

The Atlantic PRESENTS

SPECIAL
COMMEMORATIVE
ISSUE

Introduction by
BILL CLINTON

JFK

IN HIS TIME AND OURS

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IMAGES**
and
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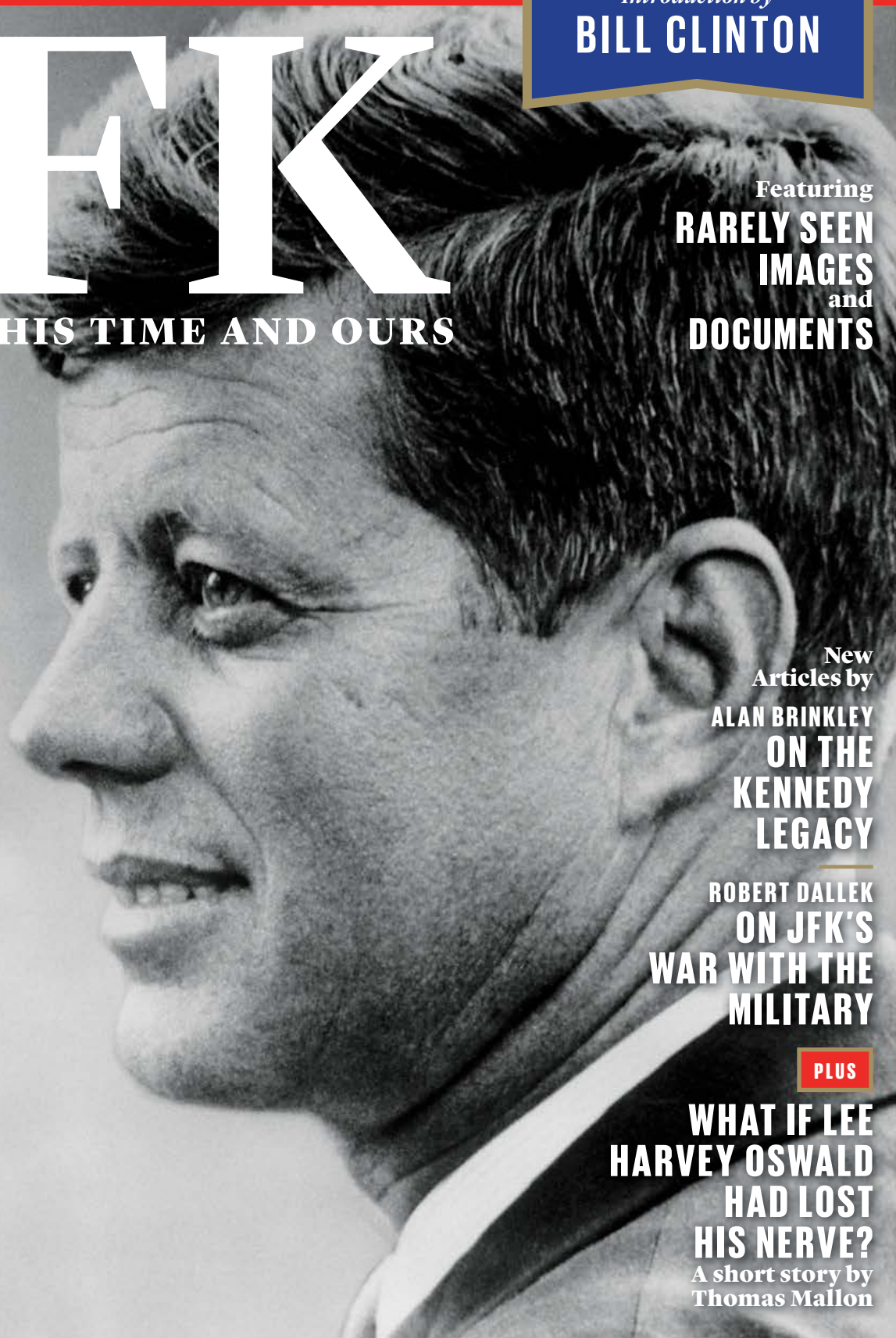
**ALAN BRINKLEY
ON THE
KENNEDY
LEGACY**

**ROBERT DALLEK
ON JFK'S
WAR WITH THE
MILITARY**

PLUS

**WHAT IF LEE
HARVEY OSWALD
HAD LOST
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THE MAN AND THE MYTHS

AFTER JOHN FITZGERALD KENNEDY was assassinated 50 years ago, *The Atlantic* published “Death of a Man,” John L’Heureux’s poem eulogizing the president as a “man of goodness” whose killing at 46 was permitted by God for reasons “we do not ripely understand.” Kennedy, a president with a sufficiently rounded appreciation of politics to call poetry “the means of saving power from itself” (see page 16), had a particular appeal to the nation’s artists.

“Let mankind hobble home now on its knees,” L’Heureux wrote.

When we contacted the poet, now a professor emeritus at Stanford University, to ask whether we could republish his poem, he said that he had one condition: that we delete a line in which he described Kennedy’s “lifeless body cradled by his queen in life.”

L’Heureux, who was a Jesuit seminarian when he wrote these verses, told me he almost instantly regretted the line, and long ago stopped reciting it when he read the poem aloud. “It played into the whole notion of eternal trumpets and the planets stopping in their course—the exaggeration of the death of a superhero, rather than of a man who had good intentions,” he said. The poem, pruned of its one purple blossom, appears on page 117.

To accompany the new stories we commissioned for this issue, we drilled into *The Atlantic*’s archive and extracted what amounts to a core sample of views, from across the political seasons, of Jack Kennedy. New and old, the pieces collected here reveal the many sources—the glamour, the drama of his era, the shock of his death, the revelations over the years of his private pains, doubts, and cruelties—of Kennedy’s continued hold on the national imagination. They also reveal how contingent our judgments can be—the judgments not just of journalism, but of poetry and history.

In what seem now to have been more-leisurely decades, at least for the analysis of news, *The Atlantic* published a monthly “Report on Washington” to inform its readers of the views of those who would one day be known as Beltway insiders (that highway was completed in 1964). You can see a familiar arc of White House coverage, from a gimlet-eyed account of Kennedy’s political tactics (page 28), to hosannas for an “energetic new president” (page 47), to—by the time of our Report of July 1963—eye-rolling familiarity and sighing disappointment (page 60):

Probably no other sentence he has uttered has proved more embarrassing to the president than his eloquent inaugural plea: “Ask not what your country can do for you—ask what you can do for your country.” That simplicity of phrase brought a chorus of “What do you want us to do?” to which there has been precious little response.

By the December 1963 issue (which went off to the printer before the president was murdered on November 22), the Report noted “an unpleasant air of defeatism in Washington” and observed, “The administration has come almost full cycle from the cry of what can be done to the cry of what cannot be done ... It will be interesting to see what tone he adopts in his reelection campaign ... to persuade the country that the dynamism of his administration has not been lost.”

After the assassination, *The Atlantic*’s tone changed again.

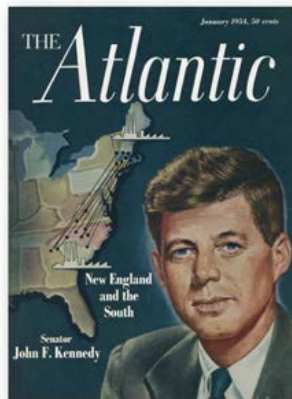
“President Kennedy did not let America sleep,” we reported in January 1964, praising his handling of the Cuban missile crisis as having halted Russia decisively. By the February issue, the historian Samuel Eliot Morison was extolling Kennedy’s courage and comparing the significance of his decision making to Lincoln’s. “Alas, that we shall never again see that bright, vivid personality, whose every act and every appearance made us proud of him, and who gave us fresh confidence in our country, even in ourselves.”

With our later coverage come less flattering insights: his temporizing on poverty, his deceptions about the powerful drugs he was taking for various ailments, his philandering. *The Atlantic*’s earlier praise for Kennedy’s handling of the Cuban missile crisis disintegrates as you read Garry Wills’s 1982 account of how Kennedy recklessly provoked and then pursued the confrontation, bringing the world to the brink of nuclear war.

And yet today we find historians still struggling to complete a picture that grows more complex with the years. In his new examination for this issue, Robert Dallek reports that Kennedy, during the Cuban crisis, faced down trigger-happy generals who were demanding air strikes and accusing the president of appeasement.

Perhaps we can’t, anymore, simply praise Kennedy. But neither can we bury him. For his part, John L’Heureux, like President Clinton (see the next page), now admires Kennedy for having succeeded in laying the foundation for Lyndon Johnson’s subsequent progress on civil rights. “Laying foundations,” L’Heureux told me, “is no small thing.”

—James Bennet



New from “Kennedy’s leading biographer” (*The New York Times*)

ROBERT DALLEK
**CAMELOT’S
COURT**

Inside the Kennedy White House



“Dallek is a master of the
biographical craft.”

—*The Boston Globe*

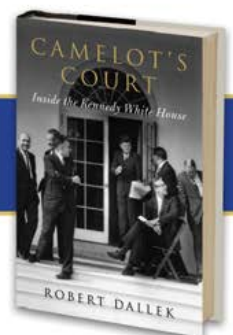
“One of our finest
historians.”

—James MacGregor Burns

A riveting, authoritative portrait of JFK
and his inner circle of advisers



On Sale October 8th



Passing the Torch

The 42nd president assesses the civil-rights accomplishments of the 35th.

By BILL CLINTON

PRESIDENT KENNEDY took office with great gifts and great promise in a time of challenges and change at home and abroad. He embodied the changing times, and he embraced the challenges with courage and vigor. In doing so, he grew on the job and made an enduring contribution to our ongoing efforts to form “a more perfect union.”

As a candidate, Kennedy had memorably reached out to Coretta Scott King when her husband, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., was arrested while leading a protest in Atlanta; once president, his actions were shaped by pragmatism as well as principle, by outside forces as well as inner conviction. So by the spring of 1963—the last spring of his life—he had arrived at a place where he could deliver a televised speech from the Oval Office on civil rights and segregation. And his fellow Americans had arrived at a place where they were at least willing to listen.

In that speech, on June 11, he made the case that the denial of basic civil rights to Americans of color wasn’t a partisan issue, a regional issue, or even, as he said, a legal or legislative issue alone—rather, he asked all who watched to broaden their idea of a common humanity:

If an American, because his skin is dark, cannot eat lunch in a restaurant open to the public, if he cannot send his children to the best public school available, if he cannot vote for the public officials who will represent him, if, in short, he cannot enjoy the full and free life which all of us want, then who among us would be content to have the color of his skin changed and stand in his place? Who among us would then be content with the counsels of patience and delay?



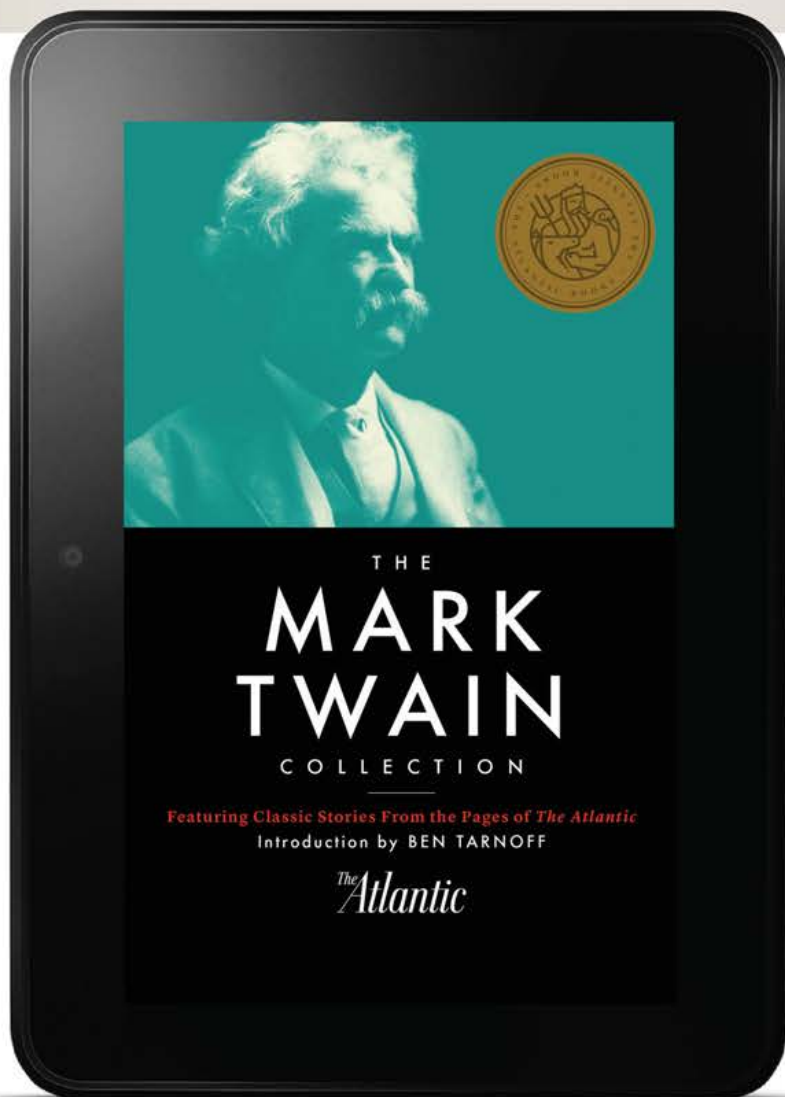
While Kennedy was clearly aiming the definition of *us* at a white American audience, he was also asking that audience to expand its definition of *us* by imagining how others experienced racism and segregation. For those who could do so, African Americans were no longer *them*, but a part of *us*.

President Kennedy’s embrace of our common humanity is also reflected in many of the initiatives he proposed or enacted yet didn’t live to see bear fruit, among them the Civil Rights Act, the Food Stamp Act, an improved free-school-lunch program for poor children, and, abroad, the Peace Corps and the Alliance for Progress. Though his death was a tragedy we still mourn, he left behind legions of his fellow Americans and people the world over who embraced his vision and picked up the torch he lit. ▣

↑ **President Kennedy greets 16-year-old Bill Clinton in the Rose Garden of the White House, at an American Legion Boys Nation event, on July 24, 1963.**



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Historians tend to rate JFK as a good president, not a great one. But Americans consistently give him the highest approval rating of any president since Franklin D. Roosevelt. Why? Not only because of Kennedy's youthful dynamism, his grace, and the tragic drama of his death, but also because he's a powerful symbol of a lost moment, a time of soaring idealism when Americans believed the country could accomplish anything.

The Legacy *of* John F. Kennedy

By ALAN BRINKLEY

FALL 2013



• Six days before the 1960 election, in an anteroom of the Cow Palace, near San Francisco, the Democratic presidential nominee looks over a campaign speech.

AMONG THE MANY MONUMENTS to John F. Kennedy, perhaps the most striking is the Sixth Floor Museum in Dallas, in the building that was once the Texas School Book Depository. Every year, nearly 350,000 people visit the place where Lee Harvey Oswald waited on November 22, 1963, to shoot at the president's motorcade. The museum itself is an oddity because of its physical connection to the event it illuminates; the most memorable—and eeriest—moment of a visit to the sixth floor is when you turn a corner and face the window through which Oswald fired his rifle as Kennedy's open car snaked through Dealey Plaza's broad spaces below. The windows are cluttered once again with cardboard boxes, just as they had been on that sunny afternoon when Oswald hid there.

Visitors from all over the world have signed their names in the memory books, and many have written tributes: "Our greatest President." "Oh how we miss him!" "The greatest man since Jesus Christ." At least as many visitors write about the possible conspiracies that led to JFK's assassination. The contradictory realities of Kennedy's life don't match his global reputation. But in the eyes of the world, this reticent man became a charismatic leader who, in his life and in his death, served as a symbol of purpose and hope.

President Kennedy spent less than three years in the White House. His first year was a disaster, as he himself acknowledged. The Bay of Pigs invasion of Communist Cuba was only the first in a series of failed efforts to undo Fidel Castro's regime. His 1961 summit meeting in Vienna with the Soviet leader Nikita Khrushchev was a humiliating experience. Most of his legislative proposals died on Capitol Hill.

Yet he was also responsible for some extraordinary accomplishments. The most important, and most famous, was his adept management of the Cuban missile crisis in 1962, widely considered the most perilous moment since World War II. Most of his military advisers—and they were not alone—believed the United States should bomb the missile pads that the Soviet Union was stationing in Cuba. Kennedy, aware of the danger of escalating the crisis, instead ordered a blockade of Soviet ships. In the end, a peaceful agreement

was reached. Afterward, both Kennedy and Khrushchev began to soften the relationship between Washington and Moscow.

Kennedy, during his short presidency, proposed many important steps forward. In an address at American University in 1963, he spoke kindly of the Soviet Union, thereby easing the Cold War. The following day, after almost two years of mostly avoiding the issue of civil rights, he delivered a speech of exceptional elegance, and launched a drive for a civil-rights bill that he hoped would end racial segregation. He also proposed a voting-rights bill and federal programs to provide health care to the elderly and the poor. Few of these proposals became law in his lifetime—a great disappointment to Kennedy, who was never very successful with Congress. But most of these bills became law after his death—in part because of his successor's political skill, but also because they seemed like a monument to a martyred president.

Kennedy was the youngest man ever elected to the presidency, succeeding the man who, at the time, was the oldest. He symbolized—as he well realized—a new generation and its coming-of-age. He was the first president born in the 20th century, the first young veteran of World War II to reach the White House. John Hersey's powerful account of Kennedy's wartime bravery, published in *The New Yorker* in 1944, helped him launch his political career.

In shaping his legend, Kennedy's personal

↓ **Hundreds of thousands of tourists each year peer through a sixth-floor window at the Texas School Book Depository, where the Warren Commission determined that Lee Harvey Oswald fired his rifle as Kennedy's motorcade passed through Dealey Plaza below.**



DONNA McWILLIAM/AP

charm helped. A witty and articulate speaker, he seemed built for the age of television. To watch him on film today is to be struck by the power of his presence and the wit and elegance of his oratory. His celebrated inaugural address was filled with phrases that seemed designed to be carved in stone, as many of them have been. Borrowing a motto from his prep-school days, putting *your country* in place of *Choate*, he exhorted Americans: “Ask not what your country can do for you—ask what you can do for your country.”

Another contributor to the Kennedy legend, something deeper than his personal attractiveness, is the image of what many came to call grace. He not only *had* grace, in the sense of performing and acting gracefully; he was also a man who seemed to *receive* grace. He was handsome and looked athletic. He was wealthy. He had a captivating wife and children, a photogenic family. A friend of his, the journalist Ben Bradlee, wrote a 1964 book about Kennedy called *That Special Grace*.

The Kennedys lit up the White House with writers, artists, and intellectuals: the famous cellist Pablo Casals, the poet Robert Frost, the French intellectual André Malraux. Kennedy had graduated from Harvard, and stocked his administration with the school’s professors. He sprinkled his public remarks with quotations from poets and philosophers.

The Kennedy family helped create his career and, later, his legacy. He could never have reached the presidency without his father’s help. Joseph Kennedy, one of the wealthiest and most ruthless men in America, had counted on his first son, Joe Jr., to enter politics. When Joe died in the war, his father’s ambitions turned to the next-oldest son. He paid for all of John’s—Jack’s—campaigns and used his millions to bring in supporters. He prevailed on his friend Arthur Krock, of *The New York Times*, to help Jack publish his first book, *Why England Slept*. Years later, when Kennedy wrote *Profiles in Courage* with the help of his aide Theodore Sorensen, Krock lobbied successfully for the book to win a Pulitzer Prize.

The Kennedy legacy has a darker side as well. Prior to his presidency, many of JFK’s political colleagues considered him merely a playboy whose wealthy father had bankrolled his campaigns. Many critics saw recklessness, impatience, impetuosity. Nigel Hamilton, the

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author of *JFK: Reckless Youth*, a generally admiring study of Kennedy’s early years, summed up after nearly 800 pages:

He had the brains, the courage, a shy charisma, good looks, idealism, money ... Yet, as always, there was something missing—a certain depth or seriousness of purpose ... Once the voters or the women were won, there was a certain vacuousness on Jack’s part, a failure to turn conquest into anything very meaningful or profound.

I. F. Stone, the distinguished liberal writer, observed in 1973: “By now he is simply an optical illusion.”

Kennedy’s image of youth and vitality is, to some degree, a myth. He spent much of his life in hospitals, battling a variety of ills. His ability to serve as president was itself a profile in courage.

Much has been written about Kennedy’s covert private life. Like his father, he was obsessed with the ritual of sexual conquest—before and during his marriage, before and during his presidency. While he was alive, the many women, the Secret Service agents, and the others who knew of his philandering kept it a secret. Still, now that the stories of his sexual activities are widely known, they have done little to tarnish his reputation.

HALF A CENTURY after his presidency, the endurance of Kennedy’s appeal is not simply the result of a crafted image and personal charm. It also reflects the historical moment in which he emerged. In the early 1960s, much of the American public was willing, even eager, to believe that he was the man who would “get the country moving again,” at a time when much of the country was ready to move. Action and dynamism were central to Kennedy’s appeal. During his 1960 presidential campaign, he kept sniping at the Republicans for eight years of stagnation: “I have premised my campaign for the presidency on the single assumption that the American people are uneasy at the present drift in our national course ... and that they have the will and the strength to start the United States moving again.” As the historian Arthur M. Schlesinger Jr., Kennedy’s friend and adviser, later wrote, “The capital city, somnolent in the Eisenhower

years, had suddenly come alive ... [with] the release of energy which occurs when men with ideas have a chance to put them into practice.”

Kennedy helped give urgency to the idea of pursuing a national purpose—a great American mission. In the 15 years since World War II, ideological momentum had been slowly building in the United States, fueled by anxieties about the rivalry with the Soviet Union and by optimism about the dynamic performance of the American economy.

When Kennedy won the presidency, the desire for change was still tentative, as his agonizingly thin margin over Richard Nixon suggests. But it was growing, and Kennedy seized the moment to provide a mission—or at least he grasped the need for one—even though it was not entirely clear what the mission was. Early in his tenure, a Defense Department official wrote a policy paper that expressed a curious mix of urgent purpose and vague goals:

The United States needs a *Grand Objective* ... We behave as if our real objective is to sit by our pools contemplating the spare tires around our middles ... The key consideration is not that the Grand Objective be exactly right, it is that we *have* one and that we start moving toward it.

This reflected John Kennedy’s worldview, one of commitment, action, movement. Those who knew him realized, however, that he was more cautious than his speeches suggested.

JOHAN F. KENNEDY was a good president but not a great one, most scholars concur. A poll of historians in 1982 ranked him 13th out of the 36 presidents included in the survey. Thirteen such polls from 1982 to 2011 put him, on average, 12th. Richard Neustadt, the prominent presidential scholar, revered Kennedy during his lifetime and was revered by Kennedy in turn. Yet in the 1970s, he remarked: “He will be just a flicker, forever clouded by the record of his successors. I don’t think history will have much space for John Kennedy.”

But 50 years after his death, Kennedy is far from “just a flicker.” He remains a powerful symbol of a lost moment, of a soaring idealism and hopefulness that subsequent generations still try to recover. His allure—the romantic, almost mystic, associations his



**HIS ALLURE—
THE
ROMANTIC,
ALMOST
MYSTIC,
ASSOCIATIONS
HIS NAME
EVOKES—
NOT ONLY
SURVIVES
BUT
FLOURISHES.**

name evokes—not only survives but flourishes. The journalist and historian Theodore White, who was close to Kennedy, published a famous interview for *Life* magazine with Jackie Kennedy shortly after her husband’s assassination, in which she said:

At night, before we’d go to sleep, Jack liked to play some records; and the song he loved most came at the very end of this record. The lines he loved to hear were: *Don’t let it be forgot, that once there was a spot, for one brief shining moment that was known as Camelot.*

And thus a lyric became the lasting image of his presidency.

White, in his memoirs, recalled the reverence Kennedy had inspired among his friends:

I still have difficulty seeing John F. Kennedy clear. The image of him that comes back to me ... is so clean and graceful—almost as if I can still see him skip up the steps of his airplane in that half lope, and then turn, flinging out his arm in farewell to the crowd, before disappearing inside. It was a ballet movement.

Friends were not the only ones enchanted by the Kennedy mystique. He was becoming a magnetic figure even during his presidency. By the middle of 1963, 59 percent of Americans



surveyed claimed that they had voted for him in 1960, although only 49.7 percent of voters had actually done so. After his death, his landslide grew to 65 percent. In Gallup's public-opinion polls, he consistently has the highest approval rating of any president since Franklin D. Roosevelt.

The circumstances of Kennedy's death turned him into a national obsession. A vast number of books have been published about his assassination, most of them rejecting the Warren Commission's conclusion that Lee Harvey Oswald acted alone. After the assassination, even Robert F. Kennedy, the president's brother, spent hours—perhaps days—phoning people to ask whether there had been a conspiracy, until he realized that his inquiries could damage his own career. To this day, about 60 percent of Americans believe that Kennedy fell victim to a conspiracy.

"There was a heroic grandeur to John F. Kennedy's administration that had nothing to do with the mists of Camelot," David Talbot, the founder of *Salon*, wrote several years ago. His book *Brothers: The Hidden History of the Kennedy Years*, more serious than most Kennedy conspiracy theories, suggested that the president's bold, progressive goals—and the dangers he posed to entrenched interests—inspired a plot to take his life.

↑ **Past 7:30 one evening, seven weeks into his presidency, JFK autographs copies of his official portrait and chats by phone with Pierre Salinger, his press secretary.**

There are many reasons to question the official version of Kennedy's murder. But there is little concrete evidence to prove any of the theories—that the Mafia, the FBI, the CIA, or even Lyndon B. Johnson was involved. Some people say his death was a result of Washington's covert efforts to kill Castro. For many Americans, it stretches credulity to accept that an event so epochal can be explained as the act of a still-mysterious loner.

Well before the public began feasting on conspiracy theories, Kennedy's murder reached mythic proportions. In his 1965 book, *A Thousand Days*, Schlesinger used words so effusive that they seem unctuous today, though at the time they were not thought excessive or mawkish: "It was all gone now," he wrote of the assassination: "the life-affirming, life-enhancing zest, the brilliance, the wit, the cool commitment, the steady purpose."

Like all presidents, Kennedy had successes and failures. His administration was dominated by a remarkable number of problems and crises—in Berlin, Cuba, Laos, and Vietnam; and in Georgia, Mississippi, and Alabama. Some of these, he managed adroitly and, at times, courageously. Many, he could not resolve. He was a reserved, pragmatic man who almost never revealed passion.

Yet many people saw him—and still do—as an idealistic and, yes, passionate president who would have transformed the nation and the world, had he lived. His legacy has only grown in the 50 years since his death. That he still embodies a rare moment of public activism explains much of his continuing appeal: He reminds many Americans of an age when it was possible to believe that politics could speak to society's moral yearnings and be harnessed to its highest aspirations. More than anything, perhaps, Kennedy reminds us of a time when the nation's capacities looked limitless, when its future seemed unbounded, when Americans believed that they could solve hard problems and accomplish bold deeds. **A**

Alan Brinkley, a professor of American history at Columbia University, is the author of John F. Kennedy (2012) and Liberalism and Its Discontents (1998), which served as sources for this article. An excerpt from his father's work appears on page 68.

1

The

MAN

Though raised in a wealthy and politically accomplished family, the young John F. Kennedy did not find life easy. But the perils he overcame, in his health and in war, shaped a character that would serve him well in the White House.

• A young man with all the advantages, 21-year-old JFK arrives back in the States in September 1938, after a summer vacation in Europe, to start his junior year at Harvard.



The Purpose

“When power corrupts, poetry cleanses,” Kennedy declared in his paean to the role of artists as critics of society.



Robert Frost held a special place in President Kennedy's intellectual pantheon. Frost died in January 1963, at age 88. The following October, Amherst College held a groundbreaking ceremony for the Robert Frost Library. Kennedy traveled to Massachusetts to deliver this speech; a month later, he, too, was dead.

In publishing the remarks after Kennedy's murder, The Atlantic noted that he “identified himself, as no president before him has done so poignantly, with ‘books and men and learning.’”

OUR NATIONAL strength matters; but the spirit which informs and controls our strength matters just as much. This was the special significance of Robert Frost.

He brought an unsparing instinct for reality to bear on the platitudes and pieties of society. His sense of the human tragedy fortified him against self-deception and easy consolation.

“I have been,” he wrote, “one acquainted with the night.” And because he knew the midnight as well as the high noon, because he understood the ordeal as well as the triumph of the human



of Poetry

By
JOHN F.
KENNEDY
FEBRUARY 1964

ORIGINALLY TITLED
"POETRY AND POWER"

spirit, he gave his age strength with which to overcome despair.

At bottom, he held a deep faith in the spirit of man. And it is hardly an accident that Robert Frost coupled poetry and power, for he saw poetry as the means of saving power from itself.

When power leads man toward arrogance, poetry reminds him of his limitations. When power narrows the areas of man's concern, poetry reminds him of the richness and diversity of his existence. When power corrupts, poetry cleanses, for art establishes the basic human truths which must serve as the touchstone of our judgment. The artist, however faithful to his personal vision of reality, becomes the last champion of the individual mind and sensibility against an intrusive society and an officious state. The great artist is thus a solitary figure. He has, as Frost said, "a lover's quarrel with the world." In pursuing his perceptions of reality he must often sail against the currents of his time. This is not a popular role. If Robert Frost was much honored during his lifetime, it was because a good many preferred to ignore his darker truths. Yet in retrospect, we see how the artist's fidelity has strengthened the fiber of our national life.

If sometimes our great artists have been the most critical of our society, it is because their sensitivity and their concern for justice, which must motivate any true artist, make them aware that our nation falls short of its highest potential.

I see little of more importance to the future of our country and our civilization than full recognition of the place of the artist. If art is to nourish the roots of our culture, society must set the artist free to follow his vision wherever it takes him.

We must never forget that art is not a form of propaganda; it is a form of truth. And as

[Archibald] MacLeish once remarked of poets, "There is nothing worse for our trade than to be in style."

In free society art is not a weapon, and it does not belong to the spheres of polemics and ideology. Artists are not engineers of the soul. It may be different elsewhere. But in a democratic society the highest duty of the writer, the composer, the artist, is to remain true to himself and to let the chips fall where they may. In serving his vision of the truth, the artist best serves his nation. And the nation which disdains the mission of art invites the fate of Robert Frost's hired man—the fate of having "nothing to look backward to with pride, And nothing to look forward to with hope."

I look forward to a great future for America—a future in which our country will match its military strength with our moral strength, its wealth with our wisdom, its power with our purpose. I look forward to an America which will not be afraid of grace and beauty, which will protect the beauty of our natural environment, which will preserve the great old American houses and squares and parks of our national past, and which will build handsome and balanced cities for our future.

I look forward to an America which will reward achievement in the arts as we reward achievement in business or statecraft.

I look forward to an America which will steadily raise the standards of artistic accomplishment and which will steadily enlarge cultural opportunities for all of our citizens.

And I look forward to an America which commands respect throughout the world, not only for its strength but for its civilization as well.

And I look forward to a world which will be safe not only for democracy and diversity but also for personal distinction. ▀

⬆ JFK chats with
Robert Frost in
the Green Room of the
White House on the
president's third day
in office.

ASSOCIATED PRESS

The Medical Ordeals of JFK

The core of the Kennedy image was, in many respects, a lie. A presidential biographer, granted access to medical files, portrays a man far sicker than the public knew. What Kennedy was able to accomplish in spite of his physical debilities was heroic.

By **ROBERT DALLEK**

DECEMBER 2002

→ **Accompanied by his wife and two attendants, Senator Kennedy is wheeled out of a New York hospital just before Christmas in 1954, after back surgery. He worked on *Profiles in Courage* during his several months of convalescence.**

THE LIFELONG HEALTH problems of John F. Kennedy constitute one of the best-kept secrets of recent U.S. history—no surprise, because if the extent of those problems had been revealed while he was alive, his presidential ambitions would likely have been dashed. Kennedy, like so many of his predecessors, was more intent on winning the presidency than on revealing himself to the public. On one level this secrecy can be taken as another stain on his oft-criticized character, a deception maintained at the potential expense of the citizens he was elected to lead. Yet there is another way of viewing the silence regarding his health—as the quiet stoicism of a man struggling to endure extraordinary pain and distress and performing his presidential (and pre-presidential) duties largely undeterred by his physical suffering. Does this not also speak to his character, but in a more complex way? ...

