

JFK: AN ASSESSMENT OF THE MAN AND THE IMAGE

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## ABSTRACT

Nearly fifty years after the assassination a majority of Americans continue to respond favorably towards President Kennedy's conduct in office despite revelations of his serial philandering and the cover-up of his serious health problems. This thesis examines the dominant images of the Kennedy presidency for some of the possible causes of the disparities between perception and reality.

Kennedy was the nation's first president to understand the power of imagery. He harnessed the power of media and television to cultivate favorable images and sustain popular appeal. Kennedy and others in the White House consciously worked to create positive images which portrayed the president's youthful appearance and his wholesome appeal as a faithful husband and loving father. Many people identified with idealized images of Kennedy who seemed like a picture of robust health and an ideal family man. Behind the scenes though, a different image has emerged over time of an enigmatic, complex man—a human being who was capable of both selfless and selfish motives and actions. This study assesses both the positive and negative dimensions of the Kennedy legacy in order to provide a fresh perspective.

This thesis will survey John F. Kennedy's life and highlight some of the images associated with his rise to the presidency. It will summarize Kennedy's popular image to understand why some Americans embraced or rejected the President's image. The final chapter will discuss the impact of assassination and emergence of the Camelot myth, and the legacy of the Kennedy presidency.

Based on an examination of historic, sociological, scholarly documents, and a lifelong interest in reading about the Kennedys, this thesis concludes that many Americans projected many positive values onto President Kennedy, but failed to account fully for the reality of his complexities and weaknesses.

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## INTRODUCTION

President John F. Kennedy's popularity continues to resonate with the American public fifty years after his death. Despite what is now known about his personal life and serious health problems, which stands in sharp contrast to Kennedy's popular image, a CNN opinion poll conducted in 2011 indicated that most Americans continue to have a favorable view of Kennedy as president. He is the "most popular past president" with nearly 85 percent of all Americans polled saying that they approved of Kennedy's job performance.<sup>1</sup> Kennedy, despite his foibles, remains one of America's best known and well-liked leaders.

Many remember Kennedy as an attractive person with good looks and an engaging personality. He possessed intellectual curiosity and a sardonic, self-deprecating humor. All this was enhanced by the fact that he was wealthy, superbly educated, a best-selling author, and a World War II hero. By the time Kennedy was elected president, he had served as a Congressman and United States Senator, he had won the Pulitzer Prize, and he had married the attractive, aristocratic Jacqueline Bouvier and started a family. To many Americans, Jack Kennedy seemed to have it all. According to historian and Kennedy biographer Robert Dallek, "...Kennedy and his family encouraged the view that here was a man and a woman who were America at its best and were

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<sup>1</sup> Rebecca Stewart, "JFK Remains the Most Popular Past President," CNN.com, <http://politicalticker.blogs.cnn.com/2011/01/20/cnn-poll-jfk-remains-most-popular-past-president/> (accessed August 29, 2012).

born to govern.”<sup>2</sup> He added that “Kennedy had established himself and his family as the country’s democratic royalty....”<sup>3</sup>

Despite all these advantages, Kennedy won the 1960 presidential election by a very close margin. As a result, he was the youngest man to hold the presidency and Jacqueline Kennedy was the youngest first lady in history. Newly elected, Kennedy hope to build confidence in his ability to lead. He planned to use his considerable attributes to inspire the electorate and turn them into Kennedy admirers and supporters. Few politicians were as well-positioned to do just that as he assumed the highest elected office in the Nation.

It is difficult to reflect upon the 1960s without considering the impact of President Kennedy and his brief, tragic administration. At the time, unlike today, Americans expressed more confidence in government and saw the future as a promising time. Accordingly, many young people wanted more for themselves than ever before. Americans desired better jobs, larger, modern homes, ideally in the suburbs, and color television. Increased numbers of high school graduates began attending college while unions offered the prospect for good-paying jobs to those who did not to go to college.

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<sup>2</sup> Robert Dallek, preface to *The Kennedys: A Portrait of a Family; Richard Avedon* by Shannon Thomas Perich (New York: Harper Collins, 2007), 13.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

These were hopeful, more optimistic times. The Kennedy call for a “New Frontier” required harnessing change, setting goals, and making choices. John F. Kennedy boldly, confidently, and enthusiastically offered to take up that mantle. Rorabaugh wrote in *Kennedy and the Promise of the Sixties* that he had run for president with “the strong conviction that he could seize the moment, shape the country, and change the world.”<sup>4</sup>

Well-educated and widely traveled, Kennedy had devoted his life to public service. He appeared to understand first-hand the difficult challenges faced by the United States at home and abroad. To many, he was a forward-thinking politician and a unique representative of his times. To those closest to him, John Kennedy seemed to understand the power of imagery. Dallek, in *An Unfinished Life: John F. Kennedy, 1917-1963*, noted that Kennedy was “a man who, like all politicians, worked hard to emphasize his favorable attributes and hide his limitations. He and those closest to him were extraordinarily skilled at creating positive images that continue to shape public impressions.”<sup>5</sup>

The nation’s magazines and newspapers promoted Kennedy’s good looks, health, and wholesome appeal. For many in the news business, Kennedy had true appeal, a man able to utilize the political advantages of television. This was confirmed by the televised debate between Kennedy and

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<sup>4</sup> W. J. Rorabaugh, introduction to *Kennedy and the Promise of the Sixties* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2002), x.

<sup>5</sup> Robert Dallek, preface to *An Unfinished Life: John F. Kennedy, 1917-1963* (New York: Little, Brown Co., 2003), ix.

Richard Nixon during the 1960 presidential election, an event that reached over 70 million people. It demonstrated the political advantages of using television to reach and influence increased numbers of voters. Many people who listened to the Kennedy-Nixon debate on the radio thought Nixon was the winner, but the larger television viewing audience thought Kennedy was the winner. It was not just his robust presence but the contrast to Nixon's appearance that served Kennedy so well. It was an historic moment when one's public image became a part of politics as it never had before. Jack Kennedy showed he possessed the essential traits for this new era: emotional power and psychological authority.<sup>6</sup> He understood that television benefited him and wisely used the medium to articulate and support his policies.

President Kennedy's politics and life contained many extraordinary moments and rendered many unforgettable images. He was the youngest man elected president and occupied office for a little more than a thousand days before his death. Kennedy was mythologized in the years following his assassination. Recent revelations about the details of his sexual escapades or the seriousness of his health issues have done little to diminish his appeal. In fact, President Kennedy is more popular now than in his own lifetime. After the president's death, his glamour and mystique were ennobled by the Kennedy family and others who created the "Camelot" myth.

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<sup>6</sup> Geoffrey Perret, *Jack: A Life like No Other* (New York: Random House, 2001), 262.

The indelible images of John F. Kennedy – PT 109 skipper, the decorated war hero, the hatless-coatless politician, the forty-three year old president-elect as he addressed the Nation during his inaugural speech, the statesman and world leader, the loving husband and father, and the assassinated president are captured in our collective memories. This thesis will examine the influence of those dominant images of the Kennedy presidency and will seek to clarify the reasons the Kennedy myth has sustained its power and meaning.

The first chapter will survey John F. Kennedy's life and highlight some of the familiar images we have come to associate with his presidency and the Kennedy family. The second chapter will attempt to summarize the president's popular image or "style" which led to the supposition of the Kennedy myth. This chapter will discuss the notable achievements of the Kennedy Administration in an attempt to understand why historians, journalists, and ordinary citizens embraced or rejected certain images. The final chapter will discuss the impact of Kennedy's assassination and the emergence of the Camelot myth. By examining the powerful images which helped to nurture and sustain the Kennedy myth, this thesis will provide a reassessment of an individual based on the facts of his life and the many ways the imagery of that life affected its outcome in history.

## CHAPTER ONE

### JOHN F. KENNEDY: THE MAN

The great enemy of the truth is very often not the lie—deliberate, contrived and dishonest—but the myth—persistent, persuasive, and unrealistic.

