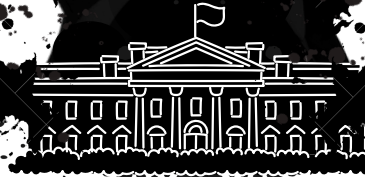


The Best Man

BY GORE VIDAL



OFFICIAL CONVENTION BALLOT

NOTICE If you tear, deface or make a mistake and mark any ballot, you must return it to the board and receive a new ballot.



Secretary William Russell	Aiden Olson O
Alice Russell	Annie Lightcap O
Fanny Jensen	Liana Murphey O
Catherine	Bailey Harding O
Senator Joseph Cantwell	Weston Widman O
Mabel Cantwell	Dillyn Fager O
Don Blades	Isidro Bacon O
Ex-President Arthur Hockstader	Connor Kressly O
Mrs. Sue-Ellen Gamadge	Jocelyn Escalante O
Senator Clyde Carlin	Ashton Antrim O
Dr. Artinian	Austin Casebeer O
Sheldon Marcus	Eli Loyd O
First Reporter	Holly Sorrenti O
Second Reporter	Miriam Smith O
Third Reporter	Emilee Stimpfle O
Fourth Reporter	Tillie McIlvain O
Fifth Reporter	Milo Douglas O
Reporter/Delegate/Hotel Staff	Jordan Brown O

Stage Manager
ASM/Shift Chief
Shift Crew



Mics	Owen Tremblay O
Sound effects	Elliott Elliott O
Light Design/Operation	Cedric Goets O
Costume Chiefs	Jess Cooper O
Props Chiefs	John Kirsch O
	Jacob Lawhon O
	Jessie Guay O
	Alaina Hylton O
	Kylie Kirk O
	Sevyn Combes O
	Genevieve Martinez O
	Gabe Fawl O
	Kalvin Wilson O
	Corrinne Fullmer O
	Victor Hawkinson-Penny O
	Sarai Smith O
	Harley Wires O
	Addisyn Hummell O
	Enzo Cabrillo O
	Rain Gonzalez O

DON'T FORGET our Musical...
URINETOWN! Jan. 30, 31, Feb. 1, 2

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Director’s
Note

Welcome to The Best Man, a witty political drama set in the summer of 1960, but surprisingly relevant to today. As you watch tonight’s performance, you’ll see how Gore Vidal captures the tension and turmoil of a presidential nominating convention. Ambition, power, and integrity are constantly at odds as characters debate how far one should go to win the highest office in the land. Just outside their Philadelphia hotel suites are the persistent reporters’ rabble and flashing cameras. Vidal provides commentary on the power of the media to influence politics by manipulating public opinion.

In terms of historical context, The Best Man was written and premiered in 1960, when television was transforming politics and the Cold War was in full swing. It was an era when issues like national security, foreign policy, and the integrity of public officials dominated the discourse. For audiences at the time, the jabs Vidal took at political hypocrisy and the media’s growing influence felt fresh and provocative. Today, his critique has only grown more prescient as we see the lines between entertainment, media, and politics blur even further.

The emergence of television as a political tool was revolutionary. Candidates were no longer just political figures; they had to become performers, appealing to an audience that was forming opinions based on carefully curated TV appearances and media sound bites. The candidates in The Best Man vie for voters through charisma and scandal, foreshadowing the role of the 24-hour news cycle and social media.

Special
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Director’s Note

The play’s humor often comes from inside jokes about political maneuvering and the types of personalities who rise to power in American politics. To better enjoy The Best Man’s satire of 1960s politics, it’s helpful to know which historical figures inspired Vidal’s characters:

William Russell - The play's idealistic candidate, a former Secretary of State known for his intellect and principled nature. His character is a spin of **Adlai Stevenson**, the Democratic presidential candidate in 1952 and 1956. Like Stevenson, Russell is cultured and thoughtful, but his hesitation to play dirty politics puts him at a disadvantage in a cutthroat race. Vidal greatly admired Stevenson for his ideals and intellectualism, but drew a critique of him in Russell for being aloof sometimes to the points of being disconnected.

Joe Cantwell - A young senator with a populist streak, eager to win at all costs. Cantwell is modeled on **Richard Nixon** and **John F Kennedy** (the two actual candidates in the election of 1960), particularly their aggressive political careers. Cantwell resembles Nixon in that he is sharp, calculating, and willing to engage in smear campaigns to secure power. Vidal pulls directly from JFK’s career by referencing the flashy televised senate trial in which JFK grilled members of the sicilian mafia. Like Kennedy, Cantwell uses the television to shape his image as a crusader for the people.

Arthur Hockstader - The former president, a shrewd, no-nonsense political veteran who relishes watching the candidates race. He is a reflection of **Harry S. Truman**, with his folksy style and willingness to make tough decisions. Like Truman, Hockstader understands the brutal realities of power. Truman’s controversial decisions, such as dropping the atomic bomb during World War II, ushered in the nuclear arms race leading to the "missile gap" anxiety that looms in the background of The Best Man. Additionally, Cantwell hints at rumored connections with political machines and organized crime. Hockstader, like Truman, knows how to play the game and enjoys it.

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Director’s Note

Alice Russell - A patient and supportive figure, but her relationship with her husband is strained due to his infidelity. Often compared to **Eleanor Roosevelt**, who stood by Franklin D. Roosevelt despite his personal failings, becoming a symbol of strength and dignity. Alice represents a supportive political spouse who understands the complexities of power, but remains steadfast in her own sense of ethics and personal dignity.

Mabel Cantwell - The opposite of Alice, Mabel projects poise and charm. She is much more calculating beneath the surface, sharing her husband’s hunger for power. Comparisons to Jackie Kennedy are apt, Vidal was her step-brother and he detested her as much as her husband. However, Mabel is likely a nod to **Pat Nixon** who, while publicly loyal and supportive, had to navigate the moral compromises of her husband's ambitious politics. Mabel is a critical player in Joe’s campaign, as she uses her charm to help soften her husband's rougher edges.

Sue-Ellen Gamadge - The well-connected Washington socialite represents the influence of society women in politics, particularly the pre-television influence on public opinion through endorsements. Sue-Ellen is thought to be inspired by figures like **Clare Boothe Luce**, a prominent Republican congresswoman, writer, and socialite. Luce’s husband, Henry, was the publisher of *Time*, *Life*, *Fortune*, and *Sports Illustrated*. Like Sue-Ellen, she was deeply involved in both politics and high society, exerting her influence behind the scenes. Sue-Ellen’s role in the play reflects the waning power of Washington insiders and print media to shape political fortunes with the rise of television.

As you enjoy tonight’s performance, keep in mind the balance Vidal strikes between sharp political satire and deeper moral questions: What makes someone fit to lead? Is it better to have a morally upright leader who may not always win, or a cunning strategist who can? And most importantly, how does the media shape who we think is "the best man" for the job?

Thank you for joining us, and I hope this play entertains and sparks reflection on the nature of leadership, integrity, and the role of media in shaping our political reality.