week’s events. The leaders of the anti-war movement were Communists, Daley insisted — David Dellinger, leader of the National Mobilization to End the War in Vietnam, had even visited Hanoi. Why, Daley wanted to know, had none of this been reported in the media? “Can’t you get their record?” Daley asked, again impatient. “Anyone can get their record.” Cronkite gently raised a point much on the minds of his colleagues: that among those injured by the Chicago police had been thirty-two members of the press. But Daley had a quick retort. “Many of them are hippies themselves,” he explained. “They’re a part of this movement. Some of them are revolutionaries and they want these things to happen. There isn’t any secret about that.” Finally, Daley announced that he was going to share with Cronkite something “that I never said to anyone.” He had received intelligence reports in recent weeks that “certain people” planned to assassinate the presidential candidates and Daley himself. “I didn’t want what happened in Dallas or what happened in California to happen in Chicago,” Daley said, invoking the shootings of John Kennedy in 1963, and Robert Kennedy only a few months before the convention. “So I took the necessary precautions.” ⁴

Most of what Daley told Cronkite was simply untrue. The young men and women who had descended on Chicago were upset about the Vietnam War and critical of the way the country was being run, but few of them were actually Communists. The vast majority of reporters injured by the Chicago police were professional newsmen with no ties to the anti-war movement. And if there were actual plots to assassinate the presidential candidates during convention week, they were never mentioned again, and no one was ever arrested or prosecuted. As for a threat to assassinate Daley, he admitted himself in the course of the interview that it was a common enough occurrence — “I’ve had that constantly,” he noted — and it certainly provided no justification for raging attacks against unarmed civilians. Most egregious of all was Daley’s attempt to blame the hundreds of anti-war demonstrators for being beaten up by the Chicago police. By week’s end, more than one hundred civilians would be hospitalized and hundreds more treated by mobile medical units. A few months after the convention, a blue-ribbon panel appointed by President Johnson would carefully sift through the evidence, examining video evidence and evaluating three thousand eyewitness accounts. The panel would conclude that Daley’s officers had engaged in an unjustified “police riot.” ⁵

Millions of Americans watching the interview at home were waiting for Cronkite to challenge Daley’s self-serving account. But that confrontation never came. In the face of the mayor’s bluster and strength of purpose, Cronkite folded. The veteran newsman, who had been deeply troubled by the events of the past week, let Daley’s wildest assertions stand. And to the amazement of many viewers, Cronkite concluded the interview with an ingratiating anecdote. He told Daley he had recently driven back to his hotel with several other people, and they had all commented on “the genuine friendliness of the Chicago Police Department.” Daley had gone into the interview a subject of national scorn, but he had emerged with a public relations triumph. As one CBS executive said dejectedly when it was over: “Daley took Cronkite like Grant took Richmond.” ⁶

* * *

The defeated CBS news staff were hardly the first people to underestimate Daley. It had happened to

him all his life. Daley was born in 1902 in the gritty, working-class neighborhood of Bridgeport on Chicago's South Side. He was bereft of the usual attributes of promising youth. He was not academically gifted, charismatic, or articulate. (Indeed, later in life he would be known for his colorful malapropisms. "The policeman is not there to create disorder," he said after the convention violence. "The policeman is there to preserve disorder.") What Daley did begin with was an Irish-Catholic background, making him part of the city's politically ascendant ethnic group; extraordinary personal drive; and a keen understanding of how to amass and wield power.

Daley was a masterful politician — perhaps the shrewdest retail politician in U.S. history. Like Stalin, he understood the enormous personal power that could come from presiding over a strong party apparatus. Daley skillfully worked his way up the ranks of Chicago's mighty Democratic machine, quietly forging the citywide coalition that elected him party boss in 1954. Daley presided over a Central Committee made up of ward committeemen from each of the city's fifty wards. Through them, he commanded an army of 3,400 precinct captains spread out over every block of the city, and dispensed 40,000 patronage jobs. Patronage workers who came through on election day kept their jobs. Those who failed to turn out the vote were "vised," or fired, and replaced with someone who would try harder. The machine's leadership was made up of Daley's fellow Irish-Catholics, but its genius was that it included most of the city — blacks, Jews, Poles, even organized crime. Within a year of becoming Democratic boss, Daley ousted Chicago's well-meaning but politically naive mayor and installed himself in City Hall.

Daley, who served as mayor of Chicago from 1955 until his death in 1976, was the most powerful local politician America has ever produced. He possessed a raw political might that today, in an age when politics is dominated by big money and television, is hard to imagine. He personally slated, or selected, candidates for every office, from governor to ward committeeman. A generation of governors, U.S. senators, congressmen, state legislators, and aldermen owed Daley their political careers. When he wanted something from them — whether it was a congressman's vote on the national budget or a patronage position in the county sheriff's office — he almost always got it. (And when he did not, he could be ruthless: one of the brightest stars on the Chicago political scene in the 1960s lost his seat on the Cook County Board for refusing to side with the machine on a vote over a garbage dump.) But Daley's influence reached far beyond the borders of his city and state. His control over the large and well-disciplined Illinois delegation made him a kingmaker in selecting Democratic candidates for president — he was, Robert Kennedy once declared, "the whole ball game."

To what end did Daley use all of this power? He reigned in an era rich with ideological leaders. Martin Luther King Jr. was battling for civil rights, and George Wallace was fighting for segregation. Eugene McCarthy was campaigning to end the Vietnam War, and President Johnson was struggling to win it. Daley had an ideology of his own: the flinty conservatism that prevailed in Bridgeport and in much of white ethnic, working-class America in the 1950s and 1960s. A devout Catholic and loyal machine member, he believed deeply in authority. He favored the strong over the weak, the establishment over dissidents. Daley liked presidents, business leaders, and powerful institutions; he was offended by anti-war protesters, civil rights protesters, and hippies, who sought to influence policy without doing the hard work of prevailing at the ballot box. Daley believed that poor people should pull themselves up by their bootstraps, as his Bridgeport neighbors struggled to do. And he believed in racial separation, of the kind that prevailed in his own neighborhood. Blacks stayed in the Black Belt to the east of Wentworth Avenue, and whites stayed to the west.

