

**The 1960 Presidential Election**

Heather Wise

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Judy DeMark

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John Fitzgerald Kennedy was the youngest man ever elected president and also the first Catholic to enter into the oval office. These issues and others made the campaigning of the 1960 presidential election stand out from all others, making it one of the most fascinating elections in American history.

The population of the United States according to the 1960 census was 179,323,175. <sup>1</sup> An estimated 107,000,000 of these people were registered to vote, and 68,838,979 actually did (64.4%). These pluralities were higher than in any other presidential election thus far.<sup>2</sup> In the state of Michigan 3,318,097 people voted, and 21,917 of these people were from Marquette County.<sup>3</sup> The Democratic party had 487 more votes than the Republicans, so the state gave its 20 electoral votes to the Democratic candidate, John F. Kennedy.

The campaigning for the 1960 presidential election erupted in full force in the middle of July. Vice President Nixon seemed to have the Republican nomination all wrapped up, but the Democratic party nomination was still open. The Democratic national convention opened in Los Angeles on Monday, July 11. Kennedy seemed to have the nomination within reach but, he still had Adlai Stephenson and Lyndon Johnson to contend with. On Wednesday night, at the role call vote, Kennedy, one of six candidates on the ballot received 1521 votes of the total 3042 votes. Three quarters of these votes were from the Northeast and Middle Western states.<sup>4</sup> On Thursday,

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<sup>1</sup>Richard M. Scammon, America Votes 4 (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1962) 189-92.

<sup>2</sup>Paul T. David, ed., The Presidential Election And Transition 1960-1961 (Washington, D.C.: The Brookings Institution, 1961) 319.

<sup>3</sup>Scammon, p. 189-92.

<sup>4</sup>David, ed., p. 11.

John F. Kennedy announced that he would nominate Senator Lyndon B. Johnson of Texas as his running mate, and the next day Senator Johnson accepted the nomination. The Democratic platform was also decided at the convention. The platform was called "The Rights of Man". Michigan was of course represented at the national convention, and State Representative Dominic Jacobetti of Negaunee was there. Jacobetti actively supported John F. Kennedy.<sup>5</sup>

The Republican national convention began on Monday, July 25. Monday and Tuesday the platforms were discussed. On Wednesday the Platform "Decisions for a Better America" was approved and Vice President Nixon and Senator Barry Goldwater were placed in nomination. Senator Goldwater withdrew his nomination and placed his support behind Dick Nixon. Wednesday evening, Henry Cabot Lodge was given the vice-presidential nomination, and both candidates gave their acceptance speeches.

Immediately after the convention of 1960, the democratic campaign staff in Washington rose from 80 to 370 paid and volunteer workers. The Democratic National Committee (DNC) and The Citizens for Kennedy-Johnson were the two main campaigning organizations. These organizations along with others, established the Materials Distribution Center in Washington. This organization spent more than 800,000 dollars on buttons, banners and brochures. This amount averaged more than one item per Democratic voter.<sup>6</sup> The Republican campaign staff also increased its membership. It went from 100 to 400 paid and volunteer workers in 1960.

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<sup>5</sup>Jan Sonoglia, Interview with author, 12 November 1995, Marquette, MI. Mrs. Sanoglia was an active member of the Democratic party at this time, and is still active in the area's politics today.

<sup>6</sup>David, ed., p. 131.

The two main organizations for the Republicans were the Republican National Committee (RNC) and The Republican Congressional Campaign Committee. The Independent TV committee also actively campaigned for the Republicans. Some 429 television stations averaged 6.5 hours of free time for the use of presidential and vice presidential candidates of both parties.<sup>7</sup> Both candidates ran well ahead of President Eisenhower in press coverage. Eisenhower had been the focus of the press since his campaign of 1952.

During the campaigning of the 1960 presidential election, a new social research technique, computer simulation, was used for the first time. It involved a new technique for processing public opinion poll data, and was able to get results fast, so the candidates were able to know the general consensus on many different topics. These public opinion polls were used extensively by both parties to obtain information on which to base campaign strategy.<sup>8</sup>

Domestic issues were one of the greatest concerns of the two parties. Both of their party platforms were centered around the improvement of domestic programs. Of these domestic issues Civil Rights was by far the most important. The right to vote was the leading issue to Negroes and also, segregationists. Kennedy had a very forceful espousal of civil rights, but Nixon helped to weaken this issue. The Republicans might have captured the South while alienating the Negroes, by showing a clear differentiation between their stand and Kennedy's. Nixon did not do this: he also took a stand for Negroes rights. When Martin Luther King was arrested John F. Kennedy called King's wife and came to the defense of him, while Nixon

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<sup>7</sup>David, ed., p. 127.

