

# ★ THE CHOICE ★

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International

# ★ THE CHOICE ★ 2008

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It has been called one of the most historic presidential elections in our nation's history—Barack Obama versus John McCain. It is a race that pits the iconoclast against the newcomer, the heroic prisoner of war against the first African American nominated by a major party. FRONTLINE's critically acclaimed series *The Choice* returns this election season to examine the rich personal and political biographies of these two men in *The Choice 2008*.

The film draws on in-depth interviews with the advisers, family and friends closest to these unlikely candidates, as well as with seasoned observers of American politics, who together tell the definitive story of these men and their ascent to their party's nominations. In an unprecedented election year, FRONTLINE goes behind the headlines to tell a deeper political story about the candidates, the decisions they made and why their nominations may indicate a historic change in American politics.

The story begins at the Democratic Convention in 2004 when Barack Obama, a little-known candidate for the US Senate from Illinois, stepped forward to tell his personal story and to call for a move beyond partisan politics.

Also that summer, the future Republican nominee John McCain, a self-described maverick and sometime adversary of the Bush administration, took the stage at his party's convention to defend the president's national security policy. In an effort to win the support of his party, the longtime senator from Arizona had decided to try to walk a fine line—a line he had had trouble walking all his life—between being an unconventional outsider and a team player.

FRONTLINE follows the two candidates from deep inside their campaigns as they run the gauntlet of the 2008 primary. In the summer of 2007, only months after McCain had officially launched his campaign, he was declared a “dead man walking” by the media and party leaders. But McCain persevered. FRONTLINE tells the dramatic story of this turnaround, with insiders involved every step of the way, which friends say was reminiscent of his determination during his time as a prisoner of war in Vietnam.

At the same time, an Obama candidacy was still seen as a curiosity by the Washington punditry. He was a newcomer to national politics and facing the formidable political team of Hillary and Bill Clinton, but Obama and his advisers sensed an opening. One key to that strategy, Obama told his advisers, was to avoid being pigeonholed as an “African American politician.” But as the contest between Obama and Clinton heated up, comments by former President Clinton and the release of the Rev. Jeremiah Wright tapes brought the issue of race, always lurking, to the forefront of the primary campaign.

With the race narrowed to two men—one whose life was focused by his military service and his years as a POW in Hanoi, the other a black child raised by his white family who found identity in grassroots organizing and politics in the African American community of Chicago—America is truly at a crossroads.

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CREDITS

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A FRONTLINE co-production with Kirk Documentary Group, Ltd. For WGBH/Boston

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