Those were Daley's views, but his agenda in office was less complicated: he was motivated first and foremost by a drive to accumulate and retain power. That was the way of the Chicago machine,

and it was Daley's — make deals and share the wealth with the Church or the syndicate, with black political leaders or anti-black neighborhood organizations, and with anyone else whose votes would help elect the machine's candidates. Daley's primary test of a political cause was whether it would increase or decrease his power. He chose candidates who would win, and who would pull the rest of the machine slate into office with them. He formed alliances with politicians who could deliver votes and ruthlessly cut them off when they were no longer useful — or when they became so strong that they posed a threat.

Daley came to see the great liberal crusades of the 1950s and 1960s — civil rights, the War on Poverty, the anti-war movement — as a threat to his power, and he battled against all of them. His focus was Chicago, but his power and influence were such that he ended up quietly shaping the national agenda. Nowhere was this more true than on civil rights. Daley was elected at the dawn of the civil rights era: it was during his first year as mayor that Rosa Parks refused to move to the back of a Montgomery, Alabama, city bus. The civil rights movement first took hold in the South, where Jim Crow enshrined racial segregation in the law books, but its implications for Chicago were substantial. The city was in the midst of a demographic revolution when Daley took office. The city's black population was reaching record levels, as trainloads of blacks fled their hard lives in the rural South for the promise of a better life in northern cities.

Chicago under Daley became America's major northern civil rights battleground. After his success in the South, and after winning the Nobel Peace Prize, Martin Luther King Jr. decided to take his movement to the North — and he chose Chicago as the place to start it off. King moved into a tenement on Chicago's South Side for eight months in 1966 and spearheaded the Chicago Campaign, personally leading open-housing marches into the city's white neighborhoods. Daley responded to King's drive with a brilliant campaign of his own. Daley did not make the same mistake so many southern governors and mayors had: he refused to let the movement cast him as the villain in its drama. In the end, Daley's handling of the Chicago Campaign would have far-reaching effects on the civil rights movement across the country. Daley also played a key role in preserving racial segregation in education, both in Chicago and nationally. Chicago's public schools were nearly as segregated as the southern schools that were being ordered by federal courts to integrate. Daley fought back attempts to integrate Chicago's public schools, and took on the federal government when it tried to force school desegregation on the city.

Daley was also a leading opponent of President Johnson's War on Poverty, and again his victory was felt far beyond Chicago. Daley did not share Johnson's moral commitment to using government programs to lift the disadvantaged up from poverty, but his greatest objections were political. Johnson's poverty programs incorporated the liberal notion of "maximum feasible participation," which meant that poor people should have as much control as possible over how poverty programs were run. Daley saw these programs as a threat to the machine, because they put money and power in the hands of independent community activists. Daley's response to the War on Poverty would be felt not only in Chicago, but in Washington and across the country.

Daley emerged on the national scene in 1968 as an icon of working-class resentment toward the anti-war movement and the youth-oriented counterculture. Daley's opposition was in large part political. The anti-authoritarian spirit behind the movement was a threat to machine politics, which was built on a foundation of blind obedience. Daley understood that when power shifted to the grass-roots level and to the streets, political bosses like him would suffer. In fact, his fears about the direction the anti-war activists were leading the Democratic Party would be borne out in the aftermath of the 1968 convention. Daley and his delegates were not seated in the 1972 convention: the party

voted instead to recognize a ragtag group of liberals and blacks as the official Illinois delegation. The schism that emerged in Chicago in 1968 would haunt the Democratic Party, and national politics, for decades to come.

In the end, however, Daley's most lasting legacy was the cause he devoted most of his life to: building the modern city of Chicago. When he took office in 1955, Chicago was spiraling downward. The city's middle-class was beginning to flee for the suburbs, their path paved by low-cost government mortgages and newly laid highways. Businesses were also headed for outlying areas, drawn by cheaper land and lower taxes. At the same time, poor blacks were flooding into the city from the rural South. Middle-class white areas were "flipping" rapidly and becoming black slums. Daley used his power to reverse Chicago's decline. His City Hall worked hard to develop the city's infrastructure and buttress its downtown business district. Daley built or helped build Chicago's superlative institutions — O'Hare International Airport, the world's busiest; Sears Tower, the world's tallest; and the Dan Ryan Expressway, the world's widest. Under Daley, an impressive new crop of skyscrapers went up downtown and filled out the city's skyline. Daley convinced a reluctant University of Illinois to build a campus in Chicago, giving the sons and daughters of the city's working class access to affordable college education close to home. And he built the Civic Center, a massive complex of government buildings, and McCormick Place, the world's largest exhibition space. Daley also presided over the rise of North Michigan Avenue's Magnificent Mile, one of the nation's grandest upscale retailing districts. ⁷

Daley's modern Chicago was built, however, on an unstated foundation: commitment to racial segregation. He preserved the city's white neighborhoods and business district by building racial separation into the very concrete of the city. New developments — housing, highways, and schools — were built where they would serve as a barrier between white neighborhoods and the black ghetto. Daley worked with powerful business leaders to revitalize downtown by pushing poor blacks out, replacing them with middle-class whites. But Daley's most striking accomplishment was Chicago's deeply troubled public housing projects. Daley used public housing as a repository for thousands of blacks who might otherwise have ended up moving into white neighborhoods. ⁸ He built new public housing in the form of densely packed high-rise towers, and he placed them in Chicago's black ghettos. Many of these projects ended up along a single street in the South Side ghetto. The State Street Corridor, as it came to be known, remains today the densest concentration of public housing in the nation. Daley was also responsible for the final touch: routing the Dan Ryan Expressway to follow the neighborhood's traditional racial boundary. The fourteen-lane Dan Ryan separated the State Street Corridor from the white, working-class neighborhoods of the South Side — including Daley's own neighborhood of Bridgeport.

