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Ray E. Boomhower. *Robert F. Kennedy and the 1968 Indiana Primary.* Indiana University Press, 2008. xii + 173 pp.p Illustrations. $21.95 (cloth), ISBN 978-0-253-35089-3.

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1968 and 2008: The More Things Change…

Ray E. Boomhower, senior editor of *Traces of Indiana and Midwestern History* (a popular quarterly of the Indiana Historical Society) and author of many articles and several books focusing on Indiana history, recalls sitting "transfixed" at age nine watching the televised funeral of Robert F. Kennedy in early June 1968. This book is not about Kennedy's assassination, but rather a close discussion of the eight weeks of the Indiana presidential primary pitting Kennedy against Minnesota Senator Eugene McCarthy and Governor Roger D. Branigan. The book opens with the murder of Martin Luther King Jr. a month before the primary election and Robert Kennedy's role in defusing an inflammable situation.

A sculpture, "Landmark for Peace," in what is now Martin Luther King Jr. Park by, Indiana artist Greg Perry, commemorates Bobby Kennedy's brief April 4 speech there on the evening of King's assassination. (The memorial, erected in 1995, is constructed partially from guns collected in an amnesty program and melted down. From two facing ten-foot curved steel panels emerge the heads and torsos of King and Kennedy, sculpted in the round, each extending an arm to the other, their hands just failing to touch.) During a scheduled stop in his campaign for delegates to the national convention, it fell to Kennedy to inform a crowd of more than one thousand (most unaware of the murder) of King's death. Black radicals in the crowd, perhaps numbering one hundred or more, were aware, while the few whites present, who stuck out "like sore thumbs" (p. 66), were verbally threatened. The possibility that retribution against whites at the rally might light the fuse of a major riot was not small. The mayor, now U.S. Senator Richard Lugar, wanted Kennedy to cancel the meeting, and the police chief warned Kennedy's staff that he could not guarantee the senator's safety.

Kennedy, having learned for certain after his plane landed that King had died, jotted down a few ideas on the way to the rally to be held in one of the city's black ghettoes. He mounted the flat bed of a truck, and delivered a six minute talk "that has gone down in history as one of the great addresses in the modern era" (p. 4). Kennedy pointed out that the nation could move to greater polarization or it could follow King "to understand, and to comprehend, and replace that violence, that stain of bloodshed that has spread across our land, with an effort to understand, compassion and love." Asking the crowd "to return home" to pray for the King family, he ended: "And let's dedicate ourselves to what the Greeks wrote so many years ago: to tame the savageness of man and make gentle the life of this world. Let us dedicate ourselves to that, and say a prayer for our country and for our people. Thank you very much." More than a hundred cities, including the nation's capital, erupted in riot, fire, and bloodshed. "But in Indianapolis the streets were quiet" (p. 68).

Indiana was a gamble Kennedy rightly believed he had to take to win his party's nomination. "This is my West Virginia" (p. 6), he said, a way to demonstrate that, like his brother in 1960, he could win where Catholics were few. It was a daunting task. Beyond his reputation of ruthlessness, a trait usually judged a liability in the Midwest, Kennedy had come late to the party and was widely reviled for his tardiness by supporters of Senator McCarthy, who had entered the campaign on the issue of ending the Vietnam War when no one else would. At Lyndon B. Johnson's request, Governor Roger Branigan ran as the president's proxy; as the head of the state party Branigan controlled its machinery, its funds, and its patronage.

On his side, Kennedy had himself. He threw himself into the campaign, far outworking Branigan and McCarthy. When RFK (a charismatic leader) filed to enter

the primary on a Thursday in late March, four thousand met him at the airport and another five thousand at the State House. During the campaign Kennedy routinely excited frenzied enthusiasm. His cuff links were pulled off, his hands and arms became swollen and scratched, his clothes torn. John Bartlow Martin, a campaign advance man, observed "the crowds were savage.... It was frightening" (p. 101). In addition, Kennedy had resources: beyond thoroughly professional and tested Massachusetts political operatives who ran his Indiana effort, he could call on Ted Sorensen, Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., Pierre Salinger, a Larry O'Brien.

John Bartlow Martin was another asset. Free lance journalist and writer, he had worked for Adlai Stevenson in 1952 and 1956 as an advance man, and he performed the same job for Robert Kennedy. Taking the temperature of the electorate, Martin prepared information on campaign stops so that Kennedy would know "what kind of town it was, who was in his audience, what kind of people they were, what was on their minds, and so on" (p. 77). For someone who had grown up in Indianapolis (Brookside Avenue, "a mean street in a mean city"), Martin had a rather jaundiced view of the state: "Indiana people are not generous nor sympathetic; they are hard-hearted" (p. 11). His recollection of "a seemingly endless parade of robed and hooded Klansmen marching around Monument Circle in dead silence" (p. 72), informed his 1947 book "Indiana: An Interpretation." The locals found the book insufficiently laudatory and "unpalatable," one reviewer called it "a bolt of lightning at the people of Indiana" (p. 73). Robert Kennedy's own take on the Indiana voter was that they were fair. "They listened to me" and were not "so neurotic and hypocritical as in Washington or New York. They're more direct.... There is something healthy about them" (p. 113).

