



1960--LBJ vs. JFK vs. Nixon: The Epic Campaign That Forged Three Presidencies

David Pietrusza

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It was the election that would ultimately give America “Camelot” and its tragic aftermath, a momentous contest when three giants who each would have a chance to shape the nation battled to win the presidency.

Award-winning author David Pietrusza does here for the 1960 presidential race what he did in his previous book, *1920: the Year of the Six Presidents*—which *Kirkus Reviews* selected as one of their Best Books of 2007. Until now, the most authoritative study of the 1960 election was Theodore White’s Pulitzer Prize-winning *The Making of the President, 1960*. But White, as a trusted insider, didn’t tell all. Here’s the rest of the story, what White could never have known, nor revealed. Finally, it’s all out—including JFK’s poignant comment on why LBJ’s nomination as vice president would be inconsequential: “I’m 43 years old. I’m not going to die in office.”

Combining an engaging narrative with exhaustive research, Pietrusza chronicles the pivotal election of 1960, in which issues of civil rights and religion (Kennedy was only the second major-party Roman Catholic candidate ever) converged. The volatile primary clash between Senate Majority leader LBJ and the young JFK culminated in an improbable fusion ticket. The historic, legendary Kennedy-Nixon debates followed in its wake. The first presidential televised debates, they forever altered American politics when an exhausted Nixon was unkempt and tentative in their first showdown. With 80 million viewers passing judgment, Nixon’s poll numbers dropped as the charismatic Kennedy’s star rose. Nixon learned his lesson—resting before subsequent debates, reluctantly wearing makeup, and challenging JFK with a more aggressive stance—but the damage was done.

There’s no one better to convey the drama of that tumultuous year than Pietrusza. He has 1,000 secrets to spill; a fascinating cast of characters to introduce (including a rogue’s gallery of hangers-on and manipulators); and towering historical events to chronicle. And all of it is built on painstaking research and solid historical scholarship. Pietrusza tracks down every lead to create a winning, engaging, and very readable account.

With the 2008 elections approaching, politics will be on everyone’s mind, and *1960: LBJ vs. JFK vs. Nixon* will transform the way readers see modern American history.

A sampling of what Theodore White couldn’t chronicle—and David Pietrusza does:

- Richard Nixon’s tempestuous Iowa backseat blowup, and his bizarre Election Day road trip
- The full story of a sympathetic call from JFK to Coretta Scott King
- John Ehrlichman’s spy missions on the Nelson Rockefeller and Democratic camps
- The warnings *before* Election Day that Chicago’s mayor Daley would try to fix the race’s outcome
- JFK’s amphetamine-fueled debate performance

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Details

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From Reader Review 1960--LBJ vs. JFK vs. Nixon: The Epic Campaign That Forged Three Presidencies for online ebook

Brent says

I picked this book up at Barnes and Nobles, and was really just looking at something to read on the side. This book provides a lot of insight as to what Presidents John F. Kennedy (D-MA), Lyndon B. Johnson (D-TX) and Richard M. Nixon (R-CA) were thinking about as the election of 1960 played out. It's an amazing look at not only how these men performed, but it is also a great account as to how these men operated. Not only that, but it's amazing how their lives transitioned into their presidencies. A very good read, the only star deduction coming from the fact that it's just a slow read. Not David McCullough slow, but slow enough.

Nicholas Bonnema says

3.5 stars

Spoiler alert: JFK wins the election, LBJ "wins" the veepstakes and Nixon loses (for eight years anyways).

While not as good as *The Making of the President 1960* by Theodore H. White, this book benefits from being published decades after the election took place as opposed to a few months later. This provides a more historical perspective rather than on-the-ground journalistic perspective. Thanks to this there is a more in depth treatment of turning points that distinguish this campaign from previous presidential campaigns as the country entered the era of television and political campaign as spectacle.