Daley may well have saved Chicago. He reigned during an era in which suburbanization, crime, and white flight were wreaking havoc on other midwestern cities. Detroit, Kansas City, Cleveland, and Saint Louis were all prosperous, middle-class cities when Daley took office, and all declined precipitously after World War II. In a twenty-five-year period after the war, Detroit lost one-third of its *Fortune* 500 companies; by the mid-1970s, it had become the nation's murder capital, with twice as many killings per capita as any other large American city. That never became Chicago's fate. In large part due to Daley, the city's downtown business district expanded at the same time Detroit's was collapsing, and much of its sprawling white, working-class "Bungalow Belt" remained intact. ⁹

Daley created a city that, in the famous phrase, worked. The question was, for whom did it work? Daley championed working-class, ethnic neighborhoods like his own beloved Bridgeport, and fought

to preserve and expand Chicago's now-thriving downtown. But for every middle-class neighborhood he saved, there was a poor neighborhood in which living conditions worsened. For every downtown skyscraper that kept jobs and tax dollars in the city, there was a housing project tower that confined poor people in an overcrowded ghetto. Over time, the Daley-era housing projects turned into "vertical ghettos," rife with crime and social dysfunction. Today, Chicago is the nation's most racially segregated large city: about 90 percent of black Chicagoans would have to move for the city to be integrated. Chicago is one of America's wealthiest cities but, remarkably, nine of the nation's ten poorest census tracts are in Chicago's housing projects. Most of these are in the State Street Corridor

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During the civil rights era, Chicago blacks often referred to Mayor Daley as "Pharaoh." Civil rights activists saw Daley as an oppressor and a taskmaster — as an unrelenting Ramses to Martin Luther King's Moses. Daley was a pharaoh in this sense, but also in others. He ruled over his empire with pharaonic power, the kind of absolute power that few American politicians have ever wielded. His twenty-one-year reign over Chicago was of dynastic proportions. And like the pharaohs of old, Daley built a city and filled it with awesome monuments — an imposing legacy that, for good and for bad, has survived long after his death, and that will likely continue to carry out his will for generations to come.

A Separate World

Richard Joseph Daley was a product of the bloody world of the Chicago slaughterhouses. Chicagoans of his day, both Catholics and non-Catholics, located themselves by referring to their local parish — they came from Saint Mary’s or Saint Nicholas’s. Daley came from Nativity of Our Lord, the parish church of his childhood, where he would be eulogized seventy-four years later. Nativity was founded in the mid-1800s to serve the poor Irish-Catholic laborers who were flooding the area to work in the growing meat-packing industry. The church’s simple stone building stood at the corner of 37th and Union, on the fringes of the South Side neighborhood of Bridgeport and hard up against a vast expansion of cattle-slaughtering facilities. Standing on the steps after Mass, young Daley could smell the fetid mixture of manure and blood that wafted over from the sprawling Union Stock Yards to the south. The gurgling in the background was the cackle of “Bubbly Creek,” a torpid offshoot of the Chicago River that got its name from the fermenting animal carcasses and offal in its slow-moving waters. If Nativity seemed like an unlikely place for spiritual repose, it had once been worse. The church’s first home had actually been in the former J. McPherson livery stables. The name “Nativity” was a reference to the fact that the church, like Christ, had been born in a stable — an attempt to put a holy gloss on grim surroundings. Nativity’s new building had a pleasant interior, including ornate stained-glass windows, but nothing could make up for the harsh reality of geography. Daley’s spiritual home was located just a few hundred feet from what one parish history called “the greatest and bloodiest butcher shamble in the world.” ¹

The whole city of Chicago had a reputation for coarseness and for lacking the style and sophistication of older cities like Philadelphia or Boston. “Having seen it, I urgently desire never to see it again,” Rudyard Kipling wrote after visiting in 1889. “It is inhabited by savages.” Chicago was the industrial capital of the Midwest, a tough town dominated by factories that belched black smoke. Theodore Dreiser, who roamed the city as a reporter, marveled in his book *Newspaper Days* at the “hard, constructive animality” of the rougher parts of Chicago. It was not uncommon, he found on his rounds, to come across men standing outside ramshackle homes “tanning dog or cat hides.” The Chicago of this era was a town in which displaced farmhands and struggling immigrants competed for space in ram-shackle tenements and rooming houses, and hooligans roamed the streets. Block after block of “disorderly houses” did a brisk business corrupting hordes of guileless young girls, like Dreiser’s Sister Carrie, who arrived daily from small towns in a desperate search for a better life. And it was Chicago saloonkeepers who invented the Mickey Finn, a chloral hydrate-laced drink slipped to solitary patrons so they could be easily robbed. “The New York Tenderloin,” journalist Lincoln Steffens wrote, “was a model of order and virtue compared with the badly regulated, police-paid criminal lawlessness of the Chicago Loop and its spokes.” Chicago’s moral climate was shaped by Al Capone and the Saint Valentine’s Day Massacre, and by the ignominy of the 1919 Chicago White Sox

— the team that shocked the nation by fixing the World Series. “Chicago is unique,” journalist A. J. Liebling would conclude after visiting for a year to research a book. “It is the only completely corrupt city in America.” Loving Chicago, Nelson Algren once said, was like loving a woman with a broken nose. ²

Even by the standards of turn-of-the-century Chicago, Daley’s neighborhood was a grim place. It was Chicago’s first slum, known in its early days by the evocative name Hardscrabble. It was settled in the 1830s and 1840s by the Irish “shovelmen” who built the nearby Illinois & Michigan Canal, many working for whiskey and a dollar a day. The area was renamed Bridgeport in the 1840s, when a low bridge was built across the Chicago River at Ashland Avenue, forcing barges to unload on one side and reload on the other. When the canals were completed, Bridgeport’s dirty work of canal-building gave way to the even less savory trade of animal slaughter. Chicago killed and prepared for market much of the livestock raised in the farm states surrounding it. Leading the nation in slaughterhouses, it was truly — as Carl Sandburg observed — “hog butcher for the world.” In the mid-1800s, Chicago slaughterhouses were being forced out of the congested downtown, and they found the vast expanses south of Bridgeport an ideal place to relocate. The area had sweeping tracts of open land, and a steady supply of water from the Chicago River available to use in the slaughtering and treatment processes. It was also near railroad tracks, which meant that once the cattle arrived from the countryside, they would not need to be led through the city streets on their way to the slaughter. In 1865, several slaughterhouses that once operated in downtown Chicago combined to form the Union Stock Yards, an enormous collection of meat-processing plants that dominated the area just south of Bridgeport. ³

Upton Sinclair, whose novel *The Jungle* exposed the horrific world of the Chicago slaughterhouses, captured the unsavory surroundings in which Daley grew up. There were “so many cattle no one had ever dreamed existed in the world,” Sinclair wrote. “The sound of them here was as of all the barnyards of the universe; and as for counting them — it would have taken all day simply to count the pens.” Young Daley used to watch as the animals were driven down Archer Avenue to their demise, and he and his friends would gawk at the remnants that showed up in Bubbly Creek. Thousands of Daley’s neighbors labored in the slaughterhouses, their workdays an uninterrupted assembly line of killing. Pigs with chains around their hind legs were hooked to a spokeless wheel, which hoisted the squealing animals into the air and carried them by overhead rail across the length of the building, where a man covered in blood cut their throats by hand. The blood that drained out was collected for use as fertilizer. Then the hog, often still squirming with life, was dropped into a vat of boiling water. Cattle were treated no better. It was hard, dispiriting work. Daley’s neighbors were the workers Sinclair told of, those who fell prey to the chemicals used to pickle the meats, which caused “all the joints” of their fingers to “be eaten by the acid, one by one.” Coming of age in this violent world, Daley was robbed of any illusions early. ⁴