--President John F. Kennedy, Yale University, June 11, 1962

Born to wealth and blessed with good looks and a charming personality, John Fitzgerald Kennedy was neither average nor ordinary. He was born on May 29, 1917 in Brookline, Massachusetts to a large, Irish Catholic family that attained great affluence and allowed him to be raised in a comfortable life with big houses and servants. Jack Kennedy was the second of nine children born to Joseph Patrick Kennedy and Rose Elizabeth Fitzgerald Kennedy. Jack's parents, both of whom were born in Boston, Massachusetts in 1888 and 1890, respectively, had known each other growing up and socially before marrying in 1914. Jack was descended from Irish Catholic immigrants on both sides of his family and possessed an impressive political lineage.<sup>1</sup> His maternal grandfather, John "Honey Fitz" Fitzgerald was the former mayor of Boston and his paternal grandfather, Patrick Kennedy was a state senator and Boston ward leader.

Jack's father, Joseph P. Kennedy Sr., a successful businessman and investor, was demanding, shrewd, loving, and generous. He amassed a great fortune in the 1920s and during the Depression and provided handsomely for Jack and his siblings. Indeed, as the stock market collapsed in 1929, the Kennedy family moved from a mansion in Riverdale, New York to another

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<sup>1</sup> Gretchen Rubin, *Forty Ways to Look at JFK* (New York: Ballantine Books, 2005), 11.

mansion in Bronxville, New York, and purchased the house in Hyannis Port, Massachusetts on Cape Cod, which they had been renting during the summers.

In the 1920s, Joseph Kennedy profited from trading in an unregulated stock market and from investments in the motion picture industry. In the early 1930s before the end of Prohibition, Kennedy made a small fortune as the sole representative for British distillers. Immersed in business and political affairs, Kennedy traveled often and was away from home for long periods of time. During Joe Sr.'s absences, the Kennedys were held together by their mother, Rose who was intelligent, outgoing, pious, and proper.

As the Kennedys' prosperity grew, so did the size of their family. The eldest son and the father's namesake, Joseph Patrick Kennedy Jr. was born in 1915, followed by second son Jack in 1917, named after Rose's father, former Boston mayor John Fitzgerald. Seven more Kennedy children came along—Rosemary in 1918, Kathleen in 1920, Eunice in 1921, Patricia in 1924, Robert in 1925, Jean in 1928, and Edward in 1932.<sup>2</sup> The Kennedys were a fiercely competitive family but were a loving and extremely close one. Jack, surrounded on one side by younger sisters and brothers, was bullied on the other by Joe Jr., a bigger, older brother two years his senior. Jack's relationship with his brother was interspersed with intense loyalty and familial rivalry. Joe Jr. born

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<sup>2</sup> Michael O'Brien, *Rethinking Kennedy: An Interpretive Biography* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 2009), 7.

with superb health was favored by their parents who invested in him their highest expectations for success.

During childhood, the Kennedys' second son, Jack was often sick. However, notions of Jack's health problems, early on and again later in his political career, were deflected by images of the Kennedys sailing, swimming, playing tennis, and tackling each other in touch football. The Kennedy family not only possessed considerable wealth, but also was always able to put forth a favorable image of a family enjoying good health. The iconic photographs of the Kennedy family, always happy, ever active, were outward indicators of health and success. Dallek observed that the Kennedy family, who appeared in *Life* magazine in 1938, was already well-known and poised to become politically significant:

They were a symbol of hope to the country's millions of ethics and its more established middle class who remained wedded to the belief—even in the worst of economic times—that anyone with exceptional talent and drive could still realize material opulence and public eminence exceeding the ordinary promise of American life.<sup>3</sup>

The young Jack Kennedy emerged from frequent bouts of illness and periods of convalescence as a voracious reader of biography and history. Most notably, he developed an affinity for the legends of King Arthur and the Knights of the Round Table, Robert Louis Stevenson, Sir Walter Scott, and Winston Churchill. "History was full of heroes for him, and he reveled in the stately

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<sup>3</sup> Dallek, *An Unfinished Life*, 26.

cadence of historical prose. His memory for what he read was photographic. Situations, scenes, and quotations stuck in his mind for the rest of his life,” recalled writer Arthur Schlesinger.<sup>4</sup> It is reasonable to assume that Kennedy yearned to emulate his heroes and laid the foundation for his desire to achieve and serve in public life.

Even though Jack Kennedy struggled with a bad back and frequent illnesses, he refused to talk about them. Instead, he cultivated a pleasing, outgoing personality, partly to compensate for what he may have perceived to be weaknesses. Jack spent significant periods of time alone and read while he recuperated and waited for visitors. He had spent so much of his young life alone that “as he grew older he never wanted to be alone,” noted Chris Matthews.<sup>5</sup> Jack spent most of the 1920s recovering from a number of illnesses which included chicken pox, German measles, mumps, scarlet fever, and whooping cough, thus he came to value movement and action. Matthews interviewed Kennedy’s youngest sister, Jean Kennedy Smith, who reflected that it was Jack’s “bedridden youth that made all the difference.”<sup>6</sup> Smith thought he advanced himself by reading while his brothers and sisters engaged in sports and outdoor activities. Over time, Jack distanced himself from his convalescence and these years seemed to develop his intellectual side and

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<sup>4</sup> Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., *A Thousand Days: John F. Kennedy in the White House* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1965), 81.

<sup>5</sup> Chris Matthews, *Jack Kennedy: Elusive Hero* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2011), 17.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 15.

open up within him an internal life that made him different from his siblings and the rest of the family.

In the 1930s, as Jack entered his teenage years in the bustling Kennedy household, his older brother Joe Jr., in the absence of their father, dutifully stepped in to guide and care for their younger brothers and sisters. “Jack was like a pal to the little Kennedys; Joe Jr. acted like a father,” wrote O’Brien.<sup>7</sup> Jack showed great kindness to his mentally retarded sister, Rosemary and had a close relationship with Kathleen, known as “Kick” who shared his humor and outlook on life. Jack was older than most of his siblings and the youngest Kennedy, Edward (“Teddy”) was born while he was away at prep school. He got to know his younger brothers and sisters when later they assisted in his campaigns for office.

Unfortunately for Jack, the sibling rivalry was broadened to a new venue when his father enrolled him at Choate, the same private boy’s boarding school where his brother, Joe Jr. was already ensconced as a model student and gifted athlete. He did not attempt to equal his brother’s exemplary record; he was a poor student and frequently missed classes because of sickness. In 1933, Jack met fellow student, LeMoyne “Lem” Billings and the two became fast friends. Jack and Lem bonded over shared experiences as second sons who endured bullying from older more successful brothers.<sup>8</sup> Following graduation in

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<sup>7</sup> O’Brien, *Rethinking Kennedy*, 13.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 15.

1935, Jack asserted his independence by choosing to attend Princeton instead of Harvard where Joe Jr. was currently enrolled and from which his father, Joseph Kennedy Sr. graduated in 1912. However, Jack's matriculation at Princeton was delayed and then prevented by illness, so while he recuperated, he applied to Harvard and was accepted.

In 1936, Jack attended Harvard where he majored in government and played freshman football. During his years at Harvard, Jack was a member of the varsity swim team and took part in a number of social activities which included the Freshman Smoker and the Spee and Yacht Clubs. Although he was a lackluster student, he was interested in history and political affairs. He was easygoing, well-known, and very popular with fellow students. Jack and his closest Harvard friend, Torbert MacDonald, a standout on the varsity football team, enjoyed themselves dating girlfriends and socializing with friends. By all accounts, Jack Kennedy was a charming, irreverent young man with an abiding interest in current events and a passion for sports, girls, and social life.

