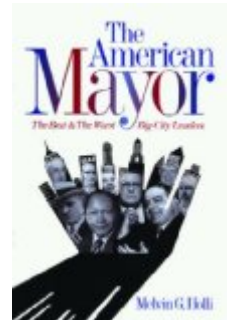


Melvin G. Holli. *The American Mayor: The Best & The Worst Big-City Leaders.* University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1999. xi + 210 pp. \$66.00, cloth, ISBN 978-0-271-01876-8.



Reviewed by Charles C. Kolb

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Biographies and autobiographies of America's "big city" mayors, state governors, presidents, and candidates for the latter office are not infrequently encountered in the literature on American politics and culture. However, American presidents and the leaders of her cities and states have received remarkably few comprehensive, comparative assessments. Over twenty years ago James MacGregor Burns (1978) began a basic analysis of the character of political leadership, and Fred Fiedler and Joseph Garcia (1987) furthered this analysis, but only a handful of other scholars have attempted to deal with this complex issue.

Melvin Holli, professor of history at the University of Illinois at Chicago, is the author or editor of a dozen books concerned with American urban politics or the biographies of big-city mayors. Most notable are his quartet of volumes on Chicago's mayors. He comments that as a graduate student at the University of Michigan under Professor Sidney Fine, he was influenced by Arthur M. Schlesinger Sr.'s expert-poll ranking of American presidents, and contemplated a similar work that would evaluate the nation's big-city mayors. Only

Murray and Blessing (1983, 1994) have prepared further comparative assessments of America's presidents.

Holli's compelling book, valuable for scholars and the general public, is the culmination of his research and appraisal of America's urban political leadership. His work is the first collective, comparative study of the America's big-city mayors and examines the "best" and the "worst" mayors while attempting to characterize the elements of leadership of the former. "Big cities" are defined as urban centers with more than 200,000 people. The volume contains a unique ranking by 76 expert scholars of the nation's 679 mayors who held office in the fifteen largest U.S. cities from 1820 to 1980, plus 53 additional "noteworthy and newsworthy" mayors for the period from 1980 to 1993. Holli also remarks that although the mayoralty is one of the most significant elective political offices, it has escaped a careful examination, so that his very original survey and analysis has produced rankings of the "best" and the "worst" mayors.

The poll of these scholars' perceptions of political leadership in major cities produced a remarkably strong consensus. The author states that his analysis provides a benchmark for future measures of big-city mayors, draws attention to the issue and characteristics of leadership, and should stimulate active public discussion beyond the academic realms of political science and public administration.

Informed members of the American public will note among the 71 "best" the names of Fiorello La Guardia, Tom Johnson, Richard J. Daley, David Lawrence, Tom Bradley, Richardson Dilworth, Henry Cisneros, Raymond Tucker, Henry Maier, and Andrew Young. At the opposite extreme, among the 82 "worst" mayors are those regarded as scalawags, or who were corrupt, insensitive, confrontational, or had chaotic administrations. Among the unworthy are Frank Rizzo, William H. Thompson, James Walker, Dennis Kucinich, Samuel Yorty, J. Michael Curley, Jane Byrne, Frank Hague, Marion Barry, Coleman Young, Wilson Goode, and Edward Koch. Byrne is the only woman among the entire list of urban leaders.

The volume has a preface, six chapters, an epilogue, and two appendices (with seven parts), amended by 284 detailed and scholarly endnotes, five tables, ten lists, one chart, and 22 black-and-white illustrations. The latter, in the main, are formal portraits or informal, candid images of the exemplary and the least worthy mayors over the 173-year period of study. Following a discussion of the criteria for evaluation and a few words about the experts who made the appraisals, Holli reports the best and worst, compares the results from his 1985 and 1993 polls, and considers distributions by city and political party affiliation. Interestingly, the "very best" were multi-term office holders. Cities with the best (where 34 mayors came from 19 different cities) include New York, Cleveland, Chicago, and Atlanta with three each; and Toledo, Los Angeles, Philadelphia, Milwaukee,

Baltimore, and San Francisco each with two. Among the "worst" (where 22 mayors came from 12 cities), New York leads with eight, followed by Chicago with three, and Philadelphia's two.