Evidence of Kennedy's medical problems has been trickling out for years. In 1960, during the fight for the Democratic nomination, John Connally and India Edwards, aides to Lyndon B. Johnson, told the press—correctly—that Kennedy suffered from Addison's disease, a condition of the adrenal glands characterized by a deficiency of the hormones needed to regulate blood sugar, sodium and potassium, and the response to stress. They described the problem as life-threatening and requiring regular doses of cortisone. The Kennedys publicly denied the allegation ...

It appears that Richard Nixon may have tried at one point to gain access to Kennedy's medical history. In the fall of 1960, as he and JFK battled in what turned out to be one of the closest presidential elections ever, thieves ransacked the office of Eugene J. Cohen, a New York endocrinologist who had been treating Kennedy for Addison's disease. When they failed to find Kennedy's records, which were filed under a code name, they tried unsuccessfully to break into the office of Janet Travell, an internist and pharmacologist who had been relieving Kennedy's back pain with injections of procaine (an agent similar to lidocaine). Although the thieves remain unidentified, it is reasonable to speculate that they were Nixon operatives; the failed



robberies have the aura of Watergate and of the break-in at the Beverly Hills office of Daniel Ellsberg's psychiatrist.

Using personal letters, Navy records, and oral histories, biographers and historians over the past 20 years have begun to fill in a picture of Jack Kennedy as ill and ailment-ridden for his entire life—a far cry from the paragon of vigor (or “vigah,” in the family's distinctive Massachusetts accent) that the Kennedys presented. After a sickly childhood he spent significant periods during his prep-school and college years in the hospital for severe intestinal ailments, infections, and what doctors thought for a time was leukemia. He suffered from ulcers and colitis as well as Addison's disease, which necessitated the administration of regular steroid treatments. And it has been known for some time that Kennedy endured terrible back trouble. He wrote his book *Profiles in Courage* while recovering from back surgery in 1954 that almost killed him.

But the full extent of Kennedy's medical ordeals has not been known until now. Earlier this year a small committee of Kennedy-administration friends and associates agreed to open a collection of his papers for the years 1955–63. I was given access to these newly released materials, which included X-rays and prescription records from Janet Travell's files. Together with recent research and a growing understanding of medical science, the newly available records allow us to construct an authoritative account of JFK's medical tribulations. And they add telling detail to a story of lifelong suffering, revealing that many of the various treatments doctors gave Kennedy, starting when he was a boy, did far more harm than good. In particular, steroid treatments that he may have received as a young man for his intestinal ailments could have compounded—and perhaps even caused—both the Addison's disease and the degenerative back trouble that plagued him later in life. Travell's prescription records also confirm that during his presidency—and in particular during times of stress, such as the Bay of Pigs fiasco, in April of 1961, and the Cuban missile crisis, in October of 1962—Kennedy was taking an extraordinary variety of medications: steroids for his Addison's disease; painkillers for his back; anti-spasmodics for his colitis; antibiotics for urinary-tract infections;

**JFK
DISMISSED
QUESTIONS
ABOUT HIS
DOCTOR'S
INJECTIONS,
SAYING, “I
DON'T CARE
IF IT'S HORSE
PISS. IT
WORKS.”**

antihistamines for allergies; and, on at least one occasion, an anti-psychotic (though only for two days) for a severe mood change that Jackie Kennedy believed had been brought on by the antihistamines.

Kennedy's charismatic appeal rested heavily on the image of youthful energy and good health he projected. This image was a myth. The real story, disconcerting though it would have been to contemplate at the time, is actually more heroic. It is a story of iron-willed fortitude in mastering the difficulties of chronic illness ...

Kennedy's collective health problems were not enough to deter him from running for president. Though they were a considerable burden, no one of them impressed him as life-threatening. Nor did he believe that the many medications he took would reduce his ability to work effectively; on the contrary, he saw them as ensuring his competence to deal with the demands of the office. And apparently none of his many doctors told him that were he elevated to the presidency, his health problems (or the treatments for them) could pose a danger to the country.

After reaching the White House, Kennedy believed it was more essential than ever to hide his afflictions. The day after his election, in response to a reporter's question, he declared himself in “excellent” shape and dismissed the rumors of Addison's disease as false ...

A THOUSAND DAYS OF SUFFERING

During his time in the White House, despite public indications of continuing back difficulties, Kennedy enjoyed an image of robust good health. But according to the Travell records, medical attention was a fixed part of his routine. He was under the care of an allergist, an endocrinologist, a gastroenterologist, an orthopedist, and a urologist, along with that of Janet Travell, Admiral George Burkley, and Max Jacobson, an émigré doctor from Germany who now lived in New York and had made a reputation by treating celebrities with “pep pills,” or amphetamines, that helped to combat depression and fatigue. Jacobson, whom patients called “Dr. Feelgood,” administered amphetamines and back injections of painkillers that JFK believed made him less dependent on crutches ...

The Travell records reveal that during the



first six months of his term, Kennedy suffered stomach, colon, and prostate problems, high fevers, occasional dehydration, abscesses, sleeplessness, and high cholesterol, in addition to his ongoing back and adrenal ailments. His physicians administered large doses of so many drugs that Travell kept a “Medicine Administration Record,” cataloguing injected and ingested corticosteroids for his adrenal insufficiency; procaine shots and ultrasound treatments and hot packs for his back; Lomotil, Metamucil, paregoric, phenobarbital, testosterone, and trasentine to control his diarrhea, abdominal discomfort, and weight loss; penicillin and other antibiotics for his urinary-tract infections and an abscess; and Tuinal to help him sleep. Before press conferences and nationally televised speeches his doctors increased his cortisone dose to deal with tensions harmful to someone unable to produce his own corticosteroids in response to stress. Though the medications occasionally made Kennedy groggy and tired, he did not see them as a problem. He dismissed

↑ **Kennedy’s chronically bad back was only one of his enduring ailments. Here, he is heading to the presidential yacht in June 1961 to host the Japanese prime minister.**

questions about Jacobson’s injections, saying, “I don’t care if it’s horse piss. It works” ...

Kennedy continued to need extensive medication. His condition at the time of the Cuban missile crisis is a case in point. The Travell records show that during the 13 days in October of 1962 when Moscow and Washington brought the world to the brink of a nuclear war, Kennedy took his usual doses of anti-spasmodics to control his colitis, antibiotics for a flare-up of his urinary-tract problem and a bout of sinusitis, and increased amounts of hydrocortisone and testosterone, along with salt tablets, to control his Addison’s disease and boost his energy. Judging from the tape recordings made of conversations during this time, the medications were no impediment to lucid thought during these long days; on the contrary, Kennedy would have been significantly less effective without them, and might even have been unable to function. But these medications were only one element in helping Kennedy to focus on the crisis; his extraordinary strength of will cannot be underestimated.

This is not to suggest that Kennedy was superhuman, or to exaggerate his ability to endure physical and emotional ills. On November 2, 1962, he took 10 additional milligrams of hydrocortisone and 10 grains of salt to boost himself before giving a brief report to the American people on the dismantling of the Soviet missile bases in Cuba. In December, Jackie complained to the president’s gastroenterologist, Russell Boles, that the antihistamines for food allergies had a “depressing action” on the president. She asked Boles to prescribe something that would assure “mood elevation without irritation to the gastrointestinal tract.” The Travell records reveal that Boles prescribed one milligram twice a day of Stelazine, an anti-psychotic that was also used as a treatment for anxiety. In two days, Kennedy showed marked improvement, and he apparently never needed the drug again ...

Lee Harvey Oswald killed Kennedy before the president’s medical ailments could. But the evidence suggests that Kennedy’s physical condition contributed to his demise. On November 22, 1963, Kennedy was, as always, wearing a corsetlike back brace as he rode through Dallas. Oswald’s first bullet struck him in the back of the neck. Were it not for the back brace, which held him erect, the second, fatal shot to the head might not have found its mark. **A**

A PHOTO ESSAY

HERE COMES KENNEDY



• *This page:* Family patriarch and merciless businessman Joseph P. Kennedy served as the U.S. ambassador to Britain in 1938. Here, he's flanked by his eldest son, Joe Jr. (left), and his next-oldest son, John. *Opposite page:* After graduating from Harvard College in June 1940, the 23-year-old JFK entered Stanford University as a graduate student the following fall.





3



FRESHMAN ADVISER'S REPORT

Name of Freshman: *John F. Kennedy*

Student's choice of a field of concentration:

First Choice *Gov*

Second Choice *Hist & Lit*

Are there any reasons for his first choice which seem to you to establish for him a special claim?

He is planning to do work in Gov. He has already spent time abroad studying it. His father is in that work.

So far as you can judge, do his course grades at mid-years give a fair picture of his intellectual powers?

He will probably do ~~(a little)~~ better on the whole.

Information about his interests or personal traits which you think might be helpful to those responsible for assignment to a field of concentration, to a House, or to a Tutor. Have you any suggestions as to type of Tutor?

He would like to live with his brother in Winthrop.

Well oriented, normal,

Any additional comments may be written on the reverse side of this sheet.

Date *3-19-37* Signature of Adviser *E. P. Little*

Please return by March 13th to Chairman of the Board of Advisers, 9 University Hall.





• *This page:* War hero John F. Kennedy campaigns for Congress in 1946 in a Massachusetts district.

JFK never lost an election.

Opposite page: 1. Rose Kennedy with her children around 1923. From left: Rose, Eunice, Kathleen, Rosemary (seated on the ground), John, and Joe Jr. 2. At the Choate School in Wallingford, Connecticut, the teenage JFK (circled) played on the junior football team. 3. JFK as a lieutenant, junior grade, in the Navy in 1942. 4. The “well oriented, normal” Harvard freshman has already settled on a career. 5. The skipper of *PT-109* in 1943.



ASSOCIATED PRESS



• *Opposite page:* Kennedy campaigns in Nashua, New Hampshire, on the Massachusetts border, in January 1960. His only opponent in the state's March 8 presidential primary was the inventor of a space-age ballpoint pen. *This page:* Running to succeed the then-oldest president in U.S. history, JFK used campaign paraphernalia that stressed his youthful appearance and the advent of a new decade.

Playing Hardball

During the Kennedy years, *The Atlantic* regularly published unsigned reports that provided an insider's perspective on the mood in Washington. Here, the column described Kennedy's political ruthlessness, which helped secure him the Democratic nomination for president in 1960.

REPORT ON WASHINGTON

APRIL 1960

THE CAMPAIGN OF 1960 has begun earlier than any other campaign of modern times, and the Wisconsin primary on April 5 will offer a clue to the voters' choices ...

The Democrats have been talking a lot about how hard it will be to defeat [Vice President Richard] Nixon, since polls generally show Nixon running ahead of any Democratic candidate. But the nature of the Democratic attack on Nixon is not yet established and cannot be until the party's nominee is known. Among themselves, the Democrats are not at all unhappy at being classed as the underdog at this stage of the campaign. Most of the party politicians are convinced that once the choice is clear-cut between Nixon and a specific Democrat, the polls will begin to register the change. Nixon himself is aware of the danger of looking too good too early.

How does each of the Democratic hopefuls

figure he might get the nomination? Here is a run-down of the current strategy in each candidate's camp on the eve of the first meaningful primary ...

SENATOR KENNEDY, THE FRONT-RUNNER

Senator John F. Kennedy is the front-runner so far in the polls. He must stay ahead, and therefore is in a go-for-broke mood. He has entered practically all the primaries which have any real effect on delegates to [the Democratic National Convention in] Los Angeles. He is campaigning back and forth, up and down, all over the nation, knowing that he must have the nomination all but cinched before the gavel calls the convention to order. Even if he should sweep the primaries, he would not have the 761 votes necessary to be nominated. Consequently, he must reinforce his primary wins with political power plays, and at this second problem he and his agents have been working unceasingly.

They succeeded spectacularly in Ohio by letting Governor Michael DiSalle know that if he did not run as a Kennedy-pledged head of the state delegation, the senator would enter the Ohio primary to challenge him with a slate of his own. DiSalle tested the state's political temperature and concluded that he must either bow to Kennedy or run the risk of losing not only a primary

→ **Top: Kennedy makes a point in his fourth and final debate with Vice President Richard Nixon, on October 21, 1960. His vigorous presence in their televised face-offs was seen as crucial to his narrow electoral victory. Bottom: October 17, 1960, in Columbus, Ohio, where Kennedy later addressed a crowd of 25,000 on the state-house lawn.**



Kennedy is trying to create internal pressures for second and third ballot votes for himself. At Los Angeles, his problem will be to break loose on each succeeding ballot a new batch of these second-choice votes, so that his total will keep edging up toward the majority figure. To be in a position to play this power game, he must do well in the primaries, proving that his religion, his youth, and any other controversial characteristics are not impediments to public approval. **A**

Kennedy and Nixon

The 1960 presidential election offered voters a clear choice between a well-born candidate who cared about the poor and a candidate of modest birth who wanted government restrained.

REPORT ON WASHINGTON

SEPTEMBER 1960

BECAUSE THERE SO OFTEN has been no real difference between the two political parties, it frequently has been difficult, if not impossible, to present a meaningful choice to the voters in an American presidential election. This year, fortunately, the choice will be clearer than usual. Two young men, intelligent and full of vigor, are the party standard-bearers. Both talk hopefully of the future, here at home and in America's relations with the rest of the world.

One candidate seeks to meet the calculable problems by a more determined, fuller use of the powers of the federal government. The other believes that the problems can be handled with only a minimal increase of activity in the federal government in foreign affairs and close to none at all in domestic matters. This is the difference between progressivism and conservatism, between those who are not afraid of big government and those who are afraid, who see any expansion of the role of government as creeping socialism ...

The candidates, far more than the platforms, matter most, however, and each of the two presidential nominees can be counted on to amend his platform as the campaign progresses.

John F. Kennedy and Richard M. Nixon are both products of the 20th century, but, paradoxically, they have reversed their inheritances.

➔ Kennedy and Nixon display a levity they probably do not feel after their second presidential debate, on October 7, 1960.



Kennedy, born to wealth, has come to know the problems of the millions without wealth. The seven primaries in which he participated, especially the primary in West Virginia, where he saw at first hand the worst kind of American poverty, were vital to his education and to his growth in understanding this nation. His experiences in these primaries, as he is the first to admit, were highly useful in making him a national figure and in acquainting him with the political figures of the Democratic Party who were crucial to his nomination and will be to his election. His experiences in the primaries and the convention demonstrate that, however imperfect the system, the combination of the two is the best way for us to nominate a candidate.

Nixon, born to modest circumstances, has come to know, though not to acquire, wealth and the power it gives, in a way which has

**MANY
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convinced him that conservatism is the essence of the American system. He, too, is well aware of the unfinished business of this nation at home, but he has accepted the view that restraint of government is vital to the continuance of the growth of free economic enterprise.

A good many observers believe that Kennedy is more conservative than the public thinks and that Nixon, on the other hand, is more progressive. This is probably so, if one compares the individuals with the party platforms. But neither should be viewed in that light alone; each is the standard-bearer of a force in the American system. Neither party is totalitarian in its approach; each has its extremists at both ends of the political spectrum. But the great majority of the Democratic Party is with Kennedy as a progressive, and the great majority of the Republican Party is with Nixon as a conservative. ■

2

The LEADER

As president, Kennedy showed a style that endeared him to the public. In private, he displayed a firmness of purpose, a talent for graceful manipulation, and an understanding of the limits of his power.

• John F. Kennedy, in his senatorial office in 1956, was the first president since Warren G. Harding to move directly from Capitol Hill to the Oval Office.



Memo to the Next President

As the 1960 presidential campaign was taking shape, an eminent political scientist examined the top candidates' leadership strategies for bringing an obstinate Congress to heel. Kennedy figured on mobilizing partisan and political pressure, while Nixon preferred bargaining behind closed doors.

By

JAMES MACGREGOR BURNS

APRIL 1960

WITHIN A FEW months of the inauguration next January, the new president will face the inevitable chasm between

White House and Capitol Hill, with most of his promises still to be redeemed. What then?

All presidents, even [Warren G.] Harding, have encountered this problem in one form or another. Some of them have seen their differences with Congress as simply a matter of poor communication; if only they could explain the problem to some balky committee chairman, they seem to have felt, the misunderstanding would disappear. So they have breakfasted with congressmen, held weekly meetings with Senate and House leaders, delivered speeches to joint sessions, sent up

bulky recommendations and even drafts of bills. Rarely have such methods won over the president's real opponents. For the real problem is that congressional leaders, whether conservative or liberal, hold office on different assumptions, different mandates, different expectations from the president's.

Inevitably the strong presidents have used the routine weapons of presidential power—patronage, deals, personal pressure, even the pardoning power—vigorously and even cynically. But the routine weapons have not been enough, and beleaguered presidents have tried to mobilize popular support behind their programs, particularly when congressmen came up for reelection. From Andrew Johnson's effort in 1866 to defend his Reconstruction program against the Radicals to Eisenhower and Nixon's attempt in 1958 to win back a Republican Congress, presidents have made the long whistle-stop trips across the nation in order to force Congress into line.

Johnson failed, so did Eisenhower and Nixon, and so did virtually every president in between ...

How will the next president tackle the problem that has perplexed and thwarted so many

“LEGISLATIVE LEADERSHIP IS NOT POSSIBLE WITHOUT PARTY LEADERSHIP,” KENNEDY SAID.



↑ **Senator Kennedy campaigns at the National Press Club in Washington, D.C., on January 14, 1960.**

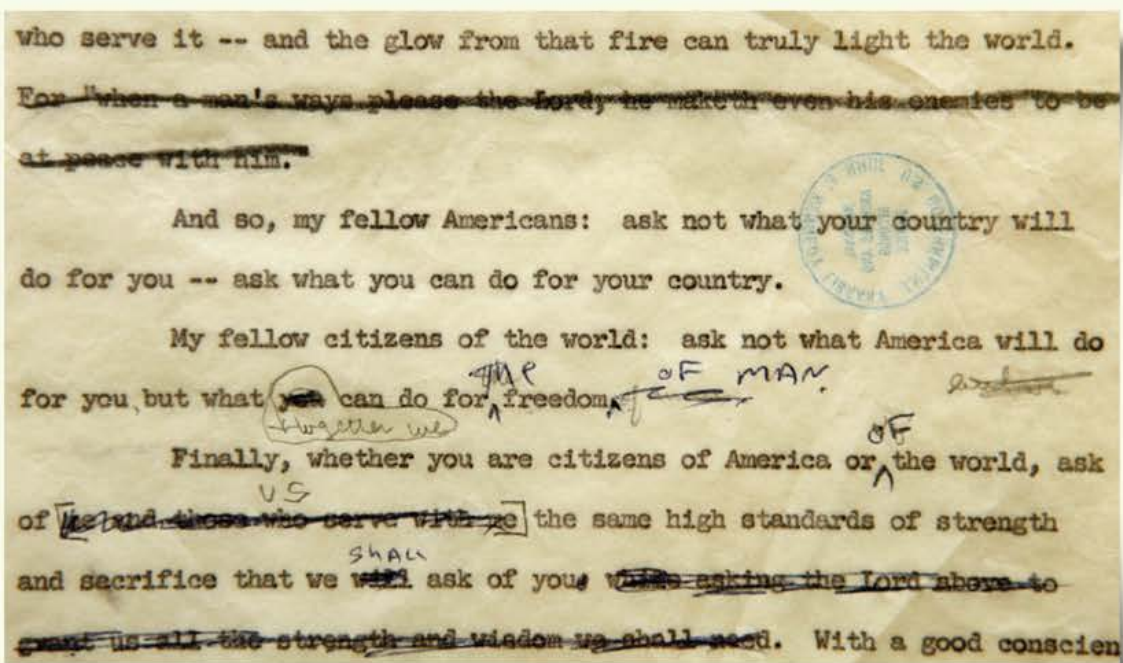
of his predecessors? That this question is already on the minds of at least two presidential candidates became clear in mid-January in a remarkable speech by Senator John F. Kennedy and in a swift rejoinder by Vice President Nixon. Kennedy's statement is worth pondering. Not only did he assert that the president must exercise the fullest powers of his office, "all that are specified and some that are not," but he called for forceful political leadership in the White House. "Legislative leadership is not possible without party leadership," Kennedy said. "No president, it seems to me, can escape politics. He has not only been chosen by the nation—he has been chosen by his party. And if he insists that he is 'president of all the people' and should therefore offend none of them—if he blurs the issues and differences between the two parties—if he neglects the

party machinery and avoids his party's leadership—then he has not only weakened the political party as an instrument of the democratic process—he has dealt a blow to the democratic process itself." Two days later, Nixon took issue with Kennedy's views. Too often people who clamored for more leadership were actually looking for someone to "lead the people to the mountaintop," he said. Some presidents achieved results by table pounding, others worked more quietly by persuasion ...

Nixon would not enjoy President Eisenhower's personal popularity with most factions of Congress. But he would possess something perhaps as important—a knack for manipulation, for making deals, for exploiting to the full the president's traditional powers of bargain and barter. No detached observer can underestimate that knack. **4**

A PHOTO ESSAY

ASK NOT



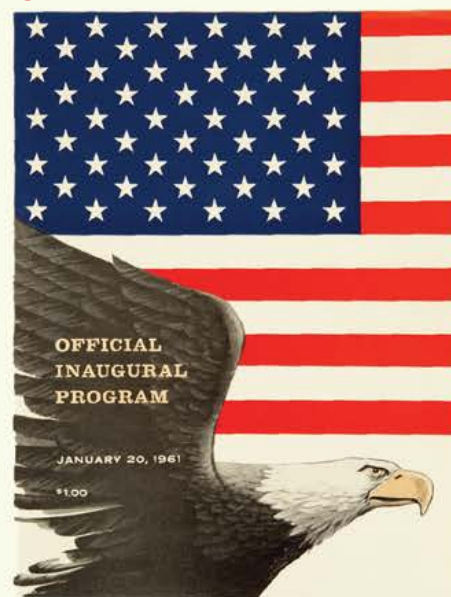
• This page: The new president's long-remembered inaugural address showcased his eloquent rhetoric and cadence.
Opposite page: Addressing a nation ready to get moving again.



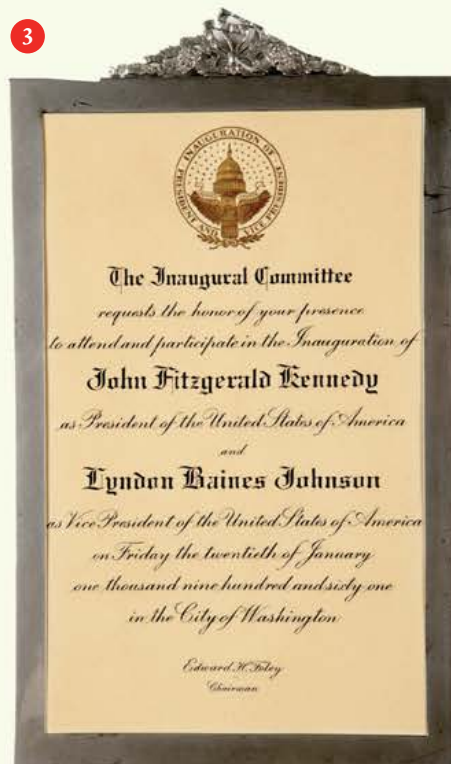
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2



3



4



• This page: 1. To take the oath of office, the incoming president placed his hand on his mother's family's 1850 Bible. Recorded inside were Rose E. Fitzgerald's 1914 marriage to Joseph P. Kennedy and the births of their nine children. 2. The official program of the January 20, 1961, inauguration. 3. A printed invitation signed by the inauguration chairman, Edward H. Foley. 4. The presidential limousine's license plate. Opposite page: Having donned a topcoat and top hat, President Kennedy strolls with the first lady outside their new residence on their way to watch the inaugural parade.



JFK

THE LEADER





• At noon on January 20, 1961, the 14th chief justice of the United States, Earl Warren, administers the oath of office to the 35th president, John F. Kennedy.

Team of Eggheads

In assembling the youngest Cabinet in generations, the 43-year-old president insisted that his appointees think along similar lines and communicate easily. For the first time since the New Deal, an administration was in the hands of intellectuals.

REPORT ON WASHINGTON

FEBRUARY 1961

PRESIDENT KENNEDY HAS ASSEMBLED a remarkable group of men in his official family. The youngest elected president in American history has chosen the youngest Cabinet in this century and probably the youngest since the youthful men who composed the Founding Fathers first guided the American democracy. But the point is not their individual or collective age, nor the number of Phi Beta Kappa keys, nor even how many went to Harvard. The point is the common thread which marks the selections of both Cabinet and sub-Cabinet members. The selection process was lengthy, because Kennedy was not easy to satisfy.

The new president sought not merely men with the same economic or political or foreign-policy ideas. He sought men who could compose a team, men who were on the same mental wavelength, men who would find it easy to communicate with one another. Kennedy confessed to one whose advice he asked that he was hampered in his search by two facts:

despite his 14 years in the Congress, he knew remarkably few who served in the executive branch of the government, and despite his father's business background, he knew few of the top men in industry, the category from which he picked Defense Secretary Robert S. McNamara.

Fortunately for newcomer McNamara, he will be backstopped by Roswell L. Gilpatric, a Pentagon veteran, as deputy defense secretary ... An outspoken critic of Pentagon organization and strategic concepts, he will be a highly knowledgeable addition to Kennedy's team.

In meeting for the first time with [Secretary of State Dean] Rusk and McNamara, for example, Kennedy was far less interested in hearing their ideas (he had already read extensive dossiers about them, including their own writing or statements) than in finding out whether they could easily communicate. One prospective Cabinet appointee was ruled out partly because he failed to give concise answers and tended to make encyclopedic replies; another because he was not easy to talk to, despite evidence of great ability at staff work. Both ended up in the administration, where their undoubted abilities will be used, but they did not make the first team.

Perhaps the incident which tells most about the quality Kennedy sought involves his brother, Robert, the new attorney general. During the closing days of the presidential campaign, the Reverend Martin Luther



King Jr. was jailed in Atlanta. Both Senator Kennedy and his brother, without consulting each other, reached for the telephone: Robert to call the judge and the senator to phone Mrs. King. Call it instinct or any other name; it is a priceless quality in a team.

Kennedy's appointment of Adlai Stevenson as ambassador to the United Nations fits into this picture with utmost precision. Kennedy knew that he would deeply wound an important segment of Democratic opinion if he did not honor Stevenson with high office; he knew, too, that Stevenson has a vast reservoir of goodwill in all the free world, an asset not to be lightly dismissed at this time of peril for the nation.

Kennedy did not disagree with Stevenson on policy, nor was there any element of personal pique in passing over for secretary of state the two-time presidential nominee. Rather, it was Kennedy's feeling that he and Stevenson do not adequately communicate with one another, that they lack sympathy, which brought the decision. Be that as it may, Kennedy has given

↑ **In the sunroom of his father's home on Cape Cod, JFK hosts a discussion of the defense budget in November 1961. Attending (clockwise from left) were Joint Chiefs of Staff Chairman Lyman Lemnitzer, White House military adviser Maxwell Taylor, Secretary of Defense Robert S. McNamara, President Kennedy, budget director David Bell, Deputy Secretary of Defense Roswell L. Gilpatric, science adviser Jerome Wiesner, speechwriter Theodore Sorensen, National Security Adviser McGeorge Bundy, and Pentagon research director Harold Brown.**

Stevenson the maximum support in his UN role, a seat in the Cabinet, and a public promise of a part in policy decision making...

Looked at as a whole, the nature of the Kennedy appointments makes it possible to say that the American government once again is in the hands of intellectuals, for the first time since the early days of the Roosevelt New Deal. The opprobrium of the term *egghead* ought now to be ended, and only in the nick of time. Intelligence, energy, enthusiasm are the key qualities with which the new administration begins.

Free government cannot exist and prosper on these qualities alone, but they are indispensable. In the months and years ahead, there doubtless will be times when not enough intelligence, not enough energy, not enough enthusiasm are applied to this problem or that, foreign or domestic. But as the new year begins, the new president and his choice of advisers have lifted the gloom which has enveloped an increasing area of the national capital over the years since the rude shock of Sputnik I. ▣

The Perils of Charisma

Taking the measure of the Kennedy administration two decades later, a historian argued that the Kennedy team had treated the bureaucracy as the enemy, launching a counterinsurgency that centralized authority in the White House and placed a dangerous amount of power in one man's hands.

By
GARRY
WILLS

JANUARY 1982

ORIGINALLY TITLED
"THE KENNEDY
IMPRISONMENT: THE
PRISONER OF CHARISMA"

PRESIDENT EISENHOWER'S crime, in the eyes of many of his critics, was a government by committee. Committees are not creative. They stifle originality, impose conformity. Eisenhower had let problems go untended in order to preserve the country's (and his own) tranquility. An "existential" leader, as Norman Mailer put it, would dare to go outside channels, to confront the unexpected with a resourceful poise of improvisation.

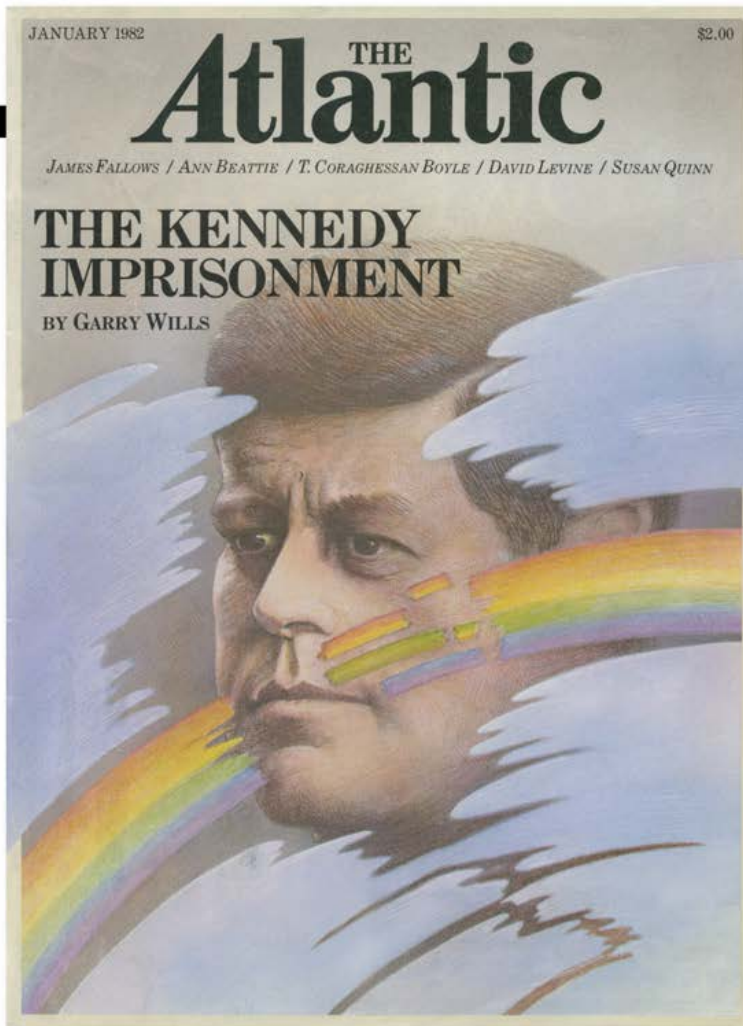
Arthur Schlesinger and Theodore Sorensen, official historians of John F. Kennedy's presidency, portray their leader as just the "existential" hero Mailer pined for. His first job was to dismantle the protective procedures Eisenhower had woven around the presidency. Kennedy wanted to be exposed, not shielded—out on the battlements, scanning all horizons, not seated in his chamber sifting documents. His ideal was the Franklin Roosevelt celebrated by Schlesinger and Richard Neustadt. Neustadt's 1960 book, *Presidential Power*, became the "hot" item of the

transition. In it, Roosevelt and Eisenhower were presented in sharp contrast—Roosevelt as a man free from procedural entanglements, Eisenhower as the slave of them. Kennedy, to imitate Roosevelt, had to become a sort of Eisenhower in reverse.

