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Fire On The Prairie: Harold Washington, Chicago Politics, And The Roots Of The Obama Presidency



Synopsis

Chicago • the city whose name is synonymous with urban politics; the city of sharply divided ethnic and racial enclaves; the city whose police force shocked America during the 1968 Democratic convention and then the next year killed Black Panther leader Fred Hampton. As Martin Luther King, Jr., said when he traveled to Chicago in 1965 to turn his attention to the great urban centers of the north, "If we crack Chicago, then we crack the world." Black empowerment "would take off like a prairie fire across the land." In 1983 Chicago elected Harold Washington as the city's first black mayor. This is the story of Washington's improbable victory over Jane Byrne, heir to the late Richard J. Daley's political empire, and over Daley's eldest son. It's the story of a coalition outside the party's mainstream coming to power and ruling in the country's most political of cities. In *Fire on the Prairie*, Gary Rivlin reveals the personalities and philosophies of those who were at the center of events, from black separatists such as Lu Palmer to community organizers such as Jesse Jackson, and from white liberals who held Washington at arm's length to Chicago originals like Ed Vrdolyak, the opposition's leader. At the center of the drama was Harold Washington, an enigmatic yet engaging figure who fashioned an uneasy but potent multiracial coalition that ruled for five years. The conflicts and compromises of all are described in vivid detail and the resulting history is a thorough account of an election and an administration that captured the nation's attention. Like Mississippi in the 1960s or Boston in the 1970s, Chicago in the 1980s was the stage for a drama that revealed the dimensions of America's racial politics and offered insights and inspiration for future generations.

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