



The Wilderness: Deep Inside the Republican Party's Combative, Contentious, Chaotic Quest to Take Back the White House

McKay Coppins

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The explosive story of the Republican Party's intensely dramatic and fractious efforts to find its way back to unity and national dominance

After the 2012 election, the GOP was in the wilderness. Lost and in disarray. And doggedly determined to do whatever it took to get back to 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue.

McKay Coppins has had unparalleled access to Republican presidential candidates, power brokers, lawmakers, and Tea Party leaders. Based on more than 300 interviews, *The Wilderness* is the book that opens up the party like never before: the deep passions, larger-than-life personalities, and dagger-sharp power plays behind the scenes.

In wildly colorful scenes, this exclusive look into the Republican Party at a pivotal moment in its history follows a cast of its rising stars, establishment figures, and loudmouthed insurgents--Jeb Bush, Chris Christie, Ted Cruz, Carly Fiorina, Bobby Jindal, Rand Paul, Marco Rubio, Paul Ryan, Donald Trump, Scott Walker, and dozens of others--as they battle over the future of the party and its path to the presidency.

The Wilderness: Deep Inside the Republican Party's Combative, Contentious, Chaotic Quest to Take Back the White House Details

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From Reader Review The Wilderness: Deep Inside the Republican Party's Combative, Contentious, Chaotic Quest to Take Back the White House for online ebook

Greg Bates says

As a chronicle of political stuff that happened on the Republican side between 2012 and today, *The Wilderness* is alright. As an in-depth look at the overlarge cast of jokers, hucksters and fools currently stabbing each other in the back to become the next candidate for president with an R after his name, it's excellent. Coppins is pretty far from unbiased in his coverage, but he's not trying to be - he's interviewed each of the candidates extensively as BuzzFeed's resident Republican analyst, and it's obvious some of them are easier to get along with than others. Rand Paul in particular benefits from Coppins' writing, while Jeb Bush and Chris Christie are "bullies," Ted Cruz is a sociopath and I honestly think Bobby Jindal might be mentally ill. An entertaining behind-the-scenes look at the freakshow, even if the show isn't quite over yet.

Anne says

Full disclosure: I'm a true-blue (ha!) Democrat who has watched with a mix of glee and horror as the Machiavellian fever dream that is the Republican primaries has unfolded/imploded. That being said, I was not going into this book expecting to change my thoughts or opinions about any of the candidates profiled here. I didn't. However, what I did find in this impeccably researched history-thus-far of the race is a lot of background information that gives the reader a tremendous amount of insight into the political evolution and journeys of the cast of characters. Whereas political books can be dry and anecdotal, here is a complex unpacking of the path to where we are politically delivered with humor and thoughtful analysis. After the long, national nightmare of the 2016 election is over, I hope there is an addendum attached (or even another book entirely) as I would be very interested in Coppins' take on and exploration of the culmination of this whole process.

Sarah says

I liked this book, but you could tell that it was written earlier in the primaries and rushed to press. It was heavy on Jindal, who (if I recall correctly) had dropped out of the race by the time the book was published.

Matt Morgan says

this was a great book! I would highly recommend to anyone who'd like to get a better understanding of all these Republican hopefuls running for President (or, were running for President until Trump rolled them all over).

I typically would not pick up and read through a book all about politics in a week - however, McKay does a great job with compelling stories to help introduce you to the life of these men and woman.

After reading this book, here's how I rate the candidates (and non-candidates):

Paul Ryan

Mitt Romney (he messed up in 2012. His fault, but the countries loss)

.....

.....

Marco Rubio

Rand Paul

Bobby Jindal

Chris Christie

Carly Fiorina

Jeb Bush

Donald Trump

Ted Cruz

In other words.....we're screwed.

I should go back and re-read the sections on Paul Ryan and the poverty tour he went on after the 2012 loss. He has dedicated himself to solving the poverty problem in America. No longer is it as simple as Milton Friedman's theory that corporations are only responsible for maximizing shareholder profit, but it is a complex issue of lifting others up and providing access to means for hope and a better life. Hard work is not the only answer. I'm waiting for Ryan & Romney to bust in the door the night of the RNC convention...

Jennifer says

Interesting perspective on the potential candidates for the Republican presidential nomination in 2016. Can't say it makes me feel better about any of them!

Jeremy says

I can't help but wonder why some other candidate didn't emerge during the 2016 Republican primaries. Jeb seems like a great candidate apart from his brothers baggage. Bobby Jindal seems smart, likable and Christian enough but Louisiana wasn't doing well. Marco Rubio has all the look and feel of the right candidate but could never quite seem to breakthrough. Carly Fioriana seems like a much better option than what we saw in 2016. Why couldn't she gain more traction. She was, however, a failed senate candidate and some of her work as CEO didn't go well. Surely Republicans have some better options out there for a female candidate. Mitt Romney always seems better in theory than reality.

