

## **Chicago Daily Observer**

### **Punchline Pols and a Black Book**

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Those of you old enough to remember the presidential campaign of 2007-08 will recall multiple efforts to muddy up Barack Obama with the unsanitary touch of Blago and the Chicago Machine. I was often called upon to explain to the national media how someone could rise in Illinois politics, have body contact with its thuggery and still come out clean.

It takes a Talmudic scholar to explain, so the best I could do was cite a few stellar examples of Illinois pols who were not only uncorrupt but actual reformers and exemplary public officials who achieved national recognition—even though, yes, they did deal now and then with the Machine.

The name Stevenson always popped up, along with Simon and Mikva.

I wish that I had a copy of [“The Black Book”](#) to pass out at the time.

Not to be confused with Lawrence Durrell’s similarly titled, once-banned novel of sex and decadence in London, it’s an odd patchwork of a volume published privately by the family of Adlai Stevenson III—the former U.S. senator, Illinois treasurer and state representative.

Briefly, it’s a compendium of quotes, notes and aphorisms first collected into a notebook by the original Adlai Ewing Stevenson of Illinois (1836-1914) who rose to be vice president under Grover Cleveland. That Veep’s grandson, Adlai II, became governor of Illinois in 1948 and ran for president in ‘52 and ‘56—inspiring a generation of young liberals through his brilliant speeches and bold statements of principle. He added to the collection of anecdotes and maxims, assembling them all in a black binder.

These arcana range in authorship from the Greeks to the Founding Fathers to George Bernard Shaw to Mr. Dooley and Everett Dirksen—with anyone and everyone in between. They were read by the Adlairs as food for thought or used as inserts into speeches. Now comes Adlai III, who not only adds to the mix but writes a kind of choppy memoir around them—wonderfully touching on events ranging from his run-ins with the Israel lobby to his current activities doing financial consulting in China and East Asia. There’s a lot of history and a scattering of good gossip, such as a young State Rep. Harold Washington lamenting that he couldn’t buck the party bosses as yet.

I don’t do book reviews here, but I mention it because it invokes this remarkable family of Illinois politicians, personifying the best in our politics—genuine pillars of integrity, liberalism and reform.

At the same time, Adlairs II and III touched and were touched by the Machine. The “Guv” was slated by the pre-Daley gang, along with Paul Douglas, to “perfume” a scandal-

scarred ticket in 1948. He hired as his state director of finance one Richard Joseph Daley who would later slate Adlai III for all the posts he held and executed so well. Yes, it's possible to relate to the Machine without being subservient to it or sullied by it. It takes a special breed, but we've bred a few.

Problem is, those guys don't make good punchlines.

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