

ONE



THE DYNASTIC IMPULSE

MY FASCINATION WITH AMERICA'S political families began, improbably, in Frankfurt, Germany, 1957. I was an army private stationed at the Third Armored Division headquarters. One evening I went to the library hoping to find something entertaining and instead spied a behemoth titled *The Biographical Directory of the United States Congress*, listing every legislator since the Continental Congress of 1774. As I skimmed names, some kept reappearing, repeated over and over. Muhlenberg. Muhlenberg. Muhlenberg. Muhlenberg. Bayard. Bayard. Bayard. Bayard. Stocktons and Frelinghuysens. Who were these senators and congressmen I had never heard of?

I had had a good education. I was a political science major! I knew of the Presidents Adams, John and John Quincy, father and son, and the two Roosevelt presidents, Theodore and Franklin, fifth cousins. I even knew about the Harrisons, having helped a professor research a history of the Republican Party. But who were these Livingstons, Breckinridges, and Tuckers? Or the Washburns, four brothers who had served in Congress from Maine, Illinois, Minnesota, and Wisconsin?

The Constitution declares, "No title of nobility shall be granted by the United States." Yet in the two centuries since these words were written, Americans had apparently chosen what Stewart Alsop once called "the People's Dukes."

Generation after generation, voters freely turned to the same families. Yet students of politics at the time were paying little attention to this phenomenon. When the army sent me home in 1958, replacing me with Elvis Presley (at least in the sense that his unit moved in when my unit moved out), I had compiled 300 genealogies. Someday I would tell their stories.

Many of these dynasties were ancient, having emerged, then faded away, so long ago. There hadn't been a Randolph of Virginia in Congress since 1833, a Winthrop of Massachusetts since 1851. Then in 1960, surprisingly, shockingly, the Kennedys arrived on the presidential scene with a talent so bright as to light up the sky. Jack told a New York audience he had received a wire from his father: "Dear Jack: Don't buy one vote more than necessary. I'll be damned if I'll buy a landslide." John Fitzgerald Kennedy, the dutiful son, narrowly won, and moved into the White House with a beautiful young wife and two engaging children who would play games under the president's desk. He made his brother Bob his attorney general. Brother Ted was soon installed in Jack's old Senate seat. Sargent Shriver, a brother-in-law, came to Washington to create the Peace Corps. Plus there was a bevy of sisters married to movie stars or British lords.

Suddenly, America's dynastic impulse became worth considering and might even have consequences for a democracy. In 1966, the year I turned my Frankfurt notes into the first edition of *America's Political Dynasties*, the U.S. Senate had eighteen members who were in some manner dynastically connected. Across the Capitol, in the U.S. House of Representatives, there were eleven sons of congressmen, two sons of senators, four who had had brothers in Congress, three whose husbands had been in Congress, and a slew of others with more distant relatives. Their stories were ripe for the telling.

SHORTLY BEFORE HIS THIRTY-SECOND birthday, in 2012, Joseph P. "Joe" Kennedy III was elected to the U.S. House of Representatives. A Harvard Law graduate, class of 2009, he was an assistant DA in the Middlesex County District Attorney's Office when he resigned to seek a congressional seat, winning the Democratic primary with a name worthy of 90 percent of the vote and the general election with 61 percent. He is the son of Joseph P. Kennedy II, who also served in the U.S. House of Representatives from Massachusetts from 1987 to 1999. Joseph P. Kennedy II is the eldest son of Robert F. Kennedy, the U.S. senator from New York who was murdered while running for the Democratic presidential nomination in 1968, and a nephew of

President John F. Kennedy and Senator Ted Kennedy, as well as a cousin of Patrick J. Kennedy, Ted's son, who was a member of the U.S. House of Representatives from Rhode Island from 1995 to 2011. Joe Kennedy is now the sixth Kennedy to have been elected to Congress, a remarkable achievement for any family and amazing for one that entered Congress only in 1947.

Forty-four American political families have had at least four members of the same name elected to federal office, and in seventy-five families three members of the same name held national office. Another forty-eight dynasties could be called "mix and match" because they produced three or more members joined through marriage, such as the Rockefellers with the Aldriches. Yet collectively, these dynastic families, though unique, have contributed just 6 percent of the men and women who have been elected to Congress since 1774.

This book is the story of seventeen of these families, plus another family who may be in the process of redefining dynasty. From these eighteen families have come eleven presidents, four vice presidents, thirty-three senators, eighteen governors, seventy-three members of the U.S. House of Representatives or Continental Congress, and eleven cabinet officers.