This book is an excellent inside account of the troubles and concerns of the Republican Party in the lead up to the 2016 election. I recommend it for those interested in understanding the Republican Party today.

Meave says

It is rare to see the other side's perspective, not just from a public, calculating, political angle, but as people. If nothing else, this book allowed me to empathize with some of the otherwise nightmarish 2016 GOP candidates, which I think is valuable, even as I wish they would take themselves and their cruel, heartless,

terrifying political views far away.

Jason Clark says

I actually enjoyed this book a lot more than I thought I might. Usually, when you read that a BuzzFeed author is writing a book about the Republican presidential hopefuls you immediately think of partisan politics and a potential hit piece. At least, I do. This book was not that, however.

The author, McKay Coppins, impressed me with both his writing style and his ability to suss out the meaningful moments, the little known facts, the "good" story if you will about the impressive group of Republicans vying to become the next President of the United States. The primaries are still going on when the author wrote the book so he's only able to take us up until the hopefuls announce their candidacy but he's found a space in between their desire and their announcements where the real story lives and he's able to bring it to us in a very compelling manner.

Coppins spends more time on some of the candidates than others but in each one he's able to bring us part of their story that maybe isn't well known to the general public. He covers almost all of the candidates in some manner. I was mostly impressed by his ability to understand and explain in a non-offense way the ideas and beliefs of the Christian nominees and their constituents who demand they remain true to their faith. Credit must be given to the author because even now I do not know for certain whether Mr. Coppins is a Christian or non-Christian or a Republican or Democrat. He cleverly conceals his whatever ideology he might have in his personal life and clearly reports on what he witnessed and learned from his research. There are a few moments when the reader is able to sense a slight disdain for certain actions or certain people but it's never so great as to taint the reporting or alter our perception of the story that's being told.

I finished the book in a matter of a couple of days and perhaps the greatest compliment is that when I was done I wished the author could have continued to follow the election and report on the drama of the debates and onward. Perhaps when the election is over he will release a follow-up and fulfill my wish.

John says

Promising start, but lost a bit of interest with emphasis on the dropped-out Jindal, and never-ran Paul Ryan. Meanwhile ... Christie, Santorum, Huckabee and Carson weren't covered at all. Rand Paul's story was the most interesting, in that I knew more about evangelicals than he did! About halfway through the author interviews Trump, with a highly unfortunate aftermath, with the book taking a nosedive in the following chapter: glossing over Fiorina's tenure as a CEO, with an implication that she was a great success, when in reality, "highly controversial" would be more accurate; that lead to a tangent on how Sarah Palin was doomed from the start by a hostile media determined to portray her as unqualified.

I got the book as I'm a political junkie, but found it overall disappointing. Narration was okay.

Wesley Roth says

As the 2016 presidential campaign has gained steam, I was intrigued by Coppins' timely book on the GOP pursuit of the White House, post-2012. The author does a decent job getting the reader up to speed with

various candidates and their desire to run for president post Obama-reelection, most notably: Rubio, Bush, Jindal, Rand Paul, Cruz. Lots of insider stories and nuggets that will provide fun reading. Good reporting especially as you see the current state of the race and why things are happening for certain reasons. Some candidates have dropped out already, so the book feels a bit outdated. But the biggest problem is the author's sly insults of conservative beliefs/dogma weaved into his writings. Not good. "The Wilderness" falls short as well compared with the masterful books by Halperin and Heilemann: Game Change and Double Down along with Halperin/Harris' The Way to Win. But the book is a good read to get you up to speed in the GOP primary.

Michael Barnes says

As a Democrat, I hoped to read this book with a goal of understanding who these talking head personalities were that have been hogging my Twitter feed and CNN news coverage. I walked away with not only a deeper understanding of the GOP presidential candidates and their desires to become heir to the GOP throne, but an appreciation of their life stories and the personal stories and sacrifices along the way. The stories embedded in this book are personal and enlightening when viewing the litany of candidates dying to become the next Moses of the Republican wilderness. These stories would not have been uncovered by a mediocre or pedestrian journalist/author. It's obvious that McKay is a highly talented researcher as well as writer. He writes with the ability to share an unbiased look and approach in a deeply partisan climate. No matter what party you belong to, he covers men and women who have stories, pasts, and ambitions that are worth reading.

This is not a 2015 or 2016 book about a few candidates. This is a book about an American political party and how the current state of politics and politicians will shape the party's future. This will be read 10 years from now and people will treasure the personalities learned and examined through this book (and let's face it, whether you want to admit it or not, Ted Cruz isn't going anywhere and will be just as relevant in the immediate future as he is now).

