



Theodore H. White

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**The Making of  
the President  
1960**

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P.O. Box 168  
Cutchogue, N.Y. 11935

(516) 734-5724, Fax (516) 734-7920

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THEODORE H. WHITE

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## AUTHOR'S NOTE

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THIS BOOK is an attempt to tell part of the story of how the Americans chose their President in 1960.

For no man can tell it all—either now or much later. The transaction in power by which a President is chosen is so vastly complicated that even those most intimately involved in it, even those who seek the office, can never know more than a fragment of it. For it is the nature of politics that men must always act on the basis of uncertain fact, must make their judgments in haste on the basis of today's report by instinct and experience shaped years before in other circumstances. Were it otherwise, then politics would not be what they are now—the art of government and leadership; politics would be an exact science in which our purposes and destiny could be left to great impersonal computers.

It was my thought that though later historians would tell the story of the quest for power in 1960 in more precise terms with greater wealth of established fact, there might, nonetheless, be some permanent value in the effort of a contemporary reporter to catch the mood and the strains, the weariness, elation and uncertainties of the men who sought to lead America in the decade of the sixties. For, to me, the central fact of politics has always been the quality of leadership under the pressure of great forces.

The reading I have made here of the seven men who in 1960 aspired to govern the American people is an entirely personal one, and many will disagree. Yet it is the best that this citizen could make. I began this book in the fall of 1959 and tried to follow as many of the men involved as I could, both in travel and in thought, from then until November 8th, 1960. I have spent the months since putting on paper what I saw and learned in these travels.

There are all too many people who helped me to list them all by name. And there is a further complication in contemporary political reporting. A historian must list his sources and attribute fact to exact reference. But a reporter's obligation is to protect the privacy of those who have befriended him with information. Therefore, since I wrote this book as a reporter, rather than giving an unbalanced table of acknowledgments, I prefer to leave all my kind and generous friends unmentioned except as text and footnote make specific reference.

I cannot, however, fail to invite the reader's attention to two of my associates who have been absolutely essential in giving this story whatever readable merit it may have. They are Chouteau Dyer, whose

### *Author's Note*

reportorial skills and even greater skill in the rhythm of our language, have contributed so much; and Shirley Farmer, whose judgment, grace and encouragement have stimulated and sustained so large a part of this effort.

Beyond that, I owe two general acknowledgments:

First, to the politicians of America—men whom I have found over the long years the pleasantest, shrewdest and generally the most honorable of companions. Their counsel, Republican and Democrat alike in state after state, has shaped every page of this book.

Second, I must thank my comrades of the press—whose reporting at every level of American politics purifies, protects and refreshes our system from year to year. Without their shared confidences and magnificent public dispatches the writing of this book would have been entirely impossible.

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PART  
ONE  
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## CHAPTER ONE



# WAITING

**I**T WAS invisible, as always.

They had begun to vote in the villages of New Hampshire at midnight, as they always do, seven and a half hours before the candidate rose. His men had canvassed Hart's Location in New Hampshire days before, sending his autographed picture to each of the twelve registered voters in the village. They knew that they had five votes certain there, that Nixon had five votes certain—and that two were still undecided. Yet it was worth the effort, for Hart's Location's results would be the first flash of news on the wires to greet millions of voters as they opened their morning papers over coffee. But from there on it was unpredictable—invisible.

By the time the candidate left his Boston hotel at 8:30, several million had already voted across the country—in schools, libraries, churches, stores, post offices. These, too, were invisible, but it was certain that at this hour the vote was overwhelmingly Republican. On election day America is Republican until five or six in the evening. It is in the last few hours of the day that working people and their families vote, on their way home from work or after supper; it is then, at evening, that America goes Democratic if it goes Democratic at all. All of this is invisible, for it is the essence of the act that as it happens it is a mystery in which millions of people each fit one fragment of a total secret together, none of them knowing the shape of the whole.

