



The Mayor Who Cleaned Up Chicago: A Political Biography of William E. Dever

John R. Schmidt

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This is the story of Chicago mayor William E. Dever and the emergence of the Chicago Democratic Machine during the Prohibition years. Although his place in Chicago history has been obscured by more recent, powerful politicians, Dever was known throughout the country in his own time as "the mayor who cleaned up Chicago." Many admirers even spoke of this reformer as the next president of the United States.

Dever's rise in the political arena in 1923 was the climax of the movement to build a consolidated, comprehensive political organization from the city's diverse ethnic factions and the remnants of the old Progressive reform bloc. This unlikely coalition adopted as its goals a government free from corruption and chose Dever to represent its interests. The political structure that later resulted from this movement became known as the machine.

His accomplishments during his one term as mayor are many. He built great public works, took the public schools out of politics, cut waste, and revitalized city government, all without a trace of scandal. He also gained nationwide fame for strictly enforcing Prohibition laws - even while he himself opposed them - and running the gangsters out of town.

Ironically, Dever's firm adherence to the law in his successful fight against corruption in Chicago also led to his downfall. Even though his integrity continued to appeal to a wide range of groups, his unpopular stand cost him the reelection. After his defeat, Dever was for the most part forgotten, but the machine he helped to form continued to gain power and influence.

Written for the general reader as well as for the scholar, "*The Mayor Who Cleaned Up Chicago*" offers a vivid portrayal of a notable man and politician and at the same time details the development and early years of Machine politics during Prohibition-era Chicago.

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