

Is corruption synonymous with being ILL(INOIS)?

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Bruce: Then and Now

Recently a radio talk show host referred to Chicago as "the murder capital of America" which really riled me. As a lifelong Chicagoan, whose grandparents emigrated here to escape religious persecution after the turn of the 20th century, I have always loved what Sinatra referred to as "my kind of town." In fact, growing up in Humboldt Park and West Rogers Park, I was always proud of the fact that I lived in the city and not the suburbs. I mean I could take a bus and an el to any corner of the city -- Wrigley Field, Comiskey Park, the beach, downtown or I could ride my bike safely anywhere -- even before there were official bike paths.

Chicago has the best hot dogs in the world (it's the home of Vienna beef) and the original deep dish pizza (Uno's and Due's). The hot summers were tempered by the beach (never over 70 degrees until mid August) and the thousands of acres of forest preserves for camping and picnics. And it was all free! We played baseball everyday (16" softball is a Chicago tradition) and had a different game for whatever number of people showed up at the school yard.

We all went to public school and there was no divorce. So even though we had between 40-44 kids in a class all throughout elementary school, we did our homework because our parents wouldn't let us watch television or play outside after dinner if we didn't. And Mayor Daley would never let the teachers strike. We walked the fraction of a mile or so to school and we never missed a day. In fact, the only time that school was called off because of a snow-storm, we were already there.

Up until the American Freedom Coalition (AFC) was created in 1987, Rev. Moon always warned us to stay as far away from politicians (political animals especially). Growing up in Chicago, my house served as a polling place and I loved it because I got to keep the American flag when it was over. In Chicago, the precinct captains are appointed by the Democratic Party and they "get out the vote" and supervise everything. I still remember the day when a big oil tanker truck pulled up in front of our house to vote. After he voted, the driver called over to the precinct captain, "hey, don't forget about the free tank of gas you promised me." The precinct captain then assured him that it was a done deal.

Today many of our political leaders in Illinois have the same last names that I remember their fathers had. The mayor, the President of the Senate, the editor of Playboy Magazine and her husband, just to name a few.

Illinois is known as "the Land of Lincoln." We also sent the first African-American woman to the Senate and elected the first African-American President. However, Chicago sprang to life amidst such professions as prostitution, gambling and political intrigue. Over the past fifty years, four of Illinois'

governors have gone to prison for corruption, as did several of the mayors' closest advisers. One governor was a federal judge, another a maverick renegade who ran against the system and then authored the report about the 1968 Democratic National Convention riots. Our last governor is currently in prison, along with several of his closest aides and the governor preceding him was just released to home detention.

Recently a lifetime Chicagoan remarked to me that the really pathetic thing about seeing a new case of political corruption hit the front page and the airways, is not that some formerly trusted public official is being tried or about to go to jail, but that those of us who grew up in Chicago are not the least bit shocked. Whether it's the current Metra scandal, the alderman or county councilman who are caught in some trap, an elected official who has hired half his lineage, "ghosts" on pay roll, or the former Illinois governors who have spent time in jail, it seems just like political business as usual in Illinois.

I grew up in the 1950s which featured a huge police scandal in Chicago and Billy Sol Estes in Washington. Our recently resigned Metra chief testified that what was done was probably not illegal (one of the most influential legislators in Illinois pressured the Metra Board to give sizable raises to his cronies). But I venture to ask, "was it immoral"? I also wonder, do we now live in a society where the Latin word "politis" (meaning to serve the people) has long been buried under the rug of self-serving politics. I remember not too long ago when two gentlemen each spent over a half a million dollars running for a \$43,000 job as a Chicago alderman. I just feel that it was not due to their desire to serve the public at all costs.

Finally, I long for the day that a public official will apologize for succumbing to the seduction of greed, and avarice for doing something corrupt and taking advantage of their position of trust. We, of course, are all susceptible -- and were those pointing their fingers at Nixon and Clinton themselves without sin -- so they could throw the first stone? I read that that lady in Dixon (the city treasurer embezzled \$54 million dollars over several years from the town) wants to appeal the length of her sentence. One former disgraced Congressman even tried to run for Congressman Jackson's open seat. He resigned after it was revealed that although married, he had seduced a teenage campaign worker. Forgive and forget? I guess the only good thing to say is that a few former convicts have become very successful media personalities. I loved our former Governor on his Saturday morning radio show every week before he went off to jail -- I had never hear any politician be so honest.

Post script:

Several years ago when I went to Wyoming as the Unification Church state leader I seriously thought about running for political office. I mean there are only 400,000 people in the entire state -- and only one Congressman. If you want to meet the governor, just go down to the post office any Saturday morning (that's how I got his signature for the signature campaign in 1986). So I thought it would be a piece of cake compared to the complexities of Chicago -- but my eyes were soon opened. What matters most in Wyoming is "how many generations your family has lived there". Wyoming also boasts to having the first woman governor in America. So, I honestly believe that corruption is not unique to Illinois or even Chicago -- or to either political party. The amazing thing to bring all of this together was that when I was walking out of a meeting with the Mayor of Cheyenne, I asked him, "so Mr. Mayor, how many generations has your family lived in Wyoming?" he laughed out loud and then replied, "I am actually from Chicago!"