What results from the fitting together of these secrets is, of course, the most awesome transfer of power in the world—the power to marshal and mobilize, the power to send men to kill or be killed, the power to tax and destroy, the power to create and the responsibility to do so, the power to guide and the responsibility to heal—all committed into the hands of one man. Heroes and philosophers, brave men and vile, have since Rome and Athens tried to make this particular manner of transfer of power work effectively; no people has succeeded at it better,

or over a longer period of time, than the Americans. Yet as the transfer of this power takes place, there is nothing to be seen except an occasional line outside a church or school, or a file of people fidgeting in the rain, waiting to enter the booths. No bands play on election day, no troops march, no guns are readied, no conspirators gather in secret headquarters. The noise and the blare, the bands and the screaming, the pageantry and oratory of the long fall campaign, fade on election day. All the planning is over, all effort spent. Now the candidates must wait.

The candidate drove from his hotel at the head of his cavalcade to the old abandoned West End branch of the Boston Public Library. Here in these reading rooms, the countless immigrants and their children of Boston's West End for two generations had, until a year ago, first set their feet on the ladder that was to take them up and out of the slums. Now, deserted and desolate, the empty library was the balloting place of the Third Precinct, Sixth Ward, and here at 8:43 he voted, signing the register as John F. Kennedy of 122 Bowdoin Street, Boston.

He was tense, it seemed, as he voted, thronged and jostled by the same adhesive train of reporters who had followed him, thronging and jostling, for three months across the country; only now his wife was with him in the press, and he was uncomfortable at how the pushing might affect her, she being eight months pregnant. He let himself be photographed as he came from the booth, and then the last cavalcade began, in familiar campaign order—photographers' car first, candidate's car second (the top of the convertible shut, for he did not want his wife to catch cold), security car next, three press buses following. It moved swiftly out of the West End, down through the grimy blight of Scollay Square, under the tunnel to East Boston and the airport. This had been his first political conquest—the Eleventh Congressional District of Massachusetts, immigrants' land, full of Irish, Italians, Jews, some Negroes, few Yankees.

For a full year of journeys he had bounded up the steps of this same airplane in a grace act that had become familiar to all his trailing entourage—a last handshake to dignitaries, an abrupt turning away and quickstep run up the stairs, a last easy fling of the hand in farewell to the crowd cheering his departure, and then into the cozy homelike Mother Ship and security.

This morning he walked up the stairs slowly, a dark-blue mohair overcoat over his gray suit, bareheaded, slightly stooped. He was very tired. He paused at the top of the stairs and, still stooped, turned away. Then he slowly turned back to the door but made no gesture. Then he disappeared. He was off to Hyannisport: a quick flight of twenty-five minutes; no disturbance; the plane full of messages of congratulation;

the welcoming group at the Cape shrunk to a few score—and no more speeches to make.

As he arrived at Hyannisport, accompanied by more than a hundred correspondents and more than eighty staff members from the other planes, the tension broke ridiculously for a moment. Many of this group had followed him now for some 44,000 miles of campaigning since Labor Day, and one of the reporters, strained, caught him, insisting she was being prevented from observing him closely, deprived of her proper rotation in the "pool" choice of reporters who are closest to him. Gravely, and because he was fond of her and knew her to be devoted to him, and because, moreover, this is a man who never forgets either friend or enemy, he turned and said, "You and I will never be apart, Mary." And yet he knew, and everyone knew, that if his hope, which she shared, came true, he would be apart, unreachably, from these people who had been his friends.

A honking cavalcade of local politicians had gathered to lead him through the town. But he could not face one more campaign trip and, turning to a car driven by his cousin, Anne Gargan, he asked her to drive him to his family's summer cottages, already surrounded and barricaded by police. On the way orders were given to the police escort to separate the huge press train from his own car as he drove home. It was the first time anyone could remember that he had sought such isolation this year.

When he came again to greet the press and people, he would be the next President, close to no one. Or else he would be an also-ran, a footnote in the history books. Now there was nothing to do but wait.

