

# The REAL Race Begins...



Round One:  
Senator Kerry  
shoots some  
harsh criticism at  
President Bush.

## Kerry and Bush running neck to neck after first presidential debate



“This president has made, I regret to say, a colossal error of judgment. And judgment is what we look for in the president.” Those words were issued from Senator John Kerry of Massachusetts on Thursday night at the University of Miami, the first

presidential debate. By the end of the ninety minute debate, Kerry supporters were on their feet, cheering for their candidate. On the other hand, Bush supporters, sitting in another room, suffered a not too pleasant surprise. A new race had begun.

**VOTER REACTIONS** Most voters who saw the debate agreed that Kerry was the victor. The reasons? Well, the senator kept his cool and confidence, while the president showed irritation and frustration on his face when harshly criticized.

**DEBATE FOCUSES** The first debate focused on Iraq, homeland security, and terrorism. Kerry claimed that Bush had made a “colossal error” in invading Iraq, instead of focusing on Osama bin Laden. He went on to say, “Saddam Hussein did not attack us, Osama bin Laden attacked us.” This simple statement left a thoroughly vexed Bush fumbling awkwardly for an answer. He ended up saying, “Of course I know Osama bin

Laden attacked us. I know that.”

Bush retaliated by insistently repeating that Kerry was a flip-flopper and charging him with changing positions on the war in Iraq. “You cannot lead if you send mixed messages,” emphasized the president.



**EVALUATION** How did each candidate do? When talking



A record number of 63 million voters watched Thursday night’s debate. Here’s a look at the statistics for their reactions to round one.

	KERRY	BUSH
Winner	61%	19%
Better command of the facts	56%	37%
More personally likeable	47% (surprise-Kerry’s usually depicted as verbose and aloof)	41% (Uh-oh, Bush needs to fix his attitude)
More confident	62%	26%
Stronger leader onstage	47%	44%
Newsweek poll	47%	45%
Previous Newsweek poll	43%	49%

about appearance, Kerry seemed to do better. While the president seemed defensive and annoyed at times, the senator stayed cool and confident, often looking at his notes while Bush was talking.

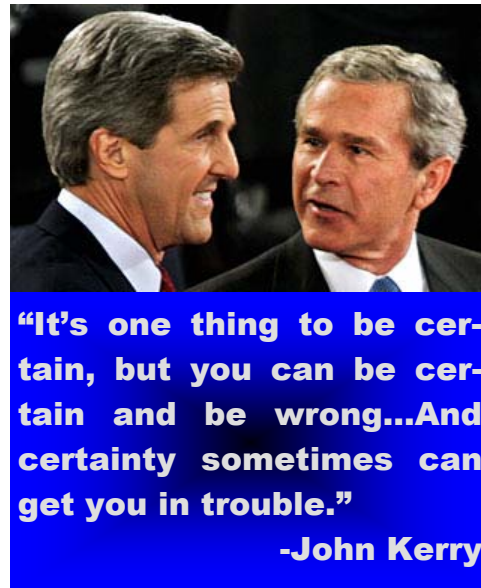
Bush defended his policies better than he hid his frustration. In addition to holding on to his convictions, Bush stressed that Kerry was inconsistent.

On the other hand, Senator Kerry defended himself, saying, "...I made a mistake in how I talk about the war. But the president made a mistake in invading Iraq. Which is worse?"

**"You cannot lead if you send mixed messages."  
-George W. Bush**

**IMPROVEMENTS** Both candidates have room for improvement. Kerry has to assure voters that he has not been inconsistent and defend his Senate record.

Bush needs to appear more confident and less defensive, in addition to being more prepared. According to Newsweek's Jonathan Alter, Bush is "unaccustomed to facing harsh criticism." He "makes decisions by instinct, then he sticks with them. It's what makes him a good politician and a poor chief executive at the same time."



**WHAT'S NEXT?** The next debate between the two candidates will be in St. Louis. It will focus on domestic and tax issues. Although Kerry won the first debate, he will now have to defend his long Senate record, which Bush will undoubtedly attack.

Historically, televised debates have often affected elections, especially close ones like this year's. Now, the battle will be fiercer than ever. Bush will have to improve his demeanor, or he may find his votes walking away from him.

And find himself in office for only three more months.

**By CONNIE**

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