Holli next presents biographical sketches of four exemplary nineteenth-century and Progressive Era mayors: Josiah Quincy (a former municipal judge and Boston Federalist, and mayor from 1823-1828), Hazen Pingree (a wealthy Detroit Republican, 1890-1897), Samuel M. Jones (a philanthropist and an Independent Republican from Toledo, 1897-1904), and Tom L. Johnson (a Cleveland Democrat, 1901-1909, who emphasized city services). The third chapter deals with the three best mayors who held office during the World Wars and the Great Depression: Daniel Webster Hoan (a former city attorney and Socialist from Milwaukee, 1916-1940), Frank Murphy (a former federal law enforcement officer and U.S. attorney in Detroit, 1930-1933), and Fiorello La Guardia (a reformer, Republican mayor of New York City, 1934-1945). Murphy, who was also elected as the first president of the U.S. Conference of Mayors, would become the Governor-General (later the High Commissioner) of the Philippines, was appointed U.S. attorney general in 1939, and later confirmed as an associate justice of the U.S. Supreme Court. La Guardia's city prosecutor, Thomas Dewey, became governor of the Empire State and a presidential candidate. In the post-war period, the three best mayors were David Lawrence (a Pittsburgh Democrat, 1945-1950, who metamorphosed from a political boss to an urban statesman), Richard J. Daley (a Chicago Democrat, 1955-1976, who was both mayor and party chairman), and Tom Bradley (a former Los Angeles policeman with 21 years of service who became a lawyer and five-term mayor, 1973-1993). Bradley, the "African-American mayor of all Angelenos" also—like La Guardia—mastered the political art of grantsmanship.

Holli's fifth chapter, "Leadership Theory and the Mayoralty," examines the question of why

these particular men were effective leaders and how their personal leadership styles related to the historical contexts in which they practiced their leadership (p. 127). Combinations of persuasion and formal authority are considered as major attributes. The author also examines the concepts of structured tasks, unstructured tasks, and task-oriented leaders. Fielder's "Performance by Leadership Style" diagram (p. 145), derived from Fiedler and Garcia (1987:81-93), is used as a paradigm. Holli also examines those variables that enable some individuals to "leap from city hall to national office"--the age of the city, presence of political machines, and the reformation of administrative systems. These "leaps" included elevations from the mayoralty to state governorships and state supreme courts, as well as to the United States Senate, ambassadorships, presidential cabinet offices, and the U.S. Supreme Court. Chicago, Boston, San Francisco, and New York City are employed as case studies. "Grover the Good" Cleveland, the mayor of Buffalo for less than one year (1881) and the governor of the Empire State (1882), became a twice elected U.S. President (1884 and 1892)--a meteoric political rise. Likewise, we learn that Cleveland, Ohio is a "success city" where politics were pragmatic and centrist and from which many mayors moved into national offices. Six of ten of the best mayors were from Great Lakes cities, five were social reformers, and four were, as Holli describes, "builder mayors."

Anyone interested in politics, urban history, public administration, public policy, or political science will find the volume interesting and informative. The analysis and biographies emphasize the best mayors; by comparison, relatively little is said about those at the other end of the spectrum. The biographies of the ten best mayors (Chapters Two through Four) are fine-tuned essays derived, in the main, from the biographical dictionary edited by Holli and Jones (1981). Some readers may be confused by the use of data sets from two separate polls and ponder why Holli himself was a member of the cohort of experts polled in 1985.

Holli's process for the selection of these experts is not explained adequately; however, a majority of the scholars seem to be historians or political scientists. Therefore, your reviewer became interested in attempting to discern the mechanics Holli employed in choosing the experts. We are not informed how the 61 scholars and writers who were contributors to Holli's 1985 poll or the 69 contributors to the 1993 poll were selected. Only the names and the academic institutions (not the departmental affiliations) of these contributors are listed (appendices I-C and II-C).

For the 1993 poll, 27 of the 69 names also appear on the 1985 tabulation, and 28 of the 61 contributors in 1985 are on the 1993 list. Therefore, there are 76 discrete names. My assessment indicates that 24 of these individuals are from institutions located in the state of Illinois; and there are 10 from Ohio; 9 from New York State; 6 from Pennsylvania; 4 each from California, Maryland, and Michigan; and 3 each from Indiana, Louisiana, and Missouri. Perhaps the reader should not be surprised by the emphasis on the number of exemplary mayors cities located in the Midwest and Great Lakes region who demonstrate the leadership characteristics described in Holli's Chapter Six and Epilogue. After all, a majority of the expert scholars and writers who contributed their evaluations were also from the centrist Midwest. Scholars from the West Coast, Southwest, and Southeast would appear to be underrepresented. It would be an interesting exercise to evaluate the characteristics of the scholars themselves.

In sum, Holli concludes that "there are leaders for situations and situations for leaders, but no universal leader or leadership style that fits all historical situations" (p. 174). Nonetheless, this is a very intriguing volume that will be of interest to scholars and laypersons. To my knowledge no scholar has attempted a similar analysis of America's state governors--perhaps a political scientist or historian might undertake this study in the fu-

ture. The brief essays on mayors Murphy, La Guardia, Lawrence, and Bradley make delightful reading. For balance I would have liked to see more fulsome accounts of some of the worst as well, for example, Rizzo, Thompson, Walker, Yorty, and Byrne. This is a "fun" book that is also scholarly and will appeal to the public, students, and academics. Readers will look for the names of particular mayors and cities they read the narrative, but it is the assessment and ranking of leaders and their qualities that make the volume even more valuable.

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