<sup>8</sup>Abelson, Robert and Samuel L. Popkin. Candidates, Issues, and Strategies. (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The M.I.T. Press 1965) 2.

refused to make a political attempt at influencing a judicial decision. This helped to push the Negro vote in support of Kennedy.<sup>9</sup>

The way in which the two candidates approached their geographical targets was very similar. They distributed their campaign time among the states in almost the exact same way, and the two vice-presidential candidates played very similar roles in the campaigning strategy. They both spent about 74% of their time in doubtful states during the campaign, and 88% of their time in the last three weeks in the seven largest of the doubtful states.

Lyndon Johnson's primary assignment was to hold the south for the Democrats. Nixon, Kennedy, and Lodge devoted about 15% of their time in the southern states, while Johnson spent about 44% of his time there.<sup>10</sup> Lodge spent more time in the Northeast, and spent the least amount of time in the West.

Two of the underlying issues that made the 1960 election so intriguing, were John F. Kennedy's age and religion. Kennedy was only 43 years old when he was nominated for president at the Democratic national convention. His youth attracted the younger generation of American citizens, while making the older generation skeptical. The issue of his religion was handled extremely well by Kennedy's campaign organization. When confronted head on with the issue, Kennedy emphasized his belief in the separation of church and state. His ability to handle this situation discouraged the Republicans from further pressing the issue. On September 7, a Protestant group issued a statement charging that a Catholic president would be under pressure from the Catholic hierarchy to conform his policy views to that of the Vatican.

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<sup>9</sup>Ibid., p. 100.

<sup>10</sup>David, ed., p. 72.

Kennedy then accepted an invitation to answer the questions of Protestant clergymen from the Ministers Association of Greater Houston. The next day Nixon announced that Kennedy's views should be accepted without further question.

Jan Sanoglia believed that JFK's religious affiliation was the most important issue for the voters in Marquette County. The issue was discussed frequently and it helped to sway many Republicans to vote for Kennedy.<sup>11</sup> It also helped to interest many other voters who may have otherwise not been involved. Michigan's population was 22% Catholic in 1960. The election results show that the Democrats had a 6.8% gain in the amount of voters in Michigan, and the Republican party had a 12.2% defection rate in 1960.<sup>12</sup> The results also show that in counties of high Catholic population, urban or rural, there were wide movements to the Democratic party.

The 1960 presidential election was the first time in American History that the candidates debated on national television, bringing the candidates together before an enormous audience. There were four debates that took place during the campaigning. The first debate was on September 26, and the topic was domestic issues. It is estimated that 75 million Americans were watching, and it was broadcast to over 30 million homes.<sup>13</sup> The other three debates were on October 7, October 13, and October 21. The other issue that was debated was international affairs. Then there was a question and answer period for the reporters. Vice President Nixon was not a fan of the media, and seemed to handle himself poorly in front of them. He refused to wear make-up for the debates and appeared to have a shadow on his face. These

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<sup>11</sup>Sonaglia Interview.

<sup>12</sup>David, ed., p. 156.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid., p. 99.

two factors caused Nixon to fall behind Kennedy, and he never seemed to fully recover from it. People who listened to the debates on the radio said that the two candidates were very good and there wasn't really a distinct winner, but the people who watched on television thought that Kennedy had stomped on Nixon.

Marquette County had 21,917 voters come out on November 8 to vote for the thirty-fifth President of the United States. On November 7, there was a terrible snow storm in the area, so it was uncertain how many people would make it to the polls on the next day<sup>14</sup>

During the local campaigning the Democrats met in the St. Michael's Church to plan how they would inform the voters on the issues. There was no real headquarters for either party at this time. Due to the iron ore mining in this area there were a lot more members of the Democratic party than there were in the Republican party. Although the Democrats were larger in number, the Republican party had more money, so the campaigning efforts here were fairly equal. Television was not used for advertising at this time, so the parties were active in making signs, handing out brochures, and delivering literature to the houses in the community. The fact that people had to read literature in order to be informed on issues, made the number of people who were well educated about the election, fewer than elections of today.<sup>15</sup>

When the debates took place on television, they were watched widely throughout the local area. This helped to get more people involved in the campaign process. The general consensus in Marquette County was that the

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<sup>14</sup>Sonaglia Interview.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid.

television debates really hurt Nixon. He was continually making bad facial expressions, and viewers were not able to overcome his appearance. Most people here thought Kennedy had won hands down.<sup>16</sup> Kennedy was not well known in this area before the campaigning began, so these debates really helped enhance his popularity in Marquette.

The issue that was the most important for the people of Marquette County was the economy.<sup>17</sup> The community was concerned with bringing more jobs to the area. The religious issue played a major underlying role here in the Upper Peninsula. John Bennett, who was running for congressman in Michigan, was Catholic and also a Republican. There was a large Catholic population in the Marquette area, so he had a strong backing of Republicans and Democrats. This helped to bridge the gap between the parties, because the people just tended to vote for the Catholic candidate.