Hyannisport sparkled in the sun that day, as did all New England. Hyannisport is the name of a hundred-odd cottages and summer homes that sprawl along the edges of Nantucket Sound just west and adjacent to the village of Hyannis (population not quite 6,000), which is part of Barnstable Township, county seat of Barnstable County, and summer center of the most fashionable area of Cape Cod's summer season. The houses are large and roomy, clapboard and shingle, white and brown, separated from one another across well-tended lawns by hedges or New England stone walls. Hyannisport was molded in the best and simplest of the old New England manner, its homes less ostentatious and snigger in style than the summer homes of the Long Island Hamptons that catch the overflow of New York's wealthy. For generations the good families of Boston had built these homes for solid comfort; the Kennedys, thirty-two years ago, were the first of the Irish to invade its quiet. A large compound encloses a number of homes at the end of Scudder Avenue where it reaches to the water; there Joseph P. Kennedy had bought a seventeen-room house to shelter his amazing brood of children. As the years passed, his son Jack had bought another house

within the same compound, a few hundred feet away; and a few years later another son, Bobby, had acquired a third. Together the three houses form a triangle on a smooth green lawn that runs off into the dune grass before plunging to the sands of the beach. (Today the father's home flew the American flag at full mast.)

The local community had never been too happy about the Kennedys, aliens and intruders, and though some, particularly those who lived close, had become friends, most of the neighbors had been upset during the summer of 1960 when, after the nomination, the horde of newspapermen, staff, and curiosity-driven sight-seers that always surrounds a candidate boiled up in their quiet streets. The Civic Committee had met informally to control this development after the Los Angeles Convention; indeed, they suggested to the police that Hyannisport be totally sealed off from the public; the police had said that was impossible. Some members threatened to hold a protest meeting. To appease their resentment, Jacqueline Kennedy had begun the construction of a wooden palisade on Irving Avenue, where her front door is exactly thirteen feet from the road. But when her husband returned from the nomination, he ordered that the building of the palisade be stopped. He would do anything he could to cooperate with the Committee short of leaving Hyannisport; but this had been his home; he had spent his boyhood summers there; he planned to keep it as his home. So only a half-finished wooden palisade, a white-picket fence and a dozen local policemen separated the three cottages from the cars that carried the gawkers and peerers. The police were polite, efficient and cooperative; Barnstable Township was doing its best—even though that day it was voting Nixon over Kennedy by 4,515 to 2,783.

Now in November, the New England hardwoods—oak, elm and maple—had given up their color with their leaves, and the scrub pine of the Cape were beginning to show branch tips wind-burned and hurricane-scorched to a rust brown. A slight offshore breeze blew off the surfless waters; the dune grass and the feather-gray tufts of beach rushes bent gently to the breeze. A single gull wheeled over the house and the beach most of the morning, dipping toward the water when a glint suggested food. The sky was pure, the weather still a comfortable few degrees above freezing; the scudding white clouds were to break up by evening as the breeze freshened.

The weather was clear all across Massachusetts and New England, perfect for voting as far as the crest of the Alleghenies. But from Michigan through Illinois and the Northern Plains states it was cloudy: rain in Detroit and Chicago, light snow falling in some states on the approaches of the Rockies. The South was enjoying magnificently balmy weather which ran north as far as the Ohio River; so, too, was the entire Pacific Coast. The weather and the year's efforts were to call out the greatest

free vote in the history of this or any other country—68,832,818 in all, 11 per cent more than was called out in 1956.

But there was nothing to do about it now. The people were already voting, their myriad impulses, intuitions, educations, heritages, fears and hopes creating the answer at the moment.

And so the candidate was restless.

He breakfasted at his father's house (across the lawn from his own), where nine of the Kennedy clan had already gathered at the board: he and his wife; his father and mother; brother Robert and sister-in-law Ethel; brother Edward and sister-in-law Joan; and brother-in-law Peter Lawford. In the next few hours of the morning all the rest were to arrive—sister Eunice Shriver and brother-in-law Sargent Shriver; sister Pat Lawford; sister Jean and brother-in-law Stephen Smith.

