

# THE DALEY SHOW

*Dynastic rule in Obama's political birthplace.*

BY EVAN OSNOS

**B**efore Barack Obama considered running for the U.S. Senate or the Presidency, he wanted to be the mayor of Chicago, a city so riven by race that the *Wall Street Journal* called it Beirut on the Lake. Obama left for Harvard Law School, where he confided to friends his desire to occupy City Hall, but by the time he returned from Cambridge, in 1991, something important had happened: Richard M. Daley had been elected mayor of Chicago.

Despite a famous name, Daley was not an obvious political powerhouse. In his first run for mayor, in 1983, his campaign hired Irving J. Rein, a communications professor at Northwestern University, to hone the candidate's delivery. Rein concluded, as he wrote later, that Daley had a "tendency to misstate the obvious, invent words never imagined by linguistic researchers, introduce irrelevant material, and demonstrate anger at seemingly uneventful moments." Daley lost; the Chicago columnist Mike Royko noted that he had "all the charisma of a plate of corned beef and cabbage."

Chicago, however, forgives syntax; Daley's father, Richard J. Daley, who died in 1976, was elected six times, despite the habit of musing about riding a "tantrum bike" and of explaining, as he did when his police attacked protesters at the 1968 Democratic National Convention, that "the policeman is there to preserve disorder." The younger Daley was elected in 1989, and then re-elected five more times, with breathtaking dominance. Unseating him, as the Obama biographer David Mendell put it, looks "akin to dethroning a king." A Daley has ruled Chicago for forty-two of the past fifty-five years. The dynasty endures in part because many voters remember what the city was like without them: in the thirteen years between Daley I and Daley II, Chicago churned through five mayors.

Daley no longer reads the local papers—"I don't take their guff, and they don't like that," he told me—so his press

secretary, Jacquelyn Heard, warns him when he might get a question about a story. One morning last summer, Heard was sitting in the front seat of Daley's town car when she turned to capture his attention. "Mayor, one of the things in the paper today is about the C.T.A."—the Chicago Transit Authority—"voting to extend the red, orange, yellow, and blue lines. The question is, Why are we doing that?"

"Well, you need vision," Daley said, but he was more interested in peering out his window to scan for run-down buildings and dirty lots. He held a manila folder in his lap, and whenever he saw something he didn't like he noted the location in large loopy script. That fixation on details has earned him praise as a leader with granular knowledge of his domain, as well as occasional ribbing from rivals. Edward (Fast Eddie) Vrdolyak, a former alderman and longtime opponent, years ago nicknamed him Mayor Rain Man. At sixty-seven, Daley looks like a healthier version of his father: short, ruddy, and jowly, despite regular gym visits and a breakfast regimen of grimly nutritious shakes.

The car pulled up to the Destiny Worship Center, a storefront church in the Austin neighborhood, a rough patch of Chicago's West Side. Daley was there to promote his annual Gun Turn-In, a ritual in which citizens receive gift cards of ten, fifty, or a hundred dollars for turning in illegal firearms, no questions asked. The church was packed with reporters and cameramen, who were standing around a table holding handguns, an AK-47, and ammunition. Daley joined a lineup of local politicians and ministers, almost all black or Hispanic, and Alderman Emma Mitts introduced him as "the finest mayor in the world."

In the city that Martin Luther King, Jr., called the Birmingham of the North, Daley has presided for two decades during which race has receded, if not into the background, then into the din of city politics. He took office at a moment when



*Mayor Richard M. Daley, at Manny's. "Rich*

Chicago was paralyzed by infighting and mismanagement. In 1987, William Bennett, the Secretary of Education, said that Chicago had the worst school system in the country—"an education meltdown." The center of the city was a desiccating museum of masterpieces by Mies van der Rohe and Louis Sullivan. Infant mortality in remote neighborhoods was comparable to levels in the Third World.

In the years that followed, Detroit, Cleveland, and other former industrial



Daley is a tough son of a bitch," one politician says. "Not in a bad way but in a very good way." Photograph by Martin Schoeller.

powers continued to wither, but Chicago did not. It has grown in population, income, and diversity; it has added more jobs since 1993 than Los Angeles and Boston combined. Downtown luxury condos and lofts have replaced old warehouses and office blocks. New trees and flower beds line the sidewalks and sprout from the roofs of high-rises. (Chicago has significantly more green roofs than any other city in America.) Diners and pizza joints have given way to daring restaurants like Alinea

and L2O, where the chefs Grant Achatz and Laurent Gras are among America's highest priests of the chemically complex food known as molecular gastronomy. Chicago is a post-industrial capital of innovation from house music to fashion—the Milan of the Midwest, as the *Washington Post* put it last year. Diverse neighborhoods are so flush with new immigrants that Mexican politicians running for office journey all the way to Chicago to campaign.

In November, 2008, in the same park

where the Mayor's father sent police to arrest antiwar and civil-rights protesters, Barack Obama celebrated the election that had made him America's first President from Chicago. He had campaigned with Daley's endorsement, and with the benefit of fund-raising by Daley's brother Bill, a lawyer and Democratic power broker who was Secretary of Commerce in the Clinton Administration, and who became a member of Obama's transition team. In the White House, Obama is sur-

rounded by people connected to Daley's City Hall: Michelle Obama once worked for Daley as a planning official; Valerie Jarrett, a special adviser to the President and an Obama-family confidante, rose through senior posts in the Daley City Hall, including deputy chief of staff, planning commissioner, and head of the transit board; David Axelrod, Obama's

isolated in what they can do. Everything is run by formulas and rules and regulations. They have no discretion!"

**W**hen Michael Bloomberg became mayor of New York, in 2002, he made a point of moving his desk out into a bullpen shared by his staff, in order to promote exchange.

Turn-In, a secretary leaned in to say that Bloomberg was on the phone. Daley picked up and boomed, "Mike, how are ya?" Bloomberg was arranging an event to promote volunteerism, and he wanted Daley to come to New York for the announcement. "Yeah, I'm all for it. When's it gonna be?" Daley said, before drifting into family talk. Bloomberg and Daley,



Daley has said that, after his father died, "I had to seek not my own identity, maybe, but the things I wanted to take on personally."

chief campaign strategist and now a senior White House adviser, was for nearly twenty years the Mayor's political consultant; Rahm Emanuel, the chief of staff, was in charge of fund-raising for Daley's first successful run for mayor.

Moreover, the deeper ranks of the Administration are as rife with Chicagoans as those of its predecessor were with Texans. The morning after Obama's election, Daley permitted himself a flicker of satisfaction. "It was a homecoming," he said. "It was a baptism. It was a bar mitzvah."

On the ride back to City Hall from the gun event, I asked Daley if he'd ever considered seeking a job in Washington. "No, no, no," he said. "I respect people going down there, but, if you look at the Presidential appointments, they are much more

Daley's office is more like a bunker.

