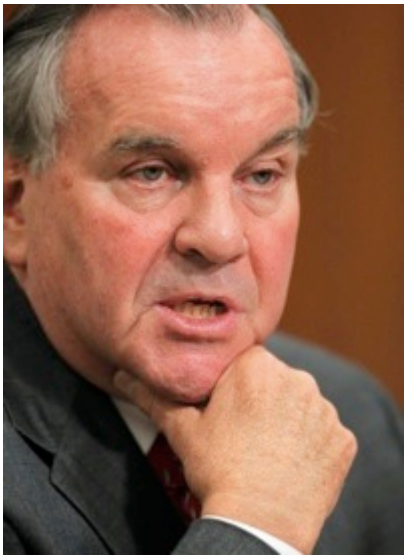
The Daley Dynasty



George Washington was one of the greatest men in human history. This greatness had to do with his tenacity, his character, and his courage. But most of all, George Washington was a giant because he rejected power and set a precedent for American government that has been a crucial part of the goodness of America.

As commanding general of the military forces that defeated the most powerful empire in the world, Washington could have been expected to claim power — as Cromwell, Napoleon, Caesar, Mao, and countless other generals in history have done — but Washington returned to private life and left power behind. When Washington was elected president, he could have served as many terms as he wanted: The presidential electors would never have voted him out and the Constitution set no limit on the number of terms a President could serve. Washington, however, set the precedent of only serving two terms in office, a tradition that lasted until the Franklin D. Roosevelt (who was part of an already famous political family in 1932).

Now in his sixth term as Mayor of Chicago, Richard Daley has announced that he will not seek a seventh. The notion of electing ordinary citizens from various walks of life who, for a time, leave their careers and professions to perform a public service has been corroded not only by career politicians but by dynastic ambitions.

Richard II, son of longtime Mayor Richard I, has now reigned in Chicago for 21 years, the same number of years as his father. We have become used to people with last names like Daley, Kennedy, Bush, and Rockefeller serving very long terms in elected office. Jay Rockefeller has been Governor or Senator from West Virginia for 34 years. The Rockefellers were Governors of three different states — New York, West Virginia, and Arkansas — and, like the Roosevelts, this political dynasty included both Republicans and Democrats.

Richard II's brother was President Clinton's Secretary of Commerce. Someone named George Bush has been President or Vice President of America for 20 of the last 30 years.

Establishment pundits seem to like men like Daley. His imperial style is regarded with some of the same admiration that Americans felt for the Kennedy family when one brother was President, another Attorney General, and a third Senator from Massachusetts. Sure, Daley had a political machine, these

pundits say, but he used it to make Chicago run — just like his dad did. How far we have descended from the goodness of Washington, who knew that what Americans needed was not bossism, but liberty.

Photo of Mayor Richard Daley: AP Images

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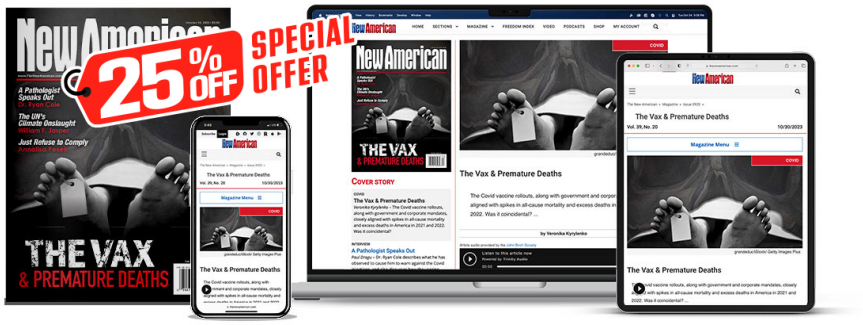

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