

enced by various American historians in the past two decades. Blodgett, well known for his scholarship on the political culture of the Gilded Age, notes that the upheavals of the 1960s strongly influenced his turning to social history. He admits that he “found the homely stuff of local history and the solid stuff of architectural history more and more alluring as an antidote to great leaders and great thinkers” (p. xxi). Working from the premise that buildings are an important environmental and social context in which people make many significant choices—about shelter, family, money, self-worth—he has written a lively overview of not only famous architects such as Cass Gilbert, Frank Lloyd Wright, and Robert Venturi who have practiced in Oberlin but also those obscure builders who designed the numerous wood-frame, vernacular structures that still comprise the built environment of a typical, small (8,500 population in 1980) midwestern town.

*University of Notre Dame,
Notre Dame*

Thomas J. Schlereth

Big City Boss in Depression and War: Mayor Edward J. Kelly of Chicago. By Roger Biles. (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 1984. Pp. 219. Tables, illustrations, maps, notes, bibliography, index. \$20.00.)

In 1888 James Bryce’s *The American Commonwealth* appeared. In two hefty volumes Bryce essayed for Gilded Age America what Alexis de Tocqueville had achieved for the Jacksonians. Although Bryce’s work is little read today, two statements still echo: the chapter titled “Why the best men do not go into politics” and the sentence “There is no denying that the government of cities is the one conspicuous failure of the United States.” Taken together the statements could stand, by consensus, as the epitaph of Edward J. Kelly’s fourteen years as mayor of Chicago.

The son of a Galway man and a German girl, the oldest of nine children, Kelly was more Studs Lonigan than one of the “best men.” A grammar school dropout, he “rushed the growler,” cut trees on canal banks for the Chicago Sanitary District, and played the hero’s part—flattening a faultfinding Republican supervisor—in the obligatory fistfight. Active in politics before he could vote, Kelly, without formal training, rose to chief engineer of the Sanitary District in 1920. He was forty-four. A pluralist and a grafter who earned \$151,000 in salary from 1919 to 1929, he admitted to a net income of \$724,000 in those years. In 1933 Chicago’s Mayor Anton Cermak was shot in Miami by an assas-

sin aiming at President-elect Franklin D. Roosevelt. Kelly was the surprise choice of the county chairman, the popular and self-effacing Patrick A. Nash, as Cermak's successor. Thus was born the Kelly-Nash machine.

From the start Kelly, "who boasted publicly of his own gambling prowess" (p. 105), made it clear that he would not run the city to suit the "bluenoses." It was more than that: the corrupt relationship between the machine and organized crime was both intimate and systemic. Profits from vice and the rackets enriched aldermen and others and provided the machine with many of the funds it used for electoral success. The author suggests that as mayor Kelly met a higher standard. Cynics quipped that "Big Ed already had his" (p. 108) from his years at the Sanitary District. Kickbacks, bribes, the circumvention of civil service requirements, and attempts to misuse New Deal agencies were also part of the pattern. In addition, Kelly's appointments to the Chicago Board of Education are legendary. Unprofessional, farcically incompetent, and venal, the board constituted an insult to the people of Chicago just short of Caligula's to the Roman Senate.

If this were all, Edward J. Kelly would deserve the oblivion into which time and journalists enamored of Richard J. Daley have thrust him. Biles believes, however, that the Kelly administration is important "in the history of American cities" and that "a healthy dose of revisionism is in order" (p. 5). The author contends that Kelly was an able, forceful man who led the rescue of the city's finances in the early 1930s. He understood, as no other mayor did, the benefits that New Deal programs could bring to the city's infrastructure and its unemployed. He was the architect of the organization that vanquished, in his day, the Republican party in Chicago. He resolved the knotty public transportation question—in the author's view perhaps his "supreme achievement" (p. 158). More than anyone else, he made Chicago the leader in war production and was a potent force in national affairs. Moreover, Kelly was no demagogue, never traded in religious bigotry, and welcomed and abetted the shift of Chicago's blacks to the Democratic party. He fought for the integration of schools and public housing. Blacks voted overwhelmingly for both the New Deal and the Kelly-Nash machine but in greater numbers for the latter. These were not mean accomplishments, administratively, politically, or morally.

This is a brief, narrowly focused, scholarly work. It is balanced, persuasive, and valuable.

Marian College, Indianapolis

William Doherty