Visitors to the fifth floor of City Hall must navigate a series of waiting rooms and secretaries before being ushered into the Mayor's office, a baronial sanctum with wing-back chairs and the vast mahogany desk used by his father. The Mayor is rarely there. He prefers a windowless unmarked conference room next door, at the center of which is a giant table laden with books, magazines, and newspapers. His tastes are erratic: he cites the *Financial Times* and *Scientific American* in equal measure. Along one wall is a saltwater fish tank, a gift from his staff. "It adds much needed tranquility," an aide says. The room, whose primary occupant has a ferocious temper, is known to some as the Woodshed.

When Daley came back from the Gun

despite radically different biographies, are united by a fervent love of unobstructed authority. "Richie Daley's philosophy, I've always thought, is 'Beg for forgiveness, not for permission,'" Bloomberg told me recently. "He goes and does it."

In one instance, Daley got sick of debating the fate of Meigs Field, a small waterfront airport that he wanted to turn into a park. Preservationists and pilots had filed a suit to keep it open. Late one night in March, 2003, Daley sent bulldozers under police escort to the runway, where they gouged a line of giant X's into the tarmac. When Chicago awoke to discover that Daley had destroyed his own airport, editorialists compared him to the generalissimo of a banana republic. (Daley explained that he did not have  $\approx$

time to alert the federal government in advance, because he was concerned that terrorists might be planning to use the airport to attack his city.)

Behavior like that, alongside Daley's radical efforts to improve Chicago schools and the city's forward-thinking environmental policy, is the envy of politicians who enjoy less latitude. "He's treated almost as a rock star—I'm not exaggerating," Joe Moore, a Chicago alderman, said of the scene at meetings of the National League of Cities. "It is fascinating to see. They shake his hand, get autographs, just express their admiration." Ed Rendell, the governor of Pennsylvania and a former mayor of Philadelphia, told me, "He's the best mayor in the history of the country, I think."

Some local environmentalists say that Daley favors flashy projects over substance—recycling, for instance, lags behind programs in other cities—but Al Gore told me that Daley's environmental initiatives are "an incredibly impressive world-leading effort. He gets that in his bones. It's not a P.R. trip; it's not green varnish." Gore added, "He has an impressive way of twisting arms—or whatever body parts he has to twist—to get it done."

Shortly before Christmas, Daley will officially surpass his father and become the longest-serving mayor in Chicago history, a prospect that invites attempts to reckon with the Daley legacy. "I think he uses political muscle in many good ways," Andy Shaw, the director of Chicago's Better Government Association and a veteran political reporter, told me. "But, on the other hand, he's a bully, and he terrorizes a lot of people, and he truly never tackled corruption and patronage and all of its negative tentacles head on."

Daley's record has impressed even some of the most ardent opponents of the Old Man, as his father is known. "Rich Daley is a tough son of a bitch," Bill Singer, a lawyer and former alderman who ran against the father for mayor in 1975, told me. "I'm saying 'tough son of a bitch' not in a bad way but in a very good way. He will do what he has to do to succeed, and he's indefatigable." Singer swivelled to face his office window, and swept his arm across miles of the West Side. "That's a new building," he said. "That's a new building. That's a new building. All those over there." He pointed at tour boats drift-

ing along the Chicago River. "People want to live here!" he added, with wonder in his voice. Did Singer ever expect this from the son? "Not in my wildest dreams," he said.

**D**aley is an unreconstructed old-school pol: rarely glimpsed without a suit jacket, fluent in the ancient political rituals. He is especially good at going to wakes. "He has a style—he gets there a little early," John Schmidt, his former chief of staff, said. "It lets you get in and out, because no one else is there." The Mayor is intensely wary of outsiders, and has a small circle of confidants: his brothers—Bill, John, and Michael—and a few buddies from the old days. His sport—cycling—is solitary. "He's really one of the shyest people I've known in public life," David Axelrod told me. "He could be in a room full of friends and stand in the corner uncomfortably."

Politics is the family business. Bill, six years younger than the Mayor, is involved in national Democratic circles; John is a powerful county commissioner who still lives in the South Side neighborhood, Bridgeport, that is the Daleys' traditional power base, and where he also runs the local Democratic organization. (Though the Mayor's three children, Nora, Patrick, and Elizabeth, have stayed away from politics almost entirely, his nephews Peter and Patrick Thompson, sons of the Mayor's eldest sister, Patricia, are prominent Democratic fund-raisers.)

Daley is a devout Roman Catholic with a punitive sense of moral clarity: among his early uses for the Internet was a Web site dedicated to posting the names and mug shots of johns picked up for soliciting within the city limits. A bad sleeper, he frequently badgers his aides with midnight phone calls. ("He couldn't send e-mails if his life depended on it," Bill Daley said.) Before the sun is up, Daley begins clipping—a never-ending accumulation of ideas and names and snippets, culled from magazines and trade journals and newspapers—and sends the clippings on to staff people and friends, often without comment. "If he doesn't write a note, you're supposed to know what he means," Lois Weisberg, his culture commissioner, told me.

If there is one thing on which his supporters and his critics agree, it's that Daley is fanatically proud of Chicago and ever vigilant against disrespect from what he

calls "the New Yorks and L.A.s and all that." A few years ago, he was visiting Beijing, and I trailed him to some events, including tea with Beijing's mayor at the time, Wang Qishan. Wang, in an attempt at small talk, mentioned that when he visited Chicago, in the eighties, violent crime was soaring and he didn't dare go out. Daley replied, "I was not the mayor then, and a lot has changed." Then he mentioned that he had been especially nervous before his visit to China, because of the threat of "civil unrest." The meeting did not last long.

Whatever Chicagoans think about him, Daley seems to have seeped into the city's cerebral cortex. In a trial a couple of years ago that looked at city hiring practices, a manager under oath said that he was in charge of insuring that toll booths were heavily staffed along the route to Daley's weekend house, to prevent the Mayor from being subjected to undue traffic. When reporters asked Daley about it, he guffawed—"It's silly, silly, silly," he said—and, indeed, there is no evidence that he ever asked for such treatment. Or needed to.

Shortly after talking to Bloomberg, Daley was at a table with officials of the Department of Streets and Sanitation. In a city where a mayor once lost an election because of lousy snowplowing, this might as well have been his war room. He flipped through a briefing packet, past sections on alley sweeping and street lights, and lingered on "Rodent Control." "What about Dunkin' Donuts?" he asked, referring to a recent case.

"Fly infestation," the rodent-control boss said.

"Who is the head of Dunkin' Donuts?" Daley demanded, his voice squeaking. "Why don't we send a letter to the president, and—who owns these?" he asked, of the local franchises. "Do we know who owns these? Absentee landlord?"

He scoured the pages before him and landed on another case—more flies, this time in a Starbucks at the airport. "Send a letter to Starbucks!" he said, poking the air with his half-glasses. "To the chairman of the board!"