Jack's father, Joseph Kennedy was born in 1880 to a comfortable, middle-class Boston family whose father, P.J. Kennedy progressed from tavern owner to election to the Massachusetts legislature. Young Joe was ambitious, hardworking, ever on the lookout for ways to be successful. He graduated from Harvard in 1912 and worked in banking and as a stockbroker. Joe managed the Fore River Shipyard during World War I and immediately turned his focus to making money at the war's end. "By 1925 Joseph Kennedy was a millionaire

and well on his way to becoming a multimillionaire,” said Perret.<sup>9</sup> In 1932, he became interested in national politics and assisted in the successful election of President Franklin Roosevelt, who later appointed Joseph Kennedy to serve as chairman of the newly created Securities and Exchange Commission.

In 1938, Joseph Kennedy was appointed ambassador to Great Britain by President Roosevelt. With Jack’s father occupying America’s most prestigious diplomatic post, he took a leave of absence from Harvard to spend time at the Court of St. James and partake in English high society. Ambassador Kennedy tapped his son to serve as his special observer and as such, Jack enjoyed special treatment from the diplomatic corps in his travels to Europe, Russia, and the Middle East. His privileged status permitted him to stay at embassies and to confer with senior diplomatic staff who arranged tours and special access. Jack was gradually becoming a more serious student and travels abroad expanded his interest in world affairs.

On September 1, 1939, Germany invaded Poland and days later, Jack, Joe Jr., and Kick were present in the visitor’s gallery in Parliament to hear Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain speak on Britain’s decision to fight the Nazis. Winston Churchill, one of Jack’s boyhood heroes, delivered an impassioned speech in Parliament that day and urged his countrymen to action. He greatly admired Churchill and the courage shown by Britain in World War I. An avid student of history, Jack had devoured Churchill’s speeches,

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<sup>9</sup> Perret, *Jack*, 21.

*Marlborough*, and *The World Crisis* which contained the author's account of the Great War. Despite the politically charged atmosphere, Jack began putting together his own ideas on the merits of Britain's waging war against Nazi Germany.

"Although Ambassador Kennedy was initially popular with the British people, he destroyed his reputation by voicing his conviction that Britain would fall to Hitler and that America's only hope lay in staying out of the war," noted Rubin.<sup>10</sup> Ambassador Kennedy aligned himself with Prime Minister Chamberlain who thought Hitler would honor the settlement for peaceful talks, which had been agreed upon at the Munich Conference in September 1938. Chamberlain's appeasement of Hitler was popular in Britain back then, but subsequent Nazi seizure of Czechoslovakia and invasion of Poland showed the agreement was a failure. Chamberlain was incapable of handling Britain's war efforts and he later resigned. Winston Churchill succeeded Chamberlain in May 1940 and established a national coalition government.<sup>11</sup>

In 1939, Jack returned to Harvard and began working on his senior thesis which represented the totality of his extensive travel and undergraduate course work. The Harvard school of government was established in 1936 and Jack would be amongst the ranks of its initial graduating class. He was an average student but took full-advantage of the opportunity to earn honors.

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<sup>10</sup> Rubin, *Forty Ways to Look*, 12.

<sup>11</sup> O'Brien, *Rethinking Kennedy*, 28.

“More than half of that first class in the Department of Government wrote an honors thesis, something that in the long-established departments such as English or History was limited to young men who were Phi Beta Kappa material...,” noted Perret.<sup>12</sup> The result was a 148-page thesis completed by Jack in short order. His thesis titled, “Appeasement at Munich: The Inevitable Result of Slowness of Conversion of the British Democracy to Change from a Disarmament Policy to a Rearmament Policy” examined Britain’s conduct at Munich and showed how the country was forced into appeasement because of failures in the 1930s to keep pace with Germany’s armaments.

In June 1940, Jack graduated *cum laude* from Harvard and received interest to publish his thesis due to the topic’s timely appeal. Joseph Kennedy sent his son’s thesis to his personal friend, *New York Times* columnist Arthur Krock, who provided editorial changes and offered a more suitable title. Jack’s re-titled manuscript was published as *Why England Slept* which bore a similar title to that of Winston Churchill’s book, *While England Slept*. Many national magazines and newspapers sang praises for Jack’s book which sparked sales.<sup>13</sup> In fact, the book became a best-seller in the United States and Britain during the summer of 1940. Joseph Kennedy was alleged to have purchased thousands of copies to keep the book on the best-seller list, but he would not

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<sup>12</sup> Perret, *Jack*, 77.

<sup>13</sup> Edward J. Renehan, Jr., *The Kennedys at War, 1937-1945* (New York: Doubleday, 2002), 159.

have needed to buy copies of his son's book though. *Why England Slept* sold well and Jack actively promoted his book at signings, lectures, and on the radio. New York publishing house, Funk, sold out of the first edition of 3,500 copies of *Why England Slept* in the first few days after publication and went on to sell more than 40,000 copies in 1940.<sup>14</sup>

Jack gained attention as a serious observer of international affairs. Although Joseph Kennedy was not then thinking along the lines of a political career for his second son, Dallek reported that Jack's father "saw the book as a valuable first step for a young man reaching for public influence."<sup>15</sup> Deeply impressed, Joseph Kennedy wrote to Jack to say: "The book will do you an amazing amount of good...You would be surprised how a book that really makes the grade with high-class people stands you in good stead for years to come."<sup>16</sup> Proud and ambitious for his son, Joseph Kennedy used his influence and wealth to help Jack publish a book that was well-received by the public. In fact, however, it was unlikely a small publisher like Funk in pre-war 1940 considered a first-time author's account of the ways in which Britain was unprepared to fight the Nazis.

While possessing cachet as an ambassador's son, Jack nevertheless helped his cause as an author because he was young, handsome, and a recent

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<sup>14</sup> Renehan, *The Kennedys at War*, 159.

<sup>15</sup> Dallek, *An Unfinished Life*, 65.

<sup>16</sup> Rose Fitzgerald Kennedy, *Times to Remember* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1974), 261-262.

Harvard graduate. Also, the book was on a timely and pertinent topic. His authorship of *Why England Slept* is marred somewhat by the inordinate amount of assistance he received from others to turn a senior thesis into a best-selling book in a short period of time. Joseph Kennedy enlisted *Time-Life* publisher, Henry Luce to write the foreword for *Why England Slept* and then beseeched author and diplomat, Harold Nicolson, to write an introduction for the British edition. For his part, Jack provided substantial revisions to *Why England Slept* and was assisted by professionals to speed up the process, but helped them re-work his thesis into a polished product before the summer's end. However, in pre-war 1940, few questioned Jack's authorship of *Why England Slept* at the time. The book sold well and helped him gain public attention. It also helped him in the Kennedy family where his success moved him ahead of Joe Jr., his older brother and rival.

The summer of 1940 found Jack Kennedy promoting *Why England Slept* which received favorable reviews and became an international best-seller. He had graduated from Harvard in June and wondered what to do next. Jack's upbringing was filled with the material trappings of great wealth, but the Kennedy tradition prohibited him from remaining idle or being without a plan for action.<sup>17</sup> He did not have a career but was not interested in emulating his older brother, Joe Jr. who was enrolled at Harvard Law School. Jack had interest in applying to Yale Law School and then health issues caused him to temporarily

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<sup>17</sup> Dallek, *An Unfinished Life*, 68.

push aside those plans. In mid- September 1940, he traveled to the West Coast and audited courses in political science and business at Stanford University instead of applying to law school.

At Stanford, he became known as a best-selling author and quickly became a resident celebrity among the student body. He gave away signed copies of his book and was known for his interest in current events. This did not, however, prevent him from socializing and having fun. More so than many of his of his fellow Stanford students, he was well-traveled and knowledgeable of overseas affairs. He also realized a war was going on and was probably going to include America at some point. A smiling Jack Kennedy was pictured in *The Stanford Daily* on October 29, 1940 as he learned that his draft number was amongst the first ones drawn. His wide smile and friendly demeanor for the college newspaper photo probably masked his own doubts he would pass the military's physical examination given his lifelong health issues and bad back.

