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Anything For A Vote: Dirty Tricks, Cheap Shots, And October Surprises In US Presidential Campaigns



Synopsis

Today's political pundits express shock and disappointment when candidates resort to negative campaigning. But history reveals that smear campaigns are as American as apple pie. Anything for a Vote is a look at 200-plus years of dirty tricks and bad behavior in presidential elections, from George Washington to Barack Obama and John McCain. Let the name-calling begin! 1836: Congressman Davy Crockett accuses candidate Martin Van Buren of secretly wearing women's clothing: "He is laced up in corsets!" 1960: Former president Harry Truman advises voters that "if you vote for Richard Nixon, you ought to go to hell!" Full of sleazy anecdotes from every presidential election in United States history, Anything for a Vote is a valuable reminder that history does repeat itself, that lessons can be learned from the past (though they usually aren't), and that our most famous presidents are not above reproach when it comes to the dirtiest game of all - political campaigning.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

I found out about this book in a magazine piece following this year's election, comparing it to elections of the past. It's a quick and enjoyable read; there's not much here that presidential history buffs won't already know, but it's interesting to see all 50-plus elections up to the time of publication considered. But while Cummins is an entertaining writer, the book comes off as slapdash. Cummins makes mistakes that contradict other parts of the book where he was correct -- after writing in his 1876 and 1880 sections that Grant had hoped for a third term, he writes in the 1940 section that

FDR was the first president to even consider it; similarly, he writes in his 1952 section that Adlai Stevenson would seek the nomination again in 1956 and 1960, then says in his 1956 section that it was Stevenson's final attempt. He also says that if Robert Kennedy had not been assassinated, he would almost certainly have won the 1968 Democratic nomination, which most historians dispute. A bigger error comes in his 1988 section, where he says the Bush campaign and Lee Atwater were responsible for the "Willie Horton" ad, which was produced by an outside group. This error is significant because this is, after all, a book about dirty politics, and that's a fact he should get right. Moreover, while the historical scope here is admirable, Cummins keeps it all at surface level. Each campaign gets a very brief write-up, followed by a few examples of nastiness. He does not really explore how or why some campaigns were dirtier than others, and it is not always clear why some score worse than others on his arbitrary 1-10 scale of sleaze. He also barely mentions dirty nomination races, focusing almost entirely on general elections. As far as the last 40 years go, that's a big omission -- Gary Hart, for instance, barely gets a mention.

Good, brief overview of every political campaign since George Washington, with emphasis on the political maneuvering and tricks. Only faults I found go back 150 years; he failed to mention how the Democratic party splintered in 1860, resulting in 3 candidates who were originally in that party. In other elections he did mention third and fourth parties, so this omission is curious. Lincoln won with approximately 38% of the popular vote; he wasn't even on the ballot in many southern states. Stephen Douglas, who came in second on the popular vote, only took 1 state (Missouri) and part of another (NJ, electoral votes split between Lincoln and Douglas). Even if the Democrats hadn't split and all the votes had gone to Douglas, Lincoln still would have won the electoral college, possibly with slightly smaller number of votes. Cummins also refers to Grant's drinking, with no proof of claim. Contemporaries during Grant's presidency say he wasn't drinking, and even during the Civil War the claim was presented without proof. Grant did suffer from migraines, which the uninformed might have mistaken for the result of drinking.

Dirty tricks, lies, abuse of the truth, and voter fraud in presidential elections are nothing new to the United States! Cummings gives copious examples of the mean-spirited, often ridiculous, and sometimes even funny attacks of one opponent against another, going back to America's earliest elections. I like the clearly delineated, short chapters - one for each national election. And while it is obviously subjective, I was fascinated by the author's "Sleazometer," by which he rates each election's campaign for just how sleazy it was! Besides providing an off-beat level of entertainment,

this book gives me hope that America may yet survive the current election - since it has survived political circuses in its past!

A good read for the upcoming conventions and 2016 elections. Not much has changed in In American politics in the last two hundred plus years. A few minor errors. The Democratic convention in 1956 had a contested race for the vice-presidency between Estes Kefauver and John Fitzgerald Kennedy. Adlai Stevenson did not publicly have a preference for a VP pick. I have a hunch that this book will be passÃ© this time next year.

Bought this book for my pop for christmas and he absolutely loved it. He is a fan of Cummins writing and i borrowed it and read it and now i am too. If you are a fan of facts and history especially having to do with Presidents you will love this book.

I wondered if the current campaign was a new phenomena, everyone commenting that they had seen nothing like it. Well I was shocked to discover that the prospect of power brings out the worst in political spheres and almost no one is above the fray!

Excellent reference to counter the, "It's never been worse than this", argument. Clear, concise well written book utilizing brevity artfully. Parallels my college textbook, "Diplomatic History of the United States", by T A Bailey.

A little choppy, but historically correct. Learned that this is not the most nasty election ever - by a long shot.

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