On his way home that night, Daley stopped at a reception, at the Chicago Cultural Center, to mark India's Independence Day. The Indian consul-general met him outside and ushered him toward a gantlet of six young women who tossed rose petals



*"And one with no bun."*

in the Mayor's path; he regarded the petals with pleasant surprise, and then strode across them, chin held high, into the party. I wandered out into the early-summer evening, across Michigan Avenue and into Millennium Park, Daley's signature development in the city center—a twenty-five-acre site for art, music, and recreation that replaced a wasteland of tangled rail lines. There was a free concert under way in the Frank Gehry-designed band shell, and thousands of people in T-shirts were stretched out on blankets across a spectacular lawn. It was a diverse crowd, and I was reminded that in the fifties restaurants in this part of town refused to serve blacks. The park opened in 2004, four years late and hundreds of millions of dollars over the original budget. The city howled about waste and corruption in public construction; the *Tribune* wondered if Chicago was now, officially, "the most corrupt city in America." And then people moved on. In the intervening years, the park has helped boost tourism to Chicago by nearly fifty per cent and has become one of its most important public spaces.

**R**ichard Michael Daley, the fourth of seven children, was thirteen when his father was first elected mayor, in 1955, after serving as a state senator and rising through the machine to become chairman

of the Cook County Democratic Central Committee. The family lived in a red brick bungalow built by Daley's parents. There was a large picture of Jesus on the living-room wall and seven bronzed baby shoes on the mantle.

The family had deep roots in Bridgeport, a heavily Irish enclave beside the Union Stock Yards. The Daleys were descended from potato-famine refugees who had settled in Bridgeport in the nineteenth century, when it was better known as Hardscrabble. The father entered politics as a teen-ager, through the Hamburg Athletic Club, a mixture of fraternity, political organization, and street gang that guarded the neighborhood's racial boundaries. When the teen-aged Langston Hughes wandered into a white section of the South Side, in 1918, on his first Sunday in Chicago, he was beaten by an Irish gang who, as he put it, "didn't allow niggers in that neighborhood."

Daley's mother, known as Sis, ran the house. His father was imposing but attentive, and often home for dinner, despite being "the most powerful local politician America has ever produced," in the judgment of Adam Cohen and Elizabeth Taylor, the authors of the biography "American Pharaoh" (2000). When John F. Kennedy was inaugurated, in 1961, the Daleys made the very first so-

cial call to the White House. (In contrast to the prevailing lore, historians have concluded that the Old Man did not steal the election for Kennedy. Chicago's vote was riddled with fraud, but Richard Nixon would have lost Illinois anyway.)

As a teen-ager, Daley watched his father confront a city that was ailing like "a jukebox running down in a deserted bar," as Nelson Algren put it. Middle-class white homeowners were fleeing to the suburbs, replaced by poor black migrants streaming up from the South. The elder Daley decided on radical treatment: to retain corporations and tax dollars, he donated a city block to make way for the Sears Tower, the world's tallest skyscraper, and annexed swaths of the suburbs to expand O'Hare International Airport. The perils of inaction, in his view, were on display in Detroit, which by the nineteen-seventies had lost a third of its Fortune 500 companies, and had become the nation's murder capital.

He was far less equipped to handle the other great drama of his day: the civil-rights crusade. He took office the same year that Rosa Parks refused to move to the back of a bus, but he never truly comprehended the movement that she embodied. He adhered to what Cohen and Taylor call a "flinty conservatism," which was shared by working-class ethnic whites: "Daley believed that poor people should pull themselves up by their bootstraps, as his Bridgeport neighbors struggled to do." From cradle to grave, Daley lived within a few blocks in a single neighborhood, and, as his adviser Edward Marciak later put it, his position was "If you grew up in a place, why do you want to come into mine?" He opposed desegregation in schools and affirmative action in the police department, and used urban-renewal funds to build public housing. Though he voiced concerns about building high-rises, he went ahead with the construction of towers that eventually became "filing cabinets" for the poor, as one federal commission put it.

The younger Daley believes that his father is "very misunderstood." He said to me, "Remember, he got elected by black voters—1955 all the way to 1975." Indeed, Daley's machine benefitted from the support of a black "submachine," which received patronage jobs and access to welfare and public housing—and voted the straight machine ticket. But beneath

that support lay a vast bitterness, according to Michael Dawson, a University of Chicago professor of political science. Dawson's late great-uncle William L. Dawson was a Chicago congressman and one of Daley's staunchest black allies. "I grew up in a political family in Chicago," Michael Dawson told me, "and I knew that a lot of his black allies had nothing but contempt for him by the sixties, even though they publicly supported him."

**F**or high school, Daley enrolled at his father's alma mater, De La Salle Institute, a training ground for the city's political élite. It had integrated in the forties—it was the first Catholic school in the city to do so—and had a handful of black students. "For most of us, it was the first experience we had with black kids," Ron Gralewski, a classmate of Daley's, told me. It was an uneasy mix. "Did you ever see a movie called 'A Bronx Tale?'" he said. "There's a scene in which a black kid's riding his bicycle through, and they're throwing stuff at him. I'm going to be honest with you: that would happen if a black person rode through our neighborhood."

At one point, the activist Dick Gregory led black marchers down South Lowe Avenue, where the Daleys lived. Residents turned on sprinklers to shower the marchers and chanted, "Two, four, six, eight, we don't want to integrate!" When I asked Daley what he recalls of sixties racial politics, he grew vague: "Everyone says, 'There was tension.' It's interesting. The riots were the tension. . . . It was fear of crime—not fear of blacks, just of crime. That's why they fled."

At De La Salle, Daley played on the lightweight basketball team, and though he did little to attract attention, he couldn't really avoid it. In a bookkeeping course, Gralewski and Daley were caught talking in class and the teacher called them to the front. "Everybody knew what was coming," Gralewski recalled. "Bend over, grab your knees! And he'd give you a smack with the paddle. And it stung." Afterward, the teacher asked Daley, half jokingly, "Your father's not going to get me in trouble, now, is he?" In the yearbook, Daley's nickname was Mayor, and in the space where he was to list his ambitions he wrote, "Become a great lawyer and politician."

Daley enrolled at Providence College, in Rhode Island, but transferred two years

later to DePaul University—his father's school—where he studied history and law, with difficulty. "I flunked the bar twice," he told me. "I was going to quit, but I was convinced I could pass, so I passed it." He added, with an edge in his voice, "I remember they used that against me in the state's attorney and the mayoral races. I just laughed at them, because, you know, they always said, 'Richie, the Mayor's son,' or 'He's not that smart.' They always did that."

