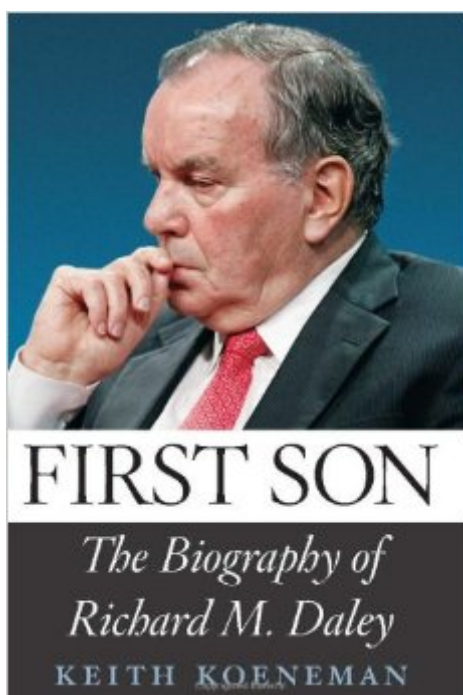


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First Son: The Biography Of Richard M. Daley



Synopsis

"Mayor Richard M. Daley dropped the bomb at a routine news conference at City Hall on Tuesday. With no prelude or fanfare, Mr. Daley announced that he would not seek re-election when his term expires next year. 'Simply put, it's time,' he said." — *New York Times*, September 7, 2010

With those four words, an era ended. After twenty-two years, the longest-serving and most powerful mayor in the history of Chicago — and, arguably, America — stepped down, leaving behind a city that was utterly transformed, and a complicated legacy we are only beginning to evaluate.

In *First Son*, Keith Koeneman chronicles the sometimes Shakespearean, sometimes Machiavellian life of an American political legend. Making deft use of unprecedented access to key players in the Daley administration, as well as Chicago's business and cultural leaders, Koeneman draws on more than one hundred interviews to tell an up-close, insider story of political triumph and personal evolution.

With Koeneman as our guide, we follow young Daley from his beginnings as an average Bridgeport kid thought to lack his father's talent and charisma to his unlikely transformation into an iron-fisted leader. Daley not only escaped the giant shadow of his father but also transformed Chicago from a gritty, post-industrial Midwestern capital into a beautiful, sophisticated global city widely recognized as a model for innovative metropolises throughout the world.

But in spite of his many accomplishments, Richard M. Daley's record is far from flawless. *First Son* sets the dramatic improvement of certain parts of the city against the persistent realities of crime, financial stress, failing public housing, and dysfunctional schools. And it reveals that while in many ways Daley broke with the machine politics of his father, he continued to reward loyalty with favors, use the resources of city government to overwhelm opponents, and tolerate political corruption.

A nuanced portrait of a complex man, *First Son* shows Daley to be sensitive yet tough, impatient yet persistent, a street-smart fighter and detail-driven policy expert who not only ran Chicago, but *was* Chicago.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

I was eager to read this book, as the subject offers up a fascinating character with which to look at any number of issues impacting American cities at the end of the 20th Century: race, urban politics in America, globalization, and much more. Chicago has been at the center of American urban life since its founding and the Daleys - father and son, ruled over it to a degree that most people might not fathom, had they not experienced it first hand. Chicago is also a great city for political reporting and I hoped this book would be a useful addition to the pantheon of other great profiles of Chicago mayors. Unfortunately, the author fails to penetrate beyond the surface of Richard Daley. For a self-professed expert on Chicago, the author also leaves a surprising degree of detail either out of the picture or reduced to generalizations. Contrasted with others who have written on Chicago politics, the work stands out unfortunately for its overall blandness and lack of conviction about who Daley is and what he represented for the city. For instance, Richard Daley made education the centerpiece of his mayoral tenure, yet what is the actual record? Chicago recently moved to close more than 50 schools and has privatized many more through an aggressive use of charter schools. Charter schools do not merit a mention, nor does the author unpack data on test scores, drop-out rates, or other standard indicators of performance. Koeneman spends literally no time on the education reform movement that was instituted by the state legislature in 1985. Reading this book, one would have no inkling of the important conflicts over neighborhood schools and who would control them, which grew out of the battles over race and neighborhood turf from Daley the elder's time.

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