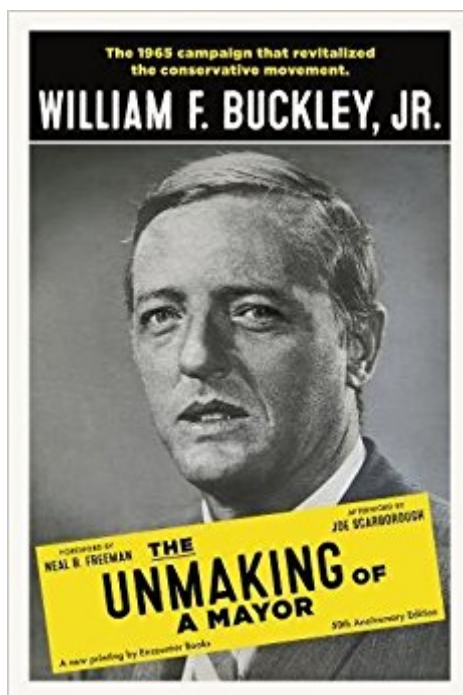


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# The Unmaking Of A Mayor



## Synopsis

John V. Lindsay was elected mayor of New York City in 1965. But that year's mayoral campaign will forever be known as the Buckley campaign. As a candidate, Joseph Alsop conceded, Buckley was cleverer and livelier than either of his rivals. And Murray Kempton concluded that the process which coarsens every other man who enters it has only refined Mr. Buckley. The Unmaking of a Mayor is a time capsule of the political atmosphere of America in the spring of 1965, diagnosing the multitude of ills that plagued New York and other major cities: crime, narcotics, transportation, racial bias, mismanagement, taxes, and the problems of housing, police, and education. Buckley's nimble dissection of these issues constitutes an excellent primer of conservative thought. A good pathologist, Buckley shows that the diseases afflicting New York City in 1965 were by no means of a unique strain, and compared them with issues that beset the country at large. Buckley offers a prescient vision of the Republican Party and America's two-party system that will be of particular interest to today's conservatives. The Unmaking of a Mayor ends with a wistful glance at what might have been in 1965 and what might yet be.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

William F. Buckley, Jr., was the author of fifty previous works of fiction and nonfiction. The founder and former editor-in-chief of National Review and former host of Firing Line, he was one of the intellectual leaders of the right since the 1950s. His syndicated column, "On the Right,"

began in 1962 and appeared in newspapers around the country. He served as a CIA agent in the early 1950s, helped found the Young Americans for Freedom in 1960, and was awarded the Presidential Medal of Freedom by George H.W. Bush in 1991.

The Unmaking of a Mayor is the story of the unique campaign of William F. Buckley, Jr. for New York City Mayor in 1965. At this point in his life, the 39-year-old Buckley had founded National Review, published six books (including *God and Man at Yale*), had a syndicated column in hundreds of newspapers across the country, run the John Birch Society out of the conservative movement, and had energized the conservative wing of the Republican party to a point that it nominated Barry Goldwater for president in 1964. With this long list of accomplishments, why would he run for mayor? That's one of the questions this book answers. In the mid-1960's, many people thought New York City was ungovernable, broken, and on an unreversible course of decline. Many of the city's problems will sound familiar with those of us who remember the period before Rudy Giuliani's election in 1993. Buckley opens the book with an account of the political system of New York, with its intricate third party laws, and follows on with a history of the previous 30 years of governance. Then he delves into what John V. Lindsay, the liberal congressman and presumptive GOP nominee, and Bill Buckley were doing in the spring of 1965. It is customary to call any third party candidate "unserious" because they have no legitimate shot of winning and they typically have a few kook positions. Buckley was under no illusions of his chance at winning. In a famous exchange from the campaign, a reporter asked him what would be the first thing he'd do if he was elected. Buckley quipped, "Demand a recount." But reading his position papers, reprinted in total with reactions from the press and the other candidates, shows he really thought through the problems facing New York. You don't have to agree with all of his proposals, but the position papers were a very compelling and thought-provoking part of the book to read. The typical politician's position papers are vague, gauzy pieces of fluff that aren't worth the paper they're printed on. Candidate Smith promises to balance the budget by eliminating waste and closing loopholes. But Buckley's papers actually offered concrete solutions. Bad Traffic? Reserve one lane in the Holland and Lincoln tunnels for buses. Allow delivery trucks to only park on odd-numbered streets on Mondays and Wednesdays and even-numbered streets on Tuesdays and Fridays. Pollution? Convert city buses to liquefied petroleum gas. Add control devices to city vehicles to reduce emissions. Modernize municipal incinerators. But the position papers also reveal some of the oddities associated with third party candidates. Buckley's traffic proposal included a Bikeway to travel above Second Avenue from 125th Street to 1st Street. His proposal for the drug problem

