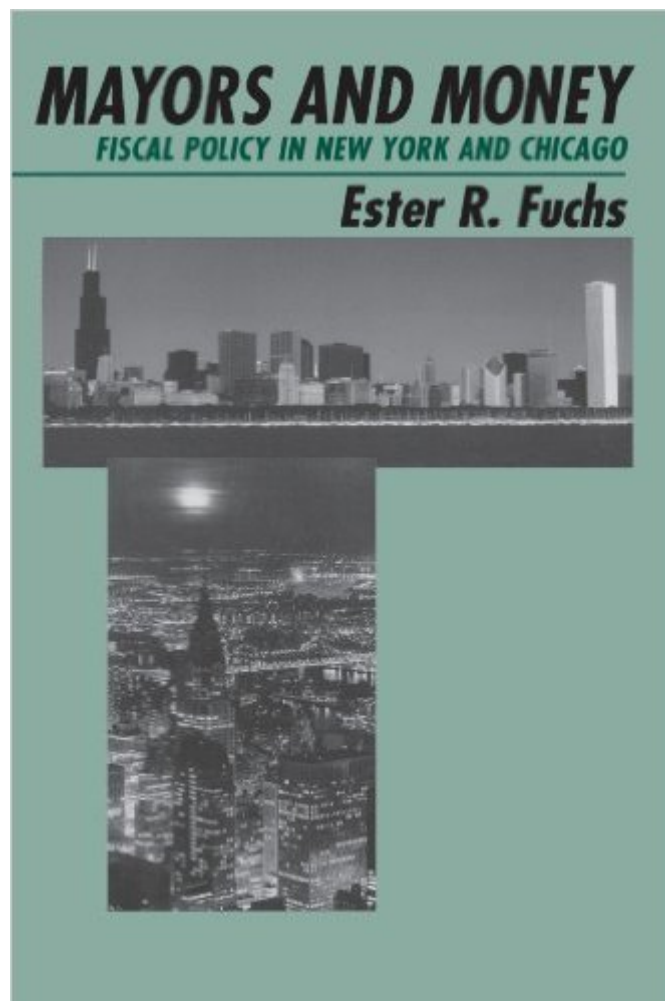


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Mayors And Money: Fiscal Policy In New York And Chicago (American Politics And Political Economy Series)



Synopsis

Chicago and New York share similar backgrounds but have had strikingly different fates. Tracing their fortunes from the 1930s to the present day, Ester R. Fuchs examines key policy decisions which have influenced the political structures of these cities and guided them into, or clear of, periods of economic crisis.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

If you like specialized books about city governance, you would probably like Mayors and Money. New York City in the 1920s and 1930s got reform, but it never got good government. Why? Chicago has the country's last machine, yet garbage is collected, snow plowed, and taxes lower than in some Sunbelt cities. How? Mayors and Money is the counterintuitive argument that a political machine is actually less draining on a city treasury than the most common alternative, eg undue influence of public sector unions. In New York a mayor must make very expensive promises to the transit workers, sanitationmen, teachers, hospital workers to get elected, in Chicago a mayor is chosen more by the insiders of the Cook County Democratic organization. Yes, a Chicago mayor

must build things with no-bid contracts and provide patronage jobs, but these cost less than the demands of city employees. If I have a problem with Fuchs' argument it is that she denies that Chicago and New York have different political centers of gravity. New York has this big liberal intelligentsia, plus a large Jewish population. New Yorkers pay higher taxes than Chicagoans in part because there are powerful constituencies in New York that want or tolerate more spending. Unlike the other review, I found Fuchs' book very readable, though I thought there could have been more anecdotes. For instance, Daley's getting the State of Illinois to assume responsibility for the courts and welfare are awesome feats. No where else in the country to cities win political battles against suburbs. Fuchs implies that Daley got those things because he was a boss, but doesn't go into detail. Also, unions were and are a part of the Chicago machine, so I think Fuchs is exaggerating the differences.

If you are interested in the link between institutional design and gigantic practical consequences, then Fuchs' book is for you. The claim is that Chicago escaped the Great Fiscal Crisis suffered by NYC in part because Chicago had a strong political machine (aka Daley) that could say "no" to its public employee unions. In addition, Fuchs has detailed description of how Chicago's reliance on legal devices like special districts rather than special authorities -- the NYC specialty -- may have kept Chicago's budget under control. I teach local government law, and any book that can give me the skinny on how and why law matters is always welcome. This book does very well on that score: You will never be bored by the details of how muni bonds are funded again. Turns out that cities rise and collapse on the basis of such "boring" stuff.

I tried to read this book for an urban studies project. It is completely unreadable. It's easily one of the top-10 dullest books I've ever come across.

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