Although these families are bound together by their pursuit of the same goal, winning elections, their histories are as varied as the Adamses' and the Lees'. The first Adams left his heirs a house, a barn, and three beds; the first Lee left an estate of 13,000 acres, all rich tobacco land. With little in common, they joined together to maneuver America's separation from Great Britain and a revolution.

Politics was a by-product of religion for the Muhlenbergs and Frelinghuysens. The Reverend Henry Melchior Muhlenberg had been sent to Pennsylvania by the German Lutheran Church. The Reverend Theodorus Jacobus Frelinghuysen had been sent to New Jersey by the Dutch Reformed Church. By the time of the American Revolution, Germans made up a third of Pennsylvania's population and Dutch a sixth of New Jersey's—sizable voting blocs indeed!

Not all the founders were as patriotic as the Adamses and Lees or as pious as the Muhlenbergs and Frelinghuysens. The first Livingston was charged with pulling off "one of the grossest land frauds ever perpetrated in an age noted for unethical dealings." The first Lodge forefather in the Senate turned the American Revolution into a good thing financially as a privateer.

The Roosevelts, until the arrival of TR and FDR in the eighth generation, were two branches of moderately successful shopkeepers, bankers, and

minor landed gentry, with hardly a politician among them. The brilliant Tuckers in Virginia arrived at politics secondary to the study and teaching of law. *Tucker on Blackstone*. *Tucker on the Constitution*. No one ever accused the Harrisons of brilliance. Their hallmark was adaptability. They went wherever they could find voters—Virginia, Indiana, Ohio, Illinois, and finally Wyoming.

Otherwise, dynasties tended to stay in a single state as they advanced generation after generation. *The Tafts of Ohio*. *The Bayards of Delaware*. They crossed borders when their ambitions exceeded a state's needs. *The Kennedys of Massachusetts*, *New York*, *Rhode Island*, *Maryland*, *Connecticut*. The Bushes have their own Connecticut-Texas-Florida history in this regard.

Within the dynasties there was harmony, until there was not. The Hyde Park Roosevelts and the Oyster Bay Roosevelts were destined to come into conflict. The Civil War split the Kentucky Breckinridges exactly down the middle, and no Louisiana Long was ever going to wait in line behind another Long. Yet there could also be deep family regard. The newspaper publisher Charlie Taft personally financed the long public career of his brother, William Howard Taft. Washburn of Wisconsin, on the floor of the House of Representatives in 1858, came to the defense of his brother from Illinois, grabbing Elihu's attacker by the hair. (It was a wig and came off in Washburn's hands.)

All the dynasties without exception engaged in uncommon combat in America's wars. Jack Kennedy and George H. W. Bush fought in World War II, and Teddy Roosevelt's sons and grandsons became known for remarkable feats in both world wars. Robert E. Lee was the greatest general of them all, while on the Union side Ben Harrison, unassertive as president, displayed bravery beyond courage during Sherman's March to the Sea. Robert Field Stockton fought in California during the Mexican War (and earned the honor of having a city named after him), while a century of schoolchildren were taught about young pastor Peter Muhlenberg marching from his church door into the Continental Army to fight with Washington at Valley Forge.

There were the great achieving families—the Adamses, Lees, Roosevelts, Tafts, Bushes, Clintons—and others more interesting than important. Still, there were great moments: James A. Bayard, Delaware's lone congressman in 1801, broke with his party to vote for Jefferson over Burr when the presidency had to be decided in the House of Representatives; Robert A. Livingston was U.S. minister to France during the years when the Louisiana Purchase was considered, then formally effected; Elihu B.

Washburne, another U.S. minister to France, was the only diplomat to remain in Paris during the Franco-Prussian War, supervising the relief of 30,000 people; Henry St. George Tucker was the author of the Seventeenth Amendment to the Constitution, which provides for the direct election of senators.

Dynastic accounting must also measure the critical role of women in their success. A framed photograph of Eleanor Roosevelt sat on a table in Hillary Clinton's White House office. Mrs. Clinton quotes Mrs. Roosevelt in her memoirs: "A woman is like a teabag. You never know how strong she is until she's in hot water." Abigail Adams proved so skillful in commerce and as a farm manager when her husband, John, was in France during the Revolution that she alone restored the family to solvency. Martha Bowers, Robert Taft's wife, was such an adept campaigner (as he was not) that a Cleveland newspaper announced his upset victory in 1938 under the headline "Bob and Martha Taft Elected to the Senate." Edward Livingston, the minister to France, in his old age wrote to his wife, "What I am, my dear Louise, I owe chiefly to you." This is a common theme in this story of male office-seekers.