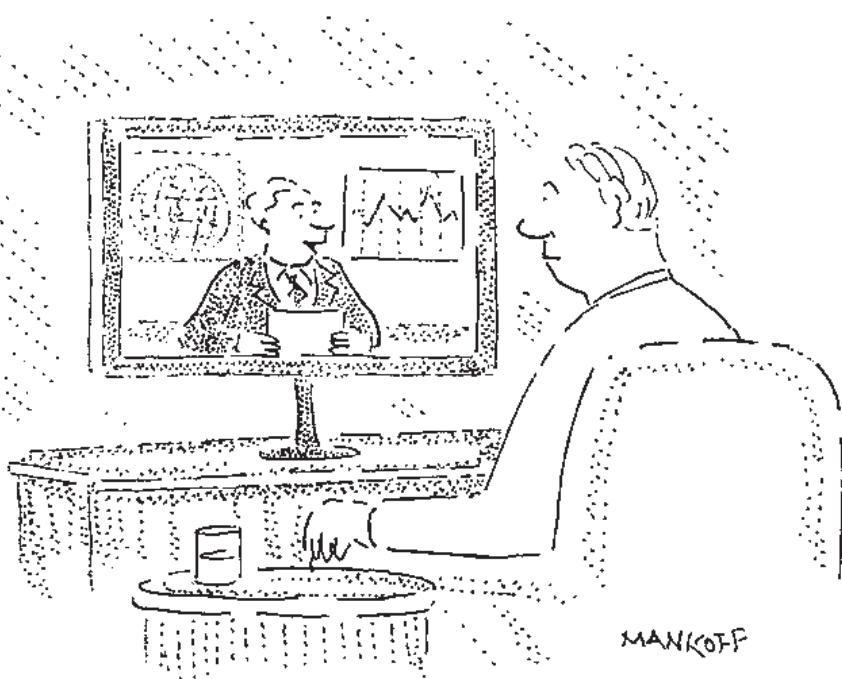
The summer he graduated from law school, in 1968, Daley stood with his father at the Democratic National Convention as Senator Abraham Ribicoff, of Connecticut, took to the lectern to decry the "Gestapo tactics" of the Chicago police. The Old Man scowled and waved Ribicoff off the stage, shouting what some heard as "fucker" but which his supporters maintain was only "faker." In photographs, the younger Richard Daley is visible at the Old Man's left shoulder, hands cupped around his mouth, his face twisted in rage. Daley says that they were taunting Ribicoff only for grandstanding: "My father said 'faker' because the night before was a big fund-raiser for him."

Having passed the bar, Daley went into private practice with his brother Michael. At one point, the press learned that the brothers had been appointed by local judges to handle cases worth tens of

thousands of dollars. When asked about it, the Old Man said, "Kiss my ass," adding, "If a man can't put his arms around his sons, then what kind of world are we living in?"

At a Christmas party in 1970, Daley met Maggie Corbett, the twenty-six-year-old daughter of a suburban Pittsburgh auto-parts dealer. They married fifteen months later, and, at the age of thirty, Daley moved out of his parents' house. He was craving his father's old State Senate seat and went to visit him at City Hall. As Daley recounted it, "He said, 'You mean, all the opportunities I've given to you, all the things that you're doing today! You make three times as much money as I'm making! Your decision cannot be my decision or your mother's decision. When you make the decision, you go back and talk to your wife. You never, ever talk to me about your decision, or your mother. Or complain about your life. That's your decision.'" Daley paused. "He scared the hell out of me."

Daley ran anyway, and after a landslide victory arrived in the legislature with a crop of new senators, including Dawn Clark Netsch, a liberal rookie. When Netsch chose a seat in the chamber, she recalled, "I heard gasps, but I didn't know why." It turned out that she had taken the Daleys' customary chair. A senator pulled her aside and said, "You gotta give the kid



*"On Wall Street today, the stock market corrected its previous correction, and is pretty sure it's got it right this time."*

his seat." "I said, 'What are you *talking* about?'" She kept the chair for the next eighteen years.

Daley joined the Senate Judiciary Committee, where he made no secret of his determination to kill legislation introduced by opponents of the machine—the "phony liberals," as he called them then. "They made sure to defeat almost every bill that I sponsored," Netsch said. One day, she mentioned to a reporter that one of her initiatives had succumbed to a "dirty little trick and little Richie did it." A nickname was born: Dirty Little Richie. Even so, Netsch couldn't help but feel sorry for Daley, who lived, she thought, "in a glass cage." He was an uncomfortable heir, a big-leaguer's son who could barely bunt, known for little more than his famous name and his wardrobe of mismatched plaids. After he'd spent five years in Springfield, the magazine *Chicago* called him one of the ten worst senators, saying, "If he were named Richie M. Schwartz, he wouldn't even be in the legislature."

**O**n December 20, 1976, the Old Man, after complaining of chest pains, collapsed and died at his doctor's office. Daley rode with his father's body in the hearse to the funeral home, in Bridgeport. Tens of thousands of people filed past the coffin at Nativity of Our Lord, the same stone parish church where he had been baptized, seventy-six years earlier.

Even amid grief, there was politics. The Old Man had been the committee-man—the boss—of the mighty Democratic organization in Bridgeport, and his eldest son was expected to take over. "My dad was buried on a Wednesday," Bill recalled, "and Rich was going to have a precinct captains' meeting the following week. Everybody was obviously still in shock." But, in her mourning, the widow Sis Daley gathered her political wits and warned her sons against waiting a full week to rally the faithful. "Move quickly on this, Richard. Don't wait," Bill recalls her saying. "And, about twenty-four hours after he was buried, an old captain came to Rich and said, 'Rich, a guy named Buddy Finley is making a move on you for committee-man.'" The Daleys thwarted Finley's challenge, but the political lesson was clear. "The world had changed," Bill said.

When Daley returned to Springfield, he startled colleagues by sponsoring a high-profile bill to protect mental-health

patients. "He certainly had never sponsored a major piece of social reform," Schmidt recalled. Daley convened months of hearings and impressed even his opponents with his mastery of arcane legal and medical detail. "It was the first time I think he had ever been involved with something that had no partisan, no political, no clout element to it," Netsch said. "And I think he realized he enjoyed it."

Daley followed the mental-health bill with campaigns for nursing-home reform and against a sales tax on food and medicine, coöperating with groups that the machine had previously ignored. "Before my father died," he later told the *Tribune*, "I had to be very careful about what I did and what I said, because everything I did ended up as 'Mayor Daley's son this, and Mayor Daley's son that.' After he died, I knew I had to seek not my own identity, maybe, but the things I wanted to take on personally."

In 1978, he and Maggie had their third child, Kevin, who was born with spina bifida. He required constant care, and the Daleys hired nurses and set aside part of their bungalow for his care on the days that he was not in the hospital. "Maggie taught him to communicate with his eyes," Daley told me. Kevin died after thirty-three months. The years in the hospital, with other parents, left a profound impression on Daley: "None of the people were complaining. Everyone had issues and they just wanted their child to live another day, another week, another month, a year." Eventually, the Daleys left the bungalow where Kevin had been treated and, in 1993, moved to a modern town house in the South Loop, beyond the Daleys' customary political fiefdom. It made front-page news. "My son died in '81, and we should have moved out then," Daley said. "That was the worst mistake I ever made in my life." He went on, "I should have moved then, because, just thinking about your child—dying and suffering . . ." He trailed off.

**I**n 1979, Daley decided to run for Cook County state's attorney, the chief local prosecutor. "Everyone said it was stupid," his brother Bill recalled. There was an entrenched incumbent, and the new mayor, Jane Byrne, had decided that Rich Daley was the biggest threat to her political future, so she had installed her own people in city jobs and supported competing

candidates, turning the power of the machine against the Daleys. "I went up and down this town," Daley said. "I went to every birthday party and bat mitzvah—'Hi, how are you?'" Bill secretly persuaded him to take out a second mortgage on his house in order to jump-start his campaign. "He never told Maggie," Bill said. "She read it in the paper."