There would be no Sherman Adams in Kennedy's White House. The president would direct his own operation. All bottlenecks to fluidity had to be broken up. The National Security Council, for one. Under Eisenhower, this was a coordinator of information coming to the president. Kennedy meant for it to be his own arm reaching out—through, over, or around the government—to get things done ...

A pattern was being set, by which the president's special teams actively took on an adversary role toward the rest of the executive branch.

Kennedy's appointments reflected his sense of priorities. Dean Rusk, a southern gentleman acclimated to Eastern-establishment ways as head of the Rockefeller Foundation, would be custodian of the State Department's traditional duties toward other countries. But McGeorge



Bundy would supply the ideas on foreign policy, from his office in the White House. Schlesinger felt that Washington could pose no difficulty too great for a man who had been king of the hill in Cambridge: “Bundy possessed dazzling clarity and speed of mind—Kennedy told friends that, next to David Ormsby-Gore, Bundy was the brightest man he had ever known—as well as great distinction of manner and unlimited self-confidence. I had seen him learn how to dominate the faculty of Harvard University, a throng of intelligent and temperamental men; after that training, one could hardly doubt his capacity to deal with Washington bureaucrats.” It is an interesting psychological point—and typical of the time—that Schlesinger considered the bureaucracy, not hostile foreign powers, the enemy to be dealt with.

Dean Rusk soon became the butt of jokes emanating from Bundy’s circle of bright men at the White House ... Rusk, it was said with condescension, actually liked to attend meetings. It was a point of pride at the White House not to hold

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meetings. Sorensen boasts, in *Kennedy*: “Not one staff meeting was ever held, with or without the President.” The few meetings the president had to call were shams: “He never altered his view that any meeting larger than necessary was less flexible, less secret and hard-hitting ... No decisions of importance were made at Kennedy’s Cabinet meetings and few subjects of importance, particularly in foreign affairs, were ever seriously discussed. The Cabinet as a body was convened largely as a symbol, to be informed, not consulted.”

The Kennedy teams lived on the move, calling signals to each other in the thick of action—as Sorensen put it, like basketball players developing plays while the game moved on; not, like Eisenhower’s people, withdrawing into football huddles after every play ...

A president who treated his executive branch as something to be raided, prodded, or ignored was bound to deal with Congress as an adversary. Kennedy’s lackluster performance as a representative and senator derived in large part from his sense that real power lay with the executive branch (if only a non-Eisenhower would come along to energize it). Congress was, in his mind, the epitome of government by committee. Its principal power was to obstruct, to “deadlock” the system (as James MacGregor Burns argued in *The Deadlock of Democracy*, an influential book of the period). A strong president was needed to use all his power against the recalcitrant legislative branch ...

Kennedy’s fascination with counterinsurgency in other countries is well known. More important is the extent to which he viewed his own administration as a raid of mobile “outsiders” on the settled government of America. He had assembled a hit-and-run team to cut through enemy resistance, go outside channels, forgo meetings, subvert committees, and dismantle structures ...

Abroad, counterinsurgency meant that a regime such as [South Vietnamese President Ngo Dinh] Diem’s could not fight off insurgents alone; it was too mired in the past, too crippled by old compromises with France. But a team without such ties, a fresh force with clean hands, could purge and reform the administration while propping it up. It could fend off insurgents *and* alter the Vietnamese establishment. The assignment at home was not very different. In order to get the country “moving again,” as Kennedy’s campaign

slogan had it, to make it clean and tough enough to confront the Russians, crisis teams would have to save the bureaucracy from itself, take over its duties, and force it to join the successful operation of the outsiders. Henry Fairlie rightly called this a vision of “guerrilla government.”

That ideal gives deeper meaning to a term that became popular in and around the Kennedy presidency. James David Barber claims that “charisma” was “a pawed-over concept Kennedy brought back to clarity.” But that was hardly the case. Kennedy’s admirers stretched and cheapened the sociological term adopted, half a century earlier, by Max Weber. Yet there was an unnoticed justice in the application of this word to the New Frontier. Weber distinguished three kinds of authority—traditional, relying on the inertia of sacred custom; legal, based on contractual ties; and charismatic, based on the special gifts of a single ruler. Charismatic leadership is transitory—the “grace” is attached to one person, who must constantly revalidate it in action (“existentially,” according to the ‘60s jargon). It serves, amid the collapse of order or old ways, to bind together a new effort—the embodiment of a cause in George Washington or Mao Tse-tung. The founders of states, or of religious orders (a favorite Weber illustration), have to exert *personal* authority, since they have no preexisting majesty of office or sanction of law to draw upon.

Kennedy’s personalized leadership consciously distanced itself from the “traditional” father-king role of Eisenhower and the “legal” order of bureaucratic committees. Power came from Kennedy’s person, according to Schlesinger. It had to be displayed, deployed, brought to bear. His “cool” was his program, style and vigor his credentials. Kennedy’s term in office was later studied as just one more stage in the development of an imperial presidency. But his followers saw it as a radical break with the institutional passivity of the post-Roosevelt presidency. They were returning to the last president who had been charismatic in Weber’s sense. Franklin Roosevelt, given special powers to deal with the crisis of the Depression, broke free of tradition, defied the two-term rule, took on himself the sacred mantle of war leader, and made policy by sheer personal fiat. Aspiring to a Rooseveltian presidency, Kennedy hoped, without the benefit of depression or war, to assume emergency powers and assert a ruling charisma.

KENNEDY’S “COOL” WAS HIS PROGRAM, STYLE AND VIGOR HIS CREDENTIALS.

Sorensen’s account of the administration is gleefully crisis-oriented. He admiringly counts 15 of them in Kennedy’s first eight months as president. The atmosphere is perfectly caught by [David] Halberstam [in *The Best and the Brightest*]: Kennedy bequeathed to Johnson “crisis-mentality men, men who delighted in the great international crisis because it centered the action right there in the White House—the meetings, the decisions, the tensions, the power—*they* were movers and activists, and this was what they had come to Washington for, to meet these challenges.” Kennedy had come to office sounding the alarm over a missile-gap crisis—as he had sounded the alarm in 1940 over England’s airplane-gap crisis at the beginning of World War II. (A. J. P. Taylor has demonstrated that the first gap was no more real than the later one.) ... Since the charismatic leader’s special powers grow from special dangers, the two feed on each other. For some crises to be overcome, they must first be created ...

Insofar as the charismatic leader asserts an entirely personal authority, he *delegitimizes* the traditional and legal authorities. Attempting to prop up the Saigon regime, Kennedy’s ambassadors to Vietnam and advisers actually called its slim claims further into question. And the same was true, in less degree, of the bureaus and agencies at home. While deferring to the FBI himself, Attorney General Robert Kennedy made clear to others that it could not be relied on for the protection of civil-rights workers. While expressing formal regard for “Secretary Rusk” (never, even in private, was it “Dean”), the president made clear his slight regard for the State Department. By relying on a few “generalists,” Kennedy signaled the lack of authority in most branches of his administration.

Charismatic authority is constructive only when it builds order from chaos. When it tries to supersede continuing forms of authority, it destabilizes despite itself. The more insistent Kennedy’s personal call to follow him became, the less compelling was any order that did not issue directly from him ...

Charisma, in the Weberian sense, is not transferable—even to members of the “graced” leader’s own family. But later presidents would be measured by the expectations Kennedy raised. He did not so much elevate the office as cripple those who held it after him. His legend has haunted them; his light has cast them in shadow. ▀

Oval Office, Open Door

President Kennedy's leadership style generated a "creative tension" that energized the executive branch, but his proposals failed to excite Congress.

REPORT ON WASHINGTON

MAY 1961

PRESIDENT KENNEDY was discussing one day the problem of revamping the approach to foreign aid. His chief aid planner, George Ball, asked whether he should try to construct a new setup on the basis of what would be most desirable or on the basis of what might be politically feasible. The president's reply was instant: "You tell me what it ought to be. I want to see the whole dimension of the kind of program the United States ought to have. And then I'll make the political decision of what can be done." Of the many stories about the energetic new president current in the capital, this one tells as much as any about the Kennedy style of running the executive department.

When Ambassador Llewellyn Thompson was called home from Moscow for consultation, he found himself spending a total of seven hours with the president, in contrast to the half-hour calls he used to pay to President Eisenhower. Kennedy discussed the Soviet problem with Thompson and the two other senior American diplomats in that field, Charles E. Bohlen and George F. Kennan. Sitting with them and with Secretary of State Rusk and McGeorge Bundy, his assistant for national-security affairs, the president let the experienced men talk themselves out without so much as giving a clue to his own feeling, which might have induced some to follow his hint. The decision to bring Kennan back into the government as ambassador to Yugoslavia was Kennedy's own, and it is generally rated as a brilliant stroke.

CREATIVE TENSION

The president's system for getting information has been called by one

of his aides "creative tension." He himself has said privately, "I can't afford to have just one set of advisers on anything," and, "The thing I have got to watch is that I'm not just sitting here at the end of the paper chain [from the departments]."

One man who sees the president almost daily comments that Kennedy "wants to have a view of the alternatives, a view wider than that available through the departments." This is why he has cut across a good deal of the bureaucratic setup, often going direct to those handling a specific problem, and why he has made Bundy's office in the White House itself the center of an interdepartmental planning staff.

Franklin Roosevelt's method was deliberately to create competition among his subordinates. There is an element of this in the Kennedy style, but the difference is that far more people have access to the president now than at any time in White House history since the earliest New Deal days ...

THE PRESIDENT AND THE CONGRESS

Kennedy is not a man to back away from a fight. He wants, however, to pick the best place and time for the inevitable first big scrap with Congress. A lot of maneuvering is likely before the executive and the legislative branches go to the mat for a decision on a critical issue. Yet Kennedy knows, as he has told some subordinates, that "there will never be a better year than the first one" to draw on his public support.

A great deal of his energies have gone into building that public support by use of televised press conferences, speeches, and a mass of messages to Congress, through which he has

dominated the news pages. A powerful image is a help at the Capitol for a president. But in itself it is not enough in a Congress as closely divided as this one. In a world of half peace, half war, every success in lessening world tensions tends to lessen a desire for strong leadership in international affairs. And a rebounding economy, despite millions of unemployed, leaves many unconcerned about domestic problems. To one visitor who urged stronger economic measures, Kennedy replied, "There may be 7 percent unemployed, but there are 93 percent employed." To another on a similar mission he remarked that "Roosevelt had it easy" in winning his way during his first year in office.

As the new administration begins to come into focus, it is evident that Kennedy has energized the government as far as the executive branch is concerned. This of itself is an immense gain and is likely to be increasingly important as time goes on. He has obtained a firm grasp on the reins of the vast bureaucracy he heads; he is making good use of the remarkable talent he has gathered together. There have been a couple of poor appointments, but they are small in the aggregate.

The major problem of how to energize the nation, and through it, the Congress, remains. That there is a willingness in the public to respond is evident from the reaction to the Peace Corps. But more will have to be done. The president is fully aware of what faces him and has begun by taking steps to put his own house in shape, both for a protracted conflict with the communist world and to teach the American public the realities of life at home and their relationship to success in that worldwide conflict. **A**



JFK vs. the Military

President Kennedy faced a foe more relentless than Khrushchev, just across the Potomac: the bellicose Joint Chiefs of Staff argued for the deployment of nuclear weapons and kept pressing to invade Cuba. A presidential historian reveals that Kennedy's success in fending them off may have been his most consequential victory.

By ROBERT DALLEK
FALL 2013



 In 1962, President Kennedy watches B-52 bombers in Florida as their pilots show their readiness for war. General Curtis LeMay, the Air Force chief of staff and JFK's frequent antagonist, looks over his shoulder.

EVERY ENLISTED MAN dreams of it: pulling rank on the military's highest brass. The heroics of John F. Kennedy, lieutenant, junior grade, in the South Pacific after his *PT-109* was sunk in 1943 eased his way, 17 years later, to being elected the nation's commander in chief. In the White House, he fought—and defeated—his most determined military foes, just across the Potomac: the members of the Pentagon's Joint Chiefs of Staff. “Here was a president who had no military experience at all, sort of a patrol-boat skipper in World War II,” Joint Chiefs Chairman Lyman Lemnitzer later said of Kennedy. Mutual respect, from the first, was in short supply.

In comparison, Nikita Khrushchev was a pushover, at least during the events that brought President Kennedy's most-notable achievements. By persuading the Soviet leader to remove missiles from Fidel Castro's Cuba and agree to a ban on nuclear tests in the atmosphere, underwater, and in outer space,

Kennedy avoided a nuclear war and kept radioactive fallout from the air and the oceans, thereby earning the country's enduring regard for his effectiveness as a crisis manager and negotiator. But less recognized is how much both of these agreements rested on Kennedy's ability to rein in and sidestep his own military chiefs.

From the start of his presidency, Kennedy feared that the Pentagon brass would overreact to Soviet provocations and drive the country into a disastrous nuclear conflict. The Soviets might have been pleased—or understandably frightened—to know that Kennedy distrusted America's military establishment almost as much as they did.

The Joint Chiefs of Staff reciprocated the new president's doubts. Lemnitzer made no secret of his discomfort with a 43-year-old president who he felt could not measure up to Dwight D. Eisenhower, the former five-star general Kennedy had succeeded. Lemnitzer was a West Point graduate who had risen in the ranks of Eisenhower's World War II staff and helped plan the successful invasions of North Africa and Sicily. The 61-year-old general, little known outside military circles, stood 6 feet tall and weighed 200 pounds, with a bearlike frame, booming voice, and deep, infectious laugh. Lemnitzer's passion for golf and his ability to drive a ball 250 yards down a fairway endeared him to Eisenhower. More important, he shared his mentor's talent for maneuvering through Army and Washington politics. Also like Ike, he wasn't bookish or particularly drawn to grand strategy or big-picture thinking—he was a nuts-and-bolts sort of general who made his mark managing day-to-day problems.

To Kennedy, Lemnitzer embodied the military's old thinking about nuclear weapons. The president thought a nuclear war would bring mutually assured destruction—MAD, in the shorthand of the day—while the Joint Chiefs believed the United States could fight such a conflict and win. Sensing Kennedy's skepticism about nukes, Lemnitzer questioned the new president's qualifications to manage the country's defense. Since Eisenhower's departure, he lamented in shorthand, no longer was “a Pres with mil exp available to guide JCS.” When the four-star general presented the ex-skipper with a detailed briefing on emergency procedures for responding to a foreign military threat,

KENNEDY SAID HE HAD MADE THE MISTAKE OF THINKING THAT “THE MILITARY AND INTELLIGENCE PEOPLE HAVE SOME SECRET SKILL NOT AVAILABLE TO ORDINARY MORTALS.”

Kennedy seemed preoccupied with possibly having to make “a snap decision” about whether to launch a nuclear response to a Soviet first strike, by Lemnitzer’s account. This reinforced the general’s belief that Kennedy didn’t sufficiently understand the challenges before him.

Admiral Arleigh Burke, the 59-year-old chief of naval operations, shared Lemnitzer’s doubts. An Annapolis graduate with 37 years of service, Burke was an anti-Soviet hawk who believed that U.S. military officials needed to intimidate Moscow with threatening rhetoric. This presented an early problem for Kennedy, in that Burke “pushed his black-and-white views of international affairs with bluff naval persistence,” the Kennedy aide and historian Arthur M. Schlesinger Jr. later wrote. Kennedy had barely settled into the Oval Office when Burke planned to publicly assail “the Soviet Union from hell to breakfast,” according to Arthur Sylvester, a Kennedy-appointed Pentagon press officer who brought the proposed speech text to the president’s attention. Kennedy ordered the admiral to back off and required all military officers on active duty to clear any public speeches with the White House. Kennedy did not want officers thinking they could speak or act however they wished.

Kennedy’s biggest worry about the military was not the personalities involved but rather the freedom of field commanders to launch nuclear weapons without explicit permission from the commander in chief. Ten days after becoming president, Kennedy learned from his national-security adviser, McGeorge Bundy, that “a subordinate commander faced with a substantial Russian military action could start the thermo-nuclear holocaust on his own initiative.” As Roswell L. Gilpatric, Kennedy’s deputy defense secretary, recalled, “We became increasingly horrified over how little positive control the president really had over the use of this great arsenal of nuclear weapons.” To counter the military’s willingness to use nuclear weapons against the Communists, Kennedy pushed the Pentagon to replace Eisenhower’s strategy of “massive retaliation” with what he called “flexible response”—a strategy of calibrated force that his White House military adviser, General Maxwell Taylor, had described in a 1959 book, *The Uncertain Trumpet*. But the brass resisted. The stalemate in the Korean War had

frustrated military chiefs and left them inclined to use atomic bombs to ensure victory, as General Douglas MacArthur had proposed. They regarded Kennedy as reluctant to put the nation’s nuclear advantage to use and thus resisted ceding him exclusive control over decisions about a first strike.

The NATO commander, General Lauris Norstad, and two Air Force generals, Curtis LeMay and Thomas Power, stubbornly opposed White House directives that reduced their authority to decide when to go nuclear. The 54-year-old Norstad confirmed his reputation as fiercely independent when two high-profile Kennedy emissaries, thought to be Secretary of State Dean Rusk and Secretary of Defense Robert S. McNamara, visited NATO’s strategic military command in Belgium. They asked whether Norstad’s primary obligation was to the United States or to its European allies. “My first instinct was to hit” one of the Cabinet members for “challenging my loyalty,” he recalled later. Instead, he tried to smile and said, “‘Gentlemen, I think that ends this meeting.’ Whereupon I walked out and slammed the door.” Norstad was so clearly reluctant to concede his commander in chief’s ultimate authority that Bundy urged Kennedy to remind the general that the president “is boss.”

General Power, too, was openly opposed to limiting the use of America’s ultimate weapons. “Why are you so concerned with saving *their* lives?” he asked the lead author of a Rand study that counseled against attacking Soviet cities at the outset of a war. “The whole idea is to *kill* the bastards ... At the end of the war, if there are two Americans and one Russian, we win.” Even Curtis LeMay, Power’s superior, described him as “not stable” and a “sadist.”

The 54-year-old LeMay, known as “Old Iron Pants,” wasn’t much different. He shared his subordinate’s faith in the untrammelled use of air power to defend the nation’s security. The burly, cigar-chomping caricature of a general believed the United States had no choice but to bomb its foes into submission. In World War II, LeMay had been the principal architect of the incendiary attacks by B-29 heavy bombers that destroyed a large swath of Tokyo and killed about 100,000 Japanese—and, he was convinced, shortened the war. LeMay had no qualms about striking at enemy cities, where civilians would



pay for their governments' misjudgment in picking a fight with the United States.

During the Cold War, LeMay was prepared to launch a preemptive nuclear first strike against the Soviet Union. He dismissed civilian control of his decision making, complained of an American phobia about nuclear weapons, and wondered privately, "Would things be much worse if Khrushchev were secretary of defense?" Theodore Sorensen, Kennedy's speechwriter and alter ego, called LeMay "my least favorite human being."

The strains between the generals and their commander in chief showed up in exasperating ways. When Bundy asked the Joint Chiefs' staff director for a copy of the blueprint for nuclear war, the general at the other end of the line said, "We never release that." Bundy explained, "I don't think you understand. I'm calling for the president and he wants to see [it]." The chiefs' reluctance was understandable: their Joint Strategic Capabilities Plan foresaw the use of 170 atomic and hydrogen bombs in Moscow alone; the destruction of every major Soviet, Chinese, and Eastern European city; and hundreds of millions of deaths. Sickened by a formal briefing on the plan, Kennedy turned to a senior

↑ **A few weeks after the Cuban missile crisis, President Kennedy confers with Secretary of Defense Robert S. McNamara (left) and General Maxwell Taylor, the former White House military adviser he had named to chair the Joint Chiefs of Staff.**

administration official and said, "And we call ourselves the human race."

FIASCO IN CUBA

The tensions between Kennedy and the military chiefs were equally evident in his difficulties with Cuba. In 1961, having been warned by the CIA and the Pentagon about the Cuban dictator Fidel Castro's determination to export communism to other Latin American countries, Kennedy accepted the need to act against Castro's regime. But he doubted the wisdom of an overt U.S.-sponsored invasion by Cuban exiles, fearing it would undermine the Alliance for Progress, his administration's effort to curry favor with Latin American republics by offering financial aid and economic cooperation.

The overriding question for Kennedy at the start of his term wasn't whether to strike against Castro but how. The trick was to topple his regime without provoking accusations that the new administration in Washington was defending U.S. interests at the expense of Latin autonomy. Kennedy insisted on an attack by Cuban exiles that wouldn't be seen as aided by the United States, a restriction to which the military chiefs ostensibly agreed. They were convinced, however, that if an invasion faltered and the new administration faced an embarrassing defeat, Kennedy would have no choice but to take direct military action. The military and the CIA "couldn't believe that a new president like me wouldn't panic and try to save his own face," Kennedy later told his aide Dave Powers. "Well, they had me figured all wrong." Meeting with his national-security advisers three weeks before the assault on Cuba's Bay of Pigs, according to State Department records, Kennedy insisted that leaders of the Cuban exiles be told that "U.S. strike forces would not be allowed to participate in or support the invasion in any way" and that they be asked "whether they wished on that basis to proceed." When the Cubans said they did, Kennedy gave the final order for the attack.

The operation was a miserable failure—more than 100 invaders killed and some 1,200 captured out of a force of about 1,400. Despite his determination to bar the military from taking a direct role in the invasion, Kennedy was unable to resist a last-minute appeal to use air power to support the exiles. Details about the deaths of four Alabama Air National Guard pilots, who

engaged in combat with Kennedy's permission as the invasion was collapsing, were long buried in a CIA history of the Bay of Pigs fiasco (unearthed after Peter Kornbluh of George Washington University's National Security Archive filed a Freedom of Information Act lawsuit in 2011). The document reveals that the White House and the CIA told the pilots to call themselves mercenaries if they were captured; the Pentagon took more than 15 years to recognize the airmen's valor, in a medal ceremony their families were required to keep secret. Even more disturbing, this Bay of Pigs history includes CIA meeting notes—which Kennedy never saw—predicting failure unless the U.S. intervened directly.

Afterward, Kennedy accused himself of naïveté for trusting the military's judgment that the Cuban operation was well thought-out and capable of success. "Those sons of bitches with all the fruit salad just sat there nodding, saying it would work," Kennedy said of the chiefs. He repeatedly told his wife, "Oh my God, the bunch of advisers that we inherited!" Kennedy concluded that he was too little schooled in the Pentagon's covert ways and that he had been overly deferential to the CIA and the military chiefs. He later told Schlesinger he had made the mistake of thinking that "the military and intelligence people have some secret skill not available to ordinary mortals." His lesson: never rely on the experts. Or at least: be skeptical of the inside experts' advice, and consult with outsiders who may hold a more detached view of the policy in question.

The consequence of the Bay of Pigs failure wasn't an acceptance of Castro and his control of Cuba but, rather, a renewed determination to bring him down by stealth. Attorney General Robert F. Kennedy, the president's younger brother and closest confidant, echoed the thinking of the military chiefs when he warned about the danger of ignoring Cuba or refusing to consider armed U.S. action. McNamara directed the military to "develop a plan for the overthrow of the Castro government by the application of U.S. military force."

The president, however, had no intention of rushing into anything. He was as keen as everyone else in the administration to be rid of Castro, but he kept hoping the American military needn't be directly involved. The planning

NUCLEAR TENSIONS, AND THE BUMBLING AT THE BAY OF PIGS, CONVINCED KENNEDY THAT A PRIMARY TASK OF HIS PRESIDENCY WAS TO BRING THE MILITARY UNDER STRICT CONTROL.



for an invasion was meant more as an exercise for quieting the hawks within the administration, the weight of evidence suggests, than as a commitment to adopt the Pentagon's bellicosity. The disaster at the Bay of Pigs intensified Kennedy's doubts about listening to advisers from the CIA, the Pentagon, or the State Department who had misled him or allowed him to accept lousy advice.

TAKING CONTROL

During the early weeks of his presidency, another source of tension between Kennedy and the military chiefs was a small landlocked country in Southeast Asia. Laos looked like a proving ground for Kennedy's willingness to stand up to the Communists, but he worried that getting drawn into a war in remote jungles was a losing proposition. At the end of April 1961, while he was still reeling from the Bay of Pigs, the Joint Chiefs recommended that he blunt a North Vietnamese-sponsored Communist offensive in Laos by launching air strikes and moving U.S. troops into the country via its two small airports. Kennedy asked the military chiefs what they would propose if the Communists bombed the airports after the U.S. had flown in a few thousand men. "You [drop] a bomb on Hanoi," Robert Kennedy remembered them replying, "and you start using atomic weapons!" In these and other discussions, about fighting in North Vietnam and China or intervening elsewhere in Southeast Asia, Lemnitzer promised, "If we are given the right to use nuclear weapons, we can guarantee victory." By Schlesinger's account, President Kennedy dismissed this sort of thinking as absurd: "Since [Lemnitzer] couldn't think of any further escalation, he would have to promise us victory."



↑ **Waiting for Indonesian President Sukarno to arrive at Andrews Air Force Base in 1961, President Kennedy chats with Admiral Arleigh Burke, the Navy chief he blocked from delivering a provocatively anti-Soviet speech.**

The clash with Admiral Burke, tensions over nuclear-war planning, and the bumbling at the Bay of Pigs convinced Kennedy that a primary task of his presidency was to bring the military under strict control. Articles in *Time* and *Newsweek* that portrayed Kennedy as less aggressive than the Pentagon angered him. He told his press secretary, Pierre Salinger, “This shit has got to stop.”

Still, Kennedy couldn’t ignore the pressure to end Communist control of Cuba. He wasn’t ready to tolerate Castro’s government and its avowed objective of exporting socialism to other Western Hemisphere countries. He was willing to entertain suggestions for ending Castro’s rule as long as the Cuban regime demonstrably provoked a U.S. military response or as long as Washington’s role could remain concealed. To meet Kennedy’s criteria, the Joint Chiefs endorsed a madcap plan called Operation Northwoods. It proposed carrying out terrorist acts against Cuban exiles in Miami and blaming them on Castro, including physically attacking the exiles and possibly destroying a boat loaded with Cubans escaping their homeland. The plan also contemplated terrorist strikes elsewhere in Florida, in hopes of boosting support domestically and around the world for a U.S. invasion. Kennedy said no.

Policy toward Cuba remained a minefield of bad advice. By late August 1962, information was flooding in about a Soviet military buildup on the island. Robert Kennedy urged Rusk, McNamara, Bundy, and the Joint Chiefs to consider new “aggressive steps” that Washington could take, including, according to notes from one discussion, “provoking an attack against Guantanamo which would permit us to retaliate.” The military chiefs insisted that Castro could be toppled “without precipitating general war”; McNamara favored sabotage and guerrilla warfare. They suggested that manufactured acts of sabotage at Guantánamo as well as other provocations could justify U.S. intervention. But Bundy, speaking for the president, cautioned against action that could instigate a blockade of West Berlin or a Soviet strike against U.S. missile sites in Turkey and Italy.

The events that became the Cuban missile crisis triggered Americans’ fears of a nuclear war, and McNamara shared Kennedy’s concerns about the military’s casual willingness

to rely on nuclear weapons. “The Pentagon is full of papers talking about the preservation of a ‘viable society’ after nuclear conflict,” McNamara told Schlesinger. “That ‘viable society’ phrase drives me mad ... A credible deterrent cannot be based on an incredible act.”

The October 1962 missile crisis widened the divide between Kennedy and the military brass. The chiefs favored a full-scale, five-day air campaign against the Soviet missile sites and Castro’s air force, with an option to invade the island afterward if they thought necessary. The chiefs, responding to McNamara’s question about whether that might lead to nuclear war, doubted the likelihood of a Soviet nuclear response to any U.S. action. And conducting a surgical strike against the missile sites and nothing more, they advised, would leave Castro free to send his air force to Florida’s coastal cities—an unacceptable risk.

Kennedy rejected the chiefs’ call for a large-scale air attack, for fear it would create a “much more hazardous” crisis (as he was taped telling a group in his office) and increase the likelihood of “a much broader struggle,” with worldwide repercussions. Most U.S. allies thought the administration was “slightly demented” in seeing Cuba as a serious military threat, he reported, and would regard an air attack as “a mad act.” Kennedy was also skeptical about the wisdom of landing U.S. troops in Cuba: “Invasions are tough, hazardous,” a lesson he had learned at the Bay of Pigs. The biggest decision, he thought, was determining which action “lessens the chances of a nuclear exchange, which obviously is the final failure.”

Kennedy decided to impose a blockade—what he described more diplomatically as a quarantine—of Cuba without consulting the military chiefs with any seriousness. He needed their tacit support in case the blockade failed and military steps were required. But he was careful to hold them at arm’s length. He simply did not trust their judgment; weeks earlier, the Army had been slow to respond when James Meredith’s attempt to integrate the University of Mississippi touched off riots. “They always give you their bullshit about their instant reaction and their split-second timing, but it never works out,” Kennedy had said. “No wonder it’s so hard to win a war.” Kennedy waited for three days after learning that a U-2 spy plane had

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confirmed the Cuban missiles’ presence before sitting down with the military chiefs to discuss how to respond—and then for only 45 minutes.

That meeting convinced Kennedy that he had been well advised to shun the chiefs’ counsel. As the session started, Maxwell Taylor—by then the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff—said the chiefs had agreed on a course of action: a surprise air strike followed by surveillance to detect further threats and a blockade to stop shipments of additional weapons. Kennedy replied that he saw no “satisfactory alternatives” but considered a blockade the least likely to bring a nuclear war. Curtis LeMay was forceful in opposing anything short of direct military action. The Air Force chief dismissed the president’s apprehension that the Soviets would respond to an attack on their Cuban missiles by seizing West Berlin. To the contrary, LeMay argued: bombing the missiles would deter Moscow, while leaving them intact would only encourage the Soviets to move against Berlin. “This blockade and political action ... will lead right into war,” LeMay warned, and the Army, Navy, and Marine Corps chiefs agreed.

“This is almost as bad as the appeasement at Munich,” LeMay declared. “In other words, you’re in a pretty bad fix at the present time.”

Kennedy took offense. “What did you say?”

“You’re in a pretty bad fix,” LeMay replied, refusing to back down.

The president masked his anger with a laugh. “You’re in there with me,” he said.

After Kennedy and his advisers left the room, a tape recorder caught the military brass blasting the commander in chief. “You pulled the rug right out from under him,” Marine Commandant David Shoup crowed to LeMay. “If somebody could keep them from doing the goddamn thing piecemeal—that’s our problem. You go in there and friggin’ around with the missiles, you’re screwed ... Do it right and quit friggin’ around.”

Kennedy, too, was angry—“just choleric,” said Deputy Secretary of Defense Gilpatric, who saw the president shortly afterward. “He was just beside himself, as close as he ever got.”

“These brass hats have one great advantage,” Kennedy told his longtime aide Kenny O’Donnell. “If we ... do what they want us to do, none of us will be alive later to tell them that they were wrong.”

BETTER “RED THAN DEAD”

Jackie Kennedy told her husband that if the Cuban crisis ended in a nuclear war, she and their children wanted to die with him. But it was Mimi Beardsley, his 19-year-old intern turned paramour, who spent the night of October 27 in his bed. She witnessed his “grave” expression and “funereal tone,” she wrote in a 2012 memoir, and he told her something he could never have admitted in public: “I’d rather my children be red than dead.” Almost anything was better, he believed, than nuclear war.

Kennedy’s civilian advisers were elated when Khrushchev agreed to withdraw the missiles. But the military chiefs refused to believe that the Soviet leader would actually do what he had promised. They sent the president a memo accusing Khrushchev of delaying the missiles’ departure “while preparing the ground for diplomatic blackmail.” Absent “irrefutable evidence” of Khrushchev’s compliance, they continued to recommend a full-scale air strike and an invasion.

Kennedy ignored their advice. Hours after the crisis ended, when he met with some of the military chiefs to thank them for their help, they made no secret of their disdain. LeMay portrayed the settlement as “the greatest defeat in our history” and said the only remedy was a prompt invasion. Admiral George Anderson, the Navy chief of staff, declared, “We have been had!” Kennedy was described as “absolutely shocked” by their remarks; he was left “stuttering in reply.” Soon afterward, Benjamin Bradlee, a journalist and friend, heard him erupt in “an explosion ... about his forceful, positive lack of admiration for the Joint Chiefs of Staff.”

