



The Best Man

Gore Vidal

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The Best Man Details

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From Reader Review The Best Man for online ebook

Colin Cox says

I enjoy revisited this play every election cycle because it reminds me of a tired cliché that is certainly appropriate for our current political moment: as much as things change, they inevitably stay the same. *The Best Man*, however, feels like a wish-fulfillment fantasy as the play's beacon of moral authority, former Secretary of State William Russell, sacrifices himself for the health and wellness of his country. Yet, the sacrifice in question feels hollow. The loss of one's political career, while meaningful to some, seems laughably insignificant to many of use. Vidal challenges the overinflated sense of self-worth the political class ascribes to itself by beautifully satirizing the sacrifice at the play's conclusion.

With that said, there is also a way of reading Russell's sacrifice as genuine and aspirational. Read without sarcasm and skepticism, Russell's sacrifice embodies the best of the American spirit (yet another tired cliché). It is also fair to imagine that Russell is Vidal's philosopher king, and that is perhaps the tragedy of the play: our system can no longer accommodate someone like Russell, and that's assuming it ever did.

Nicole says

Quick and entertaining, if a bit superficial. It would benefit from focusing more on the wife characters, that's the play I'd love to read, as their one scene together is biting and delicious. Some good arguing, but not as masterful as other political dramas.

Sheri says

Read for an audition next week. Really quite good. I'm not crazy that the good guy is the misogynist, but found the moral discussion about what should be use-able in a political campaign to be interesting. Too bad real politicians are not as upstanding as Vidal's characters. I think my favorite line was: "you have no sense of responsibility toward anybody or anything and that is a tragedy in a man and it is a disaster in a President! You said you were religious. Well I'm not. But I believe profoundly in this life and what we do to one another and how this monstrous 'I', the self, must become 'we' and draw the line at murder in the games we play with one another, and try to be good even when there is no one to force us to be good."

Steven says

Political story about how the least offensive man often wins the nomination.

Beth Lewis says

Written about 50 years ago, but the political characters are STILL recognizable! A really good read for an

election year... It reminds me of the two full months of mudslinging that we are facing until November.

Navarra says

If you know Gore Vidal at his best (usually in his essays), then you get him at his best here. Brilliant, satirical, brilliant, witty, brilliant...important.

Marian Flaherty says

This brilliant political satire beautifully performed by the LA Theatre is set at the 1960 Democratic convention. With great humor and sharp wit Gore Vidal tackles the very serious themes of power and what people are willing to do to get it. Vidal presents us with a morally imperfect protagonist as well as a villain who is not perfectly evil. We are led into the jungle of right and wrong and back out again with a wonderful surprise ending. This was a great listen; I would highly recommend it.

Jeff says

This received a starry Broadway revival last season, and I can see why--this is a sharp, well-made play. If it feels dated, it is only because it is no longer shocking that the personal lives of Presidential candidates would be used against them--and it is that very quaintness that throws our era into such sharp relief and thus makes the play so instructive. In addition, many of the hot-button issues being debated in the play remain up for grabs today. Ultimately, Vidal is asking an important question that never goes out of style--is it possible for a good man to also be a good politician(paging Machiavelli!!).

Erik Graff says

This being a (screen-) play, I listened to this particular performance of it. It's dated (1964) as Vidal himself is dated, the convention represented being of a kind which has likely not occurred since Kennedy received the nomination. Other than being a representation of character, it is about ethics, and the lack of it, in American electoral politics.

Janet Lynch says

Attention high school drama teachers: this would be a good pick to produce if it's available, especially in an election year, to clue kids in on how dirty politics can be. This 1960 political satire demonstrates that things in the political arena haven't changed much in 56 years. I had fun identifying the characters: "There's Trump! There's Cruz! There's Clinton--Bill, actually, even Bob Dole." I do quibble with the unrealistic, pat ending. "The Best Man" doesn't win, unfortunately, as illustrated by Trump's rise in the polls.

Ben says

A wonderful play, as relevant as ever. This is best read/seen in an election year.

Bobby Sullivan says

Holds up pretty well after almost 60 years, for a political play. Of course, mental illness doesn't stop anybody from becoming President, these days...

Jason says

It's sad that absolutely nothing in politics has changed since Mr. Vidal wrote this piece in 1960! This is an insightful look at power and what it means to want it and/or wield it. I wish I had been able to see James Earl Jones, as the President, in the most recent revival of this piece-that would have been a performance to treasure.

Jan Polep says

Was impressed with the star power of the actors when I saw a clip of the revival version on the Tony's, so decided to read the play. Vidal's 1960 play about a Presidential race, mudslinging, & questionable ethics rings true to today. Google the Broadway cast because it is like none other!!!

Lauren says

I decided to read this play over the summer and it wasn't until I finished the play that I realized there were two versions (1960 and 1976), and I had read the 1976 edition. I decided I wanted to read the 1960 edition to compare (since it seems like most of the revivals use the 1960 edition), and it took me several weeks to procure a copy of the 1960 play. After reading both, I decided to keep my first review (of the 1976 edition) and then add some additional thoughts after reading the 1960 edition.

My review after reading the 1976 version: It took me a while to warm up to this story of two candidates vying for their party's presidential nomination. The opening scenes didn't grab me or stand out in a meaningful way – I was surprised this was the same play that was generating such fawning reviews regarding its 2012 revival. I was ready to write it off as was one of those plays that benefits from a central subject (presidential elections) that repeats itself every few years, much as Christmas movies (sometimes regardless of quality) enjoy an annual revival. But I am thrilled to admit I judged too soon. The play picks up speed, the meaning of the title becomes clear, and the purpose of all of that earlier set up makes sense, and wow. It's a damning, brilliant commentary on politicians and the price of power. I finished with a much better appreciation for what America lost with Mr. Vidal's passing earlier this year. Recommended.

Review after reading the 1960 edition: I don't know if it's because I had already read the play in its entirety and enjoyed it, but I think I prefer the 1960 edition. The beginning didn't seem as slow, and a lot of the interactions and comments worked better in the original version. I honestly can't say if it is the best one (pun intended), or if I simply enjoyed the story more the second time through, but what I can say is rereading the play only made me appreciate it more. The story itself is unchanged between the two editions – the latter edition was simply updated to reference events that would make the play modern to audiences in 1976. Regardless of edition, *The Best Man* is a great play that, even fifty years after its original premiere, resonates with its biting and astute commentary on American politics.

A considerable downside is that *The Best Man* gave me a reason to look forward to 2016 and a potential revival, and I don't like that 2016 now has something I want, because I am so very sick of American elections and would, frankly, like a decade-long moratorium on them (ignoring the practical problems with such a wish). But I do think that's the highest praise I could give a political work of fiction: it makes me, in a tiny way, look forward to another presidential election year. Highly recommended.