Something that this books does as well as White's, and maybe better, is to make various observations on the racial and religious bigotry surrounding the 1960 election. Nixon here is a tragic figure, one who appears to have had a moral identification with the growing civil rights movement, but due to his overall lack of a moral compass he glossed over racial tensions and made dog whistle calls to the south in hopes of winning the presidency and outdoing Ike in the south. (Side note: boy did Ike have a lot of disrespect to shovel onto Nixon) Nixon later put his Machiavellian views on southern whites to full use with the 1968 Southern strategy, which fits together with a quote from LBJ in this book on the racism he saw in the south, "I'll tell you what's at the bottom of it, if you can convince the lowest white man he's better than the best colored man, he won't notice you're picking his pocket. Hell, give him somebody to look down on, and he'll empty his pockets for you." Unfortunately the politics of resentment are still with us today.

The most interesting part of reading both White's and this book's look at the 1960 election were parallels to the 2016 election that I am still putting together. The discussion of the West Virginia contest between H.H. Humphrey and JFK in particular has stuck with me. This quote in particular seems important "...instead of identifying with the woman who was like them - Muriel Humphrey - they identified with the Princess. You could tell they wanted Jackie. They had a wondrous look in their eyes when they saw her." Many voters it seemed chose a version of who they wanted to be rather than identify with a politician who was running on a platform to better address their present needs and by background should have been better able to identify with them. Together with how many voters saw the candidates on television as "watching two rival suitors in a Hollywood romantic comedy", it seems that the election of 1960 was pivotal in ushering in a new political era more focused on soundbites than white papers and appearances than ideas. Yes, this book may bring out the cynic in you.

One major criticism I have of this book is that the author seems to shoehorn in too many of the more provocative JFK stories (and conspiracy theories) regarding infidelity and mafia connections, likely to differentiate this book from White's (and the dozens of other written about this campaign and these three historical figures). But unfortunately this takes away from what is otherwise a highly recommended book for anyone who enjoys the campaign genre, presidential politics, and exploring turning points in history.

Mr. Steve says

A must read for fans of presidential campaigns and for fans of that era. Lots of interesting tidbits.

Jared Goerke says

A bit of a tough read at times, but overall, an interesting perspective into the 1960 election. It's very well researched as you can tell by the 50+ pages of notes at the end and clear that the author knows what he is talking about. This helps serve as part of the Kennedy memoirs that were never to be due to the two tragic assassinations in the 1960s.

Tom says

Great book, and not a boring page among the lot. Learned a ton about all 3 presidents, none of it was too flattering. I already knew most of the stuff about Nixon, but Kennedy and LBJ's sheer amount philandering was stunning. Neither could be president today, nor should they be. Supposedly JFK and Jackie would have separated if he hadn't won the nomination in 1960...and I also had no idea the enormous influence that Joe Kennedy had, and the large amount of distaste that everyone outside the Kennedy circle had for RFK...

I learned a lot, which is the sign of a good book!!

Anthony Bergen says

(Review originally posted on Dead Presidents)

1960: LBJ vs. JFK vs. Nixon - The Epic Campaign That Forged Three Presidencies

By David Pietrusza

Hardcover. 523 pp.

2008. Union Square Press

After the last of four historic Presidential debates in 1960, Vice President Richard Nixon shook hands with his opponent, Senator John F. Kennedy, and said, "It sure goes by fast, doesn't it?".

As I was reading David Pietrusza's ***1960: LBJ vs. JFK vs. Nixon - The Epic Campaign That Forged Three Presidencies*** (2008, Union Square Press) I found myself thinking the same thing: It sure goes by fast.

David Pietrusza writes history the way that novelists strive to write fiction. Pietrusza takes a seminal event, introduces us to a broad, fascinating cast of characters, and ties together numerous stories filled with drama and even humor to create an exciting, addictive tale. The most rewarding thing about it is that Pietrusza is writing about something that actually happened and that makes the story even more interesting. He writes about something that is real and, in the case of ***1960***, Pietrusza is writing about an election featuring three of the most dominant politicians and leaders of the 20th Century -- an election which shaped the last half of the American Century and changed Presidential politics forever.

I flew through this book -- partly because I couldn't put it down and partly because it is supremely readable. Pietrusza's research brings us amazing quotes, and the book features complex characters who are full of enough stories that it's easy to get lost in a book about each of them individually. In ***1960***, these individuals are playing a part in the same drama and there is never a moment where you wish the author would switch back to something more interesting. Every story he tells is interesting.