And Kennedy had money: campaign professionals used it to organize 15,000 block captains in major cities; produce and distribute thousands of tabloids, stickers, and posters; establish citizen groups of school teachers, lawyers, professors, seniors, farmers, conservationists. (Businessmen and physicians resisted. Of the 130 doctors in Indianapolis contacted, only 2 would endorse Kennedy.) Large amounts of cash went to precinct committeemen to pay canvassers, poll watchers, get people to the polls,and knock on doors. For example, in Indianapolis bundles of cash on tables at the Indiana Athletic Club were distributed to coordinators for each congressional district depending on need. The coordinator for Marion County guessed he dispensed $100,000 in "walking around money" (p. 104). Money also bought television and radio time, important to end run the hostile press. The campaign set up a phone system so that each day radio stations could get a live feed of Kennedy's speeches as well as commentary on size of audience, location, etc. As an example of the campaign's meticulous planning, Kennedy people checked voting machines and their serial numbers to prevent tampering.

It was very different in the McCarthy campaign. The Minnesota senator had the "kids" (or students) and the boost from exceeding expectations against Johnson's write-in effort in New Hampshire, but the McCarthy staffers "never seemed to hit their stride in Indiana" (p. 10). McCarthy was far less known and his campaign suffered from poor press coverage; a lack of competent professionals and money; factions and disorder at the top; and erratic scheduling–all the reasons that explain defeat were present. More than these, it is clear that McCarthy did not much want to be president; he challenged Johnson out of principle on Vietnam when no one else would. He told Kennedy that he only wanted one term, an astonishing thing to say. What also hurt was, as one supporter put it, his "hidden iceberg qualities" (p. 9). Often detached, he gave the impression that campaigning was undignified and beneath him. As one supporter said later, McCarthy "decided early that the Indiana people just weren't his kind" (p. 84).

Governor Branigan, premier public speaker of the Hoosier type, credited with a great sense of humor and wit, was a Harvard law graduate. Boomhower reveals that Branigan, not unduly impressed with President Johnson, did not take an "urgent call" (p. 48) from the president; in a 1971 oral history, he called Johnson "a triumph of mediocrity" (p. 34), a judgment few historians would share. Whatever his feelings, Branigan drove a hard bargain before agreeing to be Johnson's stand-in. From a list of more than twenty items, he demanded money for the campaign from the national party; a prominent ambassadorship for a state party titan; $25 million as the federal share of the cost of a port on Lake Michigan; federal funds for assorted highway projects; and reconsideration of the decision to give Illinois a nuclear research center. Once Johnson took himself out of the campaign for president, Branigan ran to control the state delegation at the convention. But there were cracks in the governor's support: he was a lame duck, and party regulars were split on his replacement. Having paid little attention to county chairmen, he was not much liked by them. Democrats upset with Branigan quietly helped Kennedy.

Of interest was the role of Eugene C. Pulliam in the

primary battle. Bobby Kennedy had somehow earned the hatred of the owner and publisher of the only daily newspapers in Indianapolis, the morning *Indianapolis Star* and the evening *Indianapolis News*, as well as papers in Muncie and Vincennes, Indiana, and Phoenix, Arizona. A friend of Branigan, Pulliam wielded extraordinary influence over him; the governor even cleared his decision to run in the primary with the publisher. In editorials and news columns, Pulliam promoted Branigan, leaving the governor "amazed," doing so even "sometimes when there was no news–or reason. You can't purchase such support" (p. 55). As for the other two candidates, Pulliam ordered the city editor to give McCarthy "full coverage" when he is in town–"but this does not apply to a man named Kennedy" (p. 56).

In preparing this review, this reviewer examined the *Indianapolis Star* in the eight weeks from the day Kennedy entered the primary to a week after his primary win. Beyond attack editorials and slanted headlines, captions, and news stories, the paper ran thirteen anti-Kennedy editorial cartoons, five on page 1. Depicted as physically unattractive, long-haired, and immature, Kennedy was by turns painted a ruthless opportunist; a vulture; the favorite of draft-dodgers and the liberal, city slicker press; and/or Clyde of Bonnie and Clyde. Kennedy's dependence on Daddy's money was the most frequent theme. Boomhower reproduces the most inflammatory cartoon, "Guests in the House!" The three candidates are at a table, with McCarthy clucking "a worried 'Mrs. Indiana"' under her chin, while Kennedy "appears to be fondling her breast" with one hand while holding high a glass of wine with the other. Branigan looks on "balefully" (p. 98).