The candidate finished quickly, and trying to find a place where he might be alone to unwind, he went back to his own cottage and sat briefly on the porch in the sun, huddled under his overcoat against the chill, exhausted from the months that had passed. An aide approached him and chatted—they talked about D-Day; and the aide remembers his talking about the quality of waiting on that longest day, and Rommel. A newspaper plane flicked down over the house as they talked, slipping within 200 feet of the porch to get his photograph—if he were President-elect tomorrow, no plane would be allowed within thousands of feet of him. Some of his neighbors sent through the guards a horseshoe of red roses ten feet high for luck; it was passed on to him without inspection—no such gift would reach his hands again if he were elected, unless the Secret Service unwired and searched it for explosives. He remembered something he had forgotten, and sent a messenger to the plane to fetch it. It was an enormous sack of toys he was bringing back from his year-long journeyings for Caroline, his three-year-old daughter; the teddy bear, wrapped in a cellophane sack, was almost as big as Caroline herself. The returning messenger remembers the warm aroma of Brown Betty baking in the kitchen when he arrived. Briefly his father, Joseph P. Kennedy, came across the lawn to visit; someone observed the father's cupping grip on his son's clenched fist, but no one caught what they said.

At noon a troop of photographers arrived to photograph him ceremonially, and he gave them, as they described it, a taut, tense ten minutes. He emerged minutes later from his cottage, leading Caroline by the hand, and found his younger brothers, Bobby and Teddy, two activists, throwing a football back and forth on the lawn. He beckoned for the football and tossed it back and forth with them for a few minutes, Caroline watching; then he disappeared again into his own house to lunch alone with his wife. He was restless still, and after lunch

he came across the lawn, dressed in a heavy sweater over a sports shirt and tan slacks (of his two shoes, one was glossily polished as usual—the other scuffed and dirty), to visit the command post set up in brother Bobby's cottage where an electronic tangle of thirty telephones, four wire-service teletype machines, and direct wires across the country had been established for the evening's vigil. Then, at 3:30 in the afternoon, he went back to his own cottage to try to nap.

It was fifteen minutes later by Pacific Coast Time, or 3:45, when Richard Nixon went back to his hotel room in Los Angeles to try to nap, too. The returns were beginning to come in; they were unreadable for both—yet disturbing. Nothing would be clear until early evening, if then.

A mile and a half away, at Hyannis' National Guard Armory, some 250 men and women of the local, national and international press had assembled—as had a similar group in Los Angeles, at the Ambassador Hotel—to prepare to report the reception of the night's tidings by the possible next President.

Two advance men of the Kennedy staff had appeared in Hyannis only a week before to convert this summer resort of the Cape, now largely shuttered and closed for the winter, into one of the two election capitals upon which the world would wait for news of the next American President. They had worked not only diligently but brilliantly, for the Democratic National Committee was at this point insolvent, and the total sum that could be allowed for operations in Hyannis was \$800.00. If the Democrats lost, even this was too much, adding to a hopeless deficit.

The two advance men had persuaded the Massachusetts National Guard to make available the Armory as press and communications center. A local television dealer was persuaded to contribute a dozen TV sets for use in the Armory and the Kennedy cottages. Western Union and American Telephone and Telegraph Company installed the hundred-odd special long-distance lines and fifty-odd teletypewriters; the news-gathering organizations would pay for those. The two advance men commandeered the ample housing space of the deserted summer resort and arbitrarily assigned the available rooms to the 250 correspondents expected, the eighty-plus staff personnel and their wives. The local lumber company contributed lumber; a local carpenter was persuaded it was an honor to build press-room partitions and platforms free. A local Ford dealer lent a number of new Fords, including ten Thunderbirds, for the use of the candidate's staff. Seats and benches were contributed by the local Protestant churches (the local Catholic church, for some delicate reason, was unwilling to do so). And then,

early on the morning of voting day, the anti-aircraft gun on which the National Guard unit of Barnstable County trains was removed from the main Armory hall; the benches were installed; seats were assigned alphabetically to all the 250 correspondents; the monk's cloth for the platform arrived from New York and was hung; and the news center was ready to report.

There is a traditional profile to the outline of news on election nights in America that is exciting and instructive, although it is also artificial, deceitful and imposed by the mechanics of counting. Voting in America is a simultaneous act of many citizens; by the time counting has begun, the act is over; only the sequence of tally makes it seem like a narrative drama; yet the drama, though false, is illuminating.