In the context of pending war, Jack Kennedy read a book that would deeply affect and influence him. Published in 1940, *Pilgrim's Way* written by John Buchan was an autobiographical recollection whose prose contained "tributes to lost friends that would be much quoted later by those seeking sentimental memorial stones to Jack Kennedy himself," noted Nigel Hamilton.<sup>18</sup> Buchan had admired his fellow Oxford classmate, Raymond Asquith who lost

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<sup>18</sup> Nigel Hamilton, *JFK: Reckless Youth* (New York: Random House, 1992), 544.

his life in the Battle of the Somme in 1916. In remembering Asquith, Buchan acknowledged, “For the chosen few, like Raymond, there is no disillusionment. They march on into life with a boyish grace and their high noon keeps all the freshness of morning.”<sup>19</sup> Brilliant, Oxford-educated, Asquith was the son of the Prime Minister. Like Asquith, Kennedy struggled with what to do with his life and whether or not to take his career path to law. Like Asquith, he wondered about his own fate in any forthcoming conflict.

Kennedy idolized Asquith and romanticized the ideals of bravery, courage, and heroic death. Jack recommended *Pilgrim’s Way* to his closest friends, many of whom picked up on the uncommon parallels between Asquith and Jack Kennedy. More than a few of Jack’s friends thought that he identified with and modeled himself after Raymond Asquith. Barbara Leaming wrote that “Jack much admired Asquith’s attitude that, as a matter of course, one ought to be ready to sacrifice everything for ideals – even one’s own life.”<sup>20</sup> He almost certainly read Winston Churchill’s earlier tribute to Asquith in *Great Contemporaries* (1917), but was moved by John Buchan’s recollection of his beloved friend. Jack was deeply affected in the way that only a young man could who himself might be headed to war. He decided early on what kind of leader he wanted to be and could recite from memory Churchill’s nod to

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<sup>19</sup> John Buchan, *Pilgrim’s Way* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1940), 50.

<sup>20</sup> Barbara Leaming, *Jack Kennedy: The Education of a Statesman* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2006), 57.

Asquith's gallantry and cool detachment: "The War which found the measure of many never got to the bottom of him, and when the Grenadiers strode into the crash and thunder of the Somme, he went to his fate cool, poised, resolute, matter-of-fact, debonair."<sup>21</sup> One might conclude that Jack Kennedy recommended *Pilgrim's Way* to people to read as a way of indicating to others what his own inner thoughts about war and personal sacrifice were like.

In December 1940, Joseph Kennedy resigned as Ambassador to Great Britain to insulate himself from unpopular defeatist views which stemmed from his alignment with Prime Minister Chamberlain's failed appeasement. Jack returned to Stanford, but returned home again in the early months of 1941 when health problems resurfaced, so he helped his father prepare his memoirs for publication. Jack's father increasingly relied upon him for advice and assistance in such matters. As the summer of 1941 approached, the dynamic of the staunchly isolationist Kennedy family dramatically changed when Jack's older brother, Joe Jr., after completing his second year at Harvard Law School, enlisted in the Naval Reserve while he awaited an appointment to flight school.

As a result, Jack's own interest in getting into uniform became more urgent. His bad back and medical problems, however, presented formidable challenges to passing the military's physical examinations. He failed the physical admissions tests for both the Army and Navy, which forced him to seek assistance from his father. With his father's help, he was allowed to enter the

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<sup>21</sup> Winston S. Churchill, *Great Contemporaries* (London: Octopus Publishing, 1990), 84.

Office of Naval Intelligence as an ensign in the Naval Reserve. Dallek noted that Jack's commission "was a complete whitewash that never would have been possible without his father's help."<sup>22</sup> Any concern later about how Jack entered the military in 1941 must be weighed against how courageous and impressive it was that he wanted to serve. He could have deferred to his illnesses, but he chose instead to sign up and serve. Both Joe Jr. and Jack choose not to follow their father's avoidance of military service in World War I.

Jack's commission again allowed him to move ahead of his older brother who awaited his pilot's wings. One of the consequences of Jack's receipt of a clean bill of health to enter into the Navy was that he could not reveal his numerous medical problems. In the late 1930s, Joseph Kennedy willingly covered the cost of expensive adrenal extracts prescribed to his son to "successfully treat his colitis, but at the possible price of stomach, back, and adrenal problems," said Dallek.<sup>23</sup> He performed extensive research into Jack Kennedy's medical information and concluded his use of adrenal extracts or corticosteroids led to a weakened back and the onset of peptic ulcers. Dallek further hypothesized that chronic use of adrenal extracts "may have caused or contributed to Jack's Addison's disease,"<sup>24</sup> the condition with which Kennedy was officially diagnosed in 1947.

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<sup>22</sup> Dallek, *An Unfinished Life*, 82.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 72.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 76.

In the fall of 1941, Ensign Jack Kennedy reported to a desk job assignment in Washington, DC where he wrote and edited news items for the Office of Naval Intelligence. The Japanese attacked the United States at Pearl Harbor, Hawaii on December 7, 1941, which initiated our involvement in World War II. Kennedy, despite the active war efforts, enjoyed an entertaining social life in Washington, DC and began an affair with a Danish woman named Inga Arvad, who was said to have former ties to the Nazi regime. It was likely that one of Kennedy's spurned girlfriends reported Arvad to the FBI who began tracking her whereabouts and recording her telephone conversations. Kennedy was transferred from Washington, DC to Charleston, South Carolina when he disobeyed an official warning to discontinue his relationship with Arvad. Kennedy's father intervened so that his son was transferred instead of dismissed. A less socially prominent sailor might have faced a dishonorable discharge but Jack Kennedy was accustomed to using his father's influence to smooth things over. He later omitted his initial tour of duty at the Office of Naval Intelligence in Washington, DC from his Navy biography.<sup>25</sup> However, Kennedy's penchant for risk taking remained with him for life.

Kennedy's father demonstrated that the standard rules of conduct did not apply to him, so Jack continued to rely upon his father's help who garnered a coveted spot for him to train as a Patrol Torpedo boat (PT) skipper. His

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<sup>25</sup> Garry Wills, *The Kennedy Imprisonment: A Meditation on Power* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1981), 19.

pronounced back problems were overlooked in the hopes of positive publicity to be had by having the former ambassador's son in the Navy's PT boat program.<sup>26</sup> Kennedy's parents were both anxious and proud of his volunteering for hazardous duty. The PT boat was essentially an 80-foot wooden hull held together with mahogany planking, which must have provided a jarring ride for a sailor like Jack with an already bad back. He told one of his friends that skippering a PT boat was the best job in the Navy. Kennedy endured the rigorous training exercises and his back bothered him continuously, but he toughed it out and slept on plywood boards to help alleviate the pain. But in doing so and enduring the arduous PT boat training, he moved away from desk jobs and closer to the possibility of having his own command.

In February 1943, Lieutenant Junior Grade Kennedy reported to Tulagi Island in the Solomon Islands and took command of PT 109 in late April. Skipper Kennedy and his crew members aboard PT 109 patrolled the Blakett Strait on August 2, 1943 when Japanese destroyer *Amagiri* struck them. Their boat was rammed, split in half, and exploded into flames. Two of Kennedy's men, Marney and Kirksey, died in the collision, one man, McMahon was badly burned, and the rest of the crew flailed about in the darkness. Kennedy and his men decided to abandon their damaged PT boat and swim for a small, unoccupied Japanese island. Kennedy, a former collegiate swimmer at Harvard, placed the strap from the lifejacket of the badly burned McMahon into

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<sup>26</sup> Dallek, *An Unfinished Life*, 87-88.

his teeth and pulled him along as he swam.<sup>27</sup> He and his crew swam for several hours until reaching the small island and rested there. Kennedy and the crew members later swam to Olasana Island, a larger island with a fresh water supply where they hid out and subsisted on coconuts for a week. Meanwhile, Kennedy continued to swim out into the channel at night in search of PT boats on patrol.