Daley won by two-tenths of a per cent of the vote, and, once in office, he took steps guaranteed to appeal to voters: he quadrupled the number of drug cases pursued and tripled the number of black prosecutors. But in other ways he was passive, and his failure to act stained his legacy. On February 25, 1982, Chicago's police chief wrote to Daley with news that a doctor had examined a murder suspect at the county jail who appeared to have been burned and subjected to electric shock in police custody. The chief said that he would do nothing until Daley told him how to proceed. Daley never replied. He referred the case to a Special Prosecutions Unit, but it went no further.

In retrospect, the persistence of torture of suspects in Chicago police custody—and the repeated failures to stop it—is astounding. From 1973 to the early nineties, Commander Jon Burge, a South Side detective, allegedly oversaw the coercion of confessions by means of beatings, burns, suffocation, mock execution, and electric shocks to the face and genitals. (Burge was said to favor a cattle prod and a hand-cranked device similar to an Army field telephone.) After years of complaints, in 2002 a special prosecutor began an investigation and found more than fifty credible cases of torture. By that time, however, the statute of limitations on the abuse had expired; Burge had retired to Florida with his city pension. Though he maintains that he is innocent, he has been charged with lying under oath about torture and is awaiting trial.

Daley was the chief prosecutor for eight years during which complaints went unheeded. He later told reporters that he could not recall reading the police chief's 1982 letter or what his response had been. "Do you think I would sit by . . . that I had knowledge about it, and I would allow it? Then you don't know my public career," Daley told reporters in 2006. He offered to "apologize to anyone." In 2008, the city agreed to a \$19.8-million settlement with victims, but Daley re-

# Genesis \*

(\*THE KING GUS VERSION)



ADAM: It's chilly.

EVE: I know. Also, these brambles are so scratchy.

ADAM: And when the sun is out I burn.

EVE: What about mosquitoes? Forget it.

ADAM: You know what I really hate?

EVE: What?

ADAM: Sitting on rough rocks!

EVE: It totally sucks... Hey, want some of this apple?

ADAM: Sure. (Bites apple.)

GOD: Hey! I'm mad at you! Put these clothes on!

ADAM, EVE: O.K.

GOD: Plus, get out!

ADAM, EVE: O.K., O.K., we're leaving.

EVE: Thanks for the clothes!

ADAM: Sorry about the apple! Bye!



What was all that about?

No idea.



jected, with irritation, the suggestion that he bore any responsibility, telling reporters, "I was not the mayor. I was not the police chief. I did not promote this man"—Burge—"in the eighties." Danny Davis, who represents part of the city's West Side in Congress, told me that the Burge case is "a sore that has festered in the hearts and minds of many people."

The writer Scott Turow was a federal prosecutor in Chicago at the time and brought civil-rights charges against police officers in the western suburbs. He is not surprised that Daley's office didn't muster the will to pursue such cases. "The big problem in those kinds of investigations—and I did them—is that the cops all dummy up. It doesn't matter what the hell the defendant looks like and he's obviously been beaten up. You can interview everybody in the station; they will not support any kind of a prosecution."

In 1983, Daley ran in the Democratic mayoral primary against Byrne, the incumbent who had tried to crush him, and Harold Washington, a charismatic congressman seeking to become Chicago's first black mayor. The race was bitterly divided: Byrne played to the worst instincts of the Bungalow Belt, while Washington drew impassioned black support that had been stifled for decades by the machine. Daley was caught in the middle. "Black and white—I'd march in one parade and they'd boo me, and in the other parade they'd boo me," he told me. "It was, like, what am I doing wrong?"

On the day of the primary, Daley prayed at his father's grave. He came in third. Washington won, and went on to win a brutal general election; a Polish-American church that he visited on Palm Sunday had "Nigger die" scrawled on the door. Shortly after the primary, Daley was in a toy store with his son when a man accused him of splitting the white vote, and thus clearing the way for the election of a black mayor. They fought. "He is rolling around on the floor getting punched out by some guy," Bill Daley says, "and the guy's punching him, and his son Patrick's there screaming, 'Hit him, Dad!' A couple of old women were hitting the thug with their purses. So that was kind of a low point post-election."

Chicago politics sank into a racial stalemate known as the Council Wars, which pitted a block of white aldermen against Washington and his supporters. Even as he was reelected state's attorney, in 1984, Daley was preparing to get out of politics. Then, in November, 1987, Washington died suddenly, of a heart attack. It was Daley's opportunity for redemption. To prepare for a mayoral race, the Daleys hired David Axelrod, the son of progressive New York Democrats. He had graduated from the University of Chicago and covered politics for the *Tribune* before leaving journalism, in 1984, to work for the reelection of the Illinois senator Paul Simon. He was known in Chicago political circles as a phlegmatic tactician with a loose-shirttail style that his mother likened to an unmade bed. Axel-

rod considered other candidates before backing Daley. "I pretty much made a decision that Daley had the best chance to win and the best chance to get the city out of the morass it was in," he told me.

Rahm Emanuel, a brash young operative with the Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee who was a friend of Axelrod's, wanted the job of campaign manager, but Bill Daley installed him as finance chair instead. ("I knew that he could raise a shitload of money, and he did," Bill said.) Emanuel's mother was not pleased; she'd spent years pushing for integration and opposing the Old Man's administration. "I said, 'I'm different than you, and the son is different than the father,'" Emanuel told me.

The campaign also hired Ned Kennan, a social psychologist, who did in-depth interviews with voters. He expected to find as much racial polarization as ever, but he discovered, instead, that Eugene Sawyer, an African-American who had been selected by the City Council to serve out Washington's term, was not energizing black voters. "It became very clear that if we can avoid having black people get excited, they are not going to go to the polls," Kennan recalled. The strategy became "the absolute avoidance of any racial tension or overtones," Schmidt said. Daley campaigned heavily in black neighborhoods, even though he expected, and received, few votes. "It was important to send a signal to the rest of the city," Axelrod said, "that he was going to govern as a healing force and not as a divisive one." Daley won, and took office on his forty-seventh birthday.

One Wednesday a month, Daley presides over a meeting of the City Council, a body that conforms to Chicago's idiosyncratic conception of democracy. The elder Mayor Daley never lost a council vote in twenty-one years, a period in which one member was best known for regularly shouting "God Bless Mayor Daley!" If a controversial measure was likely to draw a protest, the Old Man called in the Rulies, city workers who monopolized public seats to box out anyone who might be unruly.

These days, the Rulies are gone and the younger Daley has lost some votes, but he enjoys extraordinarily little opposition, in part because the law allows him to fill council vacancies by appointment. (He



has appointed seventeen out of the fifty council members.) “In many respects, it’s akin to a feudal state,” Joe Moore, a council member, explained. The City Council is a pleasant gig, perhaps too pleasant: during the nineteen-nineties, more aldermen went to prison (nine) than to higher office (eight), according to Greg Hinz, a Chicago political writer.