Yet unfortunately, the story of their children was too often one of alcoholism, drug addiction, mental illness, mental retardation, financial reverses or misconduct, sex scandals, or an inability to bear the burdens of their celebrity. Abigail and John had one son who became president of the United States and two who became alcoholics. John F. Kennedy Jr. called two of his first cousins, in print, "poster boys for bad behavior. . . . To whom much is given much is expected, right?" No dynasty children so abused their inheritance as the three eldest sons of FDR and Eleanor. Elliott, between 1934 and 1977, was investigated at least eight times by congressional committees. A Herblock cartoon showed FDR Jr., who had represented Rafael Trujillo of the Dominican Republic in Washington, sitting on a pile of the dictator's money. The caption read, "I'm broadminded—I'm just as willing to work for a democracy."

There were also in-laws. As in many families, some were unusual. Nicholas Bayard married a woman who was imprisoned for being a witch. In 1662 Judith Verlet was "seized in a strange manner with Fits." Fortunately, Nicholas's uncle was New York governor Peter Stuyvesant, and his letter to Connecticut governor John Winthrop settled the matter. In the Stockton family, Rebecca married a man who was said to have been dead for four days and who, after returning to life, gave an account of heaven. Rebecca's sister Susanna married one of General Washington's spies. A Livingston in-

law was Robert Fulton, inventor of the steamboat, which was to the financial advantage of the family. An elderly Frelinghuysen in-law led a suffrage march to the White House in 1919, for which she spent a night in jail. She reported that "the gas vapors from the sewers escaped. The fumes from the furnace escaped. Everything escaped but the prisoners."

The families were Protestant, except for the Catholic Kennedys and a branch of the Bushes; they were usually rich, at death if not at birth, although not "as rich as a Rockefeller" (unless they were Rockefellers). During the age of the robber barons and Mrs. Astor's "Four Hundred," there were no Astors, Vanderbilts, Goulds, Morgans, or Harrimans in Congress. Jay Gould felt political influence was best purchased when needed. They were not adverse, however, to their daughters marrying politicians, creating a special source of dynastic wealth: the advantageous marriage. In 1901 the son of John D. Rockefeller, the richest man in America, married the daughter of Senator Nelson Aldrich, the most powerful politician in America. Their son, Nelson Aldrich Rockefeller, became vice president of the United States. In the same way wealth also came to the Adamases, Tafts, and Frelinghuysens. A dynastic family generally was large. Philip Lee had seventeen children. John Scott Harrison, whose father and son were presidents, had thirteen. The Kennedys would not have had a fifth and sixth generation in Congress had Robert and Ethel not had eleven children. Having an only child can limit dynasty building.

I FIND THE FAMILY the most mysterious and fascinating institution in the world, writes novelist Amos Oz.

SIX OF THESE DYNASTIES ended in the nineteenth century, and several others were on life support after 1900. Perhaps more is to be learned about the nature of dynasties by asking why they leave politics. (Why they get started in politics usually owes to some meshing of ambition, circumstance, and patriotism.)

The Adamases had several explanations for their political demise. John could have contended that it was a planned exodus. While serving in France, he wrote Abigail, "I must study politics and war that my sons may have liberty to study mathematics and philosophy. My sons ought to study mathematics and philosophy . . . in order to give their children a right to study painting, poetry, music, architecture." This theory of politics to poetry in

three generations turned out to be a fairly accurate prediction for the Adams family. “A single family can stay adjusted through three generations,” Brooks Adams claimed. “It is now full four generations since John Adams wrote the Constitution of Massachusetts. It is time that we perished. The world is tired of us.” He was right in that the flinty Adamses had become more and more out of step with what voters wanted in their politicians.

If the people rejected the Adamses, the Livingstons rejected the people. “I should find myself ill-calculated to take a lead among men rendered fastidious by too much courtship, to intrigue with little men,” answered a Livingston when asked why he had left the political scene. When the Livingstons could no longer control politics, they retired to their country estates, married other Livingstons, had fewer children, and got their income from investments rather than from entrepreneurial activities. Maintaining the status quo became a full-time occupation.

The Lees of Virginia stayed in politics for a while after the Civil War. Fitzhugh Lee was governor from 1885 until 1890. But his two sons became cavalry officers and his three daughters married army officers (all generals), and after that they were all naval officers or daughters married to generals’ sons. Vice Admiral Fitzhugh Lee was skipper of the carrier *Manila Bay* during the battle for Leyte Gulf. The family had transformed itself into a military dynasty. The Civil War also had an impact on the careers of the Breckinridges, as some of them saw better opportunities available outside the war-torn South and left Kentucky, the seat of their political power.