included moving addicts to special housing so they don't get others addicted to narcotics. His affordable housing platform had something similar. Of course, twenty years after World War II, his opponents pounced on these relocation ideas as "concentration camps". So why did Buckley run? Part of it was to counter the leftward lurch of the Republican party under the leadership of Lindsay and Nelson Rockefeller. Many people were predicting that Lindsay would be the GOP standard bearer in 1968 or 1972 if he became mayor. The other reason was because he saw Lindsay and Abe Beame, the Democratic nominee, as mealy mouthed politicians who would throw bromides at each other and not discuss the things that were actually wrong with New York City. *Unmaking of a Mayor* is a bracing, sometimes hilarious, account of the race and the personalities involved. It shows the difference between career politicians and those with something to say about government. Sometimes I wish people would take more risks and speak plainly about the issues as Buckley did. It's well worth the read for anyone interested in political history, New York history, and public policy.

A great look at the past, reflecting right into our days. Buckley feels familiar and "cozy", while being his raw self! This book is a gem, something I will cherish and read over, and over, and over...Amazing read!

William F Buckley is a giant in the conservative movement. This book documents his third party campaign for mayor of New York. He describes the two party system as ineffective in governing the city. The story remains timely due to the urgent need for reform in the political system nationally in our present day. New York City and state are in even worse shape now

A great bit of history applicable to modern times. It's not possible to read Buckley without being thoroughly entertained.

WFB was sharp as a tack. We need another like him every generation. RIP

Awesome book. A must read.

In 1965, it was generally acknowledged that New York City was in crisis (although things would later get much, much worse). *National Review* editor William F. Buckley ran for mayor that year, in part to attempt to arrest the effort by many Republicans to pull the party leftward after the Goldwater landslide, and "The Unmaking of a Mayor" is a retrospective of the 1965 mayoral race. Buckley limns

the many problems that were facing the Big Apple in the mid-1960s, showing how the city was in decline and discussing the many social and cultural problems of the time. Buckley sets forth his program and explains how he thought the average New York City individual would have benefited from a Buckley victory. Position papers are not compelling reading in most cases, but the author's work on that score is an exception; the papers are a fascinating look at how Buckley would have applied the conservative ideals of individualism and freedom to the city in areas such as water, education, social programs, taxation, crime, housing, pollution, drugs, transportation, and traffic. Buckley knew he was not going to win the election--he was running to set forth his program and influence the direction of the national GOP. Readers in the 2010s will find that many of the concerns about electability versus ideology and purity have not abated with time, and that other issues, such as the mischaracterization of Lincoln, are constants as well. Also touched on is New York State's unique four-party system and its impact on the 1965 mayoral race. An issue that surfaces frequently throughout the book is one that, unfortunately, will be dreadfully familiar to present-day conservatives and especially Tea Partiers: the mischaracterization, demagoguery, and placing in the worst possible light of both conservative candidates for office and their supporters. Many of the ridiculous examples of this phenomenon mentioned inform the reader that demonization of the Right did not begin in the twenty-first century, and that even a candidate as eminently honorable as Buckley was targeted in such a fashion. The look back at the fall campaign is stellar, with compelling notes and vignettes about the weeks leading up to Election Day and the author's recollection of Election Night. Buckley decried how individuals were by 1965 already not looked at as such but instead as members of groups or blocs, and notes other unfortunate trends in our national political life that were already negatively affecting it then but have since gotten far, far worse. It took a lot of courage for Buckley to run on the platform he ran on in one of the most liberal big cities in the country a scant twelve months after the Goldwater landslide. He garnered more than an eighth of the vote on Election Day, a respectable showing, and although John Lindsay was elected mayor, the national Republican Party did not shift heavily to the left in the years after 1965. "The Unmaking of a Mayor," which also includes appendices containing vote statistics and other campaign information, would be of interest to fans of Buckley and anyone interested in the state of conservatism or of New York City a half-century ago.

Great book. As all of his are.

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