It's obviously a difficult task for an author to write a real-time book spanning 400 pages covering such a volatile and ever-changing subject. The endeavor was bold but the result was even more impressive. In the Twitter era, it's difficult to maintain leads or reserve breaking news through a book's creation and the many waves of edits followed by publication. Anyone can share any story with a few swipes and clicks of a finger. But McKay brings us back to an experience of understanding news and stories outside of a 140 character limit. His research and storytelling ability help us understand Paul Ryan behind the mask of Mitt Romney's running mate. Or the true character and personality of Bobby Jindal behind his heated rhetoric behind the pulpit. These are people that deserve more coverage than the frequent Fox News media blitz and McKay tells their true stories.

In the end, I was surprised at how fast I read this book. Political books are not particularly enticing to me and I find myself reading them less for fun, but more because if I don't I feel I won't have the credibility or understanding to take a stance on a person or issue in politics. However, McKay frames the book in such a way that you aren't dying to get to the end or slugging it out chapter by chapter. He leads the reader very carefully into the interesting plots and subplots of the characters that often intertwine and create great drama along the way. With so many candidates occupying such a small space, everyone is stepping on someone else's foot at some point in the process. Like the book's cover illustrates, the race to become the future Republican President seems like an elephant trying to fit inside a booth. The drama of it all is fascinating and McKay knows how to help us voters and layman political enthusiasts to enter the swamp and see these people in a way that can't be found in the current online/Twitter/blogger climate.

Cora says

“It’s amazing,” Rubio marveled to a friend at the time [that he was speaker of the Florida state house]. “I can call up a lobbyist at four in the morning, and he’ll meet me anywhere with a bag of forty thousand dollars in cash.”

Seems a little early to write a 2016 GOP primary book, no? No votes have been cast, and the situation is still fluid enough that any number of things might happen. (At this point in 2003, Howard Dean looked like the likely Democratic nominee.) So I didn't see the point of THE WILDERNESS at first, at least until I ran into the above quote in an Alex Pareene article.

See, this isn't just a primary book; it's a deeply reported look at a half dozen figures in the Republican party and the forces that shaped them. In some cases (Rubio, Jindal, Rand Paul), I had a bit more sympathy for them as people than I did going in; in other cases (Jeb!), much less. But for everybody, there's at least one revealing moment that goes beyond the common stereotype, and that's valuable in and of itself. And beyond that, the book is brisk and entertaining, great to read on a holiday break.

Joe says

McKay Coppins is clearly one of the best young political feature writers out there, with an eye for the most interesting stories, and an ear for the most surprising insight. This book offered more than just amusing stories about the 2016 GOP candidates, though; it also served to extract many from the pack and show how they were different and diverse individuals with very different motivations. Who knew that Bobby Jindal witnessed his wife-to-be's dramatic exorcism, or that Paul Ryan really does care about helping people in poverty? And the strange story of Rand Paul's life in competition with his father and his own rebellious instincts could make for a book on its own. Love or hate their beliefs, these are men (and one woman) who have lived lives worth studying.

I docked it a star because it is so clearly incomplete. I am sure the second half of this book will come after the election is over, but there are several threads here that end too abruptly. Even if the story was incomplete, some concluding thoughts from this bright author would have served the book well.

Rob Powell says

i was searching for a book that peaked inside the current republican party. i enjoyed this book because it offered full pictures of many of the candidates that ran for the nomination in the 2016 cycle. most of the candidates, who i find repulsive, were presented as full people with complex motivations. i was even endeared to many of them and found myself disappointed in the lack of nuance that the campaign cycle allowed for. the book is, i think, largely sympathetic to many of the candidates which is really what i was looking for. i consume enough media that despises each of them that i found myself wanting a book that offered a complete picture of some of the key republican players- i felt this book offered that. it offered a little behind the curtain elements, but not so much that it sounded contrived or gossipy.

it did hint that rand paul was gay. but, LOL, whatevs

and...donald trump is a monster and there was no sympathy for him. so if you are looking for that, this book is not for you.

the book ended a bit abruptly. like the publisher was like "hey we need to get this out there" and the author was like "oops! here's a thoughtful, brief conclusion!"

all in all, it was good and if you are a lib looking for a peak inside the other party- this is a good one.

Daniel G. Helton says

Engrossing

Mr. Coppins does not offer a diagnosis, but does an admirable job of describing the symptoms of a party that despite a few functioning, even brilliant pockets of intelligence, is collectively losing its mind. For many years Republicans have managed to win by cobbling together several antithetical constituencies whose common trait it's passionate hatred of different liberal policies. This awkward coalition increasingly required unprovable assumptions and mythological villains to keep it intact. Somewhere along the line this artificial alternative reality became so deeply embedded in the minds of so many it became an uncontrollable force whose believers required absolute homage to its every nuance. Then along came Donald Trump with the requisite ego and lack of compunction to speak the language and share the anger of the true believers. Mr. Coppins does an admirable job of showing us how this is all playing out in the lead up to the 2016 election.