Daley has never shown much interest in the niceties of checks and balances; he once had the microphone of an alderman he considered out of order cut off. That has not stopped people from trying to oppose him. In 2007, thirty-six-year-old Scott Waguespack was an outsider with the long-shot ambition to be elected alderman in the Thirty-second Ward, on the near Northwest Side—the old stronghold of Daniel (Rosty) Rostenkowski, a congressman who in his heyday—before being convicted of mail fraud—was so powerful that he reportedly had a twelve-lane expressway diverted in order to prevent the demolition of his church. (He still lives in the ward.) Waguespack, a slim, be-spectacled Colorado native who served in the Peace Corps in Kenya, cited “scandal after scandal” in City Hall as a reason to try to oust the incumbent, Ted Matlak, a Rosty protégé who was endorsed by Daley and Emanuel. Waguespack appealed to a wave of new yuppies in the neighborhood, and won. He was such a fresh face that when he showed up for his inauguration the cops at first refused to let him in.

A few months later, Daley was pushing the council to approve a plan for a new museum in a park, which sounded innocuous except that Waguespack and some other aldermen believed that it would illegally occupy public open space. The issue ballooned into a test of Daley’s authority, and Waguespack watched as his wavering allies were summoned, one by one, to the council’s back room. There, according to the *Tribune*, Daley aides dispensed promises or threats in the form of parks and schools and other local pork. “They would return with the ashen look on their faces,” Waguespack told me. “I’d go over and ask them, ‘Are you still with us?’ And they would say, ‘You know, I really can’t do that.’”

Waguespack and his allies lost the vote, and afterward a city worker whom he believed to be a Daley loyalist poked a finger in Waguespack’s chest and said, “We’re coming after you. We’re going to take you



*“Officer, that couple is just walking away from their mortgage!”*

down.” Waguespack has some idea of what that means for his reelection campaign next year. In his first race, voters received mailings accusing him of pretending to be a lawyer, doing political work on government time, and living with his parents; the accusations were untrue. “I survived that,” he said, with a faint smile. “So I say, ‘You can do it again.’” After a pause, he no longer bothered to mask his frustration. “To be honest, some days I feel like I’m beating a dead horse, because no one is listening.”

Daley practices what might be called big-tent dictatorship, in which everyone is welcome at the table, as long as nobody forgets who the host is. He assiduously courts black ministers who opposed the machine. He promoted a program that sells vacant lots to churches for a dollar. He has won over outspoken critics in the black community. Dorothy Tillman, a longtime South Side alderman, had been a firebrand ever since the Council Wars, when white aldermen dispatched the sergeant at arms to make her remove her hat upon entering the chamber, a standoff in which she prevailed. Shortly after Daley was elected, Tillman said that he was “fostering racism in the city,” but eventually she and the Mayor reached a détente: she began voting for his budgets and other measures, and he backed her effort to require companies to acknowledge any historical ownership of slaves. He also ap-

proved more than seven million dollars in taxpayer money for a cultural center that was to be her signature project, and his supporters began donating to her campaigns. “He can pick up a phone and raise more money for you with one call than you can raise in six months,” William Grimshaw, a political scientist at the Illinois Institute of Technology, told me. By 2006, Tillman was voting with Daley two-thirds of the time. (The next year, she lost her seat to a challenger who accused her of abandoning her constituents.)

Daley’s political success in the black community is indisputable: in 1989, he received seven per cent of the black vote; in the most recent race, he won seventy per cent. Among Hispanics, he is even more popular, having won nearly eighty per cent of the vote in the latest election. In 1999, facing his strongest African-American challenger yet, the South Side congressman Bobby Rush, Daley barely needed to break stride; he won more than half of all black votes in the city, including Rush’s own ward.

**I**t was once said of the Old Man that his idea of affirmative action was nine Irishmen and a Swede. When his son reached City Hall, one of the first things he did was appoint a black spokeswoman for the Mayor’s office and Hispanic leaders for the police and fire departments.



*"It was romantic during dinner, but now it's getting kind of creepy."*

• •

He issued an executive order announcing an affirmative-action policy, and that summer he marched in the city's Gay and Lesbian Pride Parade after he pushed through a bill extending benefits to the same-sex partners of city workers. In all my conversations with Daley, he never criticized his father. And yet he has spent much of his career doing what his father would not or could not do. In 1999, he announced plans to demolish all of Chicago's public-housing towers, a colossal undertaking equivalent to relocating a city of more than fifty thousand people.

Today, stretches of the city that once housed icons of American urban poverty, such as the Robert Taylor Homes and Cabrini-Green, are wholly transformed; many of them are eerily empty grass lots or have been filled by low-rise mixed-income developments. The process has been far from perfect: replacement housing that was promised for the poor is five years behind schedule, and housing advocates point out that many residents have simply been shunted out of sight, to the fringes of the city. Nevertheless, it is difficult to overstate how toxic the old projects were to their occupants and to the city. They constituted nine of the ten poorest census tracts in America, and their disappearance is an unmistakable step forward.

None of Daley's decisions, however, have done more to define his legacy—and

that of his father—than his attempt to refashion Chicago's public schools. For decades, the Old Man was criticized for allowing the schools to deteriorate. When the son took office, the district was in financial disarray and test scores were among America's worst. Alan Mather, an English teacher at Farragut High School at the time, taught in a classroom with gang symbols scrawled on the carpet. Members of the Vice Lords and the Latin Kings brawled in the hallways, and union rules protected senior teachers who were just going through the motions. "Every night I cried," Mather recalled. "What the hell was I doing?"

In 1995, Daley asked the Illinois legislature for control of the schools, and Republican leaders agreed—in no small part because they were happy to watch the Mayor take on such an albatross. "When you'd go to a school where eight per cent of students read at their grade level, no one was upset—no one was alarmed," Daley told me. Since then, the city and nonprofit groups have trained thousands of new teachers, closed failing schools, opened new ones, and revitalized the image of the system in order to attract promising students and teachers.

One morning, I visited Mather, who is now the principal of Lindblom Math & Science Academy, one of the city's élite public high schools. It is in West Englewood, a neighborhood so

poor that it is known to public-health specialists as a "food desert," because nutritious sustenance is hard to find. Despite the problems outside its walls, however, the school was humming with vitality. The students, mostly black and Hispanic, tested their way in and commute from around the city. Chicago schools have created the largest Chinese-language program of any public system in America, and I sat in on a Lindblom class in which students were giving presentations in Mandarin about their favorite movies ("Purple Rain," "American Gangster," "The Princess Diaries").

Daley has encouraged experiments. In 2001, he promoted Arne Duncan, a little-known thirty-six-year-old administrator, to C.E.O. of the school system, and Duncan focussed on the city's most chronically troubled schools. He proposed a "turnaround" concept, in which the city and nonprofit groups would remove teachers, install high-performing principals with specially trained faculties, and provide extra money for inventive programs. Daley approved, but the public did not. "World War III," Duncan told me. "It was brutal."

Parents worried that their children would be excluded from the reconstituted schools, teachers feared for their futures, and, in one case, a rumor swept through a school that it was going to be carved up into condos. "These were communities that had been lied to and mistreated forever, so there was tremendous skepticism," Duncan said. When he went to education conferences, administrators from other cities were baffled by the scale and speed of the change. "They all said, 'We couldn't begin to do that,'" he said. "They were stunned. It was almost like they thought I was lying."