Yet Kennedy could not simply disregard their advice. “We must operate on the presumption that the Russians may try again,” he told McNamara. When Castro refused to allow United Nations inspectors to look for nuclear missiles and continued to pose a subversive threat throughout Latin America, Kennedy continued planning to oust him from power. Not by an invasion, however. “We could end up bogged down,” Kennedy wrote to McNamara on November 5. “We should keep constantly in mind the British in Boer War, the Russians in the last war with the Finnish and our own experience with the North Koreans.” He also worried that violating the understanding he had

with Khrushchev not to invade Cuba would invite condemnation from around the world.

Still, his administration's goal in Cuba had not changed. "Our ultimate objective with respect to Cuba remains the overthrow of the Castro regime and its replacement by one sharing the aims of the Free World," read a White House memo to Kennedy dated December 3, which suggested that "all feasible diplomatic economic, psychological and other pressures" be brought to bear. All, indeed. The Joint Chiefs described themselves as ready to use "nuclear weapons for limited war operations in the Cuban area," professing that "collateral damage to nonmilitary facilities and population casualties will be held to a minimum consistent with military necessity"—an assertion they surely knew was nonsense. A 1962 report by the Department of Defense on "The Effects of Nuclear Weapons" acknowledged that exposure to radiation was likely to cause hemorrhaging, producing "anemia and death ... If death does not take place in the first few days after a large dose of radiation, bacterial invasion of the blood stream usually occurs and the patient dies of infection."

Kennedy did not formally veto the military chiefs' plan for a nuclear attack on Cuba, but he had no intention of acting on it. He knew that the notion of curbing collateral damage was less a realistic possibility than a way for the brass to justify their multitudes of nuclear bombs. "What good are they?" Kennedy asked McNamara and the military chiefs a few weeks after the Cuban crisis. "You can't use them as a first weapon yourself. They are only good for deterring ... I don't see quite why we're building as many as we're building."

In the wake of the missile crisis, Kennedy and Khrushchev both reached the sober conclusion that they needed to rein in the nuclear arms race. Kennedy's announced quest for an arms-control agreement with Moscow rekindled tensions with his military chiefs—specifically, over a ban on testing nuclear bombs anywhere but underground. In June 1963, the chiefs advised the White House that every proposal they had reviewed for such a ban had shortcomings "of major military significance." A limited test ban, they warned, would erode U.S. strategic superiority; later, they said so publicly in congressional testimony.

The following month, as the veteran diplomat W. Averell Harriman prepared to leave for Moscow to negotiate a nuclear-test ban, the chiefs privately called such a step at odds with the national interest. Kennedy saw them as a treaty's greatest domestic impediment. "If we don't get the chiefs just right," he told Mike Mansfield, the Senate majority leader, "we can ... get blown." To quiet their objections to Harriman's mission, Kennedy promised them a chance to speak their minds in Senate hearings should a treaty emerge for ratification, even as he instructed them to consider more than military factors. Meanwhile, he made sure to exclude military officers from Harriman's delegation, and decreed that the Department of Defense—except for Maxwell Taylor—receive none of the cables reporting developments in Moscow.

"The first thing I'm going to tell my successor," Kennedy told guests at the White House, "is to watch the generals, and to avoid feeling that just because they were military men, their opinions on military matters were worth a damn."

Persuading the military chiefs to refrain from attacking the test-ban treaty in public required intense pressure from the White House and the drafting of treaty language permitting the United States to resume testing if it were deemed essential to national safety. LeMay, however, testifying before the Senate Committee on Foreign Relations, could not resist planting doubts: Kennedy and McNamara had promised to keep testing nuclear weaponry underground and to continue research and development in case circumstances changed, he said, but they had not discussed "whether what [the chiefs] consider an adequate safeguard program coincides with their idea on the subject." The Senate decisively approved the treaty nonetheless.

This gave Kennedy yet another triumph over a cadre of enemies more relentless than the ones he faced in Moscow. The president and his generals suffered a clash of worldviews, of generations—of ideologies, more or less—and every time they met in battle, JFK's fresher way of fighting prevailed. ■

Robert Dallek is the author of An Unfinished Life: John F. Kennedy, 1917–1963. This article is adapted from his new book, Camelot's Court: Inside the Kennedy White House.

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3

The NATION

The country's economic troubles and social injustices presented President Kennedy with tough challenges. He found it easier to set a fresh tone in the capital, however, than to enact new policies.

• John F. Kennedy, then a senator, and his wife, Jackie, climb the Senate steps in May 1955, as he returns to work after recuperating from spinal surgery.



JFK's New Industrial State

As New England's textile-mill business and other industries fled to the low-wage South, a freshman senator from Massachusetts suggested a solution.

By
JOHN F.
KENNEDY
JANUARY 1954

ORIGINALLY TITLED
"NEW ENGLAND
AND THE SOUTH:
THE STRUGGLE
FOR INDUSTRY"



After three terms in the U.S. House of Representatives, JFK became a senator in 1953, at age 35. The following year, he published a cover story in The Atlantic that delved into the economic disaster facing his home state and region as—propelled by federal policies—mainstays of their manufacturing base slipped southward.

The article was almost certainly the work of Theodore Sorensen. Sorensen had left the staff of the joint congressional committee on railroad retirement to work for Senator Kennedy—induced by the thought, Sorensen said later, that Massachusetts “had neither responded to the growing competition of other regions nor made the most of postwar industrial developments.” Sorensen became Kennedy’s legislative assistant and, in the White House, a valued counselor and his finest wordsmith.

NEARLY 14,000 employees working for the John Doe Company, a New England textile concern, lost their jobs in the period following World War II because of the liquidation of 13 of their mills. During the same period, the same company opened a large number of new plants in the South. It had “migrated.” Why? To what extent was it influenced by natural advantages, by unfair practices, or by the policies of the federal government?

For one southern operation, the John Doe Company bought a surplus naval factory at a low price; and for another, it obtained an accelerated tax-amortization certificate from the federal government, authorizing it to depreciate its plant within five years rather than the normal period of 20 to 25 years. It also utilized a federally tax-exempt charitable trust in order to avoid taxes on several of its new southern operations, and negotiated with three southern communities for the building and equipping of more new plants through the issuance of municipal revenue bonds that are exempt from federal taxation.

Not a single one of the John Doe Company’s southern plants has been organized by a labor union, although attempts at unionization have been made for more than 10 years. Injunctions, employer propaganda, and procedural delays under the Taft-Hartley Act have prevented the union from keeping any foothold gained through representation elections. Partly as a result of these maneuvers, the wage scales at the southern plants are all considerably lower than the prevailing union wage scale in the liquidated New England mills ...

The board chairman of John Doe testified before a Senate subcommittee comparing the cost of his southern and New England operations. Power cost per kilowatt-hour was 7.4 mills at his Alabama plant as compared with 17 mills at his Rhode Island plant. Transportation rates were one-third lower for equal distances, unemployment-compensation taxes were half as great, and employee pension and vacation plans in operation at northern plants were not customary in southern plants.

One may think that this hypothetical case—which is actually a combination of two true cases—is an extreme example. But it is by no



means untypical in revealing the pattern of industrial migration from New England to the South. Since 1946, in Massachusetts alone, 70 textile mills have been liquidated, generally for migration or disposition of their assets to plants in the South or other sections of the country. Besides textiles, there have been moves in the machinery, hosiery, apparel, electrical, paper, chemical, and other important industries ...

In only a small number of cases does direct migration take place through closing New England plants and transferring their operations to southern plants. More often, firms start by operating mills in both New England and the South, then tend to abandon their northern plants in periods of decline and later expand their southern operations when prosperity returns ...

Why do industries move south, with all of the attendant consequences to their employees and community?

It would be unfair to imply that the South's natural advantages have not been responsible for a large share of this industrial migration. Perhaps most important of all, the South has a much larger supply of labor, primarily from the farms, to draw upon for industrial employment, thus enabling employers to select the youngest and most adaptable. Pure, fresh water; nearness to raw materials and production factors; greater space; a milder climate; and the hospitality shown new industries in new areas are also southern advantages which should not be denied. Nor should we seek to hamper the rapid efforts of the South to obtain some of New England's many and well-known advantages, in skilled labor, research, markets, and credit facilities ...

But the final reason for migration, with which I am particularly concerned, is the cost

⬆ **Urging Congress to pass anti-recession legislation in 1958, Senator Kennedy, of hard-hit Massachusetts, addresses a labor-union rally in Washington, D.C.**

THE SOUTHWARD MIGRATION OF INDUSTRY FROM NEW ENGLAND HAS TOO FREQUENTLY TAKEN PLACE FOR CAUSES OTHER THAN NORMAL COMPETITION AND NATURAL ADVANTAGES.

differential resulting from practices or conditions permitted or provided by federal law which are unfair or substandard by any criterion. Massachusetts manufacturing industries in May of 1953 paid an average hourly wage of \$1.64; but because the federal minimum is only an outdated 75 cents an hour, many industries migrating to the rural communities of Mississippi pay workers only that less-than-subsistence wage ... Practically all New England woolen textile mills pay a wage of at least \$1.20 an hour; but ... the New England mills must bid for government contracts against southern mills paying only \$1.05 an hour. Labor organizations in highly unionized New England have achieved not only better wages but pension and fringe benefits as well. In the South, however, unionization of competing plants has been virtually halted since enactment of the Taft-Hartley law.

Without adequate federal standards for social security or unemployment compensation, many employers who move south support a level of benefits far below those paid by New England industry ... One of the most obviously unfair inducements offered to those considering migration is the tax-free plant built by a southern community with the proceeds of federally tax-exempt municipal bonds.

It is therefore an unfortunate conclusion that the southward migration of industry from New England has too frequently taken place for causes other than normal competition and natural advantages ...

The answer lies neither in prohibiting federal power and other programs aiding the South, nor, as some have maintained, in cutting wages or social benefits in New England or meeting subsidy with more subsidies; for in the end all of us are harmed and our problems still remain unsolved. Instead positive action is required. For this reason I presented to the Senate in May of 1953 a comprehensive program calling for federal legislation aimed at the correction of these abuses ...

The proposals I have made should not be regarded as posing an antagonistic issue between North and South ... The competitive struggle for industry will and must go on, but it will be a fair struggle based on natural advantages and natural resources, not exploiting conditions and circumstances that tend to depress rather than elevate the economic welfare of the nation. **A**

JFK's Civil-Rights Problem

Candidate Kennedy promised a civil-rights bill, but President Kennedy was cautious—overly cautious, critics said—in proposing legislative action. JFK was similarly timid in framing economic policy, trying to avoid a collision with Congress.

REPORT ON WASHINGTON

JULY 1963

PROBABLY NO OTHER sentence he has uttered has proved more embarrassing to the president than his eloquent inaugural plea: “Ask not what your country can do for you—ask what you can do for your country.” That simplicity of phrase brought a chorus of “What do you want us to do?” to which there has been precious little response other than that young men and women could join the Peace Corps. Join the Peace Corps they have, both old and young, and with a will and enthusiasm which demonstrate what a deep river of conscience exists in this nation, if only it is tapped.

→ **Civil-rights marchers stage a rally of about 1,500 people in Indianapolis on August 4, 1963.**



Yet most of the other answers Kennedy has tried to give have often seemed too complex and too remote: improve the rate of economic growth, fight juvenile delinquency, increase American exports, improve civil rights, engage in physical-fitness programs, and so on. Indeed, the Kennedy campaign promises have provided the Republicans with numerous political barbs to throw back at the president.

TOO MUCH CAUTION?

A major example is in the field of civil rights. A recent broadside by the National Federation of Republican Women quoted Shakespeare to plague the president: “His promises were, as he was then, mighty; But his performance, as he is now, nothing.” And on civil rights the Republican women point to a campaign promise that a civil-rights bill “will be among the first orders of business when a new Congress meets in January.” This was to be in January 1961, but the president has relied not on new legislation but on persuasion and use of existing legislation to move the nation forward in this field.

Often he has acted apparently because of pressure from the more militant Negro groups, as was the case in Birmingham, Alabama. Attorney General Robert F. Kennedy has more than once complained that the militants were being too militant. Yet it probably is true that this very militancy has been the major instrument by which the Kennedy administration has been able to use its good offices in breaking down the racial bars in both North and South.

In the economic field the president has



Do Something!

Action, action, action—that was the new administration's instinct. But six months into Kennedy's term, the success of his agenda still hinged on whether the economy would pick up enough to pay for it.

REPORT ON WASHINGTON

AUGUST 1961

prodded Congress for new instruments with which to improve the nation's economy and to lower its far-too-high rate of unemployment. But he has often first sounded the high note, only to retreat later and compromise, before his own allies in Congress have had a chance to do battle for his cause ...

It is true that the president proposes and Congress disposes, at least to a large degree, despite overwhelming Democratic majorities in both House and Senate. Yet Kennedy's argument is that by careful cajolery and fancy footwork at the Capitol the Congress has passed, and will pass, many a bill by a slim margin which otherwise would have been lost, if a frontal assault on Congress or a plea to the public over its head had been tried. It is now well established that the president's approach is to avoid the head-on collisions at almost all costs.

Perhaps history will record that in domestic affairs Kennedy pushed and prodded the nation as far and as fast as anyone could have done. However, the fact remains that far too little has been accomplished on the domestic front in relation to the needs of a growing and more affluent population. ■

On June 11, 1963, evidently after the July issue of The Atlantic went to press, President Kennedy delivered an emotional speech on national television in which he called for legislation to, among other things, desegregate restaurants, hotels, and other establishments. (See "Passing the Torch," page 6.) His proposals became the basis of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, enacted after his death.

THE FIRST SIX MONTHS of the Kennedy administration have been hectic. There has been a high degree of improvisation, of trial and error, yet there is a pattern now visible in the Kennedy program, though its effectiveness is as much in doubt today as were the first results of the Roosevelt program nearly three decades ago.

In the domestic field, Kennedy's pattern was evident even before his inauguration. The program which the 87th Congress has produced was foreordained in the Kennedy task-force reports and in the president's messages to Congress. It is essentially a middle-of-the-road effort to "get this country moving again," as candidate Kennedy so often said last year.

The longer-term measures, both those enacted and those so far stalled in the Congress, will have to be in effect for some time before they can be adequately evaluated. But none are radical departures from the moderate welfare measures which began under FDR and which the Republicans in the Eisenhower years concluded were here to stay. How many of Kennedy's domestic proposals are enacted into law during the two sessions of the

present Congress, the one this year and the one which will meet next January, will depend on a number of factors, among which the state of the federal Treasury is a prime consideration. Kennedy is relying on an upsurge in the economy which will bring in, at present tax rates, enough added revenue to finance his program.

The belief is that it can all be done with nothing more than creeping inflation, though the conservative economists and politicians in Washington are highly skeptical of this. But if revenues are on the increase, the result undoubtedly will answer the cries of "How will you pay for it?" which have been hurled at every new spending measure.

In the past couple of years, there has been a growing acceptance of the thesis that the federal government has a major responsibility for improving the public sector of the economy—schools, highways, hospitals, and public works of all kinds which individuals alone cannot handle and which states and local communities are unable to finance. The groans of the homeowner over increasing local real-estate taxes in every corner of the nation have accelerated this process. ■

The Baleful Influence of Gambling

The president's brother came to be considered one of the nation's most effective attorneys general. His interest in organized crime, dating to his Senate staff work during the 1950s, led him to crusade against illegal gambling, which was known to finance criminal enterprises.

NO ONE KNOWS exactly how much money is involved in gambling in the United States. What we do know is that the American people are spending more on gambling than on medical care or education; that, in so doing, they are putting up the money for the corruption of public officials and the vicious activities of the dope peddlers, loan sharks, bootleggers, white-slave traders, and slick confidence men.

Investigation this past year by the FBI, Internal Revenue Service, the Narcotics Bureau, the Post Office Department, and all other federal investigative units has disclosed without any shadow of a doubt that corruption and racketeering, financed largely by gambling, are weakening the vitality and strength of this nation.

But, as I sit down today to write this article,

By
**ROBERT F.
KENNEDY**
APRIL 1962

a business executive with an industrial firm on the Eastern Seaboard is telephoning a bookmaker to place a \$50 bet on a horse race; a factory worker in a Midwestern town is standing at a lunch counter filling out a basketball parlay card on which he will wager \$2; a housewife in a West Coast suburb is handing a dime to a policy writer who operates a newsstand as a front near the supermarket where she shops.

These people, and millions like them who follow similar routines every day, see nothing wrong in what they are doing ...

But they are taking a chance which the nation and its economy cannot afford. They are pouring dimes and dollars day by day into a vast stream of cash which finances most illegal underworld activities ...

Last May, I appeared before a subcommittee of the House Committee on the Judiciary and testified in support of anticrime legislation then pending before the Congress. Relying on rock-bottom estimates of the Department of Justice, I estimated—probably conservatively—that illegal gambling in the United States does a gross volume of \$7 billion annually. That is more than the American people spend each year on bread ...

While we do have great problems in estimating the total amount gambled illegally, we can get some idea from significant records made available by the Internal Revenue Service through raids.

For example, the records of an Indiana bookmaker indicate that for a three-day period he received a total of \$1,156,000 in wagers. A check of the gross receipts of a large department store in the same city indicated its gross for the same three days as \$31,863. A Chicago bookie's records showed he took in \$6,400,000 in total wagers for one year, while a chain grocery store in Chicago showed total gross receipts of only \$293,000 ...

JUST AS LEGITIMATE BUSINESSMEN invest their profits in other businesses, so do the capitalists of crime use their gambling profits to invest in other criminal businesses. High on the list is narcotics ...

This administration is making a major effort to bring organized crime and racketeering under control ...

One of our new laws makes it a federal crime

for any person to move in interstate travel to promote or participate in a racketeering enterprise. Some of the nation's most notorious racketeers have been insulated from prosecution by living in one section of the country and having illegal gambling interests in another ...

Two other new laws make it a felony to transmit bets and wagers between states by wire or telephone or to transport wagering paraphernalia to another state. Wagering paraphernalia, as defined by Congress, includes tickets, slips, or paper used in bookmaking, sports pools, or the numbers racket.

The new laws, which the president signed on September 13, had an immediate effect on the gambling community. The nation's leading race wire services, including Athletic Publications of Minneapolis, Minnesota—the so-called Minneapolis line, which furnished point spread and other sports handicap information—and the Nola News of New Orleans closed down ...

The laws themselves, of course, while enabling the federal government to do a better job, will not make the final difference. That must come from the extra effort now being made by all the federal law-enforcement agencies and many local police officials, and from the support which this effort gets from the American people themselves.

The dishonesty of the gambling operations, the degradation of the narcotics and white-slave traffic are bad enough, but what really concerns me is the great wealth of the racketeers and the power that goes with it—the power to corrupt police and public officials, and in some instances, gain political control of an area.

The fundamental strength of our democracy, which is based on respect for the law, is at stake. Individual citizens, by working to elect honest public officials and raise policemen's pay, can make a major difference in this matter. But in the last analysis it depends on the business executive, the factory worker, and the housewife who have been financing big-time crime with their \$2 bets and their 10-cent wagers. If they would stop patronizing the illegal bookie, the numbers runner, and the sports-pool operator, they could take the profit out of gambling and bring organized crime down to size quicker than all the combined efforts of the federal and local law-enforcement agencies. ■

Those SOB's

"My father always told me that all businessmen were sons of bitches, but I never believed it until now," President Kennedy famously said when he felt steel executives had double-crossed him by raising prices.

REPORT ON WASHINGTON

AUGUST 1962

OF ALL THE KENNEDY campaign promises, the one on which he has fallen down hardest is the pledge to do something about the sluggish economy and its exasperating low rate of growth ...

To the liberals who supported him, the president turned out to be a prisoner of such conventional wisdoms as the balanced budget. In short, he talked like a liberal, but he acted like a conservative. He ... made a fetish of his anti-inflation policy, so that the [steelmakers'] attempt to raise steel prices in April hit him with the force of a lightning bolt. His reaction was predictable.

But if the steel masters were blind in their anticipation of what the president might do in the wake of their move, so was the president blind as to the effect of what he did on the business community as a whole ... Certainly the president's "S.O.B." crack, once it was immortalized in the pages of *The New York Times*, served as a catalyst to bring forth a wide reaction of business venom. The president's cool attitude toward business audiences contrasted with his sense of warmth with labor audiences, too.

Kennedy is not, of course, an

Andrew Jackson, a Woodrow Wilson, an FDR, trying to reshape in fundamental ways the nature of the American system. At most, he is trying to bring up to date reforms initiated by the New Deal, in order to meet changed conditions. But ... to a vast number of businessmen he is simply antibusiness—period. Being a Democratic president, he is guilty until he proves himself innocent ...

The president's initial reaction, aside from anger, to the attacks from business was a sort of "What do they want? Why don't they see what I'm trying to do for them?" At one press conference he listed the things he was trying to do for business, some of which, to his incredulity, business was resisting. Then, as the stock-market tremors alarmed Washington, Kennedy was, ironically, driven to take a liberal step.

The president announced that he will propose ... an across-the-board tax cut for corporations and individuals, retroactive to January 1. In other words, Kennedy had finally come around to the thesis of the chairman of his Council of Economic Advisers, Walter Heller, that the tax structure is sucking too much money from the public, and thereby is putting a brake on the economy. ■

Why Land on the Moon?

In 1961, when President Kennedy declared that America would put a man on the moon by the end of the decade, critics complained about the cost. In response, two scientists argued in *The Atlantic* that the endeavor shouldn't be thought of in terms of budgets or even science, but rather in terms of pursuing "a great adventure" on behalf of mankind.

→ Six weeks after the Soviet Union sent Yuri Gagarin into orbit around the Earth, and three weeks after Americans responded tepidly with Alan Shepard's suborbital jaunt, President Kennedy declared a national mission. Speaking to a joint session of Congress on May 25, 1961, he set a goal of landing an American on the moon by decade's end. If any flourish of policy captured the dynamism of Kennedy's presidential style, it was this.

When *The Atlantic* devoted much of an issue to the ensuing controversy over racing into space, a pair of NASA scientists took up the defense for the quest. Robert Jastrow, a theoretical physicist, ran the agency's Goddard Institute for Space Studies. Homer E. Newell, a mathematician, was in charge of NASA's office of space sciences.

The moon landing in 1969—"one giant leap for mankind"—burnished Kennedy's legacy.

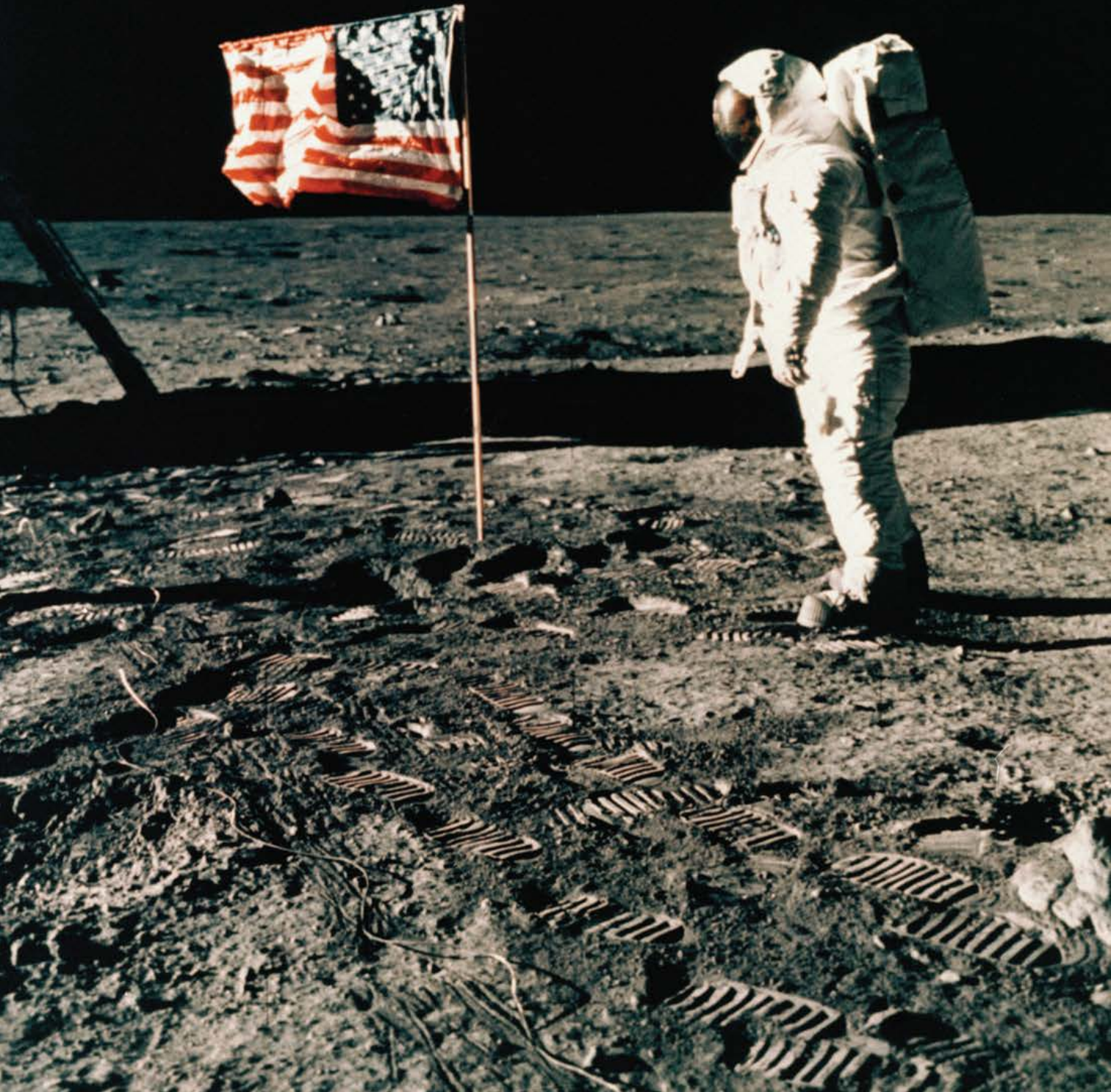
By
ROBERT
JASTROW
AND
HOMER E.
NEWELL
AUGUST 1963

→ Eight years after President Kennedy announced the goal of landing a man on the moon, Buzz Aldrin poses beside an American flag on July 20, 1969.

CONGRESS HAS BEEN asked to provide \$5.7 billion for the programs of the National Aeronautics and Space Administration during the current fiscal year, roughly six cents of every federal tax dollar. This level of expenditure has produced demands for a re-evaluation of the space program. Critics ask whether the exploration of the solar system is a valid enterprise for the United States to undertake at this time; or, granting the ultimate importance of the step, whether it must be carried out at the present pace.

The focal point of the criticism is the Apollo project for manned lunar landing, which absorbs \$3.7 billion out of the \$5.7 billion in the projected NASA budget. The Apollo budget which has produced the current outcry stems from a decision made in 1961. At that time the man-in-space

· “We choose to go
to the moon in this
decade and do the
other things, not
because they are easy,
but because they are
hard.” — President
Kennedy, speech at
Rice University,
September 12, 1962





program was expanded beyond the limited Mercury effort to a full-scale attack on the problems of manned flight to the moon and planets. The impetus for the decision came from a series of Soviet achievements in February and March of 1961, when the U.S.S.R. launched in rapid succession four spacecraft, each weighing 10,000 pounds or more. These were followed on April 12, 1961, by the successful orbiting of Major Gagarin in a 14,000-pound spacecraft and his safe recovery after a circuit of the Earth in one hour and 47 minutes. Thus, the world saw the Soviet Union achieve man's first flight in space.

On May [25], 1961, President Kennedy laid the Soviet challenge before the American people. He urged the nation to commit itself to the goal of landing a man on the moon and returning him safely to Earth before the decade was out. The president's message suggested the reasons underlying this recommendation: we faced the gloomy prospect of standing second to the U.S.S.R. in manned flight for years to come; the manned lunar landing would be the first major space achievement in which the U.S. effort could reach its full strength; a vigorous effort could achieve a manned lunar landing by the end of this decade; and if the United States set 1970 as its target date for the lunar landing, it would have a good chance to reach this goal before the U.S.S.R.

President Kennedy asked for a careful

⬆ **Six days before his death, President Kennedy was briefed on the Saturn rocket at Cape Canaveral by, among others, the famed engineer Wernher von Braun (partly hidden, third from the right).**

examination of the proposed commitment: "I think every citizen of this country as well as the Members of Congress should consider the matter carefully in making their judgment... There is no sense in agreeing, or desiring that the United States take an affirmative position in outer space unless we are prepared to do the work and bear the burdens."

In July 1961, the Congress voted overwhelmingly for the funds requested to move the space program into high gear. In 1962 Congress reaffirmed its support by doubling the budget of the previous year. Now, in 1963, we see the substantial fruits of our increased labors in space. The manned-flight program is rapidly advancing through its intermediate objectives toward the milestone of the lunar landing. The space-flight program as a whole has produced a great volume of scientific research, as well as economically important applications to weather forecasting and communications.

At the same time, the Russians continue to show great vigor in their man-in-space program. The single-orbit flight of Gagarin was followed rapidly by [Gherman] Titov's 17-orbit mission, by other multi-orbit flights, and by the formidable accomplishment of a near rendezvous between pairs of cosmonauts. The Soviet science program in space has also been stepped up to a high level after a lull of some years, with 18 Kosmos

scientific satellites, a lunar probe, and a Mars probe launched during the last year. There appears to be no letup in the Soviet space challenge to the United States.

What, then, is the basis for the questioning of the commitment to the expanded U.S. space program?

THOUGHTFUL CRITICS, concerned over the allocation of limited national resources, ask whether this is a good way in which to spend funds that might otherwise be used for the betterment of man's lot on the surface of the Earth. Could some of the money going into space research be diverted into other programs of public interest—medical research, education, housing, technical aid to emerging nations—a variety of projects contributing to the welfare of our society?

This question implies that public funds are transferable. However, the reduction of support for one national program does not carry a guarantee of increased support for other projects. President Kennedy remarked recently, "Some people say we should take the money we are putting into space and put it into housing or education ... My judgment is that what would happen would be that they would cut the space program and you would not get additional funds for education."

But if space money cannot readily be rerouted into other channels, that negative consideration in itself is not a reason for these large expenditures. What are the positive values which we derive from this investment?

The nation can expect the following consequences of the space program: the fruits of research into fundamental problems of science; economic benefits from the application of satellites to communications and weather forecasting; long-range technological benefits accruing to industry; a general stimulus to science and to science education; and, most important, the security which comes from U.S. leadership in space ...

But scientists who see the benefits of space exploration are opposed to the timetable of the man-in-space program, and particularly the schedule set for landing men on the moon. They suggest that the objectives of space research can be realized by robot instruments, with the manned-flight program carried out at a slower pace.

This question requires a further exploration

**WHILE
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IT WAS NEVER
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OBJECTIVE.**

of the motives underlying the United States space effort. Is it primarily a scientific program? Or is it motivated by a broader concern with national interests and national goals? Looking back to the overwhelming support given the new space program by the Congress in 1961, it seems clear that this support was not tendered for purely scientific reasons, but came from a deep-seated conviction that the expanded program will make an important contribution to our future welfare and security. We believe that this is the reason why the people have supported the enlarged space program and the Congress has voted for it. That brings us to the point on which we take serious issue with some of our scientific colleagues, who complain, "The scientific exploration of the moon has been accorded a secondary priority in the lunar program." This remark is based on the premise that science should have top priority in the space program. However, while science plays an important role in lunar exploration, it was never intended to be the primary objective of that project. The impetus of the lunar program is derived from its place in the long-range U.S. program for exploration of the solar system. The heart of that program is man in space, the extension of man's control over his physical environment. The science and technology of space flight are ancillary developments which support the main thrust of manned exploration, while at the same time they bring valuable returns to our economy and our culture. The science which we do in space provides the equivalent of the gold and spices recovered from earlier voyages of exploration. It is the return to the taxpayer for his investment in his nation's future. But the driving force of the program is not in scientific research alone, valuable though that may be in the long run. Thus, the pace of the program must be set not by the measured patterns of scientific research, but by the urgencies of the response to the national challenge ...