Among the bold-faced names which give ***1960*** an all-star cast are Nixon, Kennedy, Kennedy's running mate Lyndon Johnson, current President Dwight Eisenhower, Nixon's running mate Henry Cabot Lodge, Hubert Humphrey, Nelson Rockefeller, Bobby Kennedy, Jackie Kennedy, Frank Sinatra, Sammy Davis Jr., mobster Sam Giancana, Barry Goldwater, Chicago Mayor Richard Daley, Martin Luther King Jr., Tip O'Neill, Harry Truman, Stuart Symington, Eleanor Roosevelt, Adlai Stevenson, Jackie Robinson, and more. These are big names with big stories, and during the 1960 Presidential campaign they all played major roles.

One of the most interesting aspects of ***1960: LBJ vs. JFK vs. Nixon*** is the ambition of the Kennedy family as a whole, which is matched by the ambition of Richard Nixon as an individual. Kennedy family patriarch Joseph P. Kennedy is focused on getting his son, Jack, elected President in 1960 and he's willing to pay any price to do so. Nixon is similarly focused on the Presidency, but he doesn't have wealth to back him up, charm to open doors, or the support of his mentor President Eisenhower to give him strength. Nixon attempts to do it all on his own, and what is so shocking, even in retrospect, is how very close Nixon came to beating JFK in 1960.

Beginning with the battle between JFK and Hubert Humphrey in several state primary contests, the Democratic Presidential nomination comes down to a last-second challenge to JFK from Senate Majority Leader Lyndon Johnson of Texas. When JFK triumphs in Los Angeles and wins the nomination he astonishes everyone by offering the Vice Presidency to LBJ. From there the campaign -- and the book -- takes off.

1960: LBJ vs. JFK vs. Nixon is strongest when Pietrusza shares little-known backroom facts and inside secrets, as well as when he disputes myths that have surrounded the 1960 campaign, JFK, LBJ and Nixon. We learn more details about JFK's unsavory connections with Frank Sinatra and, through Sinatra, Sam Giancana and the Chicago Mafia. LBJ's insecurities as a leader and as a candidate are exposed. The tenacity and abrasiveness of Bobby Kennedy are spotlighted. Richard Nixon's strengths and weaknesses -- a foreshadowing of what would eventually finally get him elected President and then eventually topple his career in disgrace -- are obvious as he isolates himself and obsesses over campaign details while overlooking big-picture items.

All great historians are able to translate stories about events and facts into stories about people. All history is personal, and David Pietrusza's ***1960: LBJ vs. JFK vs. Nixon*** is a wonderful book about a transcendent event

populated by extraordinary human beings who faced achievements and adversity, triumphs and tragedies. We know what happened to John F. Kennedy, Lyndon B. Johnson, and Richard Nixon once they moved into the White House, but this is how they got to that point. It's a story about America and Americans, and about how 1960 was a turning point for politics and politicians in this country -- the beginning of a New Frontier, a Great Society, and a Silent Majority, and the end of American innocence.

As I first learned with his previous book (*1920: The Year of the Six Presidents*) I love the way David Pietrusza writes history and this is a book about three of the Presidents who fascinate me most. I highly recommend ***1960: LBJ vs. JFK vs. Nixon - The Epic Campaign That Forged Three Presidencies***. Get it at your local bookstore, Amazon, or through the Sterling Publishing website.

Brian says

Pietrusza provides a very interesting account of the 1960 election and takes up some of the most fascinating stories to occur on the campaign. The book takes a look primarily at the Kennedy campaign and their strengths and weaknesses dealing with the assertions that Joe Kennedy bought the election (largely supported here) and JFK's wandering eye (many of the allegations here are denied). The strategy of the modern elections from the beginning of presidential debates which this election is clearly known for as well as the idea of entering multiple primaries and the beginning of the end for the party boss system are also explored. The relationship between JFK and Bobby is also looked at along with the development of those who would become his closest advisors as his administration progressed. The alienation of LBJ which led to him working his state to bring it to JFK proved to be very interesting and really shows how he would be treated throughout JFK's presidency. Finally the Nixon camp is examined as to how they threw away the election allowing Kennedy to win. I would give this book four and a half stars because well it is done well, the book focuses primarily on Kennedy and Nixon is halfheartedly covered with LBJ almost being an afterthought. For those looking for a book that deals straight with the issues of the 1960 campaign this is a great place to start. The author does an excellent job of looking at the candidates and how they played against one each other and then what allowed Kennedy to achieve victory.