Only the Frelinghuysens stayed in place. The sixth of the family in Congress, Rodney, today represents the Raritan Valley of New Jersey as his father, Peter, had before him. It is the land where the congressman’s great-great-great-great-great-great grandfather, Theodorus Jacobus Frelinghuysen, settled in January 1720.

Dynasties die, and new dynasties are created, such as the Udalls. Stewart was first elected to Congress from Arizona in 1954. He was succeeded by his brother, Mo, after President Kennedy appointed him secretary of the interior in 1961. In the next generation, Stewart’s son Tom was elected to the U.S. House in 1998 and to the Senate in 2008, representing New Mexico, and Mo’s son Mark was similarly elected to the U.S. House in 1998 and to the Senate in 2008, representing Colorado. Mark, however, was defeated when he ran for reelection in 2014.

The rise and fall of dynasties was on display in the 2014 midterm elections. Besides Mark Udall, others from well-known families who lost Senate

ances were Mark Begich of Alaska, Mark Pryor of Arkansas, Kay Hogan of North Carolina, Michelle Nunn of Georgia, and Mary Landrieu of Louisiana. There was a winner: Shelley Moore Capito, daughter of a West Virginia governor, moved from the House to the Senate. Mary Landrieu's brother was reelected mayor of New Orleans. President Carter's grandson was defeated in his race for governor of Georgia. Gwen Graham, a new member of the U.S. House of Representatives as of 2014, is the daughter of former Senator Bob Graham; and John Dingell, who inherited his seat from his father in 1955, gave up the seat so that his wife Debbie could successfully succeed him.

There will always be dynasties. They will not always be the same ones.

America is a land of past and future dynasties. In this fluid game of getting to dynasty, there is no shortage of applicants. Public service is a worthy goal, and the routes to the top are carefully marked out. One may rise by climbing an elective-office ladder, from city, to state, to Washington, or jump the queue through celebrity status, war heroes preferred, but athletes and actors will do. Ethnic groups need a critical mass and a location from which to stake a claim. Just as the Muhlenbergs worked from a Pennsylvania Dutch power base in the late eighteenth century and the Kennedys followed the Irish to Boston a hundred years later, Little Italy in Baltimore sent Thomas D'Alesandro successively to the Maryland legislature, the Baltimore City Council, the U.S. Congress, and back to the mayor's office. His son also was mayor, and his daughter, Nancy Pelosi, became Speaker of the U.S. House of Representatives. Groups that disperse widely, such as Americans from India, are disadvantaged.

A brand name is a valuable asset—until it isn't—especially in a small state. For half the years between 1804 and 1929, a Bayard represented Delaware in the Senate. Voters can make pre-decisions based on past experiences with a dynastic family—it is comforting and efficient—and if they are wrong, there's always the next election. Congress is full of those who got there largely because their fathers or husbands got there first and then died in office. It would be generous to consider merely father-son or even grandmother-grandson (of which there is one case) relations to be a dynasty, although the media love the word and the temptation. As Diane Kincaid Blair wrote in *Over His Dead Body*, "For women aspiring to serve in Congress, the best husband has been a dead husband, most preferably one serving in Congress at the time of his demise." And as David Brooks has noted, "Now that women are more empowered, each dominant clan has essentially doubled the size of its talent pool, so family influence is increased." Voters

seem to give heirs one free pass, a step up the elective ladder, before the newcomers must prove themselves. Two of FDR's sons won seats in the House of Representatives but were defeated when they tried to climb higher.

From the last two decades of the twentieth century into the next decades of the twenty-first, when the political landscape in the United States appears dominated by two families, there are some who are embarrassed or made uncomfortable by what they perceive as an antidemocratic slide toward government-by-legacy. Or perhaps they just don't like one or the other of the contenders, and blame the American two-party system. What is fascinating about the Bushes and the Clintons in terms of background, style, and personality is that they have nothing in common except a burning desire to get elected president of the United States. A nice irony is that while the Clintons are not a dynasty but would like to be one, the Bushes are a dynasty but deny that they are one.

So one lesson of this study is patience: this too shall pass. A democracy means that any citizen—now male or female—can try to start his or her own dynasty. And as this study shows, many do. The people who try are ambitious and energetic. Some have advantages—life isn't fair. Some have changed history, others have had modest effect. On average, in this opinion, collectively they have been above average. The end result is that America's political dynasties, rather than representing rigidity (as the word "dynasty" might imply), are part of the flux, the rise and fall, of a constantly changing scene.