However we may try to break the program down into its elements and to attempt a detailed balancing of debits and credits, the fact remains that the space effort is greater than the sum of its parts. It is a great adventure and a great enterprise, not only for the United States but for all humanity. We have the power and resources to play a leading role in this effort, and it is inconceivable that we should stand aside. **4**

Too Cool for Congress

Kennedy never worked well with Congress, even while he was a member. Here, a longtime television correspondent (who was, *The Atlantic* noted, also “a talented woodworker, a silently dangerous poker player, a sage handicapper of thoroughbreds, and generously inaccurate at pocket billiards”) examines the cultural roots of JFK’s problems on Capitol Hill.

By
DAVID BRINKLEY

FEBRUARY 1965

ORIGINALLY TITLED “LEADING FROM STRENGTH: LBJ IN ACTION”

WHILE PRESIDENT Kennedy was receptive to new ideas, he never called up task forces in any way as systematically military as Eisenhower’s. Perhaps it was because among the campus intellectuals he brought to Washington, each thought he was his own task force, needing no outside experts to think up ideas because he *had* ideas. There were so many ideas; in fact, they poured out too fast and went to Congress too fast, before a public understanding and acceptance had been generated and before the private politicking and hand-holding and cajoling had been done. (“He asked Congress to

move out forward before the artillery and the Air Force had been brought up”—Senator [Eugene] McCarthy of Minnesota.) [Lyndon B.] Johnson as vice president watched with dismay while Congress was overwhelmed with Kennedy messages and programs to the point of choking confusion.

Kennedy was a good politician but not a great legislative mechanic, and the congressional response to him was slow and often nonexistent. They remembered him as a junior member who even as president still stood in awe of the congressional elders and vestrymen, with their encrusted seniority and habits of command, and they remembered that he had barely been elected at all.

There was another factor, not much spoken of, but a factor nevertheless. A high proportion of congressmen are country boys, and even some of those who are not like to say they are, and there was some mild dislike of Kennedy’s city ways. A country-boy congressman from Tennessee told me in 1962, “All that Mozart string music and ballet dancing down there and all that fox hunting and London clothes. He’s too elegant for me. I can’t talk to him.” **A**

➔ In his State of the Union address on January 14, 1963, President Kennedy proposed a tax cut for individuals and businesses as well as higher spending on nuclear weapons.



A PHOTO ESSAY

CAMELOT



• *This page:* The groom's siblings gather behind the newlyweds on September 12, 1953, in Newport, Rhode Island. From the left: Bobby, Patricia, Eunice, Ted, and Jean. *Opposite page:* Jacqueline Bouvier and John F. Kennedy on their wedding day.





• *This page:* The former naval officer and his bride-to-be on Cape Cod, preparing to set sail.
Opposite page: The 36-year-old senator and his 23-year-old fiancée pose on the lawn of the Kennedy family's compound in Hyannis Port, Massachusetts, days after announcing their engagement in 1953.







• *This page:* A moment of relaxation off Cape Cod, aboard the presidential yacht, which Kennedy renamed *Honey Fitz*, after his grandfather, a former mayor of Boston. *Opposite page:*

1. The first family in Hyannis Port in August 1962. 2. Jackie and the children, John Jr. and Caroline, out for a trot in November 1962. 3. JFK and his 2-year-old son. 4. Jackie and the children celebrate Christmas in 1962 at the Kennedy family's getaway in Palm Beach, Florida.
5. Cape Cod, with the family pets, in August 1963. The mother of the two puppies in Jackie's lap was the Soviet leader Nikita Khrushchev's gift to Caroline.
6. Father and daughter take the *Honey Fitz* out for a spin off Hyannis Port in August 1963.



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• **Above:** Aboard the USS *Joseph P. Kennedy Jr.*, named after the brother who was killed in World War II, President and Mrs. Kennedy watch the first race of the 1962 America's Cup competition off Newport, Rhode Island.

Right: Five-year-old Caroline Kennedy whispers a secret to her father in Hyannis Port, Massachusetts, on August 26, 1963.



LEFT: ROBERT KNUDSEN/WHITE HOUSE/
JOHN F. KENNEDY PRESIDENTIAL LIBRARY
AND MUSEUM; RIGHT: JOHN F. KENNEDY
PRESIDENTIAL LIBRARY AND MUSEUM



The Politics of Poverty

Kennedy's concern for the plight of the poor never turned into a broad legislative program. But his successor seized on the issue, claiming it was the martyred president's last wish that he do so.

LATE IN THE DAY on Saturday, November 23, 1963, Walter Heller, Kennedy's chief economic adviser, was called into the Oval Office to brief [the new president, Lyndon B.] Johnson. "Just as I was about to go out of his office and had opened the door," Heller wrote in notes he made just after the conversation and marked **HIGHLY CONFIDENTIAL**, "the President gently pushed it shut and drew me back in and said, 'Now, I want to say something about all this talk that I'm a conservative who is likely to go back to the Eisenhower ways or give in to the economy bloc in Congress. It's not so, and I want you to tell your friends—Arthur Schlesinger, [John Kenneth] Galbraith, and other liberals—that it is not so ... If you looked at my record, you would know that I am a Roosevelt New Dealer. As a matter of fact, to tell the truth, John F. Kennedy was a little too conservative to suit my taste.'"

For some months Heller had been urging Kennedy to launch what he called an "attack

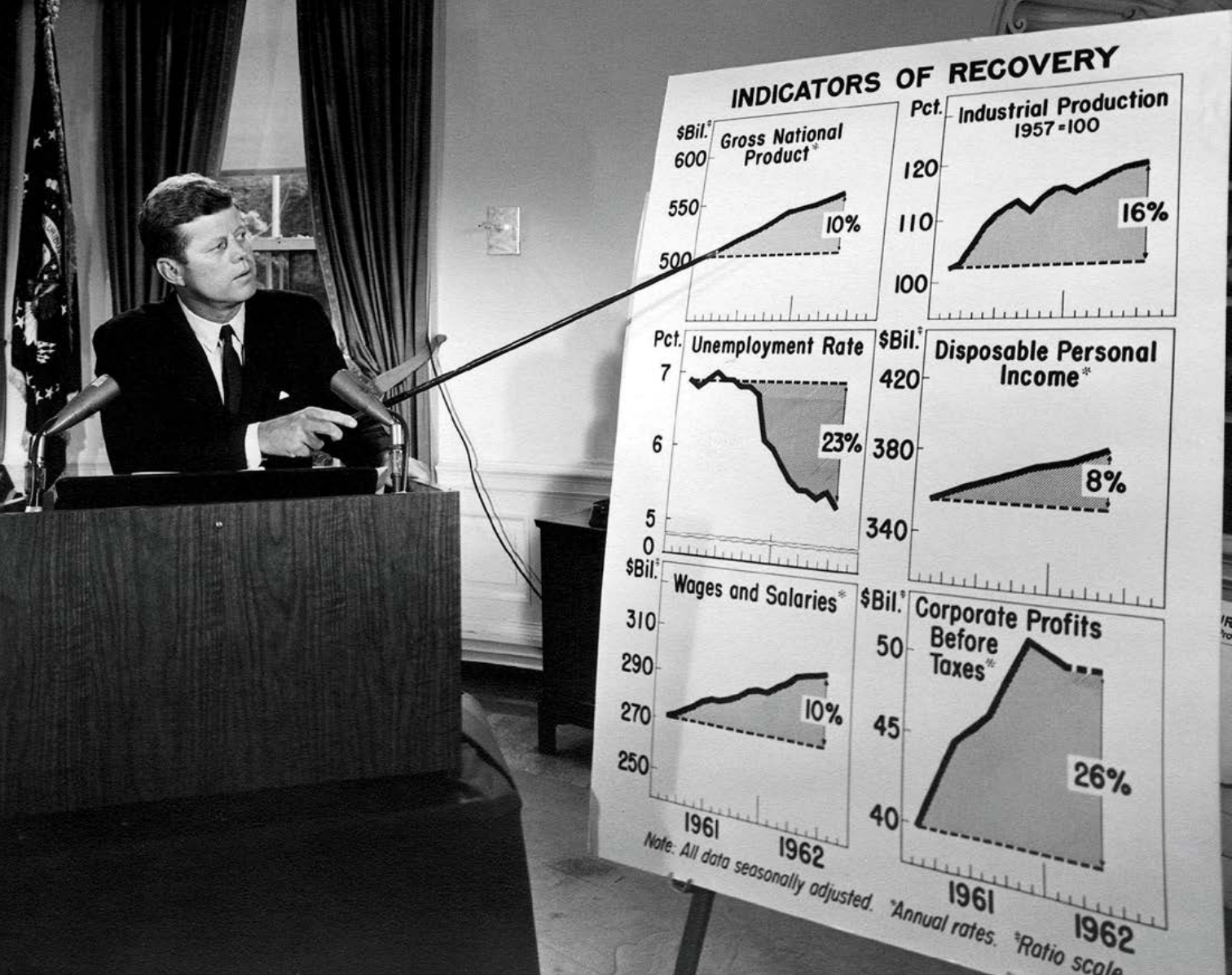
By
**NICHOLAS
LEMAN**
DECEMBER 1988

ORIGINALLY TITLED
"THE UNFINISHED WAR"

on poverty." At the time of the assassination it was in the planning stages and had not received any public attention ...

In early December of 1963 Arthur M. Schlesinger Jr. published an article on Kennedy in *The Saturday Evening Post*. He wrote, "In one of the last talks I had with him, he was musing about the legislative program for next January, and said, 'The time has come to organize a national assault on the causes of poverty, a comprehensive program, across the board.'" No sooner was Schlesinger's article published than Johnson wrote a letter to the American Public Welfare Association promising, identically, "a national assault on the causes of poverty." The severely grieving Robert Kennedy found a piece of notepaper on which his brother, during the last Cabinet meeting he had conducted, had scribbled the word *poverty* several times and circled it; he framed it and kept it in his office at the Justice Department. By the time Lyndon Johnson assumed the presidency, fighting poverty had taken on the coloration of having been John F. Kennedy's last wish.

In truth there is no evidence that this was



his last wish, and it is not at all clear how far Kennedy would have let Heller go with his poverty program. Certainly all the living principals agree today that one thing Kennedy would not have done is publicly declare war on poverty. In Heller's next-to-last talk with Kennedy on the subject, on October 21, 1963, Kennedy had, it is true, been quite enthusiastic. He said that an article on a poor white area of Kentucky by Homer Bigart in the previous day's *New York Times* had convinced him that "there was a tremendous problem to be met," according to Heller's notes of the meeting. The notes continue, "It's perfectly clear that he is aroused about this and if we could really produce a program to fit the bill, he would be inclined to run with it."

Compared with those comments, however, Kennedy's last words to Heller about the poverty problem, at a meeting on November 19, three days before the assassination, represented a

↑ **President Kennedy delivers a televised speech to the nation on August 13, 1962. In the speech, he proposes public-works spending, an investment tax credit, and other measures to boost the sluggish economy.**

pulling-back. In the time between the two talks Kennedy had been briefed on the 1964 election by Richard Scammon, the director of the census. Scammon said that many voters thought that federal programs really didn't help them. Kennedy asked him how a new poverty program might affect the campaign. Scammon said that it wouldn't do him much good, because most voters didn't consider themselves poor, and those who did weren't the ones a Democratic presidential candidate had to win over. On November 19, according to Heller's notes, "I wondered just what his current feeling about it was. His attitude was, 'No, I'm still very much in favor of doing something on the poverty theme if we can get a good program, but I also think it's important to make clear that we're doing something for the middle-income man in the suburbs, etc. But the two are not at all inconsistent with one another. So go right ahead with your work on it.'" **A**

4

The
WORLD

As the Cold War heated up in Berlin and Cuba, avoiding nuclear war became the president's paramount task. And he succeeded—barely.

•In June 1963, President Kennedy waves to hundreds of thousands of West Berliners, who hear him declare, “*Ich bin ein Berliner*.”



The Real Meaning of *Ich bin ein Berliner*

In West Berlin in 1963, President Kennedy delivered his most eloquent speech on the world stage. The director of the John F. Kennedy Presidential Library and Museum tells the evocative story behind JFK's words.

By THOMAS PUTNAM

FALL 2013

O

THETTER THAN *ask not*, they were the most-famous words he ever spoke.

They drew the world's attention to what he considered the hottest spot in the Cold War. Added at the last moment and scribbled in his own hand, they were not, like the oratory in most of his other addresses, chosen by talented speechwriters. And

for a man notoriously tongue-tied when it came to foreign languages, the four words weren't even in English.



Ich bin ein Berliner.

These words, delivered on June 26, 1963, against the geopolitical backdrop of the Berlin Wall, endure because of the pairing of the man and the moment. John F. Kennedy's defiant defense of democracy and self-government stand out as a high point of his presidency.

To appreciate their impact, one must understand the history. After World War II, the capital of Hitler's Third Reich was divided, like Germany itself, between the communist East and the democratic West. The Soviet leader Nikita Khrushchev described West Berlin, surrounded on all sides by East Germany, as "a bone in my throat" and vowed to "eradicate this splinter from the heart of Europe." Kennedy feared that any future European conflict, with the potential for nuclear war, would be sparked by Berlin.

At their summit meeting in Vienna in the spring of 1961, Khrushchev warned Kennedy that he would sign a treaty with East Germany restricting Western access to West Berlin. In response, Kennedy announced a major military buildup. In a television address to the nation on July 25, 1961, he described the embattled city as "the great testing place of Western courage and will" and declared that any attack on West Berlin would be viewed as an attack on the United States.

The speech had its desired effect. Khrushchev backed down from signing the treaty, even as



↑ Peering over the Berlin Wall at Checkpoint Charlie, President Kennedy surveys East Berlin during his June 1963 visit to the divided city.

thousands of East Germans continued crossing into West Berlin in search of freedom. In the early morning of August 13, 1961, the East German government, with Soviet support, sought to put this problem to rest, by building a wall of barbed wire across the heart of Berlin.

Tensions had abated slightly by the time Kennedy arrived for a state visit almost two years later. But the wall, an aesthetic and moral monstrosity now made mainly of concrete, remained. Deeply moved by the crowds that had welcomed him in Bonn and Frankfurt, JFK was overwhelmed by the throngs of West Berliners, who put a human face on an issue he had previously seen only in strategic terms. When he viewed the wall itself, and the barrenness of East Berlin on the other side, his expression turned grim.

Kennedy's speechwriters had worked hard preparing a text for his speech, to be delivered in front of city hall. They sought to express solidarity with West Berlin's plight without offending the Soviets, but striking that balance proved impossible. JFK was disappointed in the draft he was given. The American commandant in Berlin called the text "terrible," and the president agreed.

So he fashioned a new speech on his own. Previously, Kennedy had said that in Roman times, no claim was grander than "I am a citizen of Rome." For his Berlin speech, he had considered using the German equivalent, "I am a Berliner."

Moments before taking the stage, during a respite in West Berlin Mayor Willy Brandt's office, JFK jotted down a few words in Latin and—with a translator's help—the German version, written phonetically: *Ich bin ein Bearleener*.

Afterward it would be suggested that Kennedy had got the translation wrong—that by using the article *ein* before the word *Berliner*, he had mistakenly called himself a jelly doughnut. In fact, Kennedy was correct. To state *Ich bin Berliner* would have suggested being born in Berlin, whereas adding the word *ein* implied being a Berliner in spirit. His audience understood that he meant to show his solidarity.

Emboldened by the moment and buoyed by the adoring crowd, he delivered one of the most inspiring speeches of his presidency. "Two thousand years ago, the proudest boast was 'Civis Romanus sum,'" he proclaimed. "Today, in the world of freedom, the proudest boast is 'Ich bin ein Berliner!'"

With a masterly cadence, he presented a series of devastating critiques of life under communism:

There are many people in the world who really don't understand, or say they don't, what is the great issue between the free world and the communist world. Let them come to Berlin ... There are some who say that communism is the wave of the future. Let them come to Berlin ... And there are even a few who say that it's true that communism is an evil system, but it permits us to make economic progress. *Lasst sie nach Berlin kommen*—let them come to Berlin!

Kennedy cast a spotlight on West Berlin as an outpost of freedom and on the Berlin Wall as the communist world's mark of evil. "Freedom has many difficulties, and democracy is not perfect," he stated, "but we have never had to put a wall up to keep our people in." He confidently predicted that, in time, the wall would fall, Germany would reunite, and democracy would spread throughout Eastern Europe.

The words rang true not only for the hundreds of thousands of people who were there but also for the millions around the world who saw the speech captured on film. Viewing the video today, one still sees a young statesman—in the prime of his life and his presidency—expressing an essential truth that runs throughout human history: the desire for liberty and self-government.

At the climax of his speech, the American leader identified himself with the inhabitants of the besieged city:

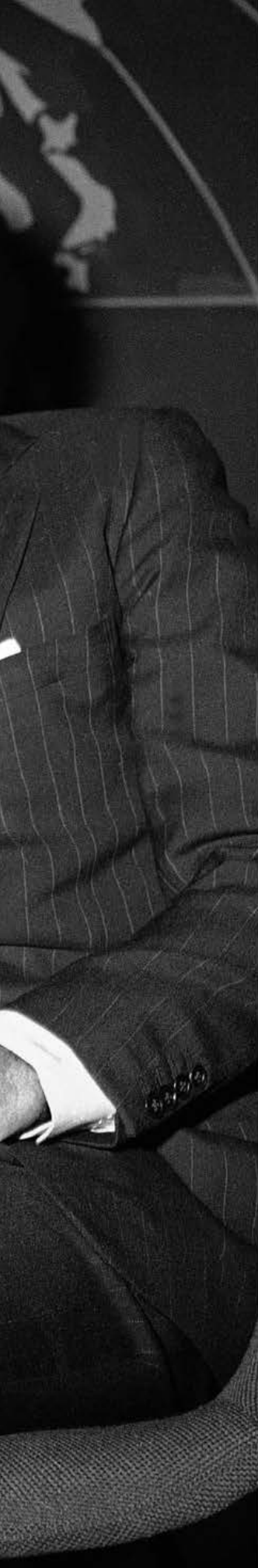
Freedom is indivisible, and when one man is enslaved, all are not free. When all are free, then we can look forward to that day when this city will be joined as one and this country and this great continent of Europe in a peaceful and hopeful globe.

His conclusion linked him eternally to his listeners and to their cause: "All free men, wherever they may live, are citizens of Berlin, and therefore, as a free man, I take pride in the words *Ich bin ein Berliner*." ■

Thomas Putnam has been the director of the John F. Kennedy Presidential Library and Museum since 2007.

JFK THE WORLD





The Cold War Logic of the Peace Corps

A former first lady's notion for competing with the Soviets: give young Americans a chance to spend two years in an underdeveloped country, offering help and spreading goodwill toward the West

← Although Eleanor Roosevelt initially opposed Kennedy's candidacy, JFK selected the former first lady to chair the newly created President's Commission on the Status of Women.

By ELEANOR ROOSEVELT

APRIL 1961

ORIGINALLY TITLED "WHAT HAS HAPPENED TO THE AMERICAN DREAM?"



During his 1960 presidential campaign, John F. Kennedy proposed "a peace corps of talented young men and women" who could serve in developing countries. The idea wasn't new; in 1957, then-Senator Hubert Humphrey had introduced a bill for such a plan. But as president, Kennedy could act on his own. He created the Peace Corps by signing an executive order on March 1, 1961, and appointed his brother-in-law Sargent Shriver to run it. The agency became the emblem of the Kennedy administration's youthful idealism.

Living in the White House for more than three terms had taught Franklin D. Roosevelt's widow a thing or two about framing a political argument, which proved useful during her later career as an advocate for human rights. Her line of reasoning for sending ambassadors of democracy abroad relied less on gauzy idealism than on hardheaded Cold War strategy: the Soviets were inculcating their youth with Marxist ideology and sending them abroad, so America had to compete.

ON JANUARY 4, 1961, the New York *Herald Tribune* carried ... a news item from Russia. It described the new propaganda drive which is in line with the world communist manifesto recently published. This manifesto declared “the United States is the bulwark of world reaction and the enemy of all the peoples on the globe.”

Writers, lecturers, and agitators are being trained in special schools to spread this propaganda wherever they can. How many Americans read that news item? How many of them glanced at it and shrugged or laughed and dismissed it from their minds? How many of them were aware of the slow and relentless effect of Soviet propaganda among the uncommitted nations of the world and its effect on our standing among many peoples? I don’t know, but I am sure that there were not enough. Not nearly enough. We are facing the greatest challenge our way of life has ever had to meet without any clear understanding of the facts ...

On my first visit to Russia I had watched the training of small babies. On my second trip, I studied the older children, their conditioning, their discipline, their docility, their complete absorption in the communist system. Every child learns his Marxism backwards and forwards. By the time he leaves school, he is prepared to take not only his skills but his political ideas with him, wherever he may be sent, to whatever part of the world ...

Today, we are one of the oldest governments in existence; ours has been the position for leadership, for setting the pattern for behavior. And yet we are supinely putting ourselves in the position of leaving the leadership to the Russians, of following their ideas rather than our own ...

When I visited Morocco in 1958 I had my first opportunity to see for myself the difficulties that arise in the transition stage between colonialism and independence. The troubles that Morocco was encountering were, it seemed to me, fairly typical of the basic difficulties of all young nations in transition.

As the French withdrew from Morocco, taking their nationals along, the ... Moroccans themselves were not yet prepared to replace



↑ In August 1962, on the South Lawn of the White House, President Kennedy greets Peace Corps volunteers, the face of his administration’s youthful idealism.

the doctors, the teachers, the civil-service employees with their own men. It may be decades before they are ready to do so. Where, then, are the necessary people to come from? ...

Today, this is happening again, in the Congo with the withdrawal of the Belgians. The time for colonization has gone forever, but some intermediate transition system is essential if chaos is not to follow ...

Russia has trained its young people to go out into the world, to carry their services and skills to backward and underdeveloped countries, to replace the missing doctors and teachers, the scientists and technicians; above all, to fill the vacant civil-service jobs, prepared not only by



JOHN F. KENNEDY PRESIDENTIAL
LIBRARY AND MUSEUM

training for the job itself, but by learning the language, by a complete briefing in the customs, habits, traditions, and trend of thought of the people, to understand them and deal with them. Where the young Russians go, of course, they take with them their Marxist training, thinking, and system.

And our young Americans? Are they being prepared to take their faith in democracy to the world along with their skills? Are they learning the language and the customs and the history of these new peoples? ...

Here, I believe, we have fallen down badly ...

What can we do to prepare young people to carry the American dream to the world in



↑ President Kennedy
walks alongside
Sargent Shriver, his
brother-in-law and
the first director of the
Peace Corps.

the best possible way? What I would like to say is this:

Today, our government and the governments of most of the world are primarily concerned—obsessed—by one idea: defense. But what is real defense, and how is it obtained? A certain amount of military defense is necessary. But there comes a point where you must consider what can be done on an economic and cultural basis ...

Instead of calling up all young men for compulsory military service, why should it not be possible to offer a counterproposal along these lines:

If you do not want to spend two years of compulsory military training, here is an alternative which is open to you. Whether you finish college or high school, you may decide what country you would like to spend two years in ...

These two-year volunteers could be doctors, engineers, teachers, scientists, mechanics, and administrators ...

If many of our young people have lost the excitement of the early settlers, who had a country to explore and develop, it is because no one remembers to tell them that the world has never been so challenging, so exciting; the fields of adventure and new fields to conquer have never been so limitless. There is still unfinished business at home, but there is the most tremendous adventure in bringing the peoples of the world to an understanding of the American dream. **A**

What Missile Gap?

In 1960, Kennedy campaigned hard against the Republican negligence that had allowed the Soviet Union to overtake the United States in producing missiles. Once in office, however, JFK learned that there was no missile gap—which gave him an opening to negotiate with Moscow from a position of strength.

REPORT ON WASHINGTON

FEBRUARY 1962

THERE IS A constant outcry in America that we have no long-term plan for dealing with the central problem of Soviet-American relationships or, more broadly, of relationships between the United States and the communist orbit. From the right comes the demand that the president declare that our goal is victory over communism, or a similar generality.

As Kennedy said in his interview with Premier [Nikita] Khrushchev's son-in-law, "Where we feel the difficulty comes is the effort by the Soviet Union to communize, in a sense, the entire world," rather than to protect its own national interests. But the communist philosophy is not going to be altered by American semantics; it is only American and allied power and its skillful application that will effect any change in the communist position ...

Today, by every intelligence estimate,

**U-2 PICTURES
CONVINCED
EISENHOWER
THAT THE
INITIAL
ASSESSMENT
OF A SOVIET
PREPARATION
FOR A FIRST
STRIKE HAD
BEEN WRONG.**

American nuclear power—and the ability to use it against the Soviet Union—is considerably greater than is the comparable Soviet power. The belief is that this American power unquestionably is the restraining influence on Khrushchev. But, by the laws of weaponry this American advantage will in due course disappear, as Soviet missiles and nuclear-submarine developments proceed.

On the other hand, so this line of reasoning goes, one of the Soviet Union's biggest assets is its ability to keep secret its military power and other aspects of its national life. In due course, this Russian advantage will decrease. The many U-2 flights over the Soviet Union ... produced a remarkable set of photographs, which laid bare manifold secrets ...

This, then, is the question posed: What should the United States attempt to do in its relations with the Soviet Union, looking toward the day when both the current American nuclear advantage and the Soviet secrecy advantage disappear? ...

THE MISSILE-GAP CONTROVERSY

To understand our more immediate plan for dealing with the Soviet Union, one must first glance back at the long argument over the so-called missile gap and what happened to it.



So all-consuming has been American suspicion of Communist motives that from the day we first learned of Soviet missile tests by means of the then-secret radar installation in Turkey, the United States government's assumption was that the Soviets were preparing for a first strike at this country. Intelligence reports, attempting to chart Soviet missile-building capabilities, said that by 1965 (a date later brought forward to 1961) the Russians would have as many as 500 to 1,000 [intercontinental ballistic missiles]. American missile production, resisted by the Air Force bomber chiefs and delayed by weight-yield problems until the invention of the hydrogen bomb, was charted at only about 70, a small number compared with the massive figures assigned the Russians. These figures leaked out, created the missile-gap furor, and were partially acknowledged

↑ **Nikita Khrushchev was widely considered to have bested the young American president at their summit meeting in Vienna in June 1961; only later did Kennedy gain the upper hand.**

by President Eisenhower's Defense Secretary, [Neil H.] McElroy.

The missile-gap controversy first began in Congress some three years ago. While it was evolving into an issue in the 1960 presidential campaign, the U-2 began to bring amazing results. Eisenhower has now stated for the record that Khrushchev had known of the U-2 flights "for several years. Their radar had tracked a number of our planes."

Responsible officials, including some who were on Kennedy's side during the election, say that Eisenhower took the risk of tapering off American defenses on the basis of what he was learning from the U-2 pictures and other data the planes collected. Yet Eisenhower was caught in a box; he could not give any such reason while the U-2 was still supersecret, and when the U-2 was caught on May 1, 1960, he at once was put on the defensive both at home and by our allies, as well as by the Soviets.

These U-2 pictures convinced Eisenhower and his aides that the initial American assessment of a Soviet preparation for a first strike had been wrong. The pictures now were read as indicating that the Soviet preparations, like our own, were essentially defensive. These readings also played a part in Eisenhower's decision to go to the 1960 summit conference, which, ironically, was wrecked by Khrushchev because of the U-2 affair.

When the Kennedy administration took office, all these facts became known to the president and Defense Secretary [Robert] McNamara, and provided the basis for McNamara's statement to newsmen last February that he had found no missile gap. It was painful, politically, for the new administration to concede this, but it represented the facts.

This does not mean that there has been any alteration of the view that the Communists would risk a nuclear attack on the United States if this country were foolish enough to so weaken its defenses that a punishing American retaliatory attack would be impossible. The aim of both the Eisenhower and Kennedy administrations was and is to see that such a state of affairs never occurs. But it does mean that the new administration, like its predecessor, believes the defenses are strong and that therefore it is possible to attempt to negotiate with the Communists. **A**

The Dawn of Nuclear Diplomacy

Every president of the postwar era longed for the approval of Walter Lippmann, the voice of the Eastern establishment. Here, Lippmann praised Kennedy for avoiding nuclear war during the Cuban missile crisis.

WE HAVE BEGUN to live in the first years of the nuclear age. Ours is an epoch when the rivalry of two great social orders includes a rivalry in nuclear arms. We were very conscious of that fact during the crisis over Cuba. For in Cuba there was, for the first time in history, the kind of grim and deadly confrontation which could have led to thermonuclear war.

As a scientific phenomenon, the nuclear age began in 1945 with the explosion of the first nuclear bomb. But in world relations the nuclear age really began about 10 years later ... Beginning about 1955, the West had ceased to have a monopoly of nuclear weapons, and by the end of the 1950s, the Soviet Union had become a very formidable nuclear power ...

The essential and novel fact in the contemporary conflict, which distinguishes it radically from the great conflicts of the

By
**WALTER
LIPPMANN**
FEBRUARY 1963

ORIGINALLY TITLED
"CUBA AND THE
NUCLEAR RISK"

past—as, for example, that between Islam and Christendom—is that the two coalitions possess nuclear weapons. These weapons differ from all other weapons, even those used as recently as the Second World War, in that they carry with them not only a greater quantity of violence but violence of a radically different order and kind.

In the wars of the pre-nuclear age, which ended with the bomb on Hiroshima, a victorious power was an organized state which could impose its terms on the vanquished. War damage, though great, was not irreparable, as we can see in the recovery of Europe and of the Soviet Union.

But after a full nuclear exchange, such as the United States and the Soviet Union are now capable of, there might well be over a hundred million dead. After the destruction of the great urban centers of the Northern Hemisphere, with the contamination of the earth, the water, and the air, there would be no such recovery as we have known after the two world wars of this century ...

If anyone wishes to understand the American position in the Cuban crisis and the American attitude toward military power in the world today, he must remember that responsible Americans do not dare to forget the reality of the nuclear age. I know some of these men. They live with these realities ...

BECAUSE NUCLEAR WEAPONS mean mutual suicide, the paramount rule of policy in this age is that, as between the nuclear powers, there can be no important change in the status quo brought about by the threat of force or by the use of force. Nuclear war cannot be used, as war has been used in the past, as an instrument of national policy. The Cuban affair has much to teach us about the nature of diplomacy in the nuclear age.

The United States has for some time possessed a marked superiority in nuclear weapons. This superiority was quite sufficient to deter the Soviet Union from using or from threatening to use nuclear weapons to enforce its purposes in Cuba. But our superiority was not sufficient to permit the United States to use or threaten to use nuclear weapons to enforce all of our own purposes in Cuba.

President Kennedy was able to prevail



because, having the power to achieve a limited objective, he had the wisdom to narrow his objective to what he had the power to achieve.

Thus, he had the power to deter the Soviet Union from attempting to break the blockade by Soviet naval action and by the threat of Soviet nuclear missiles. But the president himself could not use America's nuclear power to bring about the overthrow of [Fidel] Castro and the liquidation of a Communist regime in Cuba ...

For several reasons things did not get out of hand. First of all, [the Soviet leader Nikita] Khrushchev and Kennedy have intimate knowledge of nuclear weapons, and they have a poignant personal realization of the meaning of nuclear war. For another reason, throughout the crisis, the two heads of government kept channels of personal and official communication open.

Finally, and decisively, the United States, which had overall nuclear superiority and conventional superiority around Cuba, was careful to avoid the ultimate catastrophic mistake of nuclear diplomacy, which would be to surround the adversary and to leave him no way to retreat.

Washington did not forget that while nuclear war would be suicidal lunacy, it is an ever-present possibility. Nuclear war will not be prevented by fear of nuclear war. For, however lunatic it might

↑ **Representatives of the National Committee for a Sane Nuclear Policy picket near the Soviet Embassy in Washington, D.C., in 1961 to protest Moscow's decision to resume testing nuclear weapons.**

be to commit suicide, a great power, if it is cornered, if all the exits are barred, if it is forced to choose between suicide and unconditional surrender, is quite likely to go to war ...

