



# **John F. Kennedy, Barack Obama, and the Politics of Ethnic Incorporation and Avoidance (SUNY series in African American Studies)**

*Robert C. Smith*

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*Fascinating look at the challenges faced by John F. Kennedy and Barack Obama in their quests to win the presidency.*

Political analysts and journalists often draw analogies between John F. Kennedy, the first Catholic Irish president, and Barack Obama, the first African American president. Their election to the nation's highest office was historic, but for reasons not fully appreciated. In *John F. Kennedy, Barack Obama, and the Politics of Ethnic Incorporation and Avoidance*, Robert C. Smith provides a fascinating comparison of the challenges both men faced in their bid for the presidency, while at the same time providing comparative histories of the Catholic Irish and African American struggles to overcome racial and religious subordination in America. Kennedy's Catholicism was an explicit issue in the 1960 election, and once elected he was extremely careful to avoid appearing either "too Irish" or "too Catholic." While Obama's race was not an explicit issue in the 2008 election, he was just as careful to avoid appearing "too black." Paradoxically religion—thanks to rumors and lies about whether Obama was a Muslim—became a substitute for race, allowing Republican strategists to "otherize" Obama by raising the issue of religion in the context of national security and terrorism.

"Smith provides an important comparative and historical assessment of the elections of John Kennedy and Barack Obama." — *CHOICE*

"This book is a major contribution to the study of the presidency and ethnic, religious, and race relations. The scholarship is careful, nuanced, discerning, and learned." — Randall Kennedy, author of *The Persistence of the Color Line: Racial Politics and the Obama Presidency*

Robert C. Smith is Professor of Political Science at San Francisco State University. He is the author of several books, including *Conservatism and Racism, and Why in America They Are the Same*; *African American Leadership* (with Ronald W. Walters); *We Have No Leaders: African Americans in the Post-Civil Rights Era*; *Racism in the Post-Civil Rights Era: Now You See It, Now You Don't*; and *Race, Class, and Culture: A Study in Afro-American Mass Opinion* (with Richard Seltzer), all published by SUNY Press.

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