As its original name suggested, Bridgeport was a hardscrabble place. The neighborhood’s earliest residents had lived in wooden shanties along the Chicago River that sank into the muddy soil of the riverbank. It was a wild region, where wolves ran free in the early years of Daley’s childhood. The predominant form of housing, after residents gained the wherewithal to move beyond wooden shanties, was the humble “bungalow,” a staple of working-class Chicago architecture. These long and narrow houses, or “shotgun-shacks,” were a big step up from the squalid accommodations along the river, but they were still cheap housing for people who could not afford better. These small bungalows, on not-much-larger lots, were usually home to large immigrant families that would have

been crowded in twice the space. Years after Daley was elected mayor, his wife would recall the cramped conditions of her childhood bungalow, in a neighborhood adjoining Bridgeport. “There were 10 children in our family and we only had one bathroom but somehow we all managed,” Sis Daley told a newspaper reporter cheerfully.⁵

Bridgeport was, as much as any neighborhood in Chicago, a world apart. It lay on the geographical fringes of the city, five miles from downtown, on land that had only recently been incorporated. And was separated on all sides by imposing barriers: the Chicago River to the north, the stockyards to the south, Bubbly Creek to the west, and wide railroad tracks — and then a black ghetto — to the east. Ethnic groups had divided Chicago according to an unwritten peace treaty. Germans settled on the North Side, Irish on the South Side, Jews on the West Side, Bohemians and Poles on the Near Southwest Side and Near Northwest Side, and blacks in the South Side Black Belt. Bridgeport was more diverse than most Chicago neighborhoods: it was home to several different white Catholic immigrant groups. But this only meant that Bridgeport was itself divided into ethnic enclaves. Most of its Poles were concentrated in northwest Bridgeport, west of Halsted Street, the traditional boundary line between Irish and non-Irish Bridgeport. Lithuanians also lived predominantly in the northwest, with Morgan Street separating them from the Poles. Germans and Bohemians were more spread out, but they too stayed mainly on the non-Irish side of Halsted. It is a reflection of how ethnically divided Bridgeport was that in 1868 the “index of dissimilarity” — the most commonly used measure of residential segregation — between its Lithuanians and Irish was .96, indicating almost complete separation. In turn-of-the-century Bridgeport, a block or two meant a world of difference. Tom Donovan, who would later become Daley’s patronage chief, grew up at 39th and Lowe Avenue, only a few blocks from Daley’s home at 35th and Lowe. But it was one parish over — Saint Anthony’s, rather than Nativity of Our Lord — so, Donovan insisted, “I didn’t grow up in his neighborhood.” Even Bridgeport’s Irish were divided up into sub-neighborhoods: the northwest Bridgeport Irish; the Dashed Irish, who lived along upper Union Avenue, once named Dashed Avenue; the Canaryville Irish, who lived in the marshy far-south end of the neighborhood; and, just north of Canaryville, the little rectangle of land around Nativity of Our Lord Church known as Hamburg.⁶

Daley’s deepest loyalties were to this small Irish-Catholic village-within-a-village. Hamburg was no more than a few square blocks, stretching from 35th Street down to the stockyards at 39th Street, and bounded by Halsted Avenue on the west and the railroad tracks along Wentworth Avenue on the east. Its major institution was Nativity, which like all Catholic churches of the time was as much a center of communal life as a place of worship. Archbishop James Quigley, who led the Chicago Archdiocese from 1903 to 1915, had decreed that “a parish should be of such a size that the pastor can know personally every man, woman, and child in it,”⁷ and this was certainly the case in tiny Nativity Parish. The annual parish fair — which featured gambling games, booths selling oyster stew, and a Hibernian band playing in the corner — was almost a family gathering.⁸ Hamburg also had an array of secular institutions tying its residents together. The 11th Ward offices, headquarters of one of the most important units of the city’s powerful Democratic machine, were located on Halsted Avenue at 37th Street. Directly across Halsted was the neighborhood saloon, Schaller’s Pump, which many said was the real headquarters of the 11th Ward Democrats. Young residents had an institution of their own, the Hamburg Athletic Club, a combination of sports club, adjunct to the political machine, and youth gang. Hamburg was a tight little world inhabited by people who shared a religion, an ethnicity, and a common set of values, and who were mistrustful of those who lacked these bonds. Though it was in the middle of a large city, Hamburg was “not only a separate neighborhood, but ... a separate world

— a small town on a compact . . . scale.”⁹

By one well-established formulation, a neighborhood is a “place to be defended.” For all its seeming solidity, Irish-Catholic Hamburg was already in decline even at the time of Daley’s birth. Nativity Parish was losing congregants, declining from 2,800 to 1,200 in the early years of the century, and beginning to encounter financial troubles. Throughout Daley’s childhood, other ethnic groups were growing in size and drawing closer to Hamburg: formerly Irish Lawler Avenue, a mere four blocks west of Daley’s childhood home, was renamed “Lithuanica” as the Lithuanian population around it grew. Mr. Dooley, the fictional creation of the great Irish-American journalist Finley Peter Dunne, expressed Bridgeport’s fears of being engulfed by fast-encroaching ethnic rivals. In Dunne’s columns in the *Chicago Daily News*, Mr. Dooley was the Irish-born keeper of a Bridgeport saloon. In 1897, five years before Daley’s birth, Mr. Dooley was already bemoaning the fact that “th’ Hannigans an’ Leonidas an’ Caseys” were moving out to greener pastures, “havin’ made their pile,” and “Polish Jews an’ Swedes an’ Germans an’ Hollanders” had “swarmed in, settlin’ on th’ sacred sites.” The most telling sign of Bridgeport’s “change an’ decay,” Mr. Dooley said, was the selection of “a Polacker” to tend the famous “red bridge,” which joined Bridgeport to the rest of the city, thereby placing control of the neighborhood in the hands of a non-Hibernian. It was the rising tide of black immigration, though, that Bridgeporters found most worrisome. Daley’s youth coincided with the start of an unprecedented migration, as southern blacks moved north to take industrial jobs in the Northeast and Midwest. Most of the blacks flooding into Chicago were settling in the South Side Black Belt, just a few blocks east of Bridgeport, and the ghetto was always threatening to move closer. By the time Daley was born, many Bridgeporters had decided that their tough little neighborhood, with its workaday bungalows and slaughterhouse ambience, was best left to the new ethnic groups that were engulfing it on all sides. Irish residents of Hamburg who had the money — like Mr. Dooley’s Hannigans, Leonidas, and Caseys — were already moving out to more attractive and prestigious neighborhoods where the lawns were larger and the air did not smell of blood. But despite all sense and logic, Daley’s family, and later Daley himself, remained intensely loyal to their small Irish-Catholic village. Daley never moved out and, it might be said, he spent a lifetime defending it.¹⁰

* * *

Daley was born in a simple two-flat at 3502 South Lowe on May 15, 1902. Daley’s father, Michael, was the second of nine children born to James E. Daley, a New York-born butcher, and Delia Gallagher, an immigrant from Ireland. Like most Irish-American immigrants, Daley’s forebears came to the country as part of the Great Potato Famine migration, which caused more than two million Irish to expatriate between 1845 and 1850. Though not brought over in chains, these Irishmen and Irishwomen were torn from their land and forced to emigrate by extraordinarily cruel circumstances. Before the famine ended, perhaps one-quarter of Ireland’s population of eight million had died of starvation and disease. Many survivors headed for America. Their journey across the ocean, made in aptly named “coffin ships,” was perilous. Passengers often succumbed to “ship fever,” a kind of typhus, along the way. It was a migration of refugees fleeing a country they held dear, often forced to leave loved ones behind. Family legend has it that Daley’s grandfather began his own journey when he went to market in Cork with his brother to sell pigs and, with the few shillings he made on the sale, boarded the next ship for America.¹¹

Growing up in Bridgeport, Daley could not have avoided hearing about the horrors of the “Great Starvation.” Adults in the neighborhood, some of whom had seen the suffering firsthand, passed on to the children lurid tales of skeletons walking the countryside, and peasant women dying in the fields.

These famine stories were invariably laced with bitter accounts of how the hated British had exported wheat and oats out of the country while the Irish starved. In the course of his childhood, Daley learned the whole tragic history of his people — the centuries of rule as a conquered territory, the rebellions brutally put down, the absentee landlordism that drove farmers into poverty, and the language all but obliterated. [12](#)

The America Daley's grandparents immigrated to rescued them from famine, but it was far from welcoming. The flood of Irish arriving in the nation's large cities produced a feverish outpouring of anti-Catholic sentiment. Protestant ministers preached about the threat posed by a Catholic Church they referred to by epithets like "The Scarlet Lady of Babylon" and "The Whore of Rome." And the American reading public devoured incendiary anti-Catholic books like the infamous novel *Artful Disclosures*, an "exposé" of convent life in which a nun describes forced sexual relations with priests, frequent orgies, and the murder of nuns who refused to submit. [13](#)

This anti-Catholic fervor found political expression in the Know-Nothing Party, which in the elections of 1854/55 won seventy-five seats in Congress. In newspapers and popular magazines, a stereotype soon emerged of Irish immigrants as shiftless and prone to drink, with a dangerous propensity for brawling, gambling, and other lowlife pastimes. "Who does not know that the most depraved, debased, worthless, and irredeemable drunkards and sots which curse the community are Irish Catholics?" the *Chicago Tribune* asked in 1855. The Irish were regarded as particularly disposed to crime. "Scratch a convict or a pauper," the *Chicago Post* declared in 1898, and "the chances are that you tickle the skin of an Irish Catholic at the same time — an Irish Catholic made a criminal or a pauper by the priest and politicians who have deceived him and kept him in ignorance, in a word, a savage, as he was born." [14](#)

America reserved some of the lowest rungs on the economic and social ladder for the new Irish immigrants. Signs proclaiming "No Irish Need Apply" were common. Advertisements for housekeepers often specified "Protestant girls" only, because young Irish-Catholic women, as one account had it, were "the daughters of laborers, or needy tradesmen, or persecuted, rack-rented cotters they are ignorant of the common duties of servants in respectable positions." Irish men, for their part, were largely relegated to the jobs native-born whites would not take. They were the laborers who carved out the canals, laid the railroad tracks, and dug the ditches — often at great personal cost. As one Irish-American lamented at the time: "How often do we see such paragraphs in the paper as an Irishman drowned — an Irishman crushed by a beam — an Irishman suffocated in a pit — an Irishman blown to atoms by a steam engine — ten, twenty Irishmen buried alive by the sinking of a bank — and other like casualties and perils to which honest Pat is constantly exposed in the hard toil for his daily bread." [15](#)

Coming of age in Bridgeport, Daley absorbed a keen understanding of Ireland's long years of "misery, suffering, oppression, violence, exploitation, atrocity, and genocide." And he felt deeply the discrimination that, even in America, his countrymen experienced. Hard as it may be to imagine now, one of the major forces driving Daley — born in a working-class Irish-Catholic neighborhood in a city run by wealthy Protestants — was something as basic as "an aspiration for full-class citizenship." Later in life, after he had taken control of the Chicago Democratic machine and been elected mayor, Daley spoke at an Irish-American dinner at Chicago's venerable Conrad Hilton Hotel. "I can't help thinking of your mothers and fathers and grandparents who would never have been allowed in this hotel," Daley declared. The lace-curtain Irish crowd laughed, but Daley did not. "I want to offer a prayer for those departed souls who could never get into the Conrad Hilton." Daley's childhood

catechism of Irish deprivations left him convinced that no group had suffered as his kinsmen had suffered. In the 1960s, when Daley was turning a deaf ear to the civil rights movement, one liberal critic opined: “I think one of the real problems [Daley] has with Negroes is understanding that the Irish are no longer the out-ethnic group.”¹⁶

* * *

Daley spent his childhood in conditions a distinct notch above the world of his grandfathers. He was born just as Chicago’s Irish immigrants were making the hard transition from “shanty Irish” to the more respectable echelons of the lower middle class. Daley’s father, Michael, was a sheet-metal worker and a business agent for his union. The Daleys fit in well in a neighborhood whose beliefs were few but deeply cherished: the Catholic Church, family, labor unions, and the White Sox, who played Comiskey Park, just a few blocks away from the Daley home.

