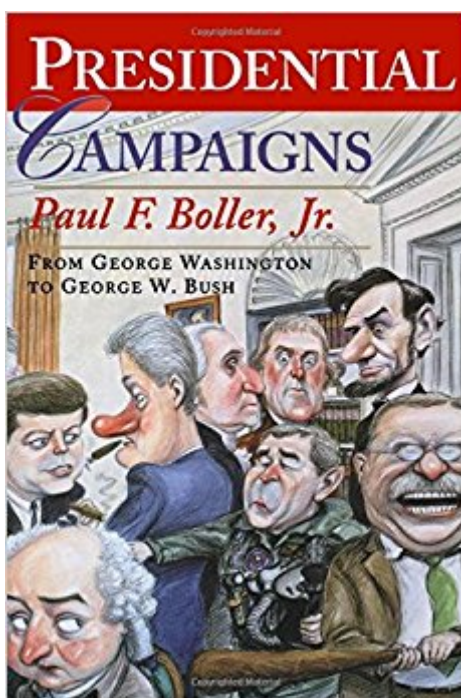


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# Presidential Campaigns: From George Washington To George W. Bush



## Synopsis

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.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

"[Boller] has a good eye for the offbeat and the ludicrous, and he spins the anecdotes together with the skill of the old fashioned Yankee yarnmaster." --The New York Times Book Review  
"An excellent handbook for the campaign junkie." --The Wall Street Journal

Paul F. Boller, Jr. is Professor Emeritus of History at Texas Christian University and the author of many popular books on American history.

This book covers the political machinations used by the opposing parties since George Washington. I was amazed at how the tactics used from day one of our political election cycles to today invoke the same accusations, mud slinging and posturing. I always thought that we had degraded ourselves to the mud slinging of today and that early elections were more "gentlemanly" and altruistic. Boy, was I wrong! This book is a great read. It covers, not with a lot of detail (so you won't get bored), each election from Washington to Bush. It made me want to delve deeper into some of our historic happenings and how those elections shaped the U.S. today. I would recommend it, but I wouldn't pay a lot for it. It's good, but not great.

Every four years, the United States must take up the task of choosing its chief executive.

Campaigns have addressed a wide variety of issues and tactics to get the word out to the American people on who the next President should be. In *Presidential Campaigns*, every election, from George Washington's essentially preordained election in 1789 to George W. Bush's controversial victory in 2000, is covered. It is interesting reading the book cover-to-cover and looking at how America's current Presidential campaigns developed. Starting with the first few elections when the electors of the electoral college were actually important, and how the electoral college itself quickly became more irrelevant around the 1820s and 1830s. Many of the traditions we see today are only recent incarnations. Debates did not come around until 1960 and were not even a mainstay until 1976. Party nominating conventions did not originate until the 1830s or so. They were an important part of every campaign until the late 1970s. With the rise of the primary and caucus systems, convention nominations simply rubber-stamp the decision, but this was not always the case. The issues themselves play a central role in many elections. From things like banking, tariffs, and the gold standard in the 19th century, to America's role in the world and dealing with Soviet Union in 20th

century. Of course, mudslinging has its place in American Presidential campaign history. Starting right out in 1800, which was one of the nastiest campaigns in history, continuing to the present day. And who could forget phrases and other notables that have become so important when looking at these campaigns? From Tippecanoe and Tyler, Too, to Bryan's Cross of Gold speech, Dewey Defeats Truman, "Senator, you're no Jack Kennedy," and so on. All of it is found in this book. Controversy is also something that has come up throughout history. Think 2000 was the most controversial election? Try reading up on 1876. Or the two elections when the House of Representatives had to settle the issue (1800 and 1824). The only error I noted when reading this book, aside from the occasional typo, was in the section on the 1844 campaign. It says that "Fifty-four Forty or Fight" was a campaign slogan, but the phrase did not originate until months after the election itself. In conclusion, I recommend this book. People interested in American history, political history, and/or presidential history are sure to love it. Each summary is well written and balanced. The only thing it really lacks are the famous electoral maps! But in this case, who needs them?

This is a well organized book full of useful facts that show how our political history has evolved over the years. Full of anecdotes and trivia, the book reveals quite a bit about America. Very well condensed stories of each election. Reports things as historical facts rather than a political leaning (except for the 1988 race maybe). Overall a very good read.

The book "Presidential Campaigns, from George Washington to George Bush" is an outstanding work of non-fiction, especially for (formerly) politically naive scientists like me. Not only is it well-written, educational, and as un-put-downable as any racey political novel on the bookstands, today, it also performs the valuable public service of dispelling the myth (perpetually resurrected during election years like this one) that the current election campaign is the dirtiest one in history. But, it also performs the even more important public service (in my opinion) of reminding us that there were, in fact, times when the profession of Politics was more civil and respectable, the American people were more appreciative of the right to vote, and the country as a whole benefitted from both, especially during times much harder than anything we face today. This volume has a permanent place on my bookshelf, and I re-read the relevant portions of it every election season. I recommend it enthusiastically to anyone and everyone who does not actually prefer to be an uninformed, non-voting citizen of the United States of America.

What do I enjoy in a book of history? Wonderful stories! This book does not fail to deliver on that. Hilarious and/or thought-provoking stories of behind the scenes in American campaigns - many quotes I have never heard, the rumors the parties started about their competitors - all there. I'm telling you, if you thought politics was down and dirty today - it's downright civilized compared to all the stuff they have been doing for over 200 years. How did you start rumors and dig up the dirt on your opponents before the Internet? Apparently they succeeded. Fascinating - highly recommend for history buffs. If they taught these stories in high school history class, there wouldn't be a bored student within hearing distance!

In honest cases, presidential elections may be nothing but politicians from governorship or Congress just trying to get to office, but seriously it has been the unexpected getting elected to the presidency. In 1828, John Quincy Adams thought that since he was a smart politician, he would never lose to Andrew Jackson. In 1948, the poll pointed Thomas Dewey thought he wouldn't lose to Harry Truman only cause of Truman's unpopularity. Expect the unexpected, no matter how politically experienced, you may have a good chance of losing. In 1884, James Blaine was more experienced in politics than Grover Cleveland, but because Blaine had some affairs during his years in Congress, he didn't win the election contest.

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