There is a line of intolerable provocation and humiliation beyond which popular and governmental reactions are likely to become uncontrollable. It is the business of the governments to find out where that line is, and to stay well back of it.

Those who do not understand the nature of war in the nuclear age, those who think that war today is what war was in the past regard these careful attempts of statesmen not to carry provocation beyond the tolerable limits as weakness and softness and appeasement.

The Chinese do not understand the nuclear age, and they charge the Russians with appeasement for drawing back in Cuba. There are a good many people in the West who do not understand the nuclear age, and they are forever charging us with appeasement because we do not brandish the nuclear bomb in all our controversies with the Soviet Union. But prudence in seeking not to drive your opponent into a corner is not weakness and softness and appeasement. It is sanity and common sense and a due regard for human life. **4**



Did Kennedy Cause the Crisis?



Conventional wisdom has tended to rank the Cuban missile crisis as the Kennedy presidency's highest drama and grandest success. Drama, yes. But this provocative recounting of the administration's policy toward Castro's Cuba suggests that Kennedy brought the crisis on himself.

ASSOCIATED PRESS

By
**GARRY
WILLS**

FEBRUARY 1982

ORIGINALLY TITLED
"THE KENNEDY
IMPRISONMENT: THE
PRISONER OF TOUGHNESS"

Opposite page: The commander in chief tells Americans on October 22, 1962, about the missile sites found in Cuba and his decision to impose a naval "quarantine."

This page: Fidel Castro addresses his fellow Cubans on October 23, after President Kennedy imposed the blockade to persuade the Soviets to remove their missiles.

IF THE KENNEDYS learned nothing from their first crisis with Cuba, how did they respond so wisely in the second Cuban crisis, when Russian missiles had to be removed? The orthodoxy is that such wisdom could only have been derived from lessons of the earlier mistake. But the orthodoxy assumes that the missile crisis ended in a triumph for America, and that assumption needs some looking at.

To the American public, [Fidel] Castro's acceptance of Russian missiles looked unprovoked, mysteriously aggressive, and threatening. There was no way for Americans to know—and, at that point, no Kennedy could bring himself to inform them—that Cuban protestations of a purely defensive purpose for the missiles were genuine. We did not know what Castro knew—that thousands of [CIA] agents were plotting his death, the destruction of his government's economy, the sabotaging of his mines and mills, the crippling of his sugar and copper industries. We had invaded Cuba once; officials high in Congress and the executive department thought we should have followed up with overwhelming support for that invasion; by our timetable of a year to bring Castro down, the pressure to supply that kind of support in a new “rebellion” was growing. All these realities were cloaked from the American people, though evident to the Russians and the Cubans.

In this game of power played apart from popular support, the Kennedys looked like brave resisters of aggression, though they had actually been the causes of it. In *The Making of a Missile Crisis: October 1962*, Herbert Dinerstein has established, from study of Russian materials, that the Soviet Union did not consider Latin America ripe for Communist influence until the Bay of Pigs failure. That gave them an opportunity, as continued American activity against Castro gave them an excuse, for large-scale intervention in this hemisphere.

The Russians were aiming at influence by supporting the Cuban David against a Goliath too cowardly to strike in the daylight. Americans, unaware of all this, did not bother to ask themselves hard questions about the real purpose of the missiles in Cuba. The president said the missiles being placed could strike at any city in the United States (which was not



↑ **Communist allies Fidel Castro of Cuba and Nikita Khrushchev of the Soviet Union atop Vladimir Lenin's mausoleum during May Day celebrations in Moscow in 1963**

true), and implied that this was their purpose. But why would Castro launch missiles against even one of our cities, knowing it would be a suicidal act? Just one of our nuclear bombs on Havana would have destroyed his nation.

Well, then, if Castro did not have the missiles to conquer us, was he making himself a willing hostage to Russia's designs? Would he launch his missiles in conjunction with a larger Russian attack, knowing that we could incinerate his island as a side blow to our response to Russia? Even if Castro had wanted to immolate his nation that way, his missiles would not have helped the Russians—might, rather, have been a hindrance, because of the “ragged attack” problem. If missiles were launched simultaneously from Russia and Cuba, the Cuban ones, arriving first, would confirm the warnings of Russian attack. Or, if Cuba's missiles were launched later, radar warning of the Russian ones' firing would let us destroy the Cuban rockets in their silos.

Then why were the missiles there? For defensive purposes, just as the Cubans said. We refused to accept this explanation, because President Kennedy had arbitrarily defined ground-to-ground missiles as “offensive,” after saying that offensive weapons would not be tolerated. Yet we called our ground-to-ground missiles on the Soviets' Turkish border defensive. Deterrence—the threat of overwhelming



response if attacked—is a category of defense when we apply it to our own weapons; but we denied the same definition to our opponents. Which meant that we blinded ourselves to the only reason Castro accepted (with some reluctance) the Russian missiles. He wanted to force the Kennedys to stop plotting his overthrow by threatening that if worse came to worst and we were ready to crush him, he would take some of our cities down with him.

Americans watched this drama, as it were, through a glass pane, unable to hear the dialogue ...

President Kennedy had two dangerous situations to deal with simultaneously—the missile emplacements and American panic over them. Robert Kennedy ... told the president he had to remove the missiles or be impeached. In other words, the president was a captive of his own people's panicky emotions. Options were denied him by the American people—he could not even think of leaving the missiles in place.

Yet Kennedy had himself stirred up the feelings that limited his freedom. He had called the missiles offensive and exaggerated their range. It is understandable that he would not reveal all the American provocation that explained the presence of the missiles. But why did he have to *emphasize* the notion that their placement was unprovoked? He told the nation that the Russians had lied to him in promising not to send offensive weapons to Cuba. He said in his address on the crisis: “The greatest danger of all would be to do nothing.” If he was chained to a necessity for acting, he forged the chains himself.

In this he was renewing a cycle that has bound all our postwar presidents. In order to have freedom of maneuver, they instill a sense of crisis, but once that sense is instilled, it commits the leader to actions he did not have in mind when he instilled it. The most famous instance of this is Harry Truman's use of Senator [Arthur] Vandenberg's advice—if he wanted to rally support for anti-Communist aid to Greece and Turkey, he would have to “scare hell out of the country.” But once Truman had raised the specter of communism as an immediate threat to America, he had to calm the people by imposing a security program, and establishing the attorney general's list of possible enemies of the state, which set up the machinery in 1947

**WHY WERE
THE
MISSILES
THERE? FOR
DEFENSIVE
PURPOSES,
JUST AS THE
CUBANS SAID.**

that [Senator Joseph] McCarthy would use in the 1950s.

Henry Kissinger assured his old academic friends during the Vietnam War that such a war must be prosecuted to the end, lest a new McCarthyism arise to ask “Who lost Vietnam?” as it had asked “Who lost China?” War became a homeopathic cure for American bellicosity—a little war taps the aggressiveness that, bottled up, might break out in a larger war. By a kind of devilish symmetry, the contemptuous manipulation of public opinion leads to a slavishness toward public opinion. Kennedy thought he could wage a war out of sight of the American people, for the people's good; but when the Cubans responded in open ways, he could not explain their effrontery, and had to ride the wave of public fear. All the talent and willpower of the best and the brightest could not manipulate away the emotions they had aroused.

In dealing with the Cuban missile crisis, John Kennedy displayed what has come to be seen as a legendary restraint ...

Undoubtedly there was restraint exercised in the White House, most laudably when a U-2 plane was shot down over Cuba during the tensest moments of the quarantine, before Russia had agreed to pull back ...

There was also restraint, of a sort, in the quick rejection of a plan for outright conquest of the island—though no one was very serious in proposing that. The option that did get serious consideration, and toward which the president at first inclined, was a preemptive air strike to destroy the missile launching pads. If the military had not suggested technical difficulties in this procedure, it would have been given even more serious attention—though Robert Kennedy's first reaction to the idea was to slip his brother a note saying, “I now know how Tojo felt when he was planning Pearl Harbor” ...

Nonetheless, the course pursued was reckless. President Kennedy did not give the Russians the obvious opportunity to “save face.” In the matter of the Turkish missiles, he humiliated them gratuitously, though the missiles had no military importance for us ... Kennedy had already ordered the Turkish missiles removed, and mere procedural delay had kept them in place. Not only were they of no value, they were a source of possible trouble. [State Department official Roger] Hilsman notes that

Though the Turkish missiles meant nothing to us, they were a symbolic grievance to the Soviet Union—in fact, exactly the kind of affront we were complaining of. We felt “crowded” by missiles 90 miles from our shore. The Russians had to live with the ignominy of hostile missiles right on their border. If Kennedy’s first and only concern was the removal of the missiles from Cuba—as he and his defenders proclaimed—then a trade was the safest, surest way to achieve it. But Kennedy wanted to remove the missiles *provided* he did not appear forced to bargain with the Soviets to accomplish this. He must deliver the ultimatum, make demands to which Russia would act submissively. He would not, as he put it, let [Premier Nikita] Khrushchev rub his nose in the dirt. Which meant that he had to rub Khrushchev’s nose in the dirt, and that Khrushchev had to put up with it. Kennedy would even risk nuclear war rather than admit that a trade of useless missiles near each other’s countries was eminently fair. The restraint, then, was shown not by Kennedy but by Khrushchev. He was the one who had to back down, admit his maneuver had failed, and take the heat from internal critics for his policy. Macho appearance, not true security, was the motive for Kennedy’s act—surely the most reckless American act since the end of World War II.

[illegible]

most important one—one they cannot afford to fail again; one no Russian leader, with the example of Khrushchev before him, will abandon. We purchased submission at the price of later intransigence.

Those who praise Kennedy for his conduct in the missile crisis often reach the conclusion that he learned pacific ways in this “restrained” success. On the contrary, he must have learned that his own and his party’s popularity soared when he could make an opponent visibly “eat crow,” even if the only way to serve up that dish was to risk national safety ...

JOHN F. KENNEDY PRESIDENTIAL LIBRARY AND MUSEUM

John Kennedy had different teachers on the nature of power. They thought that any recognition of limits signaled a failure of nerve. For them the question was not *can* you do everything, but *will* you do everything? American resources were limitless—brains, science, talent, tricks, technology, money, virtuosity. The only matter to decide was whether one had the *courage* to use all that might—and John Kennedy, in his inaugural address, assured us that he had. In his first major speech on defense, he said: “Any potential aggressor contemplating an attack on any part of the free world with any kind of weapons, conventional or nuclear, must know that our response will be suitable, selective, swift, and effective.” Anywhere along the outmost sweep of our vast reach, we would strike if provoked.

It might not have been possible for the Romans to protect an expanding perimeter of power, one thinned by its extension to enclose the known world. But America could protect the whole world, because we had things the Romans lacked—jet planes, helicopters, napalm, defoliants, one-man water-walking rockets, computers, and theoreticians of the strategic hamlet. We could do everything, it was believed, so long as we never did, in any one spot, more than was absolutely necessary. That is where [Defense Secretary] Robert McNamara’s computers came into play—for dispatching exactly the right-sized teams to troubled spots. Admittedly, the computers could not measure such things as the strength of anti-colonial feeling. But that was considered an advantage by Kennedy’s “pragmatic” nonideologists. For them, the hard facts of cash and firepower spoke louder than sentiment ...

For men holding such views, Vietnam was an ideal place to try out new tools of power—a place to prove that development could be encouraged without colonial exploitation; a place where mobility and concentration of firepower could do more than enormous armies and huge weapons; a place where the infiltrating North Vietnamese could be interdicted. Jungle and swamp would train our new guerrillas for all kinds of conditions. Despite later talk of a “quagmire” that sucked us in, Americans actually charged into Vietnam—thinking, as we did of Cuba, that a few men brilliantly directed could swiftly wrap up the whole thing. ■

America Didn't Sleep

By shoring up U.S. military strength and resolve, President Kennedy persuaded the Soviet Union to back down in Berlin and Cuba, bringing a measure of peace to a world frightened about the threat of nuclear war.

REPORT ON WASHINGTON

JANUARY 1964

ON OCTOBER 9, 1961, the presidential plane was en route to Dallas, Texas.

John F. Kennedy was flying there to visit Sam Rayburn, the speaker of the House of Representatives, who was dying. A correspondent aboard the president's plane was reading a copy of *Why England Slept*, which Kennedy had written when he was a senior at Harvard and which had just been republished. The correspondent asked the president if he would autograph the book for his son, then a college freshman.

The president quickly wrote: “For Andy—With the hope that he will not be compelled in his senior year to write ‘Why America Slept.’ With warm regards, John F. Kennedy.”

President Kennedy did not let America sleep ...

OUR CHANCES FOR PEACE

In his last public utterance ... in Fort Worth a few hours before he was cruelly slain, Kennedy said: “I’m confident as I look to the future that our chances for security, our chances for peace, are better than they’ve been in the past. And the reason is because we’re stronger. And with that strength is a determination to not only maintain the peace but also the vital interests of the United States. To that great cause Texas and the United States are committed” ...

For a time during the Eisenhower administration, hopes for some kind of adjustment and easing of the Cold War

were bright. But the conditions were not ripe. Although recent hopes may again be shattered (Kennedy warned in his Fort Worth speech that “no one expects that our life will be easy—certainly not in this decade and perhaps not in this century”), Washington does believe that the Cuban crisis of October 1962 was one of those watersheds in history comparable to the beginning or end of a great war. Russia had been halted decisively ...

TOWARD AN EASING OF TENSION

After his inauguration, President Kennedy’s first objective was to strengthen the American military so that it could be used as a subtle and effective political instrument. When Khrushchev realized toward the end of 1961 that this power was growing rapidly in a sophisticated way, and that the American nerve was equal to his, he withdrew his Berlin ultimatum.

Khrushchev’s bold and exceedingly dangerous plan to place Soviet missiles in Cuba was the most daring exercise of Soviet blackmail in the nuclear age. George F. Kennan has said that he never fully understood why the usually cautious Soviet leaders would expose themselves to such dangers so far from home. It was a desperate gamble to neutralize American power.

When the gamble failed, to the humiliation of the Soviet leaders, the world breathed more easily than it had in 15 years. ■

How Could Vietnam Happen?

“Many in government or close to it,” *The Atlantic* noted in 1968, “will read the following article with the shock of recognition.” An insider explained the bureaucratic imperatives that muzzled dissenters and kept policy makers ignorant of foreign cultures.

By JAMES C. THOMSON JR.

APRIL 1968

→ Scholars have long argued about whether President Kennedy would have extricated the United States from Vietnam had he seen a second term. But there is no disputing that he entangled us further in the region. Kennedy’s men, “the best and the brightest,” drove the nation into its greatest military humiliation. Why did the United States slip into a land war in Asia? James C. Thomson Jr., an East Asia expert who had served in the White House and State Department as the war was revving up, conducted an autopsy.



AS A CASE STUDY in the making of foreign policy, the Vietnam War will fascinate historians and social scientists for many decades to come. One question that will certainly be asked: How did men of superior ability, sound training, and high ideals—American policy makers of the 1960s—create such costly and divisive policy?

As one who watched the decision-making process in Washington from 1961 to 1966 under Presidents Kennedy and Johnson, I can suggest a preliminary answer. I can do so by briefly listing some of the factors that seemed to me to shape our Vietnam policy during my years as an East Asia specialist at the State Department and the White House ...

A first and central ingredient in these years of Vietnam ... was *the legacy of the 1950s*—by which I mean the so-called loss of China, the Korean War, and the Far East policy of Secretary of State [John Foster] Dulles.

This legacy had an institutional by-product for the Kennedy administration: in 1961 the U.S. government’s East Asian establishment was undoubtedly the most rigid and doctrinaire of Washington’s regional divisions in foreign affairs. This was especially true at the Department of State, where the incoming administration found



↑ **U.S. Army helicopters cover the advance of South Vietnamese troops during an attack on a Vietcong camp near the Cambodian border in 1965.**

the Bureau of Far Eastern Affairs the hardest nut to crack. It was a bureau that had been purged of its best China expertise, and of farsighted, dispassionate men, as a result of McCarthyism. Its members were generally committed to one policy line: the close containment and isolation of mainland China, the harassment of “neutralist” nations which sought to avoid alignment with either Washington or Peking, and the maintenance of a network of alliances with anti-communist client states on China’s periphery ...

There were other important by-products of this “legacy of the ’50s”:

The new administration inherited and somewhat shared *a general perception of China-on-the-march*—a sense of China’s vastness, its numbers, its belligerence; a revived sense, perhaps, of the Golden Horde ...

The new administration inherited and briefly accepted *a monolithic conception of the Communist Bloc*. Despite much earlier predictions and reports by outside analysts, policymakers did not begin to accept the reality and possible finality of the Sino-Soviet split until the first weeks of 1962. The inevitably corrosive impact of competing nationalisms on communism was largely ignored.

The new administration inherited and to some extent shared *the “domino theory” about Asia*. This theory resulted from profound ignorance of Asian history and hence ignorance

of the radical differences among Asian nations and societies. It resulted from a blindness to the power and resilience of Asian nationalisms. (It may also have resulted from a subconscious sense that, since “all Asians look alike,” all Asian nations will act alike.) As a theory, the domino fallacy was not merely inaccurate but also insulting to Asian nations; yet it has continued to this day to beguile men who should know better.

Finally, the legacy of the ’50s was apparently compounded by an uneasy sense of a worldwide communist challenge to the new administration after the Bay of Pigs fiasco. A first manifestation was the president’s traumatic Vienna meeting with [the Soviet leader Nikita] Khrushchev in June 1961; then came the Berlin crisis of the summer. All this created an atmosphere in which President Kennedy undoubtedly felt under special pressure to show his nation’s mettle in Vietnam ...

So much for the legacy and the history. Any new administration inherits both complicated problems and simplistic views of the world. But surely among the policy makers of the Kennedy and Johnson administrations there were men who would warn of the dangers of an open-ended commitment to the Vietnam quagmire?

This raises a central question, at the heart of the policy process: Where were the experts, the doubters, and the dissenters? Were they there at all, and if so, what happened to them?

The answer is complex but instructive.

In the first place, the American government was sorely *lacking in real Vietnam or Indochina expertise*. Originally treated as an adjunct of Embassy Paris, our Saigon embassy and the Vietnam desk at State were largely staffed from 1954 onward by French-speaking Foreign Service personnel of narrowly European experience ...

In addition, *the shadow of the “loss of China”* distorted Vietnam reporting. Career officers in the department, and especially those in the field, had not forgotten the fate of their World War II colleagues who wrote in frankness from China and were later pilloried by Senate committees for critical comments on the Chinese nationalists ...

In due course, to be sure, some Vietnam talent was discovered or developed. But a recurrent and increasingly important factor in the decision-making process was *the banishment of real expertise*. Here the underlying cause was the “closed politics” of policy making as issues become hot:

the more sensitive the issue, and the higher it rises in the bureaucracy, the more completely the experts are excluded ... Another underlying cause of this banishment, as Vietnam became more critical, was the replacement of the experts, who were generally and increasingly pessimistic, by men described as “can-do guys,” loyal and energetic fixers unsoured by expertise ...

A related point—and crucial, I suppose, to government at all times—was the “effectiveness” trap, the trap that keeps men from speaking out, as clearly or often as they might, within the government. And it is the trap that keeps men from resigning in protest and airing their dissent outside the government. The most important asset that a man brings to bureaucratic life is his “effectiveness,” a mysterious combination of training, style, and connections. The most ominous complaint that can be whispered of a bureaucrat is: “I’m afraid Charlie’s beginning to lose his effectiveness.” To preserve your effectiveness, you must decide where and when to fight the mainstream of policy; the opportunities range from pillow talk with your wife, to private drinks with your friends, to meetings with the secretary of state or the president. The inclination to remain silent or to acquiesce in the presence of the great men—to live to fight another day, to give on this issue so that you can be “effective” on later issues—is overwhelming ...

Another factor must be noted: as the Vietnam controversy escalated at home, there developed a *preoccupation with Vietnam public relations as opposed to Vietnam policy making*. And here, ironically, internal doubters and dissenters were heavily employed. For such men, by virtue of their own doubts, were often deemed best able to “massage” the doubting intelligentsia ... Incidentally, my most discouraging assignment in the realm of public relations was the preparation of a White House pamphlet entitled “Why Vietnam,” in ... 1965; in a gesture toward my conscience, I fought—and lost—a battle to have the title followed by a question mark ...

As a further influence on policy makers I would cite the factor of *bureaucratic detachment*. By this I mean what at best might be termed the professional callousness of the surgeon (and indeed, medical lingo—the “surgical strike” for instance—seemed to crop up in the euphemisms of the times). In Washington the semantics of the military muted the reality of war for the civilian



↑ **General Maxwell Taylor (left), President Kennedy's military adviser, and U.S. Ambassador Frederick Nolting (right) meet with South Vietnamese President Ngo Dinh Diem in Saigon in October 1961. Two years later, Diem was overthrown in a military coup that had tacit U.S. support.**

policy makers. In quiet, air-conditioned, thick-carpeted rooms, such terms as *systematic pressure*, *armed reconnaissance*, *targets of opportunity*, and even *body count* seemed to breed a sort of games-theory detachment ...

There is an unprovable factor that relates to bureaucratic detachment: the ingredient of *cryptoracism*. I do not mean to imply any conscious contempt for Asian loss of life on the part of Washington officials. But I do mean to imply that bureaucratic detachment may well be compounded by a traditional Western sense that there are so many Asians, after all; that Asians have a fatalism about life and a disregard for its loss; that they are cruel and barbaric to their own people; and that they are very different from us (and all look alike?). And I *do* mean to imply that the upshot of such subliminal views is a subliminal question whether Asians, and particularly Asian peasants, and most particularly Asian Communists, are really people—like you and me. To put the matter another way: would we have pursued quite such policies—and quite such military tactics—if the Vietnamese were white? ...

Crucial throughout the process of Vietnam decision making was a conviction among many policy makers: that Vietnam posed a *fundamental test of America's national will*. Time and again I was told by men reared in the tradition of Henry L. Stimson that all we needed was the will, and we would then prevail. Implicit in such a view, it seemed to me, was a curious assumption that Asians lacked will, or at least that in a contest between Asian and Anglo-Saxon wills, the non-Asians must prevail. A corollary to the persistent

belief in will was a *fascination with power* and an awe in the face of the power America possessed as no nation or civilization ever before. Those who doubted our role in Vietnam were said to shrink from the burdens of power, the obligations of power, the uses of power, the responsibility of power. By implication, such men were softheaded and effete.

Finally, no discussion of the factors and forces at work on Vietnam policy makers can ignore the central fact of *human ego investment*. Men who have participated in a decision develop a stake in that decision ...

In the course of these years, another result of Vietnam decision making has been *the abuse and distortion of history*. Vietnamese, Southeast Asian, and Far Eastern history has been rewritten by our policy makers, and their spokesmen, to conform with the alleged necessity of our presence in Vietnam. Highly dubious analogies from our experience elsewhere—the “Munich” sellout and “containment” from Europe, the Malayan insurgency and the Korean War from Asia—have been imported in order to justify our actions ...

There is a final result of Vietnam policy I would cite that holds potential danger for the future of American foreign policy: *the rise of a new breed of American ideologues who see Vietnam as the ultimate test of their doctrine*. I have in mind those men in Washington who have given a new life to the missionary impulse in American foreign relations: who believe that this nation, in this era, has received a three-fold endowment that can transform the world. As they see it, that endowment is composed of, first, our unsurpassed military might; second, our clear technological supremacy; and third, our allegedly invincible benevolence (our “altruism,” our affluence, our lack of territorial aspirations). Together, it is argued, this three-fold endowment provides us with the opportunity and the obligation to ease the nations of the Earth toward modernization and stability: toward a full-fledged *Pax Americana Technocratica*. In reaching toward this goal, Vietnam is viewed as the last and crucial test. Once we have succeeded there, the road ahead is clear. In a sense, these men are our counterpart to the visionaries of communism’s radical left: they are technocracy’s own Maoists. They do not govern Washington today. But their doctrine rides high. ▀

The Limits of Power

In an issue that went to press just before President Kennedy’s death, *The Atlantic* described how JFK’s difficulties in influencing events had brought gloom to the White House.

REPORT ON WASHINGTON

DECEMBER 1963

THE ADMINISTRATION has come almost full cycle from the cry of what can be done to the cry of what cannot be done. In 1960, Kennedy campaigned on the theme that all things were possible in an administration led by a vigorous and resourceful president. Now he more often talks about the limitations on his power and on the nation’s power. It will be interesting to see what tone he adopts in his reelection campaign to reignite the enthusiasm for the New Frontier and to persuade the country that the dynamism of his administration has not been lost.

The inability of the United States to influence events abroad has been a theme of a number of Kennedy’s recent comments in news conferences and speeches. In December 1962, when he was interviewed by three television reporters, the president said that the

problems of the presidency had proved to be “more difficult than I had imagined they were,” and that “there is a limitation upon the ability of the United States to solve these problems.” He has also said, “The responsibilities placed on the United States are greater than I imagined them to be.”

These remarks are frank and revealing. Now, with the succession of military coups in Latin America and with the inability of the United States to influence decisively the government in South Vietnam, the stalemate over Kashmir, or the determination of [French] President [Charles] de Gaulle to oppose the Western alliance, there is an unpleasant air of defeatism in Washington.

Add to these overseas problems the president’s difficulties with Congress, and the gloom that characterizes some of the president’s recent utterances is understandable. ▀

5

ASSASSINATION *of a* PRESIDENT

Every American past a certain age remembers where he or she was when the news arrived from Dallas. Four days of tragedy, unfolding on television, brought the nation into a single house of mourning.

• Three-year-old John Kennedy Jr. salutes his father's casket as it leaves the Cathedral of St. Matthew the Apostle in Washington, D.C., en route to Arlington National Cemetery.



A PHOTO ESSAY

NOVEMBER 22, 1963 12:30 P.M.



• *This page:* John and Jackie Kennedy drive away from Love Field in Dallas, Texas. *Opposite page:* The Kennedys ride in the backseat of an open limousine in downtown Dallas as the presidential motorcade heads toward Dealey Plaza.

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JAMES W. IKE ALTGENS/AP



• Secret Service agent Clinton Hill, after hearing what sounds like a firecracker, leaps onto the president's limousine and pushes Jackie Kennedy back into her seat.



- A Dallas police lieutenant holds up the bolt-action rifle, with a telescopic sight, that the Warren Commission later concluded had been used by Lee Harvey Oswald to assassinate President Kennedy.

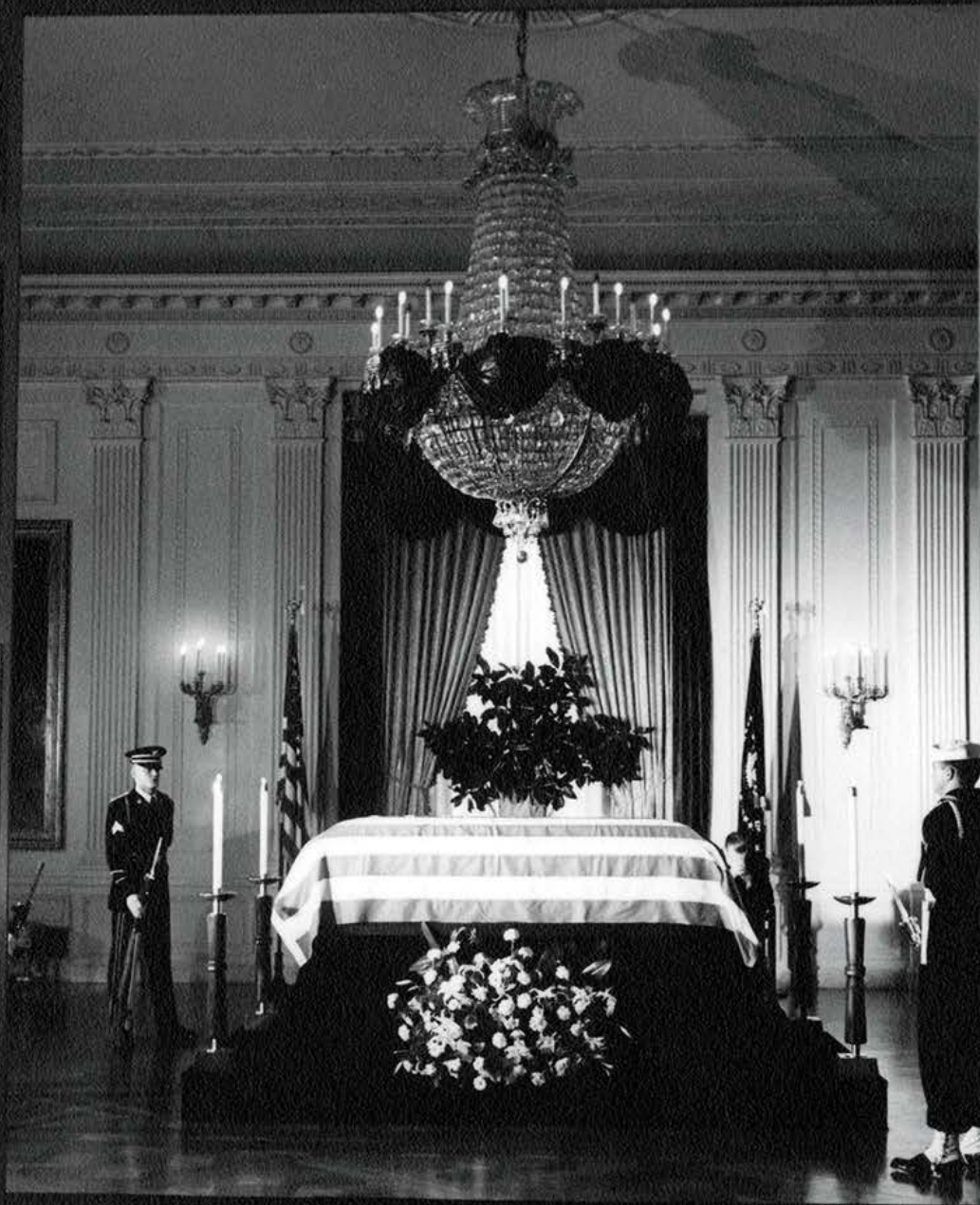


•The 36th president of the United States, Lyndon B. Johnson, addresses a stricken nation from Andrews Air Force Base, outside of Washington, D.C., after returning from Dallas on the evening of November 22. His wife, Lady Bird, stands at his side.



• World leaders follow members of the Kennedy family in the funeral procession for the murdered president, which traveled the half-dozen blocks from the White House to the Cathedral of St. Matthew the Apostle.







• *This page:* The flag that draped the president's casket. *Opposite page:* Kennedy's casket lying in state in the East Room of the White House, before it was moved to the Capitol Rotunda, where ordinary Americans could pay their respects.

John Fitzgerald Kennedy *1917–1963* A Eulogy

“It is in keeping with the *Atlantic* tradition that we should strive to give the long view of our late president,” the magazine noted shortly after Kennedy’s tragic death. “We turn to Harvard’s leading historian, Samuel Eliot Morison, for an estimate of President Kennedy’s place in history.”

By SAMUEL ELIOT MORISON

FEBRUARY 1964



COURAGE MR. KENNEDY never lacked: courage to differ publicly from the appeasement ideas of his father and elder brother; courage as [a motor-torpedo-boat] commander in the last war, when, his *PT-109* sliced in two by a Japanese destroyer and sunk, Skipper Kennedy assisted in rescuing the floating survivors; even towed one of them, his burned engineer officer, ashore by gripping the tie-ties of the man's life jacket with his teeth. After reaching shore, Lieutenant Kennedy did not relax but swam out into the sound in the hope of intercepting a rescue vessel, was in the water all night and just able to make shore in the morning. A severe injury to his back resulted from that brave night's work, but Jack Kennedy never let it keep him from active life. His courage, however, was not the bullheaded courage of Theodore Roosevelt; he had patience, he could wait, and work quietly for his New Frontier program. Witness his patience with the slow-moving Congress; TR would long ago have exploded and called names. Kennedy added serenity to courage, and that quality made him all the more effective.

Courage alone is not enough qualification for a president of the United States, but it is one of the qualifications of a great one, like John Quincy Adams, the president whom Kennedy most admired. Calvin Coolidge, the one Massachusetts president between Adams and Kennedy, won his reputation in history, such as it is, by evading great issues. John F. Kennedy, on the contrary, made his reputation by meeting them head-on. He came to the presidency at a crisis in the Cold War; and whether future historians will say he was right or wrong in refusing American aid to the 1961 invasion of Cuba, I do not dare to predict. But there can be no doubt that his courageous confrontation of [Premier Nikita] Khrushchev in the matter of the Russian missiles in Cuba not only saved our country from a deadly menace, but convinced the Soviets that they had best be wary in the future. It was a turning point for the better in our relations with the communist world.

In a high degree Kennedy had the power of decision, and of correct decision, too. For him there were no hesitations, no faltering, no sleepless, tossing nights; but a quick, intensive study of all possibilities, conferences with members of his inner Cabinet who were best cognizant of the situation, and the decision was made.

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Defense was one of President Kennedy's weightiest problems. He inherited a situation in which the Soviets had atomic capability at least equal to ours, and at a time when the shibboleth of "massive deterrent" was obsolete. He had to decide between differing estimates of Army, Navy, and Air Force officers, and of many civilians and leaders of industry too, how best to spend what the country could afford on weapons. With a keen sense of reality, he opted for paring down the strategic bomber force and building up the [intercontinental ballistic missiles], yet not neglecting mobile naval and military striking forces for limited objectives. No other president, except [Abraham] Lincoln and Franklin D. Roosevelt, has had to make so many decisions vital to his country as Kennedy was forced to make in the two years and 10 months of his administration.

Amid conflicting issues of foreign policy and defense, Kennedy always kept before him the objective of world peace, with the premise that we can only maintain peace through strength, not weakness. He consistently, insistently, sought détente with Soviet Russia. The test-ban treaty may in the future be considered the crowning glory of his short administration; but he knew very well that it was only a beginning. Although I do not claim to be privy to his thoughts, I believe that he felt there existed a certain community of interest between the United States and Russia, upon which he must build; that the really great menace to our civilization is Communist China; and that by careful diplomacy we may gain Russia for the side of the free world.

Among the many domestic issues which President Kennedy had to face, the most serious was that which has been called the Negro revolution of the 1960s. This, too, he faced courageously, and, I may add in no pejorative sense, politically; for he knew that in the framework of our federal system there are limits to what the federal government can do. What the Kennedy administration did in this respect fell short of the demands and expectations of many liberals and Negroes, yet went far ahead of what the southern white Democrats regarded as wise or even possible. On this subject the president made his own fresh estimates and decisions. He saw clearly that after a century of freedom, and in an era when native Africans were becoming

independent, the American Negro could no longer be denied the full rights and privileges of American citizenship, which actually had been promised to him almost a century ago.

President Kennedy was remarkable not only for his courage and wisdom in meeting the challenges of our day; he chose to take the most important steps ever made by a president of the United States to foster literature and the arts. A product of Boston and of Harvard, he did what John Quincy Adams tried but failed to do: he transplanted the cultural values of that community to Washington, D.C. Mrs. Kennedy, his fair partner in this enterprise, by her excellent taste and boundless energy transformed the White House into a residence worthy of the chief magistrate of the republic, which it never had been. At the presidential inauguration, Kennedy gave a principal role to New England's and America's favorite poet, Robert Frost. At a party in the White House for the American Nobel Prize winners, which my wife and I had the honor to attend, and which was conducted with an elegance that no European court could have surpassed, he entertained American writers, artists, and scholars of all races. And, as an example of his wit, the president addressed his guests thus: "This is the most extraordinary collection of talent, of human knowledge, that has ever been gathered together at the White House—with the possible exception of when Thomas Jefferson dined alone!"

In view of the fact that previous presidential administrations have been largely indifferent to the arts, President and Mrs. Kennedy's effort has been of vast significance in making the cultural aspects of American civilization respected; within three years the capital city, hitherto an artistic and literary desert, has become one of the leading cultural centers of the United States. And all that Kennedy did was done with such grace and humor ...

Incidentally, I wish to point out that, with the exception of Abraham Lincoln, the presidents of the United States who have done most for the people, who stand highest in the estimation of historians, were gentlemen born and bred—aristocrats in the proper meaning of that much-abused word. These presidents were Washington, both Adamses, Jefferson, both Roosevelts, Wilson, and Kennedy. Is it not significant that all these great presidents were well-educated

Death of a Man

No eternal trumpet cleft the air,
no planet stopped its sullen course
to gaze in wrath and vengeance; only this—
a man of goodness died.

Conscience was his guide and God
who saw his golden spring coiled taut
to justice, saw intention and desire
flower for a while in action and the promise
of an action, saw his failure
as the necessary flaw of man.

He makes the sun come up on good
and evil, sends the rain and snow;
hardly strange then He allows for apples,
stables, bullets: everything is perfect
in its time. And time is His.

One does not lightly strike down God's anointed.
For him a shot perfected spring
and hope of spring, fulfilled desire,
cleared his eyes to vision: light forever.
But for the world, darkness.

God sees, allows, and loves
in ways we do not ripely understand.

Let mankind hobble home now on its knees.

— John L'Heureux
February 1964

men of gentle background and upbringing? ...

Alas, that we shall never again see that bright, vivid personality, whose every act and every appearance made us proud of him, and who gave us fresh confidence in our country, even in ourselves. Alas, that we shall not again hear that ringing, virile voice, those words, so well chosen and phrased, in such perfect diction. With his death something died in each one of us; yet something of him will live in us forever.

So I close, thanking God for giving us a president such as John Fitzgerald Kennedy, praying the Almighty to have mercy on this whole land. **A**

Courage in a Pillbox Hat

Remembering Jacqueline Kennedy's public
dignity in the face of catastrophe

By
CAITLIN FLANAGAN
DECEMBER 2001

ORIGINALLY TITLED "COSTUMES FROM CAMELOT"

THE COTTON IS HIGH these days for unreconstructed Jackie fans. The clothing exhibition [making the rounds of U.S. museums] has brought us a new flood of hagiography, mostly in the form of picture books, such as Jay Mulvaney's *Jackie: The Clothes of Camelot* and Pamela Clarke Keogh's *Jackie Style*. It's best to stick to the transfixing, luminous photographs in such books, and not dwell too long on the text. Keogh's is chock-full of the usual claptrap: Jackie was a "breath of fresh air," the "creator of Camelot." The author believes that "although her life can be seen as one continuous act of courage, more than anything else, Jackie is associated with

style." The part about "one continuous act of courage" is so silly that it hardly bears consideration (although striking the set of *Camelot* and putting up *Zorba the Greek* in its place certainly required a measure of pure pluck). But associating her most closely with her "style," in any sense of the word, seems wrong also. To me, her life is most "associated" with the way she conducted herself during the days following her husband's murder. For people of my generation (I was 3 when John Kennedy was killed) it's difficult to have any authentic response to his assassination and to Jackie's behavior afterward, because the whole thing has been so endlessly interpreted for us by our parents' memories and by countless books and movies and television shows. We know that it was "shocking" because we are told that it was; but for us, really, it wasn't. After all, the first thing we learned about JFK was that he had been assassinated. It's one of the immutable truths of our childhood. The series of images used to telegraph the events—Jackie scrambling up and out of the touring car, standing stoically beside LBJ on *Air Force One*, appearing beside the casket in the glamorous

→ The elegance of Jackie Kennedy, who was 34 years old when her husband was killed, lent glamour to the White House. Pictured here seven weeks before JFK's death, she showed a nobility that inspired the nation.





ASSOCIATED PRESS

widow's weeds—has the predictability of the events of Holy Week. For anyone more interested in Jackie's "style" than in her "courage," her appearance at her husband's funeral in a sheer black mantilla, her children beautifully turned out in their good winter coats and shined shoes, may seem like a triumph of fashion over rotten luck. But in fact her every decision about those events came hard on the heels of horror on an epic scale ...

In an instant of pure and almost unimaginable carnage, Jackie Kennedy lost her husband, her job, and her house. Certainly, two of those losses were mitigated by her wealth: the job was an unpaid diversion rather than an economic necessity, and the house was quickly exchanged (after a brief kip at Averell Harriman's Georgetown home) for a series of glamorous houses at drop-dead addresses. Nonetheless, the life that she had lived was ripped away so completely and so roughly that she could have been forgiven almost any response. Yet at every turn she did the right thing, and not always because the cameras were watching. Days after burying her husband, she returned to Arlington Cemetery in the dead of night so that their two children who had not survived—Arabella, who had been stillborn, and Patrick, who had died a few days after birth—might be reburied next to their father. ("He seems so alone here," John Kennedy is said to have told two friends who visited Patrick's grave in Brookline, Massachusetts, with him.)

For the cynical, the entire Kennedy enterprise is a kind of all-you-can-eat buffet of hypocrisy and untrammelled personal ambition, and in this construct Jackie's composure at the time of the assassination was the result of her considerably cooled ardor for her husband. But in fact her actions at the time—and at so many times in her life—resist easy and inflexible interpretation. For example, during the long, rambling interviews that she granted [the author] William Manchester not long after the assassination (their taped voices are punctuated by the rattle of ice in glasses and the lighting of cigarettes), she told him that before leaving Parkland Memorial to board *Air Force One*, she freshened her lipstick. Later she greatly regretted this confession, and begged (in fact, sued) to have it omitted from his account; however, it came to light—and now we can bring to her

LBJ: Oswald Wasn't Alone

Was President Kennedy murdered because of his actions against Cuba? His successor suspected so.

By LEO JANOS

JULY 1973

ORIGINALLY TITLED "THE LAST DAYS OF THE PRESIDENT: LBJ IN RETIREMENT"

THE TALK TURNED to President Kennedy, and [Lyndon B.] Johnson expressed his belief that the assassination in Dallas had been part of a conspiracy. "I never believed that Oswald acted alone, although I can accept that he pulled the trigger." Johnson said that when

he had taken office he found that "we had been operating a damned Murder Inc. in the Caribbean." A year or so before Kennedy's death a CIA-backed assassination team had been picked up in Havana. Johnson speculated that Dallas had been a retaliation for this thwarted attempt, although he couldn't prove it. **A**

small gesture the full force of our feelings about her: Did she freshen her lipstick because she realized that she was moments away from the greatest photo op of her life, and didn't intend to look washed-out and cuckoo, like Mary Todd Lincoln? Or was she hewing to old-fashioned notions of decorum and propriety in the face of a national disaster in which she had just figured prominently? We will never know ...

To respond to personal catastrophe with public dignity ... represents human conduct at its most impressive. Her behavior during those four days, derived from the old values of forbearance and restraint, was girded by a kind of internal fortitude that was not at all in conflict with other aspects of her character—aspects that many of today's feminists would lambaste as pathetic and weak. ("Her instincts were completely feminine," William Manchester wrote of her; "if she met your plane at the Hyannis airport, she automatically handed you the keys to her convertible.") The ways in which she allied her matchless femininity—which only a fool would believe she deployed naively—with her tremendous strength are central to her intrigue, and they are why, so many years later, so many people will turn out to see a few dozen coats and dresses and pillbox hats. **A**

← **The widow and her children leave the Capitol, where the late president is lying in state. Walking behind them are members of the family and, near the top step, the new president, Lyndon B. Johnson, and his wife, Lady Bird.**

6

The LEGACY

A president who died in his prime left behind a successor who accomplished much of what he could not. He also left a family that has tried, with varying degrees of success, to live up to his legacy.

• President and Mrs. Kennedy stand at attention as “The Star-Spangled Banner” plays during their state visit to Mexico in 1962.



A Dad, a Cad

JFK was a loving family man who doted on his children—and a philanderer who seduced an intern in his wife's bed.

By CAITLIN FLANAGAN

JULY/AUGUST 2012

ORIGINALLY TITLED "JACKIE AND THE GIRLS"

IN 2011, CAROLINE KENNEDY appeared on the David Letterman show, her first visit, and Dave was thrilled, almost starstruck, to have this singular woman sitting beside him. There were any number of things they could have talked about, but what Dave was dying to do was look at some of those old pictures with her. He'd had two of the most famous of them mounted on black cardboard, and before he held them up to the camera, he apologized for taking up her time with them.

"These are pictures you've had all your life," he said, tapping the stack eagerly and grasping for words. Maybe, in fact, she was tired of looking at them—"but do you mind if I show these?"

"No," she said graciously, laughing in her easy, appealing way, conducting perfectly the job she was born to and has never shirked;

"but everybody *else* is probably tired of looking at them."

Hardly ...

Pictures of two children playing in their father's office: John crouching under the big desk, peeking out from the secret panel; Caroline and her brother dancing on the lush carpet. In the background, their delighted father looks on, clapping his hands, as though nothing on his agenda could be more pressing than these hijinks.

Suffer the little children to come unto me is the unwritten caption of all these saintly images. The Soviets can kiss off for five minutes; the blacks can hold their water. John-John has an adorable new hiding place, and the most powerful person in the world is fully absorbed by it. These pictures represent the pure distillation of what the word *father* means in the deepest imagination of many people, even (especially)



⬆ President Kennedy claps in time as his children dance around the Oval Office in October 1962. Caroline was soon to turn 5; John Jr. was almost 2.



those who have never lived with or even known their own. It's the father as a person of great importance in some vaguely apprehended larger world where the grown-ups live, and where he takes care of essential and necessary matters but will gladly put all of that aside to spend an extra moment with his precious children ...

[In *Historic Conversations on Life With John F. Kennedy*, taped interviews with the historian Arthur M. Schlesinger Jr.,] Jackie describes a man whose deep affection for his children was central among the many pleasures of his life. He liked having them underfoot, and he complained bitterly when Jackie delayed moving them to the White House until their rooms were painted. He was forever opening the door of the Oval Office to them, or catching sight of them playing outside and sneaking them candy. In the morning, as his wife dreamed on in her

CAN YOU IMAGINE? THE PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES COLLECTED RUBBER DUCKS.

own bedroom, he would eat breakfast from a tray in his, while the children sat near him, blasting cartoons or Jack LaLanne on the television. He would be in his rocking chair, dressed in his shirtsleeves and boxer shorts as he read the day's newspapers and briefings, but he would pause to watch them tumble and chatter, not irritated but invigorated by their noisy, energetic presence. He was hugely proud of them ...

As for the marriage ... it clearly was not a cold or mercenary arrangement. Their time together was unsullied by domestic drudgery, enriched by their shared love of reading and gossip, made meaningful by the joy of raising two children and the sorrow of losing two others. Their homeliest routines were those of rich people from an earlier era, and so seem novelistic and appealing in descriptions. He loved to give her gifts of the antiques and watercolors she adored, and sometimes he'd be so unsure of what to choose for her that he'd have the New York dealers send him 50 different items so she could take her pick ...

Most of all, you get the sense of a young couple busy with children and with figuring out, as all young couples must, how to occupy and distract them. "You've got to get me some books, or something. I'm running out of children's stories," he once told Jackie after trying to make up yet another story for Caroline. Another time he asked her to buy some toys for his bathroom, because John would wander in while he was bathing and he had nothing to entertain him with. So Jackie bought some rubber ducks, which led to a fond family story—the bathroom that male dinner guests had use of was JFK's, causing Jackie to imagine what in the world they would think when they saw all those rubber ducks lined up on the edge of the president's tub ...

And it was right then—with the description of the rubber ducks, and the way they evoked the closeness of father and son, the intimacy of husband and wife, and the essential nature of married life—that I got back together with John Kennedy. We had been broken up for a few years, at least; I'd lost track. What busts us up is never a revelation about the bungling and risky behavior that marked so much of his brief presidency; what does it is each new revelation about his womanizing and the way these revelations impugn the photographs for which David Letterman and so many other people—myself

included—have such strong feelings. Those pictures make me realize anew what a patsy I’ve been. How could they be anything more than a shrewd campaign, one that plays on the very sentiment—an essentially bourgeois regard for what is nowadays called “the sanctity of marriage”—for which JFK himself had such obvious contempt? I’ll swear to myself that I’ll never backslide again, but then I’ll catch sight of one of those pictures, or—in this case—listen to Jackie’s beautiful story about the well-loved children, the besotted father, the romance at the heart of the operation, and once again, I’m sunk.

And so there I was, back in my happy dream, until, just a scant few months after encountering the *Historic Conversations*, I read a book that is in many ways its evil twin: *Once Upon a Secret*. It was written by Mimi Alford, who as a 19-year-old college student began both a summer internship at the White House and an affair with John Kennedy that would last 18 months. The details of this affair reveal that no matter what Jackie may have believed about the inviolability of her refuge—the “hermetically sealed” nature of the compartment John shared with her alone—not one inch of it was sacred to her husband. Not the bedrooms, not the bathrooms. Not even the rubber ducks.

The relationship began on Alford’s fourth day on the job, when she was asked to the Kennedy residence for a new-staffer cocktail party. [The Kennedy aide] Dave Powers escorted her up to the deserted apartment, and she kicked around with a couple of other office girls, drinking daiquiris, nibbling cheese puffs, and waiting for the president. Within seconds of his arrival—signaled by the partygoers’ jumping formally to their feet, for this was part of the thrill of being in the inner circle: the fun and debauchery of the endless party, and the awesome formality of the American presidency—Mimi was in his thrall. When JFK invited her on a private tour of the joint she eagerly agreed, and before she knew it they were standing alone together at the open door to Jackie’s bedroom.

“This is a very private room,” John Kennedy said to her, and as she tried to comprehend what he meant by that puzzling remark, he maneuvered her smoothly into it. And then he nailed her—a virgin, a Wheaton sophomore, a girl who wore a circle pin and a side part, and who had ordered two drip-dry shirt dresses from the



↑ John Jr. in the Oval Office

Johnny Appleseed’s catalog before coming to Washington—right there on his wife’s bed. The one with the horsehair mattress and the stiff board to accommodate his bad back ...

It was in many ways a giddy year and a half, marked by a variety of physical pleasures, and the 35th president schooled Mimi in all the skills a mistress must know, from performing fellatio to making scrambled eggs ...

Above all, she reports, he was playful. The two lovers especially enjoyed getting it on in his bathroom, which they turned into their own “mini-spa,” outfitted as it was with “thick white towels, luxurious soaps, and fluffy white bathrobes embossed with the presidential seal.” But there was something else in that wonderful, elegant bathroom of his that Mimi thinks reveals so much about his true nature, something she



wants to tell us about for the unique insight it gives into the man. In addition to all the grown-up accoutrements, he also had his very own collection of—wait for it—rubber ducks! Can you imagine? The president of the United States collected rubber ducks. It turned out a buddy of his had sent them as a gag gift. And Mimi—unlike super-sophisticated Jackie—knew how to have fun with something like that. That was one of the special things she was able to bring to the relationship. She and Jack gave the ducks funny names, and they had bathtub races with them, and it was like a sexy playdate.

Every affair is a series of betrayals, some so huge that the betrayed can barely take them in, others so inconsequential that they would seem the simplest to dismiss when the bill finally comes due—yet in many cases these are the ones that hurt the most. On the one hand, once Jack Kennedy had begun a long-standing physical relationship with this girl, one that began on his wife's bed and included flying her around the country along with his baggage so that he would have access to her whenever he wanted, telling her a fib about the how and the why of those rubber ducks is hardly a significant matter. Maybe it even constituted a weird bit of loyalty, keeping his wife and son entirely out of things. But I have to say that when I came across Mimi's gushing account of the ducks, so soon after hearing Jackie explain how they symbolized something significant and lovely in her marriage, my first reaction was "What a bastard" ...

THROUGHOUT THE MARRIAGE, John always had girls: there were girlfriends and comfort girls; call girls and show-girls; girls on the campaign trail and girls who seemed to materialize out of thin air wherever he was. There was also the occasional wife of a friend, or the aging paramour of his randy pop, for those moments when the fancy ran to mature horseflesh or masculine competition. His penchant for prostitutes demoralized the agents assigned to protect him ...

What did he do for us? He started the Peace Corps and the Vietnam War. He promised to put a man on the moon, and he presided over an administration whose love affair with assassination was held in check only by its blessed incompetence at pulling off more of them ...

But most of all, he made us feel good about

**KENNEDY
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ourselves; he inspired us. Toward what? Mostly toward him. All these years later—half the time hating ourselves for it—we're still as thrilled by him as Mimi Alford was. He had a singular masculinity, and his very callousness and recklessness with women don't blight his appeal; they enhance it. The typical progressive woman thinks she is drawn to him because of his groovy, feel-good work on behalf of civil rights, but that's an assertion that doesn't bear 15 minutes' exploration. John Kennedy voted against Eisenhower's 1957 Civil Rights Act; he made lofty campaign promises that assured him the black vote but then sat on his hands for all of 1961; his nickname for James Baldwin was "Martin Luther Queen." The reason so many women love him really has nothing to do with his actual accomplishments and everything to do with his being the kind of man whose every inclination runs counter to their best interests ...

JFK was a man whose sexual life remained a central fact of his existence, who did not allow it to be diminished by anything—not his political ambitions, not issues of national security, not his Catholicism, not loyalty to his friends and his male relatives, not physical limitation or pain, not the risk of infecting any of his partners with the venereal disease that regularly plagued him, not fear of impregnating someone, not the potential for personal embarrassment, and certainly, certainly, not his marriage ...

I recently came across a Kennedy photograph I'd never seen before. The family is entering the White House for the first time, John-John wrapped in a blanket in his mother's arms. JFK's hands are in the pockets of his overcoat, his eyes glued to the precious head of his new baby boy—and I was gone. Let him have the girls, I thought; he could handle the girls and still put in an ace performance as Father of the Century.

John Kennedy was the kind of guy who could get his PT boat rammed in half by a Japanese destroyer, losing two of his men, and end up not with a court-martial but with a medal. He was a winner, and we like winners. He'll get out of every scrape history can serve up. All the aging hookers and cast-aside girlfriends with book contracts better take notice: We don't care about you. JFK is more important to us than you can ever be, so you might as well keep quiet. The cause endures, sweetheart. The hope still lives. And the dream will never die. **A**

When RFK Played the What-If Game

In 1966, *The Atlantic* assigned the NBC News correspondent Douglas Kiker to take the measure of the late president's brother and political heir, who, seeing the presidency as his destiny and his due, was biding his time until Lyndon B. Johnson was out of the way.

THE SINGULARLY MOST impressive feature about Robert F. Kennedy is that at the age of 40 he possesses the casual confidence of a man who knows that one day he is going to be president of the United States. It might not happen in 1968, and it might not happen in 1972 either. But Kennedy knows it is going to happen one day ...

Kennedy grins. He receives 5,000 letters and 300 speaking invitations every week. Kennedy shrugs and says, believe it or not—it's up to you—he just doesn't think about the next six years. He agrees with a melancholy nod when it is suggested that he is a fatalist. "I just think there's one time around, and you don't know when it's going to end, so it's better to do what you can that's productive now," Kennedy says. "Kennedy is a fatalist, but one who won't let anything

By
**DOUGLAS
KIKER**

OCTOBER 1966

ORIGINALLY TITLED
"ROBERT KENNEDY AND
THE WHAT IF GAME"

interfere with his fate," a White House assistant [to Lyndon B. Johnson] suggests. "Yes, I think that's right," Kennedy says softly, after long silence for thought, with a faraway look in his eye ...

Yes, he has friends. In fact, at 40, Robert Kennedy has everything: He has money. He has youth. He has a power base. He has vast political experience for a man of his years. He has his brother's name, and the older he gets, the more he resembles him—or is that fancy moving forward to capture the mind as memory slowly retreats? He has ambition ("Bobby, I appreciate your desire to lead this country," Johnson once said sarcastically to him). He has a sense of duty. He has great intelligence. There is nothing he does not have except the presidency, and he even has the inner knowledge that this inevitably will be his too.

But he seems to stand amid all this like some troubled young man in white flannels, gazing at



the grounds of his vast inherited estate, vaguely troubled and not knowing why. It seems to give him no sense of excitement, no real challenge, and it may be something which he feels deep within is not rightfully his own. He is his brother's heir.

He is heir to the Kennedy glamour; Johnson is the nation's first public figure, but Kennedy is its first public male celebrity.

He is heir to the tragedy of Dallas, to the fact that the American people feel guilt over John F. Kennedy's death and must make retribution for it.

He is heir to what is apparently an unlimited treasure of public goodwill; the American people will forgive him anything. His national image, at this point, is golden and unassailable.

He is heir to a political party being administered in trust for the moment, consisting of a network of senators, congressmen, governors, mayors, state and county chairmen, and vast hordes of volunteer workers, many of whom came to

↑ **Robert F. Kennedy accepts New York's Democratic nomination for the U.S. Senate in 1964. He won the seat, then campaigned for the presidency in 1968, at the cost of his life.**

power with his brother and wait now to serve him.

He is heir to the nation's young, over 23 million of whom will come of voting age between now and 1972. He is heir to the very aura and mystique which surround such political riches, for there are few in the Johnson administration today who would deliberately offend a possible future president. He is heir to all of this, but it doesn't seem to give him much satisfaction. He is heir to the White House, and he plans to claim it one day, but he appears to be able to wait for it.

It is this sublime confidence, this coolness, this disdain (many others have called it arrogance), that is most striking about the man. The political estate he has come into might not give him vast happiness and satisfaction, but—to the manner born—he has assumed ownership of it with assurance and deft control. That it belongs to him is a fact he takes for granted. He truly does want to be president, and he is moving toward it. **A**

Knifed

How a Kennedy brother-in-law, Sargent Shriver, fell victim to the jealous acolytes of a political dynasty in mourning

IN THE SPRING of 1968 Sargent Shriver—the founding director of the Peace Corps, the head of [President Lyndon B.] Johnson’s War on Poverty, and, as the husband of Eunice Kennedy, a brother-in-law of John, Robert, and Edward Kennedy—was appointed U.S. ambassador to France. His appointment was not without controversy in the upper reaches of the Democratic Party—and in his own extended family.

The problem was that during the fall of 1967 Bobby Kennedy had begun contemplating challenging Johnson for the Democratic nomination. Kennedy had been increasingly opposed to LBJ’s handling of Vietnam, and he and Johnson had never had much use for each other; Kennedy had to stifle his distaste when his brother selected LBJ as his running mate in 1960. Even though their mutual dislike was no secret, for the most part the two had maintained an outward truce, and Kennedy had resisted seeking the nomination for fear of creating a damaging rift within the party. Late in 1967, however, Senator Eugene McCarthy,

By
SCOTT
STOSSEL
MAY 2004

of Minnesota, began his own campaign; now RFK could not be held solely to blame for any rift.

In late January of 1968 the Tet Offensive destroyed any remaining credibility LBJ had with liberal Democrats and lost him the support of the American people generally ... Kennedy knew if he wanted to make a move, he had to do it soon.

The president had offered the ambassadorship to Shriver earlier that winter. So while Kennedy was considering whether to run against Johnson, Shriver was considering whether to go to Paris. Shriver monitored Kennedy’s deliberations closely. It clearly bothered Kennedy that his brother-in-law had remained in the Johnson administration long after many other former JFK aides and Cabinet members (including RFK himself) had left. But as long as the veneer of a truce existed between LBJ and RFK, Shriver could stay with impunity. If that truce were broken by Kennedy’s entering the Democratic race, however, Shriver would be seen as sleeping with the enemy if he continued to serve the administration in any capacity.

It was a no-win situation. Ever since John



↑ **As the director of the Office of Economic Opportunity, Sargent Shriver (center) joins his brother-in-law Robert F. Kennedy (left) and New York City Deputy Mayor Paul Screevane in 1965 to announce a project to rehabilitate tenements in Harlem.**

F. Kennedy's assassination, when Johnson had reached out to him in an effort to signal continuity with the Kennedy administration, almost anything Shriver did (or didn't do) for Johnson had been fraught with symbolic weight. For good or ill, both sides saw him as The Kennedy in the Johnson administration. Shriver had always supported the Kennedy family's political aspirations, but he was still working for Johnson, and he believed it was his patriotic duty to serve the president's interests. Meanwhile, although he remained unwaveringly devoted to the anti-poverty program, that wasn't enough for the president, who pressured him to accept the Paris appointment ... He wanted Shriver out of the country—and out of RFK's orbit.

In the second week of March, Shriver told Johnson he would accept the ambassadorship, pending the approval of the French government. Then he left with Eunice for a vacation in Spain. A few days later, on March 16, LBJ's fear

was realized: Bobby Kennedy announced that he would seek the Democratic presidential nomination. On March 22 Secretary of State Dean Rusk called Shriver in Madrid seeking reassurance that Shriver still wished the president to submit his name to the Senate for confirmation; he and Johnson were worried that Kennedy's announcement might have caused Shriver to reconsider. But Shriver had made up his mind: he would go to Paris.

Although Shriver accepted the appointment without any malign intent, some of those close to RFK saw his decision as an insult to their candidate. What's more, Shriver, citing his diplomatic obligations, declined to work for the Kennedy campaign—even after Johnson withdrew from the race, on March 31. To some in the Kennedy circle, this was an unforgivable violation of the family code.

Nor was it his first. In early 1964 Johnson had leaked word to the press that Shriver

topped his list of potential running mates for that year's election. LBJ believed that in making this known he could keep Bobby Kennedy off the ticket (there was considerable pressure to put him on it) and inoculate himself against attacks from Kennedy's wing of the party. But to Kennedy, for one of his in-laws to even contemplate joining LBJ's ticket constituted a betrayal...

Then, tragically, everything changed. A few minutes after midnight on June 5, 1968, moments after he had given a speech in the ballroom of the Ambassador Hotel in Los Angeles, celebrating his victory over Eugene McCarthy in the California primary, Bobby Kennedy was shot. He died in the hospital the next day. LBJ sent *Air Force One* to transport Kennedy's body to New York, and the Shriveres flew to LaGuardia to join family members and Kennedy's aides. When Shriver tried to help unload the casket from the plane, some of the aides pushed him away, bitter in their grief.

Kennedy's former advisers soon dispersed to the campaigns of the remaining candidates for the Democratic nomination, among whom the two leading contenders were now McCarthy and [Vice President Hubert] Humphrey. But the "Kennedy movement," as the journalist Theodore White called it, longed for Ted Kennedy to enter the race, or at least to make himself available as a running mate. The American people, especially Democrats, craved a Kennedy on the 1968 ticket. If Ted was not going to step forward, however, the order of succession—which had previously run from Joe Jr. to Jack to Bobby to Ted—was no longer clear. For Kennedy supporters outside Bobby's inner circle, the next best alternative was Shriver: a Kennedy in-law who shared RFK's commitment to social programs and who had something of JFK's dash and style. By the third week in June newspapers were reporting that Shriver was one of Humphrey's top choices for a running mate. On June 21 Humphrey told reporters that he was "very interested" in allying himself with Shriver.

A Shriver nomination would be politically tricky, because no one knew exactly what the Kennedys wanted and whether or not they would approve. Nevertheless, the first signs were positive...

[In late summer] Ted Kennedy weighed



in. He talked to Shriver by phone in France for about half an hour. On the question of whether the family would support Shriver on the Humphrey ticket, Kennedy was ultimately inconclusive. But the substance of the conversation, as Shriver described it the next day in a letter to one of his closest friends, was revealing. Shriver wrote, "Many K[ennedy] boosters really are sore at me—even bitter—because I didn't help more [on RFK's campaign]." Ted agreed to "keep in close touch" with Shriver through the convention and said that if [Kennedy brother-in-law] Steve Smith was the source of negative comments about Shriver, he would "slow him down or shut him up." Shriver now realized, however, that there was a fundamental problem: "Those who had staked most of their personal hopes on RFK are extremely frustrated—& the prospect of anyone 'in the family' who didn't impale him—or herself—on a picket fence without regard to the consequences—suddenly being in a position to pick up all the marbles—that prospect

↑ **Sargent Shriver, then the U.S. ambassador to France, returns to New York from Paris on June 6, 1968, to attend the funeral of Robert Kennedy, shot by an assassin the night before.**

is galling!” Shriver concluded his letter with uncharacteristic bile: “Clearly ... the same clique who opposed [the Peace Corps] as an independent agency—the same palace guard (now without a palace) (or a pretender) find it hard to accept the prospect of a prodigal in-law (let alone son) sitting down to their feast.”

“All I asked Teddie was for neutrality,” Shriver wrote ...