Nixon was definitely more well-known in the area. He had been here in the 1950's, and stayed at the Mather Inn in Ishpeming.<sup>18</sup> Even though he was well-known as vice president, most of the population knew that President Eisenhower was not a big fan of his. During the campaigning, Eisenhower failed to endorse Dick Nixon for president until two days before the election. This incident contributed greatly to Nixon's loss.

Northern Michigan College did not play a very active role in the 1960 Presidential election. There were a few members from both the Young Democrats and Young Republicans who helped distribute literature, and march in the parades. But when it came to voting day there was not a big turnout of Northern Michigan College students, because the voting age was

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<sup>16</sup>Ibid.

<sup>17</sup>Ibid.

<sup>18</sup>Ibid.



still 21.<sup>19</sup> Jan Sanoglia stated that the college students in this area were not active in politics during the early 1960's. She remembered the city setting up a voting precinct for just Northern Michigan College students, and only 38 votes were cast, although she doesn't remember the particular year. On Wednesday November 2, Dr. Bosworth, Dean of Public Services at Northern Michigan College, asserted that the President election next week will be the "most important election of our time" and urged everyone registered to vote.<sup>20</sup> Apparently, this did not help motivate the students to vote.

The local newspaper, The Mining Journal, played a significant role in the 1960 Presidential election. The Mining Journal was actively known as a Republican paper, as it reported " ...and so, in 1960 we have conducted that Vice President Richard Nixon is the best fitted to fulfill the grave demands for the presidency during the next four years."<sup>21</sup> The Mining Journal was the key source of communication in Marquette County and the parties relied on it to cover the issues and activities of the campaign. The Mining Journal did a very poor job of covering the Democratic candidates campaign trail, so it made the job of the campaigners in Marquette County more difficult. The paper covered general topics that referred to both of the parties like announcing that there would be a "get-out-the-vote parade" at 7:30 in downtown Ishpeming on November 3.<sup>22</sup> It also announced that the Kiwanis of Marquette would be offering free rides to the polls on election day.

On Sunday October 30, Eunice Schriever, a sister of John Kennedy visited Marquette. Mrs. Schriever was named Official Hostess of the

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<sup>19</sup>Ibid.

<sup>20</sup>The Mining Journal, Wednesday, 2 November, 1960.

<sup>21</sup>The Mining Journal, Tuesday, 1 November, 1960.

<sup>22</sup>Ibid.

# Over 2,300 Hear Kennedy's Sister At Reception In Armory Here



Campaign taking Jackie Kennedy's place in the campaigning process, because Mrs. Kennedy was pregnant and the campaigning would have been to strenuous on her. Eunice Schriever arrived at the Marquette National Guard Armory at around midnight on the 30th. She was accompanied by her cousin Mrs. John Devine, Governor Williams, and the Democratic candidate for Governor: John Swainson.<sup>23</sup> The reception was arranged by Robert C. McCarthy, who was the Democratic candidate for U.S. Representative. His wife was named hostess of the affair. It was originally scheduled from 8-10pm, but the entourage arrived late. The general public was invited to this reception, and when Mrs. Schriever arrived there was over 2,300 people there to greet her.<sup>24</sup>

In his speech, Robert McCarthy called the 1960 election "bittersweet" by conveying that although the Democratic Party will probably be successful, Michigan's Governor of 12 years, will be retiring. Governor Williams then gave a brief speech before Mrs. Schriever was introduced. Eunice Schriever gave a brief 10 minute speech, where she cited John Kennedy as having "physical and moral courage, along with an independent Mind." She continued by saying, his World War II heroism was an example of his physical courage, and his confrontation with the Houston Ministerial Association was an example of his moral courage.<sup>25</sup> These two statements brought an immediate standing ovation from the crowd.

The Presidential campaign of 1960 brought a lot of changes to the existing political system of that time. The television debates added a new dimension to the campaigning process, which helped to get the general

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<sup>23</sup>The Mining Journal, Monday, 31 October, 1960.

<sup>24</sup>Ibid.

<sup>25</sup>Ibid.

population involved in the election. It was very exciting for the people of this country, in particular the people of Marquette County. Jan Songali stated that she was extremely happy with the outcome of the election. She believed the result was good for the country, because the "Kennedy Camelot" brought great pride to the American people.<sup>26</sup>

This election was also important to the history of this country. John F. Kennedy is credited for getting the youth of America to participate more. In his Inaugural speech, Kennedy stated "Ask not what your country can do for you, ask what you can do for your Country,". This speech helped to get the youth motivated, and increased the number of registered voters. One of the first pieces of legislation he passed was to start the Peace Corps of America, which also helped to get the younger generation involved. Kennedy, also made great contributions to the Civil Rights movement in this Country, although most of his legislation passed was not until 1964, after his death. The 1960 election was the beginning of the "Kennedy Years", which are still vivid in the minds of many American people.

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<sup>26</sup>Sonaglia interview.

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