



The First Modern Campaign: Kennedy, Nixon, and the Election of 1960

By Gary A. Donaldson



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The presidential campaign that pitted Richard M. Nixon against John F. Kennedy was the most significant political campaign since World War II. With Eisenhower's tenure at an end, American society broke with the culture of the war years. This social shift was reflected in and provoked by new trends in American political life and political campaigning, all of which made 1960 a landmark year in American politics.

In this engaging book, Gary A. Donaldson tells the story of Kennedy versus Nixon with a sharp eye for the salient political developments and a keen sense of the drama of an election that was unlike any other the nation had experienced. The election of 1960 was also an orchestrated political drama, organized as a sweeping campaign from coast to coast and staged for a national television audience. This made it the first modern campaign in which the television media changed the dynamics of presidential politics and in which photographs, charisma, and direct appeals to voters counted as they had never done before. It was also an election of intense personal rivalry made all the more spirited by the prejudice against Kennedy's Catholicism and his intention to widen the American political arena.

Ideological shifts within the parties as they combined with innovations in campaigning would mark a clear divide in politics as it was practiced and politics as it would have to be practiced in the future. Yet not since Theodore White's journalistic account, *The Making of the President*, has attention been paid to the full 1960 campaign as it played out in the early primaries and then culminated in the November election. Donaldson shows why the whole political season is critical to understanding American politics today.

The First Modern Campaign is essential and engaging reading for anyone interested in contemporary politics in the United States.



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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

There will be no serious dispute about this book's basic, and frequently repeated, argument—that the 1960 election was the first modern presidential election, principally because of the centrality of the nation's very first televised debates. Nor will any of the details about which the author writes be new to knowledgeable readers. But what Donaldson (*Liberalism's Last Hurrah: The Presidential Campaign of 1964*) does achieve is to gather everything about that pivotal election season in a fast-paced, comprehensive tale. He brings the day's leading historical characters alive in all their complexity, diversity and skills. Sympathetic to them yet objective about their strengths and weaknesses, he lets contemporaries do the criticizing in their own words while he observes them from above the fray—all, save John Kennedy, making their way through the usual political thickets to defeat. Donaldson is particularly good at analyzing the divisions within the two major parties, especially those of the Republicans, and in assessing the role of religion in the campaign. One comes away with a heightened appreciation of Nixon's clarity of understanding, Kennedy's distinctive energy and the origins of the right's grievances, which eventually led to its takeover of the Republican Party. (*July*) Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.

Review

Donaldson . . . gathers everything about that pivotal election season in a fast-paced, comprehensive tale. . . . [He] is particularly good at analyzing the divisions within the two major parties, especially those of the Republicans, and in assessing the role of religion in the campaign. One comes away with a heightened appreciation of Nixon's clarity of understanding, Kennedy's distinctive energy and the origins of the right's grievances, which eventually led to its takeover of the Republican Party. (*Publishers Weekly*)

The book is a pleasant read that weaves interesting anecdotes and insights to provide a lively account of party politics in the 1950s and the campaign and election of 1960. . . . Recommended. (*CHOICE*)

Donaldson's brevity and thematic unity make this book an excellent choice for undergraduates. . . . Donaldson's ability to tell a good story combines nicely with a thorough survey of scholarly works and manuscript collections. (*Journal of American History*)

In this lively and informative book Gary A. Donaldson provides readers with a number of important insights into American politics. (*Journal of Southern History*)

The First Modern Campaign promises to be a more evenhanded treatment of the candidates, and it delivers on this promise. Donaldson has done extensive archival research and brings his revealing findings to bear at numerous points in his narrative. The strength of the book is in its fast-paced yet thorough account of the Kennedy-Nixon combat. Donaldson does an equally good job sketching the political background for the 1960 election and describing the pivotal events of the campaign. (*The Historian*)

Gary A. Donaldson has crafted a brisk, well-researched account of the dramatic confrontation between John F. Kennedy and Richard M. Nixon in the 1960 presidential election. Readers will find this engaging narrative a compelling introduction to the race for the White House that shaped American politics for many decades. (Lewis L. Gould, author of *Grand Old Party: A History of the Republicans*)

Theodore H. White's *The Making of the President 1960* established the popular genre of insider campaign

narratives and remains the most famous book of all campaign books. Prospective readers of *The First Modern Campaign* will want to know what is different and new about this new account of the 1960 election. Gary A. Donaldson tackles his Theodore White problem in a preface and makes an important claim: for all of its virtues, White's version of the 1960 election was marred by his romanticized portrait of John F. Kennedy. *The First Modern Campaign* promises to be a more evenhanded treatment of the candidates, and it delivers on this promise. (*The Historian*)

About the Author

Gary A. Donaldson is professor of history at Xavier University of Louisiana. He is the author of many books on American history in the twentieth century, including *Liberalism's Last Hurrah: The Presidential Campaign of 1964*, *Modern America: A Documentary History of the Nation Since 1945*, and *The Second Reconstruction: A History of the Modern Civil Rights Movement*.

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