Daley's changes have been controversial—some critics say that gains have been overstated and parents' input has been marginalized—but dropout rates have consistently declined and test scores have improved. Duncan is now Obama's Secretary of Education; he is attempting to adapt a similar model to a thousand schools nation-wide. William Julius Wilson, the Harvard sociologist, who spent years studying Chicago's poor black neighborhoods, credits Daley with giving Duncan a chance to experiment. "It was a brilliant appointment," Wilson told me. "Daley recognized this guy's gifts."

He added, "He's been criticized for not being concerned with the conditions of the poor. Based on my experiences with him, I think that criticism is bogus."

For all the changes that Daley has wrought in his city, he has made scarcely a dent in Chicago's breathtaking capacity for corruption. In 2004, the *Sun-Times* investigated the city's Hired Truck program and discovered that the Daley administration was spending forty million dollars a year to hire private dump trucks for city work, except that many of the trucks were doing virtually nothing; some were owned by felons or reputed Mob associates like Nick (the Stick) LoCoco, a bookie and juice collector. Among the workers who were taking bribes to dole out trucking contracts was John (Quarters) Boyle, a member of a pro-Daley campaign group who had been hired despite having been convicted of stealing four million dollars—in nickels, dimes, and quarters—while overseeing toll booths. When Quarters was busted for taking bribes—one of forty-seven people eventually convicted in the trucking scandal—he protested, "Everyone else was doing it."

Long before Daley took office, Chicago had established itself, in A. J. Liebling's words, as "the only completely corrupt city in America." Since 1972, Illinois has convicted three governors, two congressmen, nineteen Cook County judges, and thirty aldermen. Daley grew up in a system in which much of government was for sale and a popular tactic on Election Day consisted of shuttling winos and drifters to multiple polling places and paying them fifty cents for each ballot cast. (The practice was known as "Hobo floto voto.") Rod Blagojevich, the former governor, is no friend of Daley's. Since Blagojevich's arrest, on charges that he tried to sell Obama's Senate seat, Daley has taken to describing him as "cuckoo." (Blagojevich refused to comment.) But, even by Chicago standards, Daley's recent tenure has been notable for a relentless series of investigations into public corruption. Federal prosecutors came closest to implicating the Mayor himself in 2006, when a jury convicted his former patronage chief, Robert Sorich, and other defendants of handing out city jobs and promotions to political supporters in order to strengthen Daley's campaign operation. The defendants had been rigging appli-

cation tests and interviews to make sure that political allies succeeded; in one case, a city job as an equipment dispatcher was awarded to a man with an impressive interview score, even though, on the stated day of the interview, he was in fact dead.

In Bridgeport, the cases felt like an assault on the customary spoils of politics. Sorich—a Bridgeport native—was regarded by many neighbors as a hero; to cover his legal bills, friends held a fundraiser in the same church where the Mayor had been baptized. (In comments to the *Tribune* columnist John Kass, a priest compared Sorich to Jesus Christ.)

Like his father, Daley has not been accused of personally profiting from the city, but he has done little more than take pro-forma steps to stop others from doing so. His efforts to reduce the kind of quasi-legalized bribery known as pay-to-play have been halfhearted; he stopped taking political contributions from companies that do business with the city, for instance, but has continued to accept contributions from firms that do business with the city's giant pension funds. Meanwhile, his brother Michael's law firm handles numerous zoning cases involving the city, and his brother John sells insurance to city contractors. Daley's nephew Robert Vancko in the past signed millions of dollars' worth of city-related development and service contracts, and in 2004 Daley's son Patrick was discovered to have a small piece of a sewer-inspection contract with the city. (He sold it.)

Whenever a case comes to light, Daley has a standard response: he denies any personal knowledge of wrongdoing, and points out that he doesn't micromanage the city's thirty-three thousand workers. He fires people and proposes new procedures, such as an inspector general's office, to prevent further abuse. But there is conspicuously little outrage—no sense that he will attack corruption with the same intensity that he displays toward flies at Dunkin' Donuts.

"Unfortunately, there's corruption all over—private sector, public sector, all that—so you do everything possible," he told me. "We are much ahead of most cities on this issue." But, when you talk to Daley, it seems clear that he is betting that the best parts of his legacy will outweigh the worst parts. "If you look at it over all, look at it over the years, look at it all the way back to '89 . . . there were some

cases and they were corrected," he said.

Why doesn't he do more to stop it? He was brought up in the system, he has thrived in it, and, for all his modern-minded changes to the city, he is a conservative man. Most of all, perhaps, voters evidently couldn't care less. In his most recent reëlection, corruption scandals and the investigation into police torture had left pundits declaring that Daley looked vulnerable for the first time in years. He went on to win with more than seventy-one per cent of the vote.

The unsavory side of Daleyism is one reason that for many years Obama maintained a wary distance. When, in the summer of 1991, his fiancée, Michelle Robinson, told him that she had been approached about a job in City Hall, he insisted on learning more about who would be watching out for her. The couple went to dinner with the recruiter, Valerie Jarrett, who eventually became one of their closest friends. Michelle was already acquainted with Chicago politics, because her father had been a precinct captain during the Old Man's administration.

When Obama entered politics, in Hyde Park, the liberal enclave that is home to the University of Chicago, where he worked, he did little to involve himself in local zoning issues—the sort of issues that might draw him into kinship or conflict with Daley—and the Mayor had little reason to notice him. In 1999, Obama was preparing to challenge Bobby Rush for his seat in Congress, and he got in touch with Axelrod. They had known each other socially, but now Obama was formally seeking to hire him as a consultant. Axelrod said no. "I had just helped Daley get reëlected," he said. "Obama was running against Bobby Rush, and it would look as if it were a vindictive campaign, that somehow Daley was trying to purge Rush. That wouldn't have been good for Daley, and it frankly wouldn't have been good for Obama."

Obama went ahead with his challenge to Rush, and received a vivid education in the perils of running without a powerful patron. The race was a lonely slog. I was assigned to cover it for the *Chicago Tribune*, and when Obama met me for an interview at a diner I sensed that I had a busier schedule than he did. He lost by an embarrassing thirty-one points, and when the results were in Daley phoned him—not to console him but to explain why

Obama had screwed up. "I said, 'Why did you run against him?'" Daley told me. Obama replied that Rush's loss to Daley in the mayoral race had suggested that Rush was vulnerable. Daley went on, "No, an election doesn't show you're weak. The other person just got more votes. So there is not weakness in your opponent. Maybe it taught you a good lesson."

As his prospects rose, Obama charted a careful line with the Daleys. In an interview in late 2003, Obama's biographer David Mendell asked him to describe his relationship with the Mayor. "Cordial, not close," Obama replied. Mendell pushed him to say whether it would have been wiser to spend hundreds of millions of dollars on improving Chicago's public schools or developing poor neighborhoods rather than on Millennium Park. Obama winced before replying, "How do you really expect me to answer that? If I told you how I really felt, I'd be committing political suicide right here in front of you."