Shauna says

This book was fascinating. It's not something I'd typically read--I prefer fiction, and the nonfiction I do read is never related to politics--but I was taken in by the author's engaging writing style. It was at times a bit too distractingly metaphorical, but that made it all the more fun to read. I learned a lot about the election, and about the three candidates vying for presidency. At times the book may have been a little too thorough--I learned more than I ever needed to know about people I hadn't heard of--but as it presented a very detailed account of the events leading up to the election, I was okay with that.

My favorite (darkly amusing) parts: JFK proclaimed that the vice-presidency doesn't matter because he's young and isn't going to die in office. And, just before becoming vice president, LBJ said that one in four presidents have died in office and that he's "a gamblin' man."

GT says

In-depth history of the 1960 Presidential campaign. Very compelling to read through the ups and downs, twists and turns of a campaign showdown where we of course know the outcome, but is dramatic stuff none-the-less. I loved the information not only on the candidates, their wives, and families, but on each leaders friend's, staff, and advisers. Given the benefit of history it is interesting to note when candidates were given good advice, by whom, and insight into why, or why not, they'd choose to follow it.

I'm again reminded of, and amazed by, how much I don't know. For example, the 1960 debates between candidates Kennedy and Nixon. I've seen clips and read before that Nixon was tired, didn't look good, and didn't understand the medium of TV as well as the suave and smart Kennedy. Here I learned that although Nixon was overly tired for the first debate and came off poorly when compared to Kennedy's calm and composed demeanor on TV, that those listening on radio actually felt Nixon was the debate winner. And then for debates 2 - 4, Nixon is universally felt to have gotten the better of Kennedy.

As far as securing each party's nomination, the process was so different back then. I was not aware that in 1960 there were only 11 primaries, and that candidates would never think to enter each one. They'd pick and choose which primary might give them the best press, best momentum, or best shot at securing the Presidential nomination at their party's political convention. LBJ barely campaigned at all prior to the Democratic convention, and another Democratic front runner, Adlai Stevenson, actively communicated he was not interested in the nomination (a practice that had worked well for him in securing the Democratic Presidential nomination in both '52 + '56).

Fascinating reading... 4 Stars

★ = Horrid waste of time

★★ = May be enjoyable to some, but not me

★★★ = I am glad I read it

★★★★ = Very enjoyable and something I'd recommend

★★★★★ = A rare find, simply incredible

Ugo Marsolais says

The 1960 U.S. presidential election is largely viewed today as an era-defining election, with JFK coming into power on an irresistible wave of change. Well, this book does nuance that idyllic view quite significantly and that's what make it an interesting and enjoyable read. For starters, the election was anything but a landslide for Kennedy, who barely squeezed a tiny 100,000 votes majority over Nixon on a total 70 millions votes cast. Secondly, for all its charismatic and telegenic proprieties, JFK only really won the first of the four TV debates, although it's the only one people remember now.

One of the thing that I found so difficult to do throughout the book: not seeing Nixon distorted by what we now know about Watergate. But I am not alone as I found the author David Pietrusza himself seemed to have a tendency to portray Nixon as quite a dark man, even though 1974 hasn't arrived yet. Pietrusza does a good job of carrying the story starting more or less a year before the election, going chronologically thought the main highlights of the election campaign.

I removed a star because the sub-heading of this book (The Epic Campaign That Forged Three Presidencies) made me expect much more development and thought around the connections between those 3 presidencies (Kennedy 1960, Johnson 1964, and Nixon 1968). But Pietrusza doesn't really do that, except in a few rushed pages in the last chapter. He does explore in more details the complicated Kennedy-Johnson relationship, especially as it happened at the Democratic convention when Kennedy, to the surprise of everyone and himself too, selected LBJ as his running mate.

Ralphz says

A great look at a key election, impacting more than 15 years of U.S. history.