Kennedy and fellow officer, Ross happened upon a native canoe hidden in the bushes located farther up the island. He and Ross encountered a couple of natives but were unable to make friendly communications before the natives hurriedly paddled away. Later that night, Kennedy used the canoe he found to make another trip out into the channel but had no success in signaling to patrolling boats. When Kennedy and Ross returned to their men, they discovered that the natives they had seen the previous day made contact with the PT 109 crew. Thom, one of the officers who stayed behind, managed to convince the natives that they were Americans. Kennedy then carved a message on a coconut shell which was taken by the natives to the Allied Forces Command. The natives returned to Olasana Island with instructions for Lieutenant Kennedy to return with them to the Allied Forces' base. On August 8, 1943, Kennedy guided the rescue efforts and came back aboard another PT boat to fetch his marooned men.

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<sup>27</sup> John F. Kennedy Presidential Library and Museum, "John F. Kennedy and PT 109," <http://www.jfklibrary.org/JFK/JFK-in-History/John-F-Kennedy-and-PT109.aspx> (accessed September 5, 2012).

Jack Kennedy's tireless actions to save the surviving crew members of PT 109 later made him a war hero. He was awarded the Navy and Marine Corps Medal for lifesaving and received the Purple Heart for injuries he sustained. When Kennedy was later asked how he became a hero, he humorously remarked, "It was easy-- they sank my boat," recalled Sorensen.<sup>28</sup> His eagerness to get into the war was less about youthful risk taking but was more akin to the feeling that our American way of life was something worth fighting for. Military service shattered a number of Kennedy's tendencies to romanticize war. Now, he was more impressed with the focus of fighting men on staying alive than with their rushing headlong into heroic combat. Dallek, noted, "Jack admired the courage and commitment to duty he saw among the officers and men serving on the PTs, but he also sympathized with their fear of dying and saw no virtue in false heroics."<sup>29</sup>

Despite Kennedy's self-deprecating remarks, some have criticized his performance at the helm of PT 109. In particular, Garry Wills, author of *The Kennedy Imprisonment*, believed that Kennedy's courage and lifesaving efforts were real but only after PT 109 was *rammed* by the Japanese destroyer. Wills contended that language in Kennedy's medal citation referred to the PT 109 situation as a "collision" with the enemy destroyer. He also questioned the veracity of language used in PT 109 accounts appearing in *The New Yorker*

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<sup>28</sup> Theodore C. Sorensen, *Kennedy* (New York: Harper & Row, 1965), 18.

<sup>29</sup> Dallek, *An Unfinished Life*, 92.

and *Reader's Digest* magazines, which Wills claimed left readers with the impression that Kennedy's PT boat was averting collision or wheeling around for attack.<sup>30</sup> However, Kennedy's personal bravery was not diminished by whether his boat was rammed by an enemy vessel or was struck while turning to attack. Despite his bad back, Kennedy swam several miles while towing an injured shipmate and continued to swim nightly into the channel to signal passing boats. Claims of his alleged negligence must be weighed against his courage, leadership, and his determined efforts to save his crew. Also, one must consider that the Navy approved the news articles which represented Kennedy and PT boats in a heroic, dramatic light. PT boats were built for speed and their maneuverability was greatly exaggerated for propaganda purposes. PT 109 may have been structurally incapable of turning quickly in close quarters and the Navy, for reasons of national security or embarrassment of image, would have censored negative articles about PT boats.<sup>31</sup> It was not widely reported, but Lieutenant Kennedy and several members of the original PT 109 crew stayed behind and continued to serve in the South Pacific aboard a new boat, PT 59.

In 1944, Kennedy was transferred stateside for discharge when his health deteriorated and PT boats were no longer needed by the Navy. He suffered fatigue, exhaustion, and needed back surgery almost immediately

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<sup>30</sup> Wills, *The Kennedy Imprisonment*, 136-138.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 137-138.

upon returning to the United States He spent most of 1944 recovering and working to regain his health. “Kennedy emerged from the war wise, mentally tougher, and with self respect for having done his patriotic duty,” observed O’Brien.<sup>32</sup> He experienced war and came to value peace but understood too, that peaceful times could be sustained only through diligence and preparation. Kennedy’s responsible, cool-headed leadership held the potential for a successful career in public service.

Jack Kennedy returned home, in the eyes of many, as a genuine war hero and his father, Joseph Kennedy sought to advertise and publicize his son’s heroism. “Indeed, the desire to enhance the Kennedy image was a driving force in this complicated man, and the skill he evinced at creating just the right image was phenomenal,” wrote Doris Kearns Goodwin.<sup>33</sup> Jack’s father worked tirelessly to expand the prestige and status of the Kennedy family, especially for his eldest sons, Joe Jr. and Jack. With Joseph Kennedy’s help, the PT 109 story was reported widely on the front pages of major newspapers and Jack gained widespread notoriety. He received tremendous praise for the bravery and courage shown in battle. This public acclaim made it difficult for detractors to sully Jack’s heroism and the story of PT 109 soon became legendary.

Jack Kennedy’s fame as a decorated war hero may have led his older brother, Joe Jr. to volunteer for a dangerous flying mission. Their sibling rivalry

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<sup>32</sup> O’Brien, *Rethinking Kennedy*, 50.

<sup>33</sup> Doris Kearns Goodwin, *The Fitzgeralds and the Kennedys* (New York: Simon & Shuster, 1987), 500.

was genuinely competitive but friendly. However, Jack's heroism affected the dynamic of their relationship. On August 10, 1944, Joe Jr. drafted some biting comments for Jack after reading John Hersey's PT 109 article in *The New Yorker*, but also voiced his own concern for coming home with a medal.<sup>34</sup> Tragically Joe Jr. did not survive the bombing mission as his plane blew up shortly after take-off. Jack lost a good friend and a beloved brother who had borne their parents' ambitions. Moreover, he realized competing with his older brother defined his own life and in heroic death Joe Jr. gained superiority.<sup>35</sup> Lieutenant Joseph P. Kennedy Jr., the eldest son and his father's hope for political office, was posthumously awarded the Navy Cross. The Kennedys, despite their prosperity and fame, experienced the suffering that came to other families. In early September 1944, nearly one month after young Joe's death came the news that Kick's husband, William "Billy" Cavendish, an officer in Britain's Coldstream Guards was killed on the front lines in Belgium by a German sniper. Kick had been living in London during the war and married Billy Cavendish, an aristocratic, prominent Protestant against her mother, Rose's wishes.

In 1945, Joseph Kennedy wangled his friend William Randolph Hearst for a writing assignment for his son, Jack with one of Hearst's newspapers, the *Chicago Herald-American*. In his first assignment as a journalist, he was invited

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<sup>34</sup> Dallek, *An Unfinished Life*, 106.

<sup>35</sup> Goodwin, *The Fitzgeralds and the Kennedys*, 698.

to cover the founding of the United Nations (U.N.) at a conference in San Francisco. The pay was meager but Jack, already an author of a best-selling book, connected with government officials, and a war hero, was poised to provide stories from his unique perspective. According to Dallek, “Jack had credibility from his editors and reading audience as an expert on postwar international affairs.”<sup>36</sup> During the conference, however, Jack began to question the U.N.’s ability to broker peaceful relations between Russia and the West. More specifically, he did not understand how the U.N. with its limited powers could overcome the distrust built-up over twenty-five years’ time. He foresaw the possibility of war between the two powers and the U.N. as an ineffective peacekeeper.<sup>37</sup> Jack filed seventeen articles during the month that he covered the U.N. meeting and still made room for socializing and fun.

Before the war’s end, Jack traveled to Europe where he was assigned to Winston Churchill’s campaign in Britain’s general election, which ended in Churchill’s defeat by the Labour Party. “Kennedy’s brief journalism career, from May to August 1945, was an extraordinary experience for a twenty-eight-year-old,” observed O’Brien.<sup>38</sup> Despite his beginning a promising career in journalism and closely interacting with national leaders, Jack expressed frustration with

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<sup>36</sup> Dallek, *An Unfinished Life*, 115.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>38</sup> O’Brien, *Rethinking Kennedy*, 56.

passively writing about things instead of being one of the doers. He quit journalism and politics soon provided the opportunity to become more involved.