In the teeming Irish-Catholic world of Hamburg, Daley was a rarity: an only child. He and his parents were, perhaps because there were only three of them, an unusually closely knit family. Michael Daley, a wiry man who almost always sported a derby, was a man of few words. If Daley did not learn ambition or politics at his father’s knee, he did acquire one of the mannerisms that would serve him best in his career: speaking little and keeping his own counsel. “Part of the mystique of Richard Daley is that no one ever seems to know precisely what he thinks,” one observer has written. Daley’s taciturn ways may have been sheer political strategy, but they were also the prevailing character trait in the Daley household. “I think the reason he’s always had trouble talking,” an old Bridgeport neighbor recalled, “was that there weren’t any other children in his home, and his parents were quiet people.” Daley’s father also taught him respect for authority and reverence for the government. Years later, when his own mayoral authority was questioned by civil rights protesters, Daley would invoke a lesson he learned from his father at the funeral parade for Governor Edward Dunne. “There is the governor of Illinois, son,” Daley recalled his father saying to him. “Take off your hat.”¹⁷

Lillian Dunne Daley was eight years older than Daley’s father, and she had a far stronger personality. Students of Irish history contend that as families left the land and moved to cities, gender roles changed, and women began to play a more dominant role. Mrs. Daley was one of this new breed: the “powerful and autocratic Irish matron.” She was an active force in the church. Once, a young priest new to the parish wanted to start a bingo game, but was too shy to bring it up. Mrs. Daley advised him to raise it at an upcoming meeting of churchwomen. When the priest said in an uncertain voice that he wanted to start bingo, Mrs. Daley shouted out, “And we all do, too!” applauding, and carrying along the other women in the group. In addition to her work at Nativity of Our Lord, Mrs. Daley was a committed suffragist — not a usual cause for women in Bridgeport — and even took her son along to marches in support of the franchise for women. It is a measure of how formidable a force Lillian Daley was that a spectator would recall that as the Daley family walked by, a neighbor pronounced with dark Irish humor, “Here they come now, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost!” Daley remained close to his mother her entire life, never moving more than a block away. Years later, as mayor, Daley would nod and wipe a tear from his eye when a women’s float at a Chicago Saint Patrick’s Day parade waved a banner saying, “The Mayor’s Mother Was a Suffragette!”¹⁸

Mrs. Daley had high hopes that her only son would end up somewhere better than the stockyards or a South Side sheet-metal union hall. She always dressed Daley more formally than his contemporaries, in suits with neckties, which made him look like a little adult — an extravagance made easier by the fact that the family had only one child to clothe. Young Daley often sported a

handkerchief and he was, according to one family friend, the only child in Bridgeport at the time who owned pajamas. Whether it came from his parents or from somewhere within, Daley had a strong work ethic from a very young age. His first childhood job was selling newspapers at the corner of 35th and Wallace. Daley also made the rounds of the city's streetcars, riding to the end of the line as he walked up and down the aisle selling papers. These early jobs provided Daley with spending money, but they also trained him for his future career. "I think selling newspapers is a good thing for kids," Daley would say later. "They learn how to handle themselves with people." Daley also worked Saturday mornings, starting at 7:00, running up and down stairs to make deliveries for a peddler who sold vegetables door-to-door from a horse-drawn wagon. Bridgeport was a neighborhood in which many parents expected nothing more of their children than for them to match their own modest achievements. Lillian Daley, however, always made it clear she wanted more. This pressure to succeed was a constant in Daley's life as long as his mother lived. Shortly before her death, after Daley won the Democratic nomination for the powerful post of Cook County sheriff, Lillian Daley made it clear that she was unimpressed. "I didn't raise my son to be a policeman," she told a friend. She also had another reason for opposing his run for sheriff. Gilbert Graham, a priest and a friend of the family, recalls that she complained to her son: "You're going to have to put people to death." Earl Bush, Daley's longtime press secretary, suspects Mrs. Daley had an entirely different career path in mind for her only child. "I don't think [Mrs. Daley] naturally thought of her son as being a politician," says Bush. "I think she would have preferred him to become a priest." [19](#)

Daley attended parochial school at Nativity, where he became an altar boy and stayed through graduation. In that era, the Catholic Church expected its parishioners to send their children to parochial school, and most complied. By one estimate, as many as 90 percent of Bridgeport's Catholic children attended church schools. The Daleys, like many Catholic parents, probably feared the non-Catholic world around them. The Catholic press of this era was filled with cautionary tales of Catholic parents who had entrusted their children to Protestant-dominated public schools. An article in the *Iris World and American Industrial Liberator*, extreme but not entirely atypical, told the tale of a ten-year-old child whipped "black and blue" in a Boston public school "for refusing to read the King James Version" of the Bible. The story all but omitted the fact that the incident had occurred fifty years earlier, but it reflected the deep mistrust many Irish-Catholic parents held for the public school system. [20](#)

Daley's parochial school education emphasized the basics: reading, writing, arithmetic, and the catechism. But as much as anything he learned in the formal curriculum, his eight years there helped instill in him many of the Irish-Catholic values he would carry with him throughout his life. Parochial school education was a prolonged education in submission to authority. Daley's patronage coordinator, Matt Danaher, who grew up in Bridgeport, once told of serving as an altar boy for a monsignor at Nativity of Our Lord Church. "I said to him one morning, 'We're all set, Father,'" Danaher recalled. "He walked over, looked at the clock and said, 'It's one minute to 6.' And then he said, 'How would you like to hang for one minute.' He was always a perfectionist." And the nuns were, as countless Catholic memoirs have attested, often tyrants in habits. One chronicler of a parochial school in a parish not far from Bridgeport wrote that "children were sometimes asked to kneel on marbles, or eat soap, or scrape gum from the hallway stairs." The curriculum at Nativity emphasized memorization, penmanship, and rote learning. The Catholic catechism drilled into Daley in religion class was, of course, the ultimate form of rote learning, reducing almost every question students could have about God or man to a memorized short answer. It was the ideal education for a young man who might find his way to a career in machine politics, where success lay in

unquestioningly performing the tasks set out by powers above. But it was less helpful as training for leader who would need to think independently and adapt himself to changing times. [21](#)

In school and out, Daley absorbed his neighborhood's conservative values and flinty self-reliance. Bridgeport, with its legions of slaughterhouse workers marching off to their bloody and dangerous jobs each day, was a community dedicated to the virtues of industry. No Bridgeporter with any pride would rely on others for his daily bread: success came through constant toil and pulling oneself up by one's own bootstraps. The Catholic Church had its charities, but the overwhelming ethic in neighborhoods like Bridgeport was that except in the most dire cases of family death or illness it was an embarrassment to accept alms. "Poor people didn't look to anybody for help or assistance," observed the superintendent of Bridgeport's parochial schools in the 1930s. Mr. Dooley tells of the down-on-his-luck laborer Callaghan who nevertheless musters the strength of character to tell the Saint Vincent de Paul almsgivers to "Take ye'er charity, an' shove it down ye'er throats." If the Callaghans had things tough, it was because this earthly life was a hard one. [22](#)

The pre-Vatican II Catholicism in which Daley was raised impressed on him a keen sense of man's fallen state, and of the inevitability of sin. Man had to struggle hard against the influence of evil, which could be warded off only "if one chose the path of dutifulness and care, if one made sure by doing this twice over and respecting authority, if one closed off the energies of rebellion inside oneself." It was an education that bred a wary, even skeptical view of one's fellowman — a character trait Daley would carry with him through life. "He's like a fellow who peeks in the bag to make sure the lady gave him a dozen buns," a profile of Daley in the *Chicago Daily News* once observed. And it was an environment that left Daley with a lifelong skepticism of idealists of all kinds — whether they were reformers working to clean up machine politics or civil rights activists hoping to change hearts and minds on the question of race. These utopians all proceeded from an unduly optimistic vision of man's perfectibility. "Look at the Lord's Disciples," Daley would later say in response to a charge of corruption in City Hall. "One denied Him, one doubted Him, one betrayed Him. If our Lord couldn't have perfection, how are you going to have it in city government?" [23](#)

* * *

Daley was an obedient student, but not a particularly gifted one. He was "a very serious boy," his teacher Sister Gabriel recalled. "A very studious boy. He played when he played. He worked when he worked. And he prayed when he prayed." In 1916, after graduating from Nativity, Daley enrolled at De La Salle Institute, a three-year Catholic commercial high school known as "the Poor Boy's College." De La Salle was located at 3455 South Wabash, in a poor black neighborhood on the "wrong" side of the racial dividing line separating Bridgeport from the black neighborhoods to the east. Daley's commute brought him into closer physical proximity with the blacks who lived across the railroad tracks, but it did nothing to break down the psychological barriers that still separated him and his classmates from their black neighbors. De La Salle regarded its location in a black neighborhood as an unfortunate trick of fate, and it made no effort to introduce its young charges to their neighbors. "The school was surrounded by tenements and by low life," a history of De La Salle, prepared by the school itself, states bluntly. "It was a white school as an island surrounded by a black sea." Daley traveled to De La Salle in a pack of his fellow Bridgeporters, and quickly made his way out of the neighborhood when school let out. [24](#)

De La Salle, founded by an Irish immigrant from the Christian Brothers Order named Brother Adjutor of Mary, had a highly practical approach to educating the children of the Catholic working

class. Brother Adjutor believed the best training for a young man with few advantages was intensive instruction in business. De La Salle's curriculum combined Catholic religious studies with commercial courses, including typing, bookkeeping, and business law. The school had actual "counting rooms," and other lifelike replicas of business settings, for students to begin acting out the financial jobs they would one day hold. Daley continued to be a diligent but unremarkable student. One classmate remembered him as "a hard worker ... maybe a little above average." Brother Adjutor's educational philosophy worked well for Daley: the business skills he acquired at De La Salle were of considerable help later in life, when his financial skills proved to be a critical factor in his rise up the ranks of the machine. Like Nativity, De La Salle instilled the importance of unquestioning obedience. The Christian Brothers, imposing figures in long black robes and stiff white collars, instructed with a strictness that at times crossed the line to brutal. "They were good teachers," one of Daley's classmates recalled, "but if you got out of line, they wouldn't hesitate to punch you in the head." ²⁵

De La Salle's real strength was its extensive efforts to get jobs for its graduates. Most young Irish-Catholic boys coming of age in places like Bridgeport in the early 1900s never made it out of the working class. But De La Salle opened up another world, a white-collar alternative, for its students. As graduation neared, its faculty operated as a kind of Irish-Catholic educational machine — mirroring the Irish-Catholic political machine — in which Brother Adjutor and other instructors drew on their contacts in the business world to find jobs for the "Brother's Boys." Brother Adjutor's reference letters were similar to the ones precinct captains were writing in clubhouses across the city. Because of "the necessity of giving our students a good start in life," went one, "I have for many years past strenuously exerted myself to secure for them good positions in the leading mercantile houses of this and other cities." The school's combination of commercial training and methodical Irish-Catholic networking was a powerful engine for thrusting working-class boys into the upper echelons of the city's power structure. When Daley was elected mayor, he would be the third consecutive mayor educated at De La Salle. The school also produced numerous aldermen, including two from Daley's own graduating class, and many prominent businessmen. A commemorative book boasted, with only some hyperbole, that "The battle of Waterloo was won on the playing fields of Eton" but "the business leaders of Chicago were trained in the Counting Rooms of De La Salle." As an adult, Daley would remember De La Salle warmly as a place that "taught us to wear a clean shirt and tie and put a shine on your shoes and be confident to face the world." Daley worked after school and on weekends. When classes let out at 3:30 every day, he traveled to the Loop to wrap packages and act as a department store messenger until the early evening. He also worked on bakery wagons and joined the drivers' union. ²⁶

When Daley was not at school or working, he spent much of his free time at the Hamburg Athletic Club, which met in a nondescript clubhouse at 37th and Emerald, just a few blocks from his home. Hamburg was one of many such clubs in Chicago at the time — others had names like "Ragen's Colts," "the Aylwards," and "Our Flag" — that were part social circle, part political organization, and part street gang. The athletic clubs placed a premium on toughness and loyalty. The Ragen's Colts' motto could have belonged to any of them: "Hit me and you hit two thousand." Young men like Daley often ended up on the wrong end of the local policeman's billy club. "All they wanted to do was just beat you over the head," Daley would later say, revealingly, about the policemen of his youth. When they were not testing the limits of the law, Hamburg Athletic Club members actually engaged in a few athletic activities. The clubs organized their own competitive sports leagues, sponsored outings to professional sporting events, and even held picnics and dances. Daley excelled in the Hamburg Athletic Club's sports program — not as a participant but as a manager of others. "Dick often came t

practice carrying his books,” recalled a union official who was once the mascot of the Hamburg Athletic Club baseball team. “He was a very busy guy, but he took his job as a manager seriously. He made lineups, booked the games, and ran the team on the field during games.” [27](#)

Clubs like Hamburg also served as the first rung of the Democratic machine. Most were sponsored by machine politicians, who contributed to their treasuries and took a personal interest in their members. The clubs, for their part, did political work in the neighborhood during election season. The “Ragen” of Ragen’s Colts was Cook County commissioner Frank Ragen, who paid the rent on the clubhouse and underwrote many of the club’s other expenses. Hamburg’s patron was Alderman Joseph McDonough, a rising star in the Democratic machine. Hamburg had a long history as a training ground for machine politicians. Among its alumni was Tommy Doyle, president of the club in 1914, who challenged Bridgeport’s twenty-year-incumbent alderman and won. The club had served as a powerful political base for Doyle, providing him with an army of 350 campaign workers. Four years later, when Doyle moved on to higher office, McDonough inherited his aldermanic seat. Clubs like Hamburg were also valuable because their members were willing and able to apply force on behalf of their sponsors. It was a useful service, since Chicago political campaigns had a way of getting rough. A fierce battle for ward committeeman in the “Bloody 20th” Ward in 1928 ended with one candidate killed gangland style and his opponent put on trial for the killing. It was common for election judges to be beaten up on election day, or kidnapped and not released until the voting — and the vote stealing — was completed. “Politics ain’t bean-bag,” Mr. Dooley said in one of his most famous pronouncements. “’Tis a man’s game, an’ women, childer, cripples an’ prohybitionists ’d do well to keep out iv it.” For a young man in Bridgeport with political ambitions, the Hamburg Athletic Club was a good place to start out. Daley was elected president of the club in 1924, at age twenty-two, a post he held for the next fifteen years. [28](#)

Another prime function of the athletic clubs was defending their narrow stretch of turf from outsiders. Before World War II, Chicago was divided into ethnic enclaves that were bitterly mistrustful of their neighbors on all sides. When an Irish neighborhood adjoined a Slavic one, or a Polish neighborhood adjoined a Scandinavian one, the fault lines were clear and the animosities barely restrained. For Bridgeport, the great dividing line was Wentworth Avenue, which separated it from the black neighborhoods to the east. Bridgeport’s fears were exacerbated by the fact that the population in the black ghetto was expanding rapidly as a result of migration from the South. At any moment, it seemed, the black neighborhoods to the east might expand and grow large enough to overrun Bridgeport. The intensity of Bridgeport’s racial feelings would be laid bare decades later by a small but brutally revealing incident. It was June 1961, just weeks after busloads of Freedom Riders had been beaten up in the segregated bus stations of the South. The old Douglas Hotel on the black South Side had caught fire, and eighty residents had suddenly been made homeless. Red Cross volunteers had arrived on the scene and — unaware of Bridgeport’s racial sensitivities — evacuated the refugees to temporary quarters in Bridgeport’s Holy Cross Lutheran Church, a few blocks from Daley’s home. Word spread quickly, and almost immediately a crowd of jeering whites was standing outside the church demanding the removal of the black fire victims. “They threatened to break windows in the church and screamed obscenities I can’t repeat,” Helen Constien, the pastor’s wife, said afterward. “They threatened to destroy the church if we didn’t get the Negroes out of the building.” The Red Cross quickly took the black fire victims out of Bridgeport. [29](#)

The work of patrolling the South Side’s racial borders was often taken care of by gangs like Daley’s Hamburg Athletic Club. Because of these gangs’ propensity for violence, blacks who walked through

neighborhoods like Bridgeport did so at their peril. It was a lesson that black children growing up on the South Side absorbed with their ABC's, but newly arrived blacks who wandered into the area from outside could be caught unaware, often with dire results. In 1918, the poet Langston Hughes made the mistake of walking west across Wentworth Avenue into the heart of the white South Side. It was Hughes's first Sunday in Chicago — he was a high school student at the time — and he “went out walking alone to see what the city looked like.” Hughes returned to the black side of Wentworth with black eyes and a swollen jaw, having been beaten up by an unidentified Irish street gang — it is lost to history whether it was the Hamburg Athletic Club — “who said they didn't allow niggers in that neighborhood.” [30](#)

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Blacks have lived in the Chicago area longer than any group but Native Americans. “Chicago's first white man,” the old Chicago saying has it, “was a Negro.” The man in question was Jean Baptiste du Sable, a Haitian black who built a trading post at the mouth of the Chicago River in 1779 to trade with the Potawatomi Indians. The city's black population grew slowly at first: black migration into Illinois was limited until the Civil War by laws that barred blacks, both slave and free, from settling in the state. Despite the legal prohibitions, enough fugitive slaves followed the Underground Railroad to Chicago in the 1840s and 1850s that it came to be known among pro-slavery polemicists as a “sink hole of abolition.” By the 1870s, Illinois blacks had the franchise, and in 1876 Chicago sent a black representative to the Illinois legislature. Chicago had 3,700 black residents — 1.2 percent of the total population — when, as legend had it, Mrs. O'Leary's cow kicked over the lantern that started the Great Chicago Fire of 1871. By the turn of the century, blacks still numbered only 30,000. Although they were starting to concentrate in a small “Black Belt” on the South Side, even as late as 1915 blacks were still living in virtually every part of Chicago. [31](#)

Daley's childhood coincided with one of the nation's most far-reaching social transformations: the Great Migration of blacks from the rural South to the urban North. With the start of World War I, the booming wartime economy in the North faced a severe labor shortage, as the war cut off the flow of European immigrants. Realizing that there was a ready supply of workers in the rural South, where agricultural automation was fast reducing the need for black farm laborers, northern recruiters spread out across the Deep South. Many northern cities were competing for these black workers, but Chicago had a unique advantage. The *Chicago Defender*, the nation's leading black newspaper, was widely read throughout the South, and it painted an especially rosy picture of the high-paying jobs and good life that awaited black migrants in Chicago's factories and slaughterhouses. “MILLIONS TO LEAVE SOUTH,” a banner headline in the January 6, 1917, *Chicago Defender* declared. “Northern Invasion Will Start in Spring — Bound for the Promised Land.” To many southern blacks living in conditions of extreme poverty and chafing under the oppression of Jim Crow, Chicago and the other large northern cities became a “glorious symbol of hope.” Even blues singers from the era got caught up in the spirit:

I used to have a woman that lived up on a hill
I used to have a woman that lived up on a hill
She was crazy 'bout me, ooh well, well, cause
I worked at the Chicago Mill. [32](#)

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