The conundrum for the Pulliam papers was how to ignore the New York senator and feature Indiana's governor when Kennedy was making the bulk of the news. More professional newsmen, among them his son and his managing editor, warned Pulliam that his prejudice might harm the paper. For instance, this reviewer recalls many liberals in the city who thought hard about dropping the *Star* and the *News* for the *Louisville Courier-Journal*, which had good Indiana coverage. Kennedy said he had never seen "a worse paper.... It's certainly the most distorted, I think, one of the most warped" (p. 99). That fall, the *Star*'s general manager tried to convince the publisher "that such slanted news coverage should never ... happen again in the newspaper." Pulliam said only, "Well, I guess we did go a little too far" (p. 99).

Kennedy's base in Indiana was the black vote: his canvassers in Muncie discovered that blacks were already sold on him, while in poorer white areas they would be threatened with guns (p. 72). How to keep black support and win over whites was the crux. In a memo to Kennedy and Theodore Sorensen ("to avoid too close an identification with black concerns"), Martin urged stops at what he called "redneck backlash factory cities" (p. 77). The strategy before white audiences was to feature Kennedy's law enforcement background as attorney-general, "the chief law enforcement officer in the U.S" (p. 78), while still mentioning injustice. This assumed that blacks understood that RFK was with them, while whites applauded assertions that violence would not be tolerated. As he told a reporter, "We have to write off the unions and the South now and replace them with Negroes, blue-collar whites, and the kids. If we can do that, we've got a chance to do something" (p. 101). Thus Tony Zale, the Polish-American boxer, and the newly elected black mayor of Gary, Richard G. Hatcher, rode in the same Kennedy Lake County motorcade. Additionally, Martin advised a less frenetic campaign pace, one more "sober and responsible" (p. 77), with visits to the Clark Memorial in Vincennes and the Benjamin Harrison home; references to James Whitcomb Riley; etc.

In the end Kennedy's gamble paid off, winning 42.3 percent of the vote to Branigan's 30.7 and McCarthy's 27 percent. He kept his black support (getting 85 percent of the black vote); he also carried the seven best George Wallace counties in 1964, but in Gary he lost 59 of 70 white precincts.

Readers will note the many parallels between the 1968 and 2008 Indiana Democratic primaries. Both primaries, held as usual late in the campaign season, mattered for a change. Race was a crucial factor in both, putting blacks and working class whites at opposite ends of a teeter-totter—what pleased one would displease the other. Both years saw appeals for Republicans to vote in the Democratic primary, the Republican nominee having already been decided–Governor Branigan to vote for himself, conservative radio host Rush Limbaugh and others to defeat Hillary Clinton. Complaints flew about the unfairness of the press: the Pulliam press in 1968 was guilty as charged; in 2008 all the candidates cried foul. In 1968 a prominent Democrat, on specious grounds, accused Kennedy of injecting "racism and religion" (p. 97) into Indiana politics; by August 2008, the parties having chosen their candidates, the Republican candidate and his party were riding these prejudices for all they were worth with great effect.

There are differences between 1968 and 2008, too. Neither primary, as it turned out, was a turning point

election. Indiana did not prove to be Robert Kennedy's West Virginia; it did not knock out McCarthy, who went on to win Oregon and contest California. Although Hillary Clinton defeated Barack Obama in Indiana, the narrowness of the margin led prominent commentators to announce, correctly, that Obama was the presumptive nominee. One great difference is that in 1968 there were too few primaries to secure the nomination even if someone swept the board; uncommitted party bosses held enough votes to ensure the election of their choice. In 2008 Obama did well enough in the primaries to win the support of the bulk of uncommitted delegates he needed.

Robert F. Kennedy and the 1968 Indiana Primary is a good book, well researched and well written. The author mined the papers of Robert Kennedy, Schlesinger, Sorensen, John Bartlow Martin, and Branigan, among others; he used thirteen oral history interviews, among them Jeff Greenfield, Frank Mankiewicz, and Birch Bayh; and he interviewed nine other principals, among them Andrew Jacobs Jr., Louie Mahern, and Gordon St. Angelo, all Indiana politicians in a position to know what was what in 1968. Of the nineteen newspapers consulted, fifteen were Indiana papers, along with two Chicago papers, the *New York Times*, and the *Louisville Courier-Journal*. The bibliography includes titles germane to the topic.

You do not have to be from Indiana to read this book. Insights on politics and electioneering in the United States abound. For example, the novelist Jeremy Larner, an Indianapolis native, used his experiences in the McCarthy campaign in Indiana to write the Oscar winning screenplay, the cynically realistic "The Candidate," starring Robert Redford.

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