Jack's father, Joseph Kennedy, Sr. was planning for his eldest son, Joe Jr. to run for office. With Joe Jr.'s death in August 1944, the paternal pressure was placed upon Jack. According to Dallek, "There is evidence that Joe raised the matter of a political career with his son in December 1944, only a few months after Joe Jr.'s death...."<sup>39</sup> His father urged him to consider politics but he resisted for more than a year. In late 1945, Jack, assisted by his father, entered the congressional race in the Eleventh District of Massachusetts set to begin on June 18, 1946. At this point, Jack was well-educated and a decorated war hero but lacked political depth and experience. He was intelligent and motivated, but his image and political views were unformed.

When Jack announced his candidacy, many Massachusetts voters were taken aback by the appearance of this shy, gaunt, handsome young man who had entered into the race. However, his candidacy was carried along by recognizable local names on both sides of his family and by great wealth. In the 1946 campaign, Jack set in motion some political strategies which would mold his political career throughout his life. He kicked-off his campaign with an early, organized start and surrounded himself with loyalists comprised of intellectuals, relatives, friends, and war buddies. Jack hired David Powers and Billy Sutton to run his campaign, both men were Boston locals and recently

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<sup>39</sup> Dallek, *An Unfinished Life*, 117.

discharged veterans. “Because Jack Kennedy was a veteran and war hero, young men like Sutton and Powers were drawn to him. Like him, they were freshly returned from the war, and Jack represented to them a new kind of politician,” wrote Helen O’Donnell, daughter of future aide Kenneth O’Donnell.<sup>40</sup>

The Kennedys’ wealth helped to launch a media campaign which plastered the District with political handbills, posters, and billboards which presented Jack’s image primarily as that of a handsome war hero running for office. O’Brien noted, “The PT 109 story...became one of Kennedy’s greatest political assets and a major theme in his early campaign literature.”<sup>41</sup> Joseph Kennedy, who continued behind the scenes to fortify Jack’s status as a veteran and military hero, ordered re-prints of the *Reader’s Digest* article about PT 109 titled “Survival,” and mailed them to registered voters before the November election.

In 1946, Jack was successful in his first attempt at running for office. He handily beat Republican Lester Bowen, 69,093 votes to 26,007 to win the congressional seat. It was an impressive victory for someone with no political experience. Jack Kennedy, a moderate Democrat, was greatly assisted by a familiar name, a large, network of family and friends, and good finances. During the campaign, Jack reacquainted himself with his younger sisters, Eunice, Pat, and Jean and got to know his younger brothers, Bobby, now twenty years old

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<sup>40</sup> Helen O’Donnell, *A Common Good: The Friendship of Robert F. Kennedy and Kenneth P. O’Donnell* (New York: William Morrow, 1998), 51.

<sup>41</sup> O’Brien, *Rethinking Kennedy*, 50.

and Teddy, fourteen. He was close to Joe Jr. and Kick, but Jack was away at prep school or college or serving in the Navy when his younger siblings were growing up. All of the Kennedys were pressed into action and helping Jack's campaign became a family affair. However, Jack himself motivated people to work for his campaign. He was an energetic, intelligent, war hero with a bright political future. Jack developed an earnest, straightforward way of speaking and people liked his humor and informal manner. "Patriotism remained a strong suit in 1945-1946 and a war hero commanded unqualified public approval," noted Dallek.<sup>42</sup> In the end, Joseph Kennedy spent a great deal of money on Jack's campaign and he won the election by a landslide.

Twenty-nine year old Jack Kennedy entered the House of Representatives on January 3, 1947 and served there for six years until he entered the United States Senate on January 3, 1953. He hired Ted Reardon, a Harvard friend of Joe Jr.'s to work as an administrative assistant in his Washington, DC office. Jack entered the House under Republican majority control and experienced little hope of pushing significant legislation through Congress. Although he was less interested in accomplishments in the House, he was intent on using the office as a trajectory to higher political office.<sup>43</sup> Jack was appointed to the House Education and Labor Committee and he also garnered an appointment to the Veterans' Affairs Committee. He voted with

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<sup>42</sup> Dallek, *An Unfinished Life*, 129.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid.*, 135.

House Democrats and the White House on most issues. Jack's domestic platform emphasized federal aid to education, labor, housing, jobs, and issues important to veterans. He was a proponent of federally financed housing for veterans and represented his working-class district by voting in favor of the interests of labor unions. Jack led the opposition to the 1947 Taft-Hartley Bill, which effectively took away labor unions' ability to strike. He determined the bill was excessively harsh and sought a more balanced way to avoid industrial clashes. Although the House voted overwhelming to pass the bill, Jack's dissent led to his writing a minority opinion critical of the conduct of management and labor unions. Ultimately, President Truman vetoed Taft-Hartley but the House and Senate overrode the veto.

In his first term in Congress, Jack's foreign affairs platform consisted mainly of a dialogue extolling the battle between capitalism and communism. "During his first two years in Congress, Kennedy seldom spoke up on foreign policy," wrote James MacGregor Burns.<sup>44</sup> He supported Truman's Doctrine to provide aid to Greece and Turkey. He also backed NATO and delivered a speech at the University of North Carolina in favor of the Marshall Plan Bill, which authorized aid to Western Europe. However, during his second term, Jack criticized Truman's foreign policy decisions and blamed him for the Communists' victory in China.

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<sup>44</sup> James MacGregor Burns, *John Kennedy: A Political Profile* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1960), 79.

In 1948, Jack ran unopposed for re-election, but by the end of his second term in Congress, he was bored and ready for higher office. “Kennedy found most of his fellow congressmen boring, preoccupied only with advancing their career and their narrow political agendas,” observed O’Brien.<sup>45</sup> Still in his early 30s, Jack was much younger than many of his older House colleagues. He contrasted their stodginess with his casual dress and laid-back manner. Jack developed the reputation as a lone operator but happenings in his life may have affected his outwardly behavior. In 1947, he became sick while traveling in Ireland and was officially diagnosed with Addison’s disease. Jack’s condition was kept secret by the Kennedy family. In 1948, Kick was killed in a plane crash in France. Details about Kick’s companion, also killed in the crash, were hushed by the Kennedys because she was traveling with her married lover. In 1949, Jack began stumping in Massachusetts for statewide recognition. By early 1952, he had visited nearly all of the 351 cities and towns.<sup>46</sup> Jack pushed himself and was always on the go. He earned one of the highest absentee rates in the House due to his constant travelling, campaigning, and recuperating from illness or surgery.

In 1950, Jack easily defeated Republican Vincent J. Celeste and received over 80 percent of the vote. His third-term victory was somewhat perfunctory though as already he had begun preparing for his run against

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<sup>45</sup> O’Brien, *Rethinking Kennedy*, 62.

<sup>46</sup> Burns, *John Kennedy*, 101.

Senator Henry Cabot Lodge in 1952. In 1951, the balance of power shifted from Joseph Kennedy to Jack as he staffed his own campaign for the Senate. He hired Kenneth O'Donnell, a Massachusetts native and a football teammate of Bobby's from Harvard. In turn, O'Donnell recruited Lawrence O'Brien, an experienced public relations man and political observer. Both men would continue to serve with Jack Kennedy for over a decade. Jack selected his twenty-six year old brother, Bobby, a recent law school graduate to organize and run his campaign. Bobby worked long hours; he was efficient and detail-oriented which led to his successful efforts to re-elect his older brother, Jack.

The Kennedys resorted to what worked for them in 1946 and, among many efforts, held numerous Sunday afternoon teas for local women. Jack recognized and championed the value of women's votes The Kennedys' formal receptions were a huge success and approximately 50,000 women attended them.<sup>47</sup> All of the Kennedy family including in-laws rang doorbells, made appearances, or helped out in some way, in addition to contributing money to Jack's campaign. As in previous campaigns, his heroism and military service figured prominently. Thousands of re-prints of the *Reader's Digest* article about PT 109 were distributed to barber shops and beauty parlors across Massachusetts.<sup>48</sup> Jack Kennedy was everywhere on billboards, television, radio, newspapers, and in person shaking voters' hands.

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<sup>47</sup> Burns, *John Kennedy*, 114.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, 107.

“Both Kennedy and his opponent in the Senate race, Henry Cabot Lodge, Jr., were tall handsome, self-assured graduates of Harvard and veterans of World War II,” noted O’Brien.<sup>49</sup> However, a majority of Massachusetts voters chose representation by the youthful, dynamic Kennedy over the Boston Brahmin incumbent Lodge. Jack outmaneuvered Lodge and won the Senate race, 1,211,984 votes to 1,141,247. The Kennedy campaign officially spent \$349,646 to Lodge’s \$58,266, but neither man’s total was accurate or inclusive. The whole cost of the Kennedy campaign was estimated to be more than a half a million dollars.<sup>50</sup>

In 1953, Jack began to assemble a Senate staff that would stay with him over the coming years and entered into a couple of successful relationships which served him well. He hired Mrs. Evelyn Lincoln as his secretary and she continued to the White House. More importantly, Jack hired Theodore “Ted” Sorensen to serve as his chief legislative aide and speechwriter. During his charmed life in Washington, DC, the handsome, bachelor Jack Kennedy had had no plans to settle down but Jack, now thirty-six years old told his friends that he would get married if elected to the Senate.

Jack Kennedy met Jacqueline “Jackie” Bouvier at a friend’s dinner party in 1951. She was working in Washington, DC as an “inquiring photographer” for the *Times-Herald*. His friends immediately realized that Jackie was much

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<sup>49</sup> O’Brien, *Rethinking Kennedy*, 69.

<sup>50</sup> Burns, *John Kennedy*, 115.

different from the other girls Jack had dated—she was intelligent, literary, and refined. Jackie was born on July 28, 1929 in Southampton, New York amidst large houses with servants, gardens, and stables. She traveled abroad, attended the best schools, and cultivated a great knowledge of literature, languages, and art. According to Dallek, “From the first, Jackie seemed like an ideal mate, or as close to it as Jack was likely to find: physically attractive, bright and thoughtful, shy but charming, and from a prominent Catholic Social Register Family.”<sup>51</sup> He fell in love with Jackie who also charmed his father, Joseph Kennedy and won his approval.

Jack and Jackie began a two-year courtship during which he frequently traveled or worked in Massachusetts. Jackie described her courtship by Jack as being “spasmodic” since he spent the better part of each week in his home state. News of their engagement was delayed until the *Saturday Evening Post* article extolling Senator Kennedy’s bachelor status appeared in its June 13th issue. Their engagement was announced the following week on June 25, 1953. They married on September 12, 1953 on her stepfather’s estate in Newport, Rhode Island. Jack was thirty-six and his new wife, Jackie was twenty-four. Despite Jackie’s mother’s request for a small church wedding, the Kennedy family opted for a large church wedding which became one of the biggest, most publicized events of the year. After their honeymoon, Jack and Jackie settled into the Georgetown section of Washington, DC. They did not live together

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<sup>51</sup> Dallek, *An Unfinished Life*, 192.

before marriage and were unprepared for each other's fierce independence. He continued to take off with his male friends or go on political trips while Jackie was left home alone. In addition, his health problems compounded their marital tensions.

In 1954 and 1955, Jack worked on a book while he recuperated from two back surgeries and hospitalizations related to the management of his Addison's disease. The book which became *Profiles in Courage* contained stories about eight Senators: John Quincy Adams, Thomas Hart Benton, Sam Houston, Lucius Lamar, George W. Morris, Edmund G. Ross, Robert Taft, and Daniel Webster, all of whom courageously defied convention and risked their political careers to do the right thing. Published in 1956, *Profiles in Courage* was a huge success and became a best-seller. "The book proved more politically valuable than Kennedy could ever have imagined," wrote O'Brien.<sup>52</sup> Kennedy's book turned out to be a tremendous asset which elevated his standing and boosted his image within the Democratic Party. In 1957, *Profiles in Courage* won the Pulitzer Prize for biography.

Historian Herbert Parmet believed that Ted Sorensen wrote *Profiles in Courage* and has been critical of Kennedy's claim to authorship. He hypothesized that the chronology of Kennedy's life in 1954-1955 and accumulated documentation and materials did not support the contention that

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<sup>52</sup> O'Brien, *Rethinking Kennedy*, 85.

Kennedy was the book's author.<sup>53</sup> Parmet's pronouncements influenced many people but his claims lacked credibility. His analysis did not include Kennedy's notebooks, various letters, and other evidentiary materials which went missing through the passage of time. Also, Parmet assumed that Kennedy would have been unable to contribute to his book while convalescing.<sup>54</sup>

Kennedy contended, though, that he wrote *Profiles in Courage*. The Kennedys brought legal action against critics and demanded retractions to protect Jack's claim to authorship. "Jack did more on the book than some later critics believed, but less than the term *author* normally connotes. *Profiles in Courage* was more the work of a "committee" than of any one person," observed Dallek.<sup>55</sup> Over the years, Ted Sorensen, the alleged "ghostwriter" for *Profiles in Courage*, minimized his role and refuted claims that he wrote the book. In 2008, however, Sorensen acknowledged, "Like JFK's speeches, *Profiles in Courage* was a collaboration, and not a particularly unusual one, inasmuch as our method of collaboration on the book was similar to the method we used on his speeches."<sup>56</sup> Sorensen did not write the book for Kennedy, per se but one could claim that his "deep collaboration" on *Profiles in Courage* connoted co-authorship.

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<sup>53</sup> Herbert S. Parmet, *Jack: The Struggles of John F. Kennedy* (New York: Dial Press, 1980), 331.

<sup>54</sup> O'Brien, *Rethinking Kennedy*, 85.

<sup>55</sup> Dallek, *An Unfinished Life*, 199.

<sup>56</sup> Theodore C. Sorensen, *Counselor: A Life at the Edge of History* (New York: Harper Collins, 2008), 151-152.

“John Kennedy was not one of the Senate’s great leaders,” Sorensen later wrote describing Kennedy’s eight-year stint in the Senate.<sup>57</sup> No laws of national importance carried his name due in part to his absenteeism. His constant traveling and campaigning caused many of his absences. In parts of 1954 and 1955, Kennedy was on leave from the Senate for about a year while he recovered from back surgeries and other health concerns. During his absence, his colleagues scorned him for arranging to abstain from voting to censure Senator Joe McCarthy, a Kennedy family friend. Although in 1956, Kennedy’s colleagues witnessed his rise to national prominence at the Democratic National Convention in Chicago, Illinois. Delegates commented on his good looks and warmed to his humor and charm. Indeed, Kennedy’s polished style and easy-going manner were honed from hundreds of speeches he gave in Congress and in Massachusetts. He nearly secured his party’s nomination for Vice President but was edged out by Tennessee Senator Estes Kefauver. However, Kennedy appeared smiling and gracious in his defeat. “In this moment of triumphant defeat, his campaign for the presidency was born,” noted Burns.<sup>58</sup> He gained national attention without getting bogged down by Governor Adlai Stevenson’s defeat by President Eisenhower. Kennedy’s religion likely would have been cited as one of the reasons for the ticket’s failure.

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<sup>57</sup> Sorensen, *Kennedy*, 43.

<sup>58</sup> Burns, *John Kennedy*, 190.

After 1956, Kennedy began conducting himself more like a presidential candidate. He began wearing custom-made suits and crisscrossing the United States to deliver speeches. Although Kennedy began campaigning nationally, there were issues to be addressed and smoothed over. According to O'Brien, "Kennedy's father, his ambiguous stand on civil rights, his silence on the McCarthy issue, his youth, his Catholicism all concerned Democrats."<sup>59</sup> Criticized for being impatient, Kennedy bypassed the traditional reliance on congressional record and party ties. He forged his own path to the presidential nomination. As a result of the favorable impression made at the 1956 Democratic National Convention, Kennedy was popular and appeared frequently as a guest on numerous television and radio talk shows. He used family money and charisma to develop a national following.

In 1957, Kennedy's path to national attention began at home. In May, his book, *Profiles in Courage* was awarded the Pulitzer Prize. During summer of 1957, he and his brother, Bobby were featured in a photo spread in *Look* magazine. Media interest was being generated in the Kennedy family, their wealth and personal lives. In November, Kennedy became a new father as he and Jackie's first child, a daughter, Caroline Bouvier Kennedy was born. As he looked toward both the future and re-election to the Senate in 1958, he re-hired Kenneth O'Donnell to work on his staff and Lawrence O'Brien to run his re-election campaign.

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<sup>59</sup> O'Brien, *Rethinking Kennedy*, 81.

On November 4, 1958, the forty-one year old, Democratic incumbent Jack Kennedy was re-elected to another six-year term in the Senate. He defeated Republican opponent Vincent J. Celeste, 1,362,926 votes to 488,318. Kennedy easily won re-election to the Senate with over 70 percent of the vote, but in reality he was already in the midst of national campaigning and hoped win his party's nomination for president.

On January 2, 1960, John F. Kennedy announced his candidacy for the president of the United States. He immediately attempted to confront the issues of his religion and his youth. Sorensen related his observation about Kennedy's sentiment regarding his religion and said the following:

No obstacle to the Presidency handicapped or antagonized John F. Kennedy more than the widespread charge that a Catholic in the White House could not uphold this country's traditional and constitutional separation of church and state and could not place the national interest ahead of the dictates of his church hierarchy.<sup>60</sup>

Kennedy knew he needed to answer voters' reasonable questions and their unreasonable ones too, if he planned to end the tradition against a Catholic president. To this end, Kennedy drafted thoughtful responses to questions he was asked repeatedly about his religion. He also became skilled in how to politely shame outspoken bigots. As a result, Kennedy's aplomb and measured responses softened some perceptions that his Catholicism was an impediment to the presidency.

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<sup>60</sup> Theodore C. Sorensen, ed., *Let the Word Go Forth: The Speeches, Statements, and Writings of John F. Kennedy, 1947 to 1963* (New York: Dell, 1988), 124.

In July 1960, Kennedy's won his party's presidential nomination at the Democratic National Convention in Los Angeles, California. His performance was efficient and well-organized in the nine presidential primaries in which he campaigned. More importantly, Kennedy demonstrated to fellow delegates and others with his victory in the West Virginia primary that a Catholic could run and win in a heavily Protestant state. Kennedy's great wealth was a tremendous advantage in his run-up to the nomination. "Money bought radio, television, and newspaper ads, financed his staff, and provided an airplane to convey him quickly to campaign stops," observed O'Brien.<sup>61</sup> By contrast, his main challenger, Minnesota Senator Hubert Humphrey experienced campaign funding issues and could not compete with Kennedy's advertising efforts. He outperformed Humphrey in the primaries and won over 60 percent of the vote. Kennedy contributed to his success through his determined efforts and strong resolve.

Kennedy's campaign received estimates that more than a million votes could potentially be lost due to anti-Catholic prejudice. He decided to take on the religion issue head-on and agreed to speak at a highly publicized appearance in Houston, Texas. On September 12, 1960, he appeared before a group of three hundred Protestant ministers at the Rice Hotel Crystal Ballroom in Houston. Kennedy realized opening a dialogue with people of faith was a good way to allay their fears and communicate about his Catholicism. Before

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<sup>61</sup> O'Brien, *Rethinking Kennedy*, 103.

addressing his religion, Kennedy described for the audience what kind of America he believed in and declared:

...I believe in an America where religious intolerance will someday end—where all men and all churches are treated as equal—where every man has the same right to attend or not attend the church of his choice—where there is no Catholic vote, no bloc voting of any kind—and where Catholics, Protestants, and Jews, at both the lay and pastoral level, will refrain from those attitudes of disdain...If I should lose on the real issues, I shall return to my seat in the Senate, satisfied that I had tried my best and was fairly judged. But if this election is decided on the basis that forty million Americans lost their chance of being President on the day that they were baptized, then it is the whole nation that will be a loser....<sup>62</sup>

Kennedy's message was well-received by the ministers who applauded vigorously and gave him a standing ovation. The Houston speech temporarily stalled the religion issue and allowed Kennedy to turn his attention to voters who thought him too young or inexperienced to be president.<sup>63</sup> To offset concerns about his youth, Kennedy stressed his heroism and war record while downplaying his lack of executive experience.

The first, televised political debate between the presidential candidates took place in Chicago, Illinois on September 26, 1960. Richard Nixon, the Republican nominee and Jack Kennedy, the Democrat nominee agreed to meet face-to-face in a series of four televised debates. An audience of over 70 million people tuned in to see the two candidates. The three subsequent

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<sup>62</sup> Senator John F. Kennedy of Massachusetts, Greater Houston Ministerial Association, Houston, Texas, on September 12, 1960, in Sorensen, *Let the Word Go Forth*, 130-136.

<sup>63</sup> Dallek, *An Unfinished Life*, 284.

debates between Kennedy and Nixon neither generated interest nor enthusiasm from television viewers.

Kennedy looked directly into the camera while making opening and closing remarks. His large head filled the television screen on close-up shots and at times seemed to float in the middle of the screen as he addressed viewers. Kennedy spoke smoothly and confidently with his head thrown back. By contrast, Nixon glanced around and forced nervous smiles. He seemed uncomfortable and appeared gangly while seated; his suit jacket gaped loosely at his shirt collar. Nixon spent much time agreeing with and refuting the points made by his opponent and reverted to a collegiate debating style. "Kennedy came across as a leader who intended to deal with the nation's greatest problems; Nixon registered on voters as someone trying to gain an advantage over an adversary," wrote Dallek.<sup>64</sup> Nixon's greatest concession came from radio listeners who thought he bested Kennedy while television viewers thought Kennedy won. The future lay in televised images and what a candidate looked like and sounded like on television began to influence voters' impressions.

On October 7, 1960, Kennedy told viewers during the second debate with Nixon that a single stroke of the president's pen could end housing discrimination and that he, Kennedy, would do so when elected to office.<sup>65</sup> On

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<sup>64</sup> Dallek, *An Unfinished Life*, 285.

<sup>65</sup> Harris Wofford, *Of Kennedys and Kings: Making Sense of the Sixties* (New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 1980), 63.

October 19, 1960, Kennedy telephoned Coretta King, the wife of Civil Rights leader, Martin Luther King Jr., and expressed his concern at learning of her husband's arrest. Kennedy showed both courage and compassion in reaching out to Mrs. King. Shortly thereafter, millions of pamphlets describing Kennedy's telephone call to Mrs. King were distributed in black communities in the North. Kennedy would go on to capture 80 percent of the black vote in the November election.

Forty-three year old John F. Kennedy was elected president but the margin of victory was one the smallest in recent history. Nearly half of the people who voted had cast a ballot for his opponent. Kennedy's religion both helped and hurt him. Some Catholics voted for him and while other voters may have cast ballots against Kennedy because he was Catholic. Nixon relied heavily on his experience and campaigned in all fifty states instead of focusing on swing states. The election was extremely close and rumors ensued that Kennedy stole the election from Nixon. According to Edmund Kallina, an authority on the presidential election of 1960, the Democrats perpetrated massive vote fraud in Chicago, Illinois but did so to influence a local race. He added, "Republicans never produced convincing evidence that it affected the outcome of the presidential contest in Illinois."<sup>66</sup> Moreover, Kallina's research showed that the 1960 Chicago election results could not by themselves have

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<sup>66</sup> Edmund F. Kallina, Jr., *Kennedy v. Nixon: The Presidential Election of 1960* (Gainesville, FL: University Press of Florida, 2010), 258n13.

affected national results. Kