

AMERICAN EXPERIENCE



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The Kennedys

Monday, May 18, 2009 at 9pm on PBS (check local listings)
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“The epic scope and dramatic depth of a classic Shakespearean tragedy.” *Chicago Sun-Times*

“Novelistic and anecdotal, emotional while rarely sensational...colorful and compelling.” *USA Today*

On August 25, 2008, just two months after undergoing surgery for a malignant brain tumor, “The Lion of the Senate” and the Kennedy family’s lone male survivor—Edward M. Kennedy—surprised attendees with an unscheduled speech at the Democratic National Convention in Denver, Colorado.

“As I look ahead, I am strengthened by family and friendship. So many of you have been with me in the happiest days and the hardest days. Together we have known success and seen setbacks, victory and defeat,” Kennedy said.

On Monday, May 18, PBS’s AMERICAN EXPERIENCE presents *The Kennedys*, an American story unlike any other: a saga of ambition, wealth, family loyalty and personal tragedy. Edited down to three hours from its original four, *The Kennedys* draws on a wealth of still photographs, archival footage, and home movies, and features extensive interviews with family members, friends, and first-hand witnesses to the many chapters of the Kennedy story.

The Kennedys first premiered in 1992 to vast critical acclaim, hailed for having “the epic scope and dramatic depth of a classic Shakespearean tragedy” (*Chicago Sun-Times*) and as “novelistic and anecdotal, emotional while rarely sensational...colorful and compelling” (*USA Today*). Nearly two decades later, the Kennedy story continues to capture the imagination of Americans of all ages.

The founding father, Joseph Kennedy, rose to wealth and power by way of Boston, Wall Street, Hollywood and Washington. Then, moving on to London as Franklin Roosevelt’s ambassador to the Court of St. James -- his popularity greatly enhanced by his large, photogenic family -- Joe Kennedy seemed poised for the pinnacle, the presidency, his lifelong goal.

But, ironically, the man who had so long prided himself as a publicity genius was undone by his own remarks to a reporter, to the effect that democracy was finished in Britain -- and possibly in America, too. In the parlance of a later time, Joe Kennedy sounded soft on fascism. His presidential prospects in ruins, he vested all in the next generation. By 1960, son John had at last attained the White House -- “the long of arm” of Kennedy power, as was said, plus a seemingly endless fund of Kennedy family charm having played a part all the way.

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What followed was a human drama as powerful and painful as any in our history, a compounding national tragedy, as one violent, senseless act followed another.

Taken in all, the long Kennedy quest for the presidency can be seen as a chronicle of evolving political ideology from the isolationism of Joe Kennedy to the cold warrior stance of John to the fierce social activism of Robert Kennedy; and, finally, to Edward, the lone male survivor.

CREDITS

Executive producer for *The Kennedys*
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AMERICAN EXPERIENCE is a production of WGBH Boston
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ACCESSIBILITY

AMERICAN EXPERIENCE is closed captioned for deaf and hard-of-hearing viewers, and described for people who are blind or visually impaired by the Media Access Group at WGBH. The descriptive narration is available on the SAP channel of stereo TVs and VCRs.

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ABOUT AMERICAN EXPERIENCE

Television's most-watched history series, AMERICAN EXPERIENCE has been hailed as "peerless" (*Wall Street Journal*), "the most consistently enriching program on television" (*Chicago Tribune*), and "a beacon of intelligence and purpose" (*Houston Chronicle*). On air and online, the series brings to life the incredible characters and epic stories that have shaped America's past and present. Acclaimed by viewers and critics alike, AMERICAN EXPERIENCE documentaries have been honored with every major broadcast award, including twenty-four Emmy Awards, four duPont-Columbia Awards, and fourteen George Foster Peabody Awards, one most recently for *Two Days in October*.

ABOUT WGBH BOSTON

WGBH Boston is America's preeminent public broadcasting producer. More than one-third of PBS's prime-time lineup and companion Web content as well as many public radio favorites are produced by WGBH. The station also is a pioneer in educational multimedia and in access technologies for people with disabilities. For more information visit wgbh.org.

For more information about AMERICAN EXPERIENCE and *The Kennedys*, visit pbs.org/americanexperience

Promotional photography is available for download from pbs.org/pressroom and pressroom.wgbh.org.

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