



Presidential Campaigns: From George Washington to George W. Bush

Paul F. Boller Jr.

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Were presidential campaigns always as bitter as they have been in recent years? Or is the current style of campaigning a new political development? In this revised and updated edition of *Presidential Campaigns* the answers to these questions are clear: the race for the presidency, although at times mean and nasty, has always been an endlessly entertaining and highly-charged spectacle for the American public. This book unveils the whole history of American presidential elections, from the seamless ascent of General George Washington to the bitterly contested election of George W. Bush, bringing these boisterous contests to life in all their richness and complexity.

In the old days, Boller shows, campaigns were much rowdier than they are today. Back in the nineteenth century, the invective at election time was exuberant and the mudslinging unrestrained; a candidate might be called everything from a carbuncle-faced old drunkard to a howling atheist. But there was plenty of fun and games, too, with songs and slogans, speeches and parades, all livening up the scene in order to get people to the polls. *Presidential Campaigns* takes note of the serious side of elections even as it documents the frenzy, frolic and the sleaze. Each chapter contains a brief essay describing an election and presenting "campaign highlights" that bring to life the quadrennial confrontation in all its shame and glory.

With a postscript analyzing the major changes in the ways Americans have chosen their Presidents from Washington's time to the present, *Presidential Campaigns* gives the reader a full picture of this somewhat flawed procedure. For all of its shortcomings, though, this "great American shindig" is an essential part of the American democratic system and, for better or for worse, tells us much about ourselves.

Presidential Campaigns: From George Washington to George W. Bush Details

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Anders Hanson says

If, like me, you have an interest in politics and history, yet at the same time have an embarrassingly poor understanding of American political history, then this is the perfect primer.

Presidential Campaigns by Paul F Boller manages to summarise every presidential campaign (up to George W Bush's first victory) in just a few pages. It gives you the essential historical background to the campaign, and excels in explaining how the particular candidates who fought it out came to be selected, and then finishes off with a number of interesting anecdotes and stories about the campaign to give a flavour of how it was conducted. A good summary of the key details you should know over a long period of history and well worth reading.

A very good book, and one that has highlighted a number of key figures and moments in American history about which I now want to read more.

Maggie says

was worried that it would be too text bookish as it is long and with very small print but a very interesting look into the Presidential Campaigns from the beginnging to 2000. Loved the small blurbs at the end of each chapter about events that happened....kind of like bloopers. Oddly, things have not changed much as far as campaigning goes.

Stacy says

Just finished Presidential Campaigns: From George Washington to George W Bush by Paul Boller; a very timely read since the elections are tomorrow. This was a very interesting book that provides informative and concise summaries of all the elections through George W Bush beating Gore. Having more information about the presidencies would have been nice but then the book would have been ridiculously long. As it was, I felt I learned quite a bit and am eager to read more about the various presidents. It's amazing how campaigns haven't really changed throughout the years. They are just as nasty today as they were after Washington was elected. In fact, they might possibly be a bit nicer which is hard to believe.

Nathan says

Boller's "Presidential Campaigns" only covers campaigns up through the 1984 re-election of Ronald Reagan, but it's worth reading - for fans of American politics - for its anecdotes covering every campaign up through Reagan's last. At times funny, at other times somewhat depressing, it's a good history-in-a-bottle, not of America or her history, but strictly of her political campaigns. A very interesting read, especially as we gear up for another round of what Jon Stewart calls "The Clusterf*ck to the White House". This book proves that

although the coverage may change, the action never does.

NC

Kathy says

Enjoy presidential trivia.

Shawn Thrasher says

Presidential Campaigns proved that our modern presidential campaigns have nothing on the campaigns of yore. Each successive presidential campaign becomes more stage managed, more scripted, and consequently more boring. They used to really duke it out. When Theodore Roosevelt said his hat was the ring, he knew that campaigns could be as bloody and brutal as a boxing match. Campaigns today are grueling - especially compared to those earliest campaigns a few years after the revolution. Back then, the citizenry (at least those who could vote) really cared. I mean, a big chunk of them had just fought for that.

John O'Brien says

A nice light read about every presidential election since George Washington. Obviously it doesn't go into great depth but the book is engaging and creates future topics of exploration readers.

Jerry Landry says

Boller's Presidential Campaigns was a good synopsis of the presidential campaigns up to 1980 and had some fun tidbits and interesting quotes. My main complaint, though, is that I often found inaccurate dates in the work. Typically, each chapter had at least one date wrong, some by a good many days. For me, it takes away from a work when I can't intrinsically trust that the information being presented is accurate. Still, I did enjoy the experience of examining the elections that led up to the present day.

Carter says

Punctures a fair number of myths, including the notion that presidential politics have gotten nastier over the years -- Washington was probably the only candidate who wasn't accused of being something worse than a child molester. But by focusing only on campaign cycles, this book misses some of the intervening history

that helps put each presidential election in context.

Ben Goodhue says

A historical review of every presidential election including the first election of George Washington. It displayed the changes in strategies and showed the overall evolution of elections. Boller explains the background of each candidate and has changed my opinion of many of the people that became president who I previously did not know the history of before.

Liz says

Paul Boller, Jr. loves the intense rivalries that evolve during campaigns, giving special attention to cut throat criticisms and extreme groups and side stories, the contemporaries of which are issues like the Acorn scandal which history will fairly forget. He is mostly accurate, but cuts little slack for founding fathers in early campaigns, decrying the establishment of the electoral college as their lack of faith in the populous, which is totally errant historically. This being my only real criticism, this a wholly fun, enjoyable read for any one interested in political campaigning (even as an art form).

Loyalhistorian says

Excellent read, extremely informative and interesting. Boller did a great job of giving a concise history of each political election from 1790 to 2000, spanning George Washington to George W. Bush's first election. It was very interesting to see the evolution of our political election system, as well as the evolution of the party system and the change in platforms over the years.

Each chapter began with a small summary over the key issue for that election year, then went into which key candidates were elected by which parties, then outlined the major platforms for each party for that election. From there Boller gave the brief history of the campaigning, the debates, any major smears/ploys, and key twists leading up to election night. He gives the breakdown over all electoral votes and popular votes for each candidate. Afterward, there is usually a small blurb mentioning whether or not the elected candidate kept to his word on platforms or gives a foreshadowing of what happens in the next election. After the main body of the election history, he gives several small anecdotes and factoids about that year's election and its candidates.

Boller's postscript "Presidential Campaigns through the Years" was very good, and I would have preferred to have read it as a prologue to the book, to set me up briefly on how the "electioneering" and the election structure morphed over time. Because many times through the book I was thinking, "Oh, that's cool how that used to be done, but when exactly did they start doing _____?" Overall, a very good book. I've already marked a couple more of Boller's books on political history as "to-read."

Ethan Hulbert says

This book was incredible and gave me a window of insight into politics that I think few people have - more people should read this book! If you think things are wild now - and granted, they are - it turns out it's been this way the whole damn time. Presidential Campaigns was a little dry and dull at points, the writing didn't exactly leap off the page, but the content was more than enough to make up for it. Fascinating.

Zack says

I learned more about American history and the evolution of our democracy than I really expected to. I'll never look at a presidential contest the same again. I highly recommend this book to all political junkies.

Jdetrick says

A nice overview of over two centuries of campaigns. The latter campaigns are somewhat tarred by partisanship on the part of the author (partisanship I agree with, but it still wish it was slightly more even handed), but it barely diminishes a good book.