This is more than just The Great Debate and Papa Joe. The backroom dealings begin with the primaries, and the mistakes made by all.

Adlai Stevenson dithers, Nelson Rockefeller jumps in late and Hubert Humphrey isn't up to the task.

Kennedy takes on Nixon, and both sides have their pros and cons. And Nixon led deep into the election season. Then The Great Debate. Then Nixon battled back and took the lead again - which isn't widely remembered.

A lot of interesting characters populate this tale, and coming off worst of all were Eleanor Roosevelt (pretty much a racist), Bobby Kennedy (pretty much a profane bully) and Dwight Eisenhower (pretty much a disconnected president).

You'll likely find a lot of new information here, and new takes on old facts. Worth your time.

More reviews at my WordPress site, Ralphsbooks.

TrumanCoyote says

Interesting style, but it paled a bit after a while. Don't get me wrong, injecting a little vigor and readability into political books is just what the doctor ordered (if only more of them didn't sound all terminally stodgy, like theses rotting away on some university shelf), but it was hard to know how to take his attitude sometimes. Like when he lambasts the supposed shallowness of the era of the TV presidential debate as "Government by gotcha." I mean, is he really that snide? Or is he that dense? Either way, it's a bit off-putting (and USA Today-ish), and I found myself not quite trusting him by the end of the read (this was incidentally enforced by the utterly pointless final chapter). At the start of things I found it perhaps refreshing to read a sentence in such a book like: "The day [JFK's] older brother Joe was blown to bits." Later on though it started to seem a bit gimmicky and cheap.

But of course it was a heck of a contest, and time (and all that). Particularly diverting was reading of Nixon's impromptu junket to Tijuana at the end of the campaign. The Trickster hardly got any wackier than that! (it was like the 1970 Lincoln Memorial dawn all over again, only it came first of course).

Andy Miller says

A disappointing telling of the 1960 Presidential election. True, many books have been written about that campaign, but the author's premise was promising, telling it from the perspective of the three candidates who would eventually become President.

However, the author seemed to quick to make superficial comments to distinguish this narrative from the others--and they typically didn't add up. For example, the book dismisses Lyndon Johnson's father as "nothing but a drunkard" Every biography I have read has painted a complex picture of Johnson's father while acknowledging alcohol issues, many talk of his integrity, his alliance with Sam Rayburn in battling against lobbyists while in the state legislature. It was as if the author was more interested in being glib than being accurate

Another example is his quote of Clare Booth Luce in describing Wayne Morse after Morse opposed her nomination as ambassador to Brazil, that her difficulties with Morse started "when he was kicked in the head by a horse" While the quote was accurate it was used to describe a general consensus of feeling toward Morse, of course the use of the quote takes on a whole different context when you learn that Luce had to resign the job within a couple of days of the quote because of what she said. The book did not include the reaction to Luce's quote which is another example of author being more interested in being glib than being accurate.

The whole tone of the book was somewhat gossipy, while there were interesting tidbits such as a political argument between Frank Sinatra and John Wayne, the triumph of gossip and glib over depth and analysis left me with a two star review for the book

Peggy says

In 1960, I was growing-up in a staunch Democratic household, so I heard a lot about JFK/LBJ - and not much about Nixon (at least, not much good). Reading this book was very interesting - resurrecting memories, as well as giving a lot of information. You always hear about the "backroom" dealings of the politicians - and this book told the details about them. Reading this during an election year when the race was close (as it was in 1960) made me wonder what goes on behind the scenes in today's politics.

Jacob says

This book is well-written and easy to read, and the author goes to some effort to be objective about all three candidates, as well as the others mentioned in the book. Unfortunately, this pursuit of objectivity results in the author sometimes telling events without helping us interpret their meaning or significance. Towards the end of the book, I could start to figure out the significance myself. Maybe I'm getting better at politics! Okay, maybe not.

For those who are not as familiar with John F. Kennedy, Lyndon B. Johnson, or Richard M. Nixon as they would like to be, this book provides a decent background and detailed coverage of the 1960 election, as well as super-quick references to future events you already have to be familiar with to understand. As I read this, I realized that none of the candidates should ever have been president, though ironically all three were. The

level to which they were corrupt and/or mentally unstable was surprising.
