



The Contender: Richard Nixon: The Congress Years, 1946 to 1952

Irwin Gellman

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At long last the true Richard Nixon can be revealed. The man known as "Tricky Dick," who is seen today as the greatest villain in the history of American politics, actually began his amazing career as a principled campaigner and a scrupulously honest member of Congress.

Sadly, the first real reassessment of Richard Nixon's early career -- his Congress years -- had to wait until after his death in 1994. Only then was Pulitzer Prize-nominee Irwin F. Gellman able to get the documentary access of which previous Nixon biographers could only dream. Gellman became the first historian to have complete and unfettered access to (among other sources) the 1946, 1948, and 1950 campaign files in the National Archives; papers from the executive sessions of HUAC; and every document dated through July 1952 in the Nixon Library & Birthplace. All told, Gellman scoured millions of pages in dozens of collections, the vast majority of which have never before been used.

Gellman's research revealed that much of the work done on Nixon was not only based on incomplete information but was wrong. The legend of "Tricky Dick" was little more than a series of myths. For example: The "Committee of 100" did *not* buy Nixon his 1946 upset of Jerry Voorhis. Nixon did *not* unfairly smear Helen Gahagan Douglas. There was *no* secret funding of his Senate race in 1950. Nixon did *not* out-McCarthy McCarthy on HUAC. And finally, Nixon was true to Earl Warren at the 1952 convention -- there was no secret deal made for the vice presidency. As Gellman irrefutably shows, each of these myths has been built on guesswork or faulty sources.

Who then was the real Richard Nixon? Other historians have given us ominous hints and vague charges of financial and moral misconduct. Gellman shows otherwise, and the proof is in the details. In 1946 Nixon used his own meager savings in a shoestring campaign. In 1950, operating with a budget in the low six-figures -- high for the time, but many times lower than other estimates -- he reaped the benefits of his opponent's bruising primary. And the Red bashing? On HUAC Nixon was a moderate who won universal praise for his even-handedness. Behind the scenes he cautioned McCarthy against his excesses.

Even during the incredible success of Nixon's Congress years there are occasional lapses of judgment. But, as Gellman shows, it was innocence and energy -- not deceit -- that made a fresh-faced Richard Nixon the victor against great odds in contest after contest. Here are the triumphs of the early years of a young man that we can unabashedly admire. Here is the rise of Richard Nixon, from nobody to vice president, that makes all previous biographies obsolete. Here is the Nixon that history will now remember.

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