Within months, Obama was edging closer to Daley's realm. He endorsed the reelection of Dorothy Tillman, the former agitator who was by now a Daley convert, even though it irritated his liberal friends in Hyde Park. Now Axelrod approached Obama about running for office. They discussed a number of options, including the mayoralty—after Daley retired, of course—but quickly settled on the U.S. Senate. The Daleys were supporting Obama's opponent, Daniel Hynes, the son of their ally Thomas Hynes. And yet the Obama campaign noticed that the Daleys' support for Hynes was minor by Chicago standards. "They didn't have any bodies out there pushing," Dan Shomon, Obama's campaign manager at the time, said. When it seemed clear that Obama was going to win the primary, he wrote a private note to Bill Daley, saying that he understood the Daleys' loyalty to Hynes. "I hope after the primaries that you will support me," he wrote, according to Bill, who responded, Axelrod says, reassuringly: "If it worked out in our favor, he would be helpful."

Obama and Daley made their alliance public that October: Axelrod arranged a highly visible lunch for the two at Manny's Deli, a venerable political eatery. They ate corned-beef sandwiches in front of a scrum of photographers and reporters. ("They wouldn't let anybody close enough to hear what they were saying, but Obama was doing most of the talking,"

## THE THUNDER SHOWER

A blink of lightning, then  
a rumor, a grumble of white rain  
growing in volume, rustling over the ground,  
drenching the gravel in a wash of sound.  
Drops tap like timpani or shine  
like quavers on a line.

It rings on exposed tin,  
a suite for water, wind and bin,  
plinky Poulenc or strongly groaning Brahms'  
rain-strings, a whole string section that describes  
the very shapes of thought in warm  
self-referential vibes

and spreading ripples. Soon  
the whispering roar is a recital.  
Jostling rain-crowds, clamorous and vital,  
struggle in runnels through the afternoon.  
The rhythm becomes a regular beat;  
steam rises, body heat—

and now there's city noise,  
bits of recorded pop and rock,  
the drums, the strident electronic shock,  
a vast polyphony, the dense refrain  
of wailing siren, truck and train  
and incoherent cries.

All human life is there  
in the unconfined, continuous crash  
whose slow, diffused implosions gather up  
car radios and alarms, the honk and beep,  
and tiny voices in a crèche  
piercing the muggy air.

Mendell recalled.) In addition to showcasing Axelrod's unique place in American politics, the meeting underscored the fact that, for all their differences of style and speech, Obama and Daley shared a basic approach to politics as a constant negotiation of interests and ideals—Chicago's brand of Realpolitik. Both had advanced by capitalizing on the prevailing power structure, not by dismantling it, and they were united, above all, not by ideology but by pragmatism.

In the winter of 2007, as both entered a campaign season, Obama and Daley met at City Hall, this time with no cameras or outsiders. There was a distinct mutual benefit at stake. Obama was trailing far behind Hillary Clinton, who had a good relationship with the Daleys. The

Mayor was running against Dorothy Brown, a long-shot African-American challenger, whose supporters hoped that Obama would join them. Within weeks, Daley made a rare intervention in a primary and endorsed Obama. Soon afterward, Obama endorsed Daley for reelection, less than two years after Obama had said that City Hall corruption gave him "huge pause" about Daley's administration. In his endorsement, he focussed instead on the fact that the city had "blossomed so much" under Daley's control.

**B**arely a year after Obama's celebration in the park, at a moment when the Administration's drive for health-care reform appeared to be foundering, David Brooks, in the *Times*, faulted the Admin-

Squalor and decadence,  
the rackete global-franchise rush,  
oil wars and water wars, the diatonic  
crescendo of a cascading world economy  
are audible in the hectic thrash  
of this luxurious cadence.

The voice of Baal explodes,  
raging and rumbling round the clouds,  
frantic to crush the self-sufficient spaces  
and re-impose his failed hegemony  
in Canaan before moving on  
to other simpler places.

At length the twining chords  
run thin, a watery sun shines out,  
the deluge slowly ceases, the guttural chant  
subsides; a thrush sings, and discordant thirds  
diminish like an exhausted concert  
on the subdominant.

The angry downpour swarms  
growling to far-flung fields and farms.  
The drains are still alive with trickling water,  
a few last drops drip from a broken gutter;  
but the storm that created so much fuss  
has lost interest in us.

—Derek Mahon

istration for a “voracious pragmatism” that had driven it into too many issues at once. Some reports speculated that Rahm Emanuel might take the fall, a rumor fuelled by talk that he could be planning to return to Chicago to run for mayor. Emanuel dismissed that talk and encouraged Daley to run again. (When I spoke to Emanuel on the afternoon following the Massachusetts Senate election, he was subdued and spoke wistfully about his home town. “I can’t wait to get back,” he said.)

Daley, meanwhile, was having one of the worst spells of his career. A City Hall deal to privatize Chicago’s parking meters, in order to plug a budget gap, quadrupled parking rates downtown and sparked intense public criticism. Daley

maintains that the deal, which netted the city a billion dollars, “was sound.” Moreover, after Daley spent two years rallying a wary city around a bid for the 2016 Olympics, Chicago lost in the first round. While he was in Copenhagen for the Olympic vote, a video surfaced online that showed a high-school brawl on the South Side, in which an honor-roll student named Derrion Albert was beaten and stomped to death by other teen-agers.

Daley’s approval rating had dropped into the thirties, and reporters began to talk about whether he would run for a seventh term when he faces reelection next year. He hasn’t decided, he says, and has chided reporters who have “already put me in the grave.” There are

pressures on him at home. In December, Maggie Daley underwent a round of radiation treatments for a tumor in her leg, a setback in an eight-year fight against metastatic breast cancer. All the speculation seemed only to reinforce the consensus that there is nobody in Chicago politics who has remotely the power or the money or the recognition to defeat him.

One afternoon a few days before Christmas, the Mayor emerged from the Woodshed and took a seat in a conference room in a circle of visiting students from Orr Academy High School, one of the city’s most troubled schools. Much of the student body had been expelled from other schools or spent time in jail, and only thirteen per cent of the junior class last year could read at grade level. But Orr had a new principal, new teachers, and six million dollars in special funding over five years. One year into the process, attendance rates were up and student misconduct was down.

This was Orr’s Reading Club, in for a book talk with the Mayor. The students, in gold-and-black uniforms, ate pizza and talked about John Cheever’s story “Christmas Is a Sad Season for the Poor.” After a few minutes, they had forgotten about Cheever and were grilling the Mayor, who looked at ease for the first time in days.

“Do you plan to retire or something?”

No.

“You say you want colleges to be cheaper. Can you take power and actually make that happen?”

Not immediately.

“What’s the best gift you’ve ever received on Christmas?”

Children.

Then one of the students got to wondering just where the Mayor came from. “How do you become the guy?” she asked. “I mean, how did you get to where you’re at now?”

For a moment, Daley looked stumped. “Well,” he said, “my dad was the mayor from 1955 to 1976.” Jaws dropped, the kids gasped, and for an instant Mayor Daley savored the fact that nobody around him had ever heard of anyone else named Mayor Daley. ♦