



Rolling on the River: The Best of Steve Neal

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"There are few places where the game [of politics] is played with more intensity than in Chicago," notes Steve Neal, who has covered that city's politics since 1979.

The longtime political columnist for the *Chicago Sun-Times*, Neal covered Jane M. Byrne's election in 1979 as the city's first woman mayor and Harold Washington's 1983 triumph as Chicago's first African American mayor. Even people who are not interested in politics are drawn to Neal's column because of his hard-hitting style and lucid insights. *Rolling on the River* is the first published collection of his work.

In these pages, you'll meet the state legislator who never met a special interest he did not like, an alderman groveling to a mob boss, and the prosecutor who gained notoriety as a publicity hound. Of a junketing congressman, Neal writes: "Instead of sending out a congressional newsletter, [he] ought to be sending his constituents 'Wish you were here' postcards of sandy beaches."

Neal's beat is politics, but his interests are rich and varied. He also writes about sports, music, literature, and film with a point of view that is fresh and original. Neal shows how Muhammad Ali became the heavyweight champion who transcended sports and how Sid Luckman changed football. He writes of Kenny Washington's importance in breaking professional football's color barrier and Steve Prefontaine's courage in taking on the little gray men of the sports establishment. Neal chronicles Paul Robeson's struggles: "His name became a great whisper. . . . The injustices against Paul Robeson have not been righted."

Nobel laureate Saul Bellow tells Neal that comedy is the bright hope of American fiction because it is too difficult for writers in this country to grasp the worst of the human condition. Neal tells why Frank Sinatra called Chicago his kind of town and also shows how the city inspires the poetry of Gwendolyn Brooks.

Neal, a former White House correspondent, shares his perspective as one of the few reporters to have interviewed Ronald Reagan in four different decades. He recalls spending an evening with Richard M. Nixon, defends Harry Truman's most controversial decision, and writes from Ireland of John F. Kennedy's enduring legacy in the nation of his ancestors. Neal portrays William Jefferson Clinton as the "world's oldest teenager."

With vivid imagery, Neal makes his subjects come alive. Mayor Richard M. Daley is likened to Forrest Gump, and the legendary boxing announcer Ben Bentley is hailed as the last of the Damon Runyon characters.

Tough but fair. Illuminating. Compassionate. That's the best of Steve Neal.

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