



The Kennedy Men: 1901-1963

By Laurence Leamer

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The renowned biographer and *New York Times* bestselling author of *The Kennedy Women* returns with this first volume in a multigenerational history that will forever change the way America views its most famous family ...

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

Journalist Leamer (*The Kennedy Women*) provides a stirring narrative of the Kennedy men but comes up short as regards analysis of the byzantine motivations, complex psychology and persistent moral failures that lie behind the events he otherwise describes so well. Putting his own spin on well-known anecdotes (including all the most popular tales from so many other books that document Joe Sr.'s rise in business and politics, his failure to recognize the menace of Hitler and his sponsorship of his children's careers). Leamer steadfastly refuses to shed a critical light on the proclivities of Kennedy père. The author soft-pedals, for example, the Kennedy patriarch's well-documented anti-Semitism. The same lack of critical analysis despite Leamer's access to never-before available materials constitutes a considerable flaw throughout the book. Although offering engaging and fast-moving accounts of such events as Joe Jr.'s death and Jack's rise in politics through means both fair and foul, Leamer consistently refrains from considering the ethical implications of his stories, or the evident shortcomings in the character of more than one Kennedy. He seems, for example, to step back in awe when considering the brilliance and audacity of the Kennedys' stealing Cook County and therefore the election during the 1960 presidential race. In the final analysis, Leamer is a fan, idealizing his subjects. The result is a good read, though not necessarily a balanced history. Leamer's book is the first of a projected two-volume set.

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From Library Journal

While this is a work of political and family history, as any Kennedy book must be, it is best described as an extended character study of Joseph Kennedy and his sons, Joseph Jr., John, Robert, and Edward. It is not a celebration of triumphs or an undraping of frailties but instead offers much of both in an evenhanded narrative of courage, meanness, ambition, hypocrisy, patriotism, anti-Semitism, duty, and wantonness. Few tales can be more familiar, yet the writing is always tight and often graceful. How the men of this family lived their lives both publicly and privately is the real subject of this book, even as the cinema of Leamer's plot projects scenes featuring the likes of Roosevelt, King, Monroe, Castro, and Nixon. Although Leamer aims primarily at a general audience, scholars will take note of his considerable primary research, in printed and recorded material, and dozens of his own interviews. Worthy of being placed on the same shelf with Doris Kearns Goodwin's *The Fitzgeralds and the Kennedys*, this book follows Leamer's *The Kennedy Women* and precedes a planned second volume. For all libraries.

- Robert F. Nardini, Chichester, NH

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From [Booklist](#)

Leamer, author of *The Kennedy Women* (1994), turns to the men of the family with this exploration of the lives and psyches of Joe Kennedy and his sons, Joe Jr., Jack, Bobby, and Ted. This is no dry, by-the-numbers biography. Leamer begins with a young Joseph Kennedy making his way through Boston to deliver a hat, and in those vivid opening pages, he not only captures what life in Boston was like for an Irish Catholic lad on the make but also sets up the themes that will be both the motivation and ruination of Kennedy men: the importance of winning, the willingness to cut corners, the ideal of family solidarity. Leamer's eye is particularly sharp when it is trained on Joe Sr and the isolationism, both personal and global, that helped define his character. Not all the rest of the book is quite as smooth as the opening--sometimes juggling the stories of four men becomes a bit unwieldy--but Leamer's writing is impressive throughout, regularly catching the reader up with a felicitous phrase or a surprising insight. The story ends with JFK's death, but a sequel is expected. *Ilene Cooper*

Users Review

From reader reviews:

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