



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

David Pietrusza

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Three Presidents, three giants--one election.

A thousand secrets.

Round One of 1960's electrifying presidential contest pits charismatic upstart John Kennedy's blend of Harvard eloquence, social register style, and dashing vigor against molasses-drawl Senate power broker Lyndon's Johnson mercurial mix of overbearing Texas bluster and maddening indecision.

Kennedy versus Johnson--the cool patrician versus the manic cowboy.

Round Two pits JFK--dashing yet flawed in ways kept carefully hidden for an adoring public--head-to-head, down-to-the wire, against lone-wolf Richard Nixon's brooding, ultimately-damned, quest for political power and personal validation.

Nixon versus Kennedy--Uriah Heep versus Dorian Gray.

The election, the year, the experience, its sights and soundbites, slogans and hopes and fears, remain indelibly in our collective memory, vivid as ever, a presidential drama exceeding fiction's bounds, presenting not merely the grandest of characters, but the most astonishing of plot twists, the sharpest confrontations, mobsters and molls, brains and bribes, the most eloquent and compelling of dialogue, eternal truths and convenient lies.

And, when the ultimate cliff-hanger ending of twentieth century politics hurtles to its exhausted conclusion, its warring tickets find themselves separated by only two tenths of a single percentage point of the popular vote--and the Mayor of Chicago.

1960's legendary contest remains unsurpassed for color, personality, and continuing historical significance.

1960 created the world we live in today.

1960 marked the triumph of tolerance over decades of ingrained anti-Catholic bigotry.

1960 witnessed a spectacular infusion of idealism, style, and glamour into politics--PT-109 and the birth of New Frontier, frenzied crowds storming the first "rock-star" candidate, the turbulent sunrise of Camelot's storied thousand days.

1960 also witnessed back-alley, bare-knuckle politics--big money and back-room deals, threats and broken promises, brutal, murderous mobsters and pious hypocrites.

In other words--politics as usual.

1960 ushered in television's unquestioned political domination, massively increased emphasis on TV news coverage and advertising and, above all, a quartet of riveting televised presidential debates staged before 77 million viewers, seizing the collective national imagination, forever altering American perceptions of politics and, indeed, of the presidency itself. The old machines were dead. Television--"the new machine"--was king.

1960 witnessed Martin Luther King's civil rights movement reach maturity and take national center stage, the sit-in phenomenon, King's sentencing to a brutal Georgia prison camp, and how JFK's very much spontaneous and very human intervention triggered King's release--and changed the course of the election.

1960 saw a ruthless multi-millionaire, his fortune made in predatory capitalism, bootlegging and stock manipulation, his own dreams of political power long ago destroyed, too controversial to seek any office for himself, skillfully maneuver his charismatic son into the highest of all of all offices.

1960 pitted Democrats and Republicans in nip-and-tuck combat for a solid year, at most a percentage point or two separating them. Among the most dramatic electoral cliffhangers ever--even without a final dollop of fraud.

But above all, 1960 pitted a warring trio of legendary, unique and totally different personalities--John Fitzgerald Kennedy, Richard M. Nixon, and Lyndon Baines Johnson--three imperfect, all-too-human, giants scrambling and scheming and clawing for the presidency of the United States. How they battled, how they warily saw each other, their strategies, their alliances, their ambitions, their ideals and scandals and compromises, their strengths and tragic flaws are all forcefully chronicled in *1960--LBJ vs. JFK vs. Nixon: The Epic Campaign that Forged Three Presidencies*.

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