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William Donald Schaefer's Real Legacy

[Jesse Walker](#) | May 17, 2011

When William Donald Schaefer -- the former mayor of Baltimore, former governor of Maryland, former comptroller of Maryland, and infamous boor -- died last month, the obit columns were filled with enthusiastic tributes to his legacy. Now Edward Ericson Jr. has written a much more critical account of Schaefer's record for the *Baltimore City Paper*. I have some disagreements with the article, and I think it's deeply odd for Ericson to write that "even" the Cato Institute



opposes stadium subsidies, as though that stance should be some sort of surprise. But the thrust of the piece is right on, and it's well worth reading for anyone interested in the last few decades of American municipal history. As Ericson writes, "something like a Cult of Schaefer spread across the nation, infecting cities as diverse as Hartford and Cleveland, Ohio, with its brand of evangelistic showmanship, voracious consumption of federal dollars, undemocratic public-private partnerships, and media razzle-dazzle." And at its heart, Ericson argues, was a man who

amalgamated the worst aspects of both the bald-faced institutional corruption of the machine era and the sophisticated college-educated incompetence and deceit of the reform era. The combination is everywhere evident in Baltimore, from its crumbling infrastructure

and collapsing buildings to its shrinking, shirking tax base and billowing pension crisis. If Schaefer's outsized personality masked all this during his reign, it is only fair to ask: What keeps the state's political class from noticing today?

Read the whole thing [here](#).