Returns usually start in upper New England, as the clean white hamlets of the northern hills, largely Protestant and overwhelmingly Republican, race each other to hit the news wires first and enjoy a fleeting midmorning fame as their names flash in early newspaper editions. By late afternoon returns from rural and mountain counties across the land begin to trickle in. Tennessee's rural areas close their polls at four in the afternoon; an hour later, eastern (or mountain) Kentucky begins to close its country polls, as does rural Alabama; so do Maine precincts with fewer than 300 voters. By this time substantial returns are in from Kansas (again, heavily Republican) where this year separate tally sheets and separate ballots permitted some Kansas communities to count the vote as it proceeded throughout the day. The early news reports that late afternoon papers show as people come home from work always bear tidings of a Republican lead.

Then, between six and seven, the tide changes. At six the polls close in urban Alabama, rural Illinois, Indiana, Mississippi, rural Oklahoma, South Carolina, urban Tennessee and Vermont. At 6:30 Arkansas, North Carolina and Ohio close their polls and begin to check in. And at seven comes the deluge: the Democrats from the big-city states.

A few minutes after seven the political silhouette of the industrial Northeast first becomes apparent—for Connecticut, a state that closes its polls at seven, votes on machines and counts quickly. At 7:15 the returns from Bridgeport, New Haven, Hartford—Democratic-industrial bastions all—are pouring in. Fifteen minutes later the slightly slower returns are totaled from the suburban towns of Fairfield County, the bedroom of New York's Republican executive class. Connecticut is a switch-voting state, and when Fairfield County's gut-Republicans balance out against the gut-Democrats of the factory towns, the first real clue to the nation's decision shows. At 7:30 on voting day of 1956, when Bridgeport repudiated Adlai E. Stevenson, it was instantly clear



that this repudiation in a factory town meant that Eisenhower was to sweep the country nationwide.

By the time the news systems and the commentators on TV and radio have digested Connecticut, the other big Democratic cities of the East are beginning to flood the wires. First Philadelphia (where polls close at 7:30) then Pittsburgh, then Chicago, then, at nine o'clock, New York City. From nine o'clock, when New York closes its polls, to midnight the Democratic tide reaches its peak as the big cities of Michigan, Illinois, Pennsylvania, Ohio, New Jersey, swamp the vote-gathering facilities of the news networks.

Between ten and midnight the United States is politically leaderless—there is no center of information anywhere in the nation except in the New York headquarters of the great broadcasting companies and the two great wire services. No candidate and no party can afford the investment on election night to match the news-gathering resources of the mass media; and so, as every citizen sits in his home watching his TV set or listening to his radio, he is the equal of any other in knowledge. There is nothing that can be done in these hours, for no one can any longer direct the great strike for America's power; the polls have closed. Good or bad, whatever the decision, America will accept the decision—and cut down any man who goes against it, even though for millions the decision runs contrary to their own votes. The general vote is an expression of national will, the only substitute for violence and blood. Its verdict is to be defended as one defends civilization itself.

There is nothing like this American expression of will in England or France, India or Russia or China. Only one other major nation in modern history has ever tried to elect its leader directly by mass, free, popular vote. This was the Weimar Republic of Germany, which modeled its unitary vote for national leader on American practice. Out of its experiment with the system it got Hitler. Americans have had Lincoln, Wilson, two Roosevelts. Nothing can be done when the voting returns are flooding in; the White House and its power will move to one or another of the two candidates, and all will know about it in the morning. But for these hours history stops.

If the Democrats are going to win, they must have a healthy margin of several million votes by midnight. After midnight the tide reverses itself as the farm states, the mountain states, the Pacific Coast, all begin to check in with their traditionally Republican tallies. Thus the profile that repeats itself every four years and creates the arbitrary drama of election night: the afternoon and early-evening trickle of Republican votes, the Democratic tide from the big cities between eight and midnight and then, after midnight, the Republican counterassault.

There is little that can be done by either political leadership about these tides—except for the opportunity of a grace note that television