

# The kingmaker of chicago

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Richard J. Daley was a questionable man. His long and prosperous reign over the city of Chicago was one of controversy and awe.

Daley brazenly wielded his political power as if he was a monarch. Rules were thrown out the window and the entire political system was tossed into a state of chaos. Daley, however, was right at home. He stood in the shadows as most of his city descended into poverty, reveling in his absolute power. When his critics finally had the gusto to attack his administration, Daley would finally emerge, hammering the dissenters into their rightful place.

Amidst all the problems that plagued Daley's time in office, there was no denying he was an ambitious man. He revamped Chicago's public infrastructure, creating towering buildings that seem to go above the heavens. Under all the glamour that Daley created for the city, there was still a part of Chicago wailing for reform. Their desperate cries descended only upon deaf ears as Daley continued to manage his regime. To many he was a god among mortals, beyond the reproach of others "lesser" than him. In reality, however, Daley was just a man bound to his own self-constructed ideas.

He was not a terrible individual, but rather a morally flawed man blinded by his crude notions. To begin with, during his tenure as mayor, Daley exhibited minimum interest in reforming the African American section of the city. According to him, ". . . those people should lift themselves up by their bootstraps like our grandparents did .

. . . take care of their children . . ." (pg.

140). In addition to this, when the author writes about Daley's perspective on African Americans, the text states, " They weren't Daley's concern. If problems arose, Dawson or one of his men were consulted. They were his straw bosses, harvesting the rich black vote for him" (pg. 137). These details reveal how Daley willfully neglected his duty to help those truly in need.

Daley viewed the problems African Americans were facing in a more objective fashion, not realizing the racial stigma his city was entrenched in. Daley was blind to the fact that all was not well in his city and instead used the " bootstrap theory" to condone the treatment of African Americans. Daley assumed that they were only going through a phase like the Irish or the Polish. According to Lawrence Kohlberg, a psychologist from the 60's, he believes, ". .

. a person will experience conflict in attempting to integrate morality with legality" (pg. 3). The way this detail applies to Daley is that he tried to impose his own beliefs upon the inner workings of his administration. It was wrong of Daley to ignore the conditions that African Americans were facing because it was his responsibility to ensure their safety. Daley may have believed he was helping them by leaving them to their own devices, but instead he was only forcing his primal beliefs upon them.

He mixed his moral beliefs with that of the law, hoping the problem would resolve itself. Unbeknown to him, Daley was only allowing the problem to fester. Furthermore, Daley was the type of man to quickly resort to passiveness when a situation was bound to spin out of control. When the author writes about how Daley stood idle when the police brutalized the

protesters, the text states, “ By doing nothing, Daley permitted the police to take off both gloves. The first had come after the shoot-to-kill order”(pg.

178-179). In addition to this, when the author writes about Daley’s characteristics the text states, “ As he proved over and over again, he didn’t trust outsiders, whether they were long hairs against war, black preachers against segregation. . .”(pg.

6). These details highlight how Daley’s resistance to help the protesters was due to the fact that he didn’t approve of their presence in the city. In his mind, they were a threat to his city because they stirred people’s feeling with their anti-war propaganda. Daley knew the officers would resort to unnecessary violence because he already had minimum control over them. With his power “ threatened”, Daley believed matters would resolve themselves. Similar to his stance on African Americans, Daley was convinced passiveness would be the way to promptly deal with the protesters, but once again this proved faulty.

The reason for Daley’s lack of sympathy was due to the fact he was product of his community. His community had an “ intolerance toward the unconventional” and “ suspicion of others.” Daley actions may have been atrocious, but he wasn’t an inherently bad man. He was a stark reflection of what his community was, thus making him majorly flawed. According to Kohlberg, “ morality is determined by an individual’s own conscience.” Daley’s community structured his mentality in his later years, influencing his choices while in office.

Daley could have reformed himself, but how could he when years upon years of rudimentary thinking was instilled in him? Daley must be analyzed in an objective fashion and not written off as a common racist or despot. His intentions were good, but were just directed in the wrong way. To conclude, Daley was an imperfect mayor. His lack of empathy towards others made him cold and unrelatable. Although he paraded around as “ the man of the people” he was in reality a simplistic thinker influenced by the principles of his past. Many of us can’t shake off the past, but it’s important we attempt to.

We can’t go through life with a one-sided mentality because it can affect others in the most basic ways, thus hindering society’s trek towards a greater future.