Humphrey was evidently convinced that Shriver had all the qualifications he was seeking in a running mate; [Humphrey confidant] Max Kampelman recalled in a memoir, “Hubert was very fond of Sarge, whose genial and charming exterior hid a strong sense of principle, personal integrity, and stubborn independence.” But he felt he could not choose him without the Kennedy family’s unequivocal blessing ...

The convention opened on Monday, August 26. By Wednesday morning it looked as though Humphrey had the nomination sewn up ...

Over breakfast with Humphrey on Wednesday morning, [Chicago Mayor Richard] Daley—having finally accepted that Kennedy would not run for vice president—had strongly urged him to pick Shriver. *The Chicago Daily News* that day enthusiastically trumpeted Shriver’s qualifications. In Paris, Shriver had been meeting with Averell Harriman and Cyrus Vance, LBJ’s leading negotiators in the Paris peace talks, to discuss what sort of peace plan he would urge on Humphrey if offered a place on the ticket. He began thinking about how, if nominated, he would proffer an olive branch to the peace movement generally, and to the protesters who had been beaten and jailed in Chicago in particular.

But late Wednesday night, as Harris Wofford, who had worked for JFK in the White House and for Shriver at the Peace Corps, recorded in a memoir, Senator Walter Mondale, of Minnesota, called him from Humphrey’s suite to say that “Kennedy family opposition to Shriver’s nomination was weighing heavily against his selection.” (Wofford suspected that [longtime JFK aide] Kenny O’Donnell was speaking in the family name, “perhaps without prior authority.” Indeed, as Kampelman later recalled, O’Donnell made clear to Humphrey during the convention that “the family would consider it an unfriendly act” if he were to

select Shriver.) Wofford told Mondale that this “former Palace Guard” had “no monopoly on the Kennedy legacy.” Besides, he asked, did Mondale really think that a man as decent as Ted Kennedy would impede the electoral aspirations of his own brother-in-law?

In fact, it seems, Kennedy already had. Earlier in the day, according to Humphrey’s aides, he had called Humphrey and promised his support. But notes [Shriver’s friend Bill] Josephson took on a conversation with Kampelman that September make clear that the support did not extend to Shriver. According to the notes, which I obtained from Josephson recently, Kampelman recalled Humphrey’s exact words after getting off the phone with Kennedy: “I sensed Teddy was not adamant [in his opposition to Shriver], but led [me] to believe better not.”

Reflecting on these events nearly 40 years later, Ted Kennedy acknowledges having been disappointed at Shriver’s decision not to participate in RFK’s campaign. But he insists that he did not veto Shriver’s nomination for vice president. He says that he does not clearly recollect the telephone conversation with Humphrey about Shriver, but that he will never forget how he felt at the time. His brother Bobby’s death had been devastating to him; he was in a state of physical and emotional exhaustion. Having had two brothers assassinated while campaigning, Ted wanted to get as far away from politics as possible until his wounds could heal. His distress and his desire to retreat from politics, Kennedy believes, account for any negative vibrations Humphrey may have received when they spoke.

Whatever Ted intended, on Thursday morning Humphrey’s people let Shriver’s people know that the choice for VP was down to [Oklahoma Senator Fred] Harris and [Maine Senator Edmund] Muskie. (Ultimately Humphrey chose Muskie.) “We needed the good will of the Kennedys more than we needed Sarge,” one of Humphrey’s advisers said at the time. “His name was effectively vetoed” ...

Two years after the 1968 convention Max Kampelman had lunch with Shriver in Washington. As Kampelman recorded in a letter soon afterward, “We ... talked about 1968 and Chicago. I again made it clear to [Shriver] that he was knifed and I believe he knows that. I believe he also knows who did it.” **A**

THE ORDER OF SUCCESSION—WHICH HAD PREVIOUSLY RUN FROM JOE JR. TO JACK TO BOBBY TO TED—WAS NO LONGER CLEAR.

The Cultural Meaning of the Kennedys

Jack, Jackie, Bobby—or is it Elvis, Marilyn, Ringo? The Kennedys have left the realm of politics to reign as entertainment superstars, at the intersection of Washington and Hollywood.

By STEVEN STARK

JANUARY 1994



JFK campaigns at a Baltimore shopping center in the spring of 1960.



LERNER
SHOPS



“ALL HISTORY IS gossip,” President Kennedy used to say, which may or may not have been accurate then, but—owing to the changes he and his family helped accelerate—is somewhat more accurate today ...

Because of the current cultural obsession with inner life, biography now tends to stray into the personal more than it once did. Still, the Kennedy family isn’t written about the way that Harry Truman, or Ronald Reagan, or Martin Luther King Jr. is. The Kennedys are different from you and me and them, and not simply because they have more money.

To be sure, the Kennedys have had—and continue to have—a political impact on the nation. To many, they have embodied an ideal of public service. But politics hasn’t been this family’s calling card in the mass culture for some time. Even in the aggregate the Kennedys have never had the political impact of Martin Luther King Jr., FDR, or even Reagan. If President Kennedy is still revered today, it’s more because of his glamorous style and because he died young than for any specific accomplishments ...

The Kennedys have really become entertainment superstars. Consider some of the evidence: Like Marilyn Monroe and Elvis Presley, they attract a kind of tabloid journalism and biography which focuses even more than usual on scandal and unsavory personal tidbits ... The screaming crowds that engulfed Robert Kennedy in 1968—tearing at his clothes and stealing his cuff links—were not unlike those that followed the Beatles and the Rolling Stones. If several people were killed trying to see Robert Kennedy’s funeral train, the analogy may be as much to the reaction to Rudolph Valentino’s death or to what happened in 1979 at a Who concert as it is to the funeral procession for Abraham Lincoln.

This is a family identified by first names in the familiar Hollywood style—Jack, Jackie, Bobby, Ethel, Teddy—just as we once knew Elvis, Marilyn, and Ringo, but certainly not as we have known Franklin, Ronald, or even Bill. The Kennedy men are as well known for their rather public life of wine, women, and song (or its modern equivalent), an existence that approximates life



↑ The Kennedys’ youngest brother, Senator Ted Kennedy of Massachusetts, along with JFK’s and RFK’s widows, Jackie and Ethel, preside at the Robert F. Kennedy Pro-Celebrity Tennis Tournament in 1975, in New York City’s Forest Hills.

→ At the Democratic National Convention in Denver on August 25, 2008, Caroline Kennedy leads a tribute to her uncle, Senator Edward M. Kennedy of Massachusetts, who had been diagnosed with a brain tumor. He died exactly a year later.



on the road for a rock star. Even in marriage the family reveals a kind of split personality about what it has become. Some Kennedys have gone into politics and married other people in that profession, but the two best-known current family alliances are Maria Shriver’s marriage to the box-office king Arnold Schwarzenegger and John Kennedy Jr.’s relationship with the actress Daryl Hannah. (Entertainment in-law Peter Lawford was a preview of things to come.)

Defining the Kennedys as an entertainment family does explain some anomalies. There is only a weak tradition of political families in this country; the strong antipathy to royalism explains why. But there is an enduring convention of entertainment families who are often treated by the press and public like royalty, their names including Booth, Barrymore, Fairbanks, Bridges, Sheen, Douglas, Belushi, Baldwin, Garland and Minnelli—the list goes on. There has also been a pattern of “brother acts” in vaudeville, and particularly in rock and country music—the Everly Brothers, the Stanley Brothers, the Jacksons,

TOP: SUZANNE VLAMIS/AP; BOTTOM: PAUL SANCYA/AP



the Osmonds, the Kinks, the Beach Boys, the Allman Brothers, the Mills Brothers, the Statler Brothers, the Ames Brothers, even New Kids on the Block.

According to pop-culture folklore, several of these brother acts in rock have followed roughly the same pattern: The family is driven hard and molded by a difficult father. The first success is collective. Then one brother hits it big and becomes a superstar. Other family members ride the superstar's name and coattails to derivative careers of their own. Some brothers break down under the pressure, while other members of the family seem to invite trouble on a regular basis. So it has often seemed to go with the Kennedys.

As a kind of entertainment family the Kennedys were a prime force in blurring the distinctions between Hollywood and Washington—that blur being a condition characteristic of the age. As the critic Richard Schickel has observed

↑ **John F. Kennedy Jr. accompanies his mother, Jackie Kennedy Onassis, in Hyannis, Massachusetts, after cousin Maria Shriver's 1986 wedding to the actor Arnold Schwarzenegger.**

in his book *Intimate Strangers*, they were certainly not the first to court the film industry or to recognize the consequences of the media era. Woodrow Wilson had D. W. Griffith's *The Birth of a Nation* screened at the White House in 1915, and Douglas Fairbanks told Franklin Roosevelt when he was only assistant secretary of the Navy that he had the persona to succeed as an actor if he so chose.

But the Kennedys helped complete the revolution. As the biographers tell it, Father Joe “mingled” with Gloria Swanson and other stars, and his real business interest was in movie production, because he thought that was where the aristocracy of the next generation would be created. Judging from the biographies, much of the next Kennedy generation's childhood appears to have been one long photo op, culminating in John Kennedy's marriage to, of all things, an aristocratic photographer. If, in the media planning devised largely by Father Joe, JFK's 1960 race for presidency was the first to resemble the packaging of a Hollywood blockbuster—the buildup, the bio, the promos, the publicity shots, the early buzz among influential critics, the reviews, the breakthrough performance (in debates), and, finally, the crowd reaction—that may have been no accident ... After all this, and an administration that made the elevation of style over substance into both a zeitgeist and an ideology, not only the hanging out with Sinatra and Marilyn was inevitable; so was the eventual arrival of someone like Ronald Reagan.

Sadly, the assassinations also played a role in the conversion of the Kennedys into pop-culture phenomena. As Schickel has observed, dying young, if not violently, is something of an entertainment-industry phenomenon, as anyone familiar with the lives and deaths of Elvis, Marilyn, Valentino, James Dean, Jimi Hendrix, Janis Joplin, Buddy Holly, John Belushi, Ritchie Valens, John Lennon, and Jim Morrison knows. It's not simply that an untimely death fulfills a romantic image that goes back to Byron and Keats, or that the premature passing of an entertainment figure tends to inspire a death cult in which numerous fans refuse to believe the star is dead. Dying young freezes the stars at their peak: like the promise of Hollywood itself, they remain forever young and beautiful—the perfect icons for the immortality that films and records purport to offer. 4

Magnified

What if Lee Harvey Oswald had lost his nerve?
A historical novelist—who is also a student of the Kennedy assassination—
imagines what might have happened next.

By THOMAS MALLON

Illustrations by Matthew Woodson

“**W**HAT ARE YOU lookin’ for?” asked Wesley Frazier in his friendly way, once he noticed Oswald entering the warehouse’s basement. “A ride back to Irving.” “Sure,” said Frazier. “You can meet me out back after quittin’ time.”

Oswald said nothing. The barest hint of a nod indicated his understanding that “out back” meant the unpaved parking lot well away from the Book Depository, not far from the freeway’s triple underpass.

“I thought you were stayin’ in town tonight,” Frazier added, not as a challenge, but in another attempt to make conversation with this sullen fellow he didn’t understand any more than he understood the man’s living arrangements. Except on the weekends, Oswald stayed in a rooming house downtown, while his Russian wife and two little girls, one a brand-new baby, lived out in Irving with a Mrs. Paine and *her* two small children—just down the street from where the nineteen-year-old Frazier lived with his older sister, Linnie Mae.

“I changed my mind,” said Oswald.

Frazier gave him a look that said “fair enough,” and added one last conversational question: “How ’bout the curtain rods?”

Yesterday, a Thursday, Oswald had unexpectedly asked for a lift out to Irving. And this morning, getting into the car for the trip back to Dallas, he’d put a long package wrapped in brown paper on the backseat of Frazier’s Chevy. He was planning, he’d explained, to spruce up his room downtown with the help of these extra curtain rods from the Paine house.

“I can bring them there Monday,” Oswald now said. “Nobody’ll care if they sit upstairs over the weekend.”

His expression indicated that this was enough chatter, and Frazier, who knew how hard it could be for Oswald to talk about the weather—let alone offer to pay for gas—said, “Sure, Lee, I’ll see you at a quarter to five.”

Without a thank-you, Oswald headed back toward the stairs. Frazier, forgetting again that this was no ordinary Joe, called out: “Didja see the parade?”

TWO FLIGHTS UP, in the lunchroom, Oswald stood in front of the sink and noticed that his hands had again started shaking. He filled a cup of water and drank it while leaning against the Coke machine into which he never put a dime.

He never spent money on newspapers, either, knowing he could usually find a day-old one here, the way he had on Wednesday, when he’d opened up the *Dallas Times Herald*



and seen the route map for the president's Friday motorcade. Kennedy, he realized, would pass right by the book warehouse. He'd spent the next 24 hours wondering whether he should or shouldn't, dare or not dare, changing his mind back and forth until this time yesterday afternoon, when he went off to find Frazier and his ride to Irving.

From that point on everything had gone smoothly, almost automatically. Marina might have been chilly to him—they'd quarreled on the phone a few nights before—but neither she nor Ruth complained about his showing up unannounced. He played with Junie, his older girl, and spent even more time romping with Ruth's little boy, Chris, who deserved a more attentive father than Michael, the husband Ruth was separated from. Ruth fed him dinner before he slipped off to wrap up the rifle she didn't know he kept in a blanket on the floor of her cluttered garage.

He'd toted the paper-wrapped rifle into the warehouse this morning, carried it up the same stairs he was now climbing all the way to the sixth floor, returning to the scene of a crime no one had committed.

The gun was now hidden amidst some wooden planks that had been ripped up and stacked by workers replacing stretches of the floor. Some night next week, he could bring the rifle back to Irving; he'd tell Frazier the curtain rods hadn't fit the window in his room on North Beckley. And if between now and then somebody found the gun? No one would know it was his. And if somehow someone did, what difference would it make? In the month he'd been here, he'd twice seen guys he worked with, getting ready for a weekend of hunting, come in with guns.

Alone on the sixth floor, as he'd been for part of the morning, he felt like the main character in a movie running backwards. He began to dismantle the little fortress of textbook cartons,

ten books to the box, that he'd built just before lunch. For a while he'd been thinking that when his last day on this job arrived, he would tuck a leaflet, maybe something from Fair Play for Cuba, inside every copy in some carton of Scott Foresman American-history textbooks. He'd find a box headed for some town like Lubbock or Midland. And maybe one of the leaflets would have the same effect on some eighth-grader that a SAVE THE ROSENBERGS! flyer had had on him, when someone stuck it in his hand in New York City, ten years ago, the spring he was thirteen.

The last day on this job would come soon enough, the way it always did, every place he worked, except at the radio factory in Minsk, where the party never got rid of anybody. Today, of course, *would* have been his last day here, if he'd been able to hold on to the urge that had driven him in a single direction for almost 48 hours, from that moment he'd seen the newspaper in the lunchroom.

He went over to the still-open window and looked out. There was nothing happening along the streets to make you think there'd ever been a parade here. No cop on a motorcycle; not one person with a camera. All he could see was a single man in a brown suit and a cowboy hat counting the bills in his Friday pay envelope on his way to the bank.

Didja see the parade?

He'd seen it from up here; seen it come toward him on Houston Street and then withdraw down Elm, the little pink hat disappearing under the triple underpass like that last point of white light after you turn off the television. From up here he'd been closer to everything than guys like Frazier who'd gone out on the sidewalk to watch. The four-power scope of the rifle had put him into the open car; for a moment he'd thought he could count the petals on the roses.

But it was also the scope that threw him off, made him fail. As the car moved slowly toward him, he made the mistake of looking Kennedy full in the face. And for an instant he'd seen his lips move, seen him turn his head ever so slightly toward his wife and speak two or three words that made him look contented and amused—the way Oswald could imagine he himself used to appear, lying next to Marina, late at night, before things between them went altogether wrong.

That was why he couldn't do it. Not because firing while the car came down Houston would have given people time to look up and see him at the window; he had never for an instant imagined he would get out of the building today. No, he couldn't do it because he couldn't bear to shoot him full in the face, not when the face was displaying a mood, a *feeling*, one that, however mild, he thought he understood. At the crucial moment, instead of seeing his target's politics and money and fame, *that's* what he had seen. And he had remembered Frazier's scratchy car radio, which on the drive into town this morning had mentioned how the president's son would be having his third birthday on Monday. All at once, instead of

being able to envision the heroic status he was about to achieve, he could only remember himself roughhousing with Ruth's little boy.

He had pulled the gun back in over the windowsill, a movement noticed by a serious-looking man below, who glanced up from his spot beside the reflecting pool in the plaza, his expression puzzled, but only slightly so; you could see him reasoning that this must be a police officer, or a Secret Service man, he was watching.

He got a second chance once the car made the hairpin turn onto Elm. The target was even closer, this time presenting the back of its head instead of its face. So again he took up the gun. Through the scope he could see the president's suit jacket bunched up around the collar, and for a moment he thought he could pretend that he was shooting only at the clothing, as if the target were a scarecrow. But the image of the face lingered. His will and his hand seized up; they had been ready to make a declaration, but not to perform a slaughter. And before he could unfreeze them, the pink hat disappeared beneath the underpass.

Back in April, when he'd used this same gun—actually fired it—against Walker, he hadn't seen the full face of his target. The segregationist general had been sitting at a desk, struggling with his income taxes, looking down toward a piece of paper. His expression was masked by the open hand against which he leaned his forehead.

He himself may have turned pale that night, but his hands never shook, not before or after he fired through the general's window. And he had come so close!—nearly grazing Walker's scalp. As it was, plaster dust fell into the general's hair once the bullet struck the wall.

He'd gotten away—a miracle—and buried the rifle by the railroad tracks, not knowing when its next opportunity would come. This afternoon he had escaped only because there was nothing to get away *from*; no deed performed, no point made, no world exploded. And for this he was furious with himself, the way he was usually furious with the whole world and with no one in particular.

“YOU SCARE ME THIS MORNING!” cried Marina, even as she watched for Ruth's car through the living-room window.

“Say it in Russian,” he commanded, not liking the way she was acquiring bits and pieces of a new language along with an American taste for washing machines and hair dryers.

“Don't wake the baby,” Marina said, reverting to Russian. She knew better than to agitate him when he was in this kind of mood.

“Why did Papa scare you?” he asked, lowering his voice, shifting toward conciliation.

“I found your wedding ring in my grandmother's cup,” she explained, referring to one of the few objects she'd been able to take with her from Russia last year. “With all that cash you

left with it. What made you do that?"

Oswald's anger flared again, higher this time. "What business is it of yours?" He'd asked the same question of her a few nights ago, after she and Ruth had called the rooming house on North Beckley and asked for him by his real name instead of the alias he lived under on weeknights. Being "O. H. Lee" gave him a sense of possibilities, of freedom and even power, as if he might actually be on his way toward becoming prime minister of the ideal state he'd once imagined and tried to describe on paper.

"All morning I wondered," said Marina. "Then Ruth and I watched Kennedy on television—and I got the terrible feeling that you were up to it again, that you would try to kill him the way you tried to kill Walker."

Last spring there had been excitement in his confession of failure, because it was also a confession of near-success and cunning escape. He'd fled on *foot*—overcome his inability to drive a car, a handicap that hadn't yet yielded to Ruth's patient and exasperating lessons. In April he had felt resourceful, courageous, no matter that Walker had survived. To confess to *today's* failure, a failure of nerve, would be only miserable and enraging. And yet, he was so disgusted with himself that he could feel confession coming; it was a humiliation he deserved.

"Stupid!" he said. "If you thought that, why didn't you tell Ruth?" He knew that Marina had never confided the Walker secret to their Quaker benefactor, the woman who had helped get him the job at the warehouse and who didn't know there had been, for months, a gun in her own garage. "Why didn't you tell her there was an assassin on the loose? Why didn't you dial the operator and ask for the police? Do you know *that* word in English?"

As calmly as she could, Marina explained: "I didn't do those things because I went into the garage to check for the blanket."

"The blanket!" cried Oswald, mocking her, as if this piece of East German fabric, which looked like camouflage and had traveled with them out of Russia alongside the grandmother's cup, were some comical prop. "Did you think to *pick it up* while you were looking at it?"

Confused, and then alarmed, Marina opened the door off the living room and entered the jumble of the garage, quickly threading her way through tools and toys and boxes of baby clothes. She reached down to the blanket, picked it up, and saw it hang, limp and empty, from her hand.

He could see her shaking the way she had that night in April; with every new detail he'd told her about the Walker mission, she shook some more, and hurt some more—all in a way that pleased him, he realized.

"You crazy man!" she cried, her English and Russian now chasing each other. "You destroy me! You destroy your *devochki*!" She pointed back toward the rooms of the house, where Junie and the baby were still napping.

The mention of his girls almost softened him, but then he

saw Marina looking toward the driveway, as if hoping for the approach of Ruth's car, with their provider at the wheel. And if that weren't enough to incense him, she now spun around and showed him the other side of her personality, the taunting one that sometimes made him hit her. "Kennedy safe!" she cried, in English, with a kind of cackle. "Far away now! Whatever you try to do!"

He turned away from her, fled her voice as it trumpeted his failure. He stepped from the garage back into the house and marched silently into the bedroom, where he kissed his sleeping girls, scooped up the wedding ring, and took back the cash he'd left behind this morning.

Marina, always quick to adapt, awaited him in the living room, prepared to seek advantage and forgiveness all at once. She said, in Russian, "This morning, after I decided the gun was still there, I thought you'd left the money for Christmas. For toys and shoes for the girls." Her expression was a swirl of fear, relief and perplexity. She still didn't know where the rifle was, or if and how he'd tried to use it.

"Christmas!" he cried, making it sound like the most shameful word in the world. He struck her in the face and walked out the front door.

SEVERAL HOURS LATER, without having eaten dinner, he awoke in the North Beckley Avenue rooming house. His bed here, with its headboard of iron rods, reminded him of the one he'd slept in twenty years ago at the orphanage in New Orleans, where his mother, deciding she was too put-upon to care for them, had dispatched him and his brothers. Here in the rooming house, past the foot of his bed, stood a woman's vanity table with a triptych of mirrors, in which he could see his face from three different angles. On top of the table sat the wad of cash he'd carried from Ruth's house—slightly diminished by the cost of the first taxi he'd taken since leaving Russia. He had called for it from a payphone outside a market in Irving, and for the whole dozen or so miles between there and Dallas he had watched the meter with a kind of low-level terror. The cab's radio, like Frazier's this morning, still spoke of Kennedy, who'd gone from Dallas to Austin and a reception at the governor's mansion.

He'd made the driver turn it off, but even now he could hear the television in the rooming house's parlor. Some of the other lodgers were clustered around it, presided over by Mrs. Roberts, the housekeeper, who was even fatter than his mad mother and who every night when she was here rolled her stockings down in the same disgusting way.

He tried plugging his ears with his fingers, but the resulting half-silence brought with it echoes of Marina's early-evening taunts. Before coming here tonight he had gone to a movie, *War Is Hell*, on Jefferson Boulevard, sneaking in without a ticket. He stayed until his body so craved rest that he'd had no choice but to come back to this bed.

It was now past 10 o'clock, and the long nap he'd had would probably ruin his night's sleep. He hated the idea of leaving this room, but the sound of the television was exerting the same pull that Ruth's set did on weekend nights; he would find himself sitting in front of it even when he couldn't stand the company. And so he now rose and went into the parlor, saying hello to no one before claiming a kitchen chair that was always there to supplement the worn upholstered ones.

WFAA, the Dallas ABC affiliate, was running a special recap of the day's events: there were the Kennedys shaking hands along a rope line at Love Field, just before noon; parading in the open car down Main Street, the bright-pink hat now a fuzzy black-and-white; and greeting the huge luncheon crowd at the Trade Mart, where the Catholics in attendance had been given special permission by the local bishop to eat meat. Mrs. Roberts and one of the other lodgers snorted at the mention of this fact. And then the picture returned to Love Field, where the Kennedys moved down another rope line, boarded their plane, and waved goodbye to Dallas at 2:47 p.m.

The president and first lady will spend tonight at Vice President Johnson's ranch outside Austin. It will be the president's first visit there since the 1960 campaign, and Mrs. Kennedy's first ever. Tomorrow they will fly back to Washington from nearby Bergstrom Air Force Base.

A surge of energy brought him to his feet and startled the others. If there'd been a rope line at Love Field, there would be another at the Air Force base, maybe outside its gates, and there was a good chance Kennedy would get out to shake hands, assuring himself of a few last Texas votes in next year's election.

If he himself could get there in time—if he started now—he might have a third chance.

Back in the bedroom, he grabbed the money. He threw a pair of socks and some clean boxer shorts into an airline bag left behind by a former tenant, and from the bottom drawer of the vanity table he extracted his .38 pistol—which he'd never figured on needing today, so certain had he been of getting caught. He put the gun in his jacket pocket.

"You sure are in a hurry," said Mrs. Roberts.

"I may not be back this weekend."

"Suit yourself," she said. He was paid up, and that was all she cared about.

He set off on foot, determined to conserve his cash. He could get to the bus station in under a half hour. Hurrying, he headed into the heart of downtown.

but he managed to walk to one of the benches and sit down.

He could not go back to the rooming house. Having seen him leave with the airline bag, the other lodgers would snicker at his immediate return. And going back to Irving, at this late hour and from such a distance, was out of the question.

Could he stay out all night? Get the 7 a.m. bus and somehow still make it to the Air Force base before Kennedy left? He inclined his head toward another passenger's transistor radio, hoping he could pick up information about the president's travel times, but the news announcer turned out to be a disc jockey setting up the next song on his playlist.

The bus station would be closing soon. So he got up and left, exiting to the strains of "Mickey's Monkey." Outside, on the corner of Lamar and Commerce, he wondered where to go. He decided against heading south or west, directions that would only move him back toward the rooming house; he would also avoid going east, toward downtown's most visible concentration of still-lit storefronts.

So it was north he found himself walking, vaguely in the direction, he realized, of the book warehouse. It took him only minutes to reach the plaza in front of the building, where he sat down on the rim of the reflecting pool, near the spot where the serious-looking man, the one who'd seen him retract the rifle through the window, had been sitting at lunchtime. The plaza was now deserted, except for two drunks lolling on the slope of grass across the way.

He felt contempt for the phony grandeur of this municipal space, with its little breezeways and pillars that might as well be made of papier-mâché. In Minsk he had had an apartment near Victory Square and the great obelisk, in sight of the river and the opera house—all of which he'd given up to come back to this arid, killing landscape, over which he daily trudged, going nowhere, a pedestrian being roared past by automobiles.

He looked up at the building that now housed his rifle, loaded and unfired, and saw that the corner window on the sixth floor was still open. He had forgotten to shut it when dismantling the sniper's nest. There were still, he remembered, two or three cartons of textbooks below the sill. If a rainstorm finally broke the heat tonight, they would get wet.

HE WALKED THE NEARBY STREETS for another half hour, afraid of encountering, with all this money in his pocket, some Friday-night Negroes who were high on booze and looking for an easy target. He decided to stick to the busiest blocks after all, to get back on Commerce and this time head east, toward such activity and light as downtown yet offered. He crossed Field Street and came to the Adolphus, the city's best hotel, which was nothing compared with the Metropole in Moscow, where he'd let a woman reporter interview him after his defection.

He walked past the doorman and into the lobby, where he knew he would feel safe, if out of place. He took a seat far

"IT LEFT TEN MINUTES AGO. At 11:15."
"Well, when's the next one?" he asked, his heart sinking as it had when the pink hat disappeared.

"To Austin? There's nothing out of here until tomorrow morning, 7 a.m."

He felt himself beginning to sweat, could smell the odor Marina sometimes complained about. His tongue was locked,



from the front desk and pulled down his jacket cuffs, trying to look neat, as if he belonged, the way he would try to look outside the Air Force base tomorrow morning. He regarded the potted palms and tried to listen to the soft piano music, but he could only think of all the things that had gone wrong throughout the spring and summer and beyond. Walker had survived; the Cubans had rejected him when he showed up at their consulate in Mexico City; the FBI wouldn't leave him and his wife alone.

Now the man behind a lectern marked *CONCIERGE* was giving him a disapproving look. He responded with the smirk he sometimes couldn't control, and the man's lips tightened further, as if he were a librarian getting ready to throw him out.

It was best to leave here too, to keep moving until the sun came up.

Back outside, he looked across Commerce. He saw flashing lights and thought he could hear the thump of music. He crossed the street and approached a small storefront: *GIRLS! GIRLS! GIRLS! CONTINUOUS SHOWS 9 P.M. TILL??*

He looked at the pictures in the display case near the door. He already knew this was not his kind of place, but he lingered, knowing he had money and could more easily spend two hours here than out on the ever-darker streets. He took another look inside and was surprised by a voice from behind him. "Like what you see?"

The man was a little shorter than himself, but you could tell there was as much muscle as fat under the tight suit. The fedora he wore was pushed just far enough back for an observer to see that he was mostly bald on top.

"Good girl, Sheba!"

The dachshund he was walking had begun to relieve itself on a *NO PARKING* sign. The man was for a moment so caught up in the dog that Oswald, without having answered his question, turned back to peer once again at the strippers' pictures.

"Go in!" said the man. He almost shouted the words, a command more than a suggestion. Determined not to be taken charge of, Oswald felt his own anger rising.

"You act like you're the owner," he said, with a smirk the street lamp probably showed.

"I am," said the man, no more friendly than a second ago. With the hand not holding the dog's leash he reached into his pants pocket and took out a pink business card:

THE CAROUSEL CLUB
YOUR HOST ... JACK RUBY

Oswald frowned at the card's crude little sketch of a naked girl dancing beside a big champagne glass.

The man's temper now really soared. "You want a look at the girls? Then go the fuck inside!"

Two men suddenly came out the door. Surprised to see they were policemen, Oswald prepared to slink away, with an apology if necessary.

"Cool off, Jack," said one of the cops. Laughing, and more

than a little drunk, he was sizing up the situation. "He's just a jerk-off. He's harmless."

But the heavyset man, yanking the dachshund, came closer. He was even more angry than before.

"Maybe you like boys instead of girls," he said. The hand that had fetched the business card was balling into a fist, and his round face was coming closer—a face whose meanness and basic stupidity didn't require a four-power scope for Oswald to detect; a face that looked like the one on the marine guard at the Atsugi brig, where they'd thrown him for seven weeks back in '58.

He turned to walk away, but after two or three steps the man's face was somehow still in front of him, as Kennedy's had been even after the limousine turned. The man was now complaining to the cops about the "little cocksucker" who "couldn't make up his mind."

And so Oswald turned around, reached into his jacket, and took out his pistol. The man's whole chest seemed to explode through his white shirt; as he fell to the sidewalk, his suit jacket disarranged itself to reveal that he too was carrying a pistol.

"Christ, Jack!" shouted the drunker of the two cops, as he went for his own gun. His buddy did the same. Drawn by the sound of the shot, two more cops poured out the door of the club and joined the ones who were punching Oswald.

Calmer than he had felt all day, he dropped his gun to the sidewalk. "I am not resisting arrest!" he said, plainly and loudly, the way he had rehearsed the line for use earlier today. "I am not resisting arrest!"

"Yeah, dipshit," said one of the cops, putting handcuffs on him, "but you're sure as hell *under* arrest."

"Is he dead?" asked Oswald, pointing with one of his cuffed hands to the man on the pavement. The pink business card fluttered to the ground. ■

Thomas Mallon has published eight novels and seven books of nonfiction, including Mrs. Paine's Garage, about the Kennedy assassination. His most recent novel is Watergate.

What JFK Saw: November 22, 1963

By STEVE BRODNER

LOOKING AT NEWS FOOTAGE of events in Dallas on November 22, 1963, one is struck by the jubilation enveloping President Kennedy before 12:30 p.m., central standard time. Texans thronged the route from the airport, holding homemade signs and waving. Kennedy waded heedlessly into the crowds, in a way that presidents after him never again could. To the watcher today, this rousing welcome comes across as a deeply emotional farewell.



• 11:40 a.m.: The president arrives at Love Field in Dallas and greets the crowd waiting along a fence.



• 12 p.m.: Thousands line the streets. People bring babies to see the president.



• 12:25 p.m.: The crowd in front of a jewelry store as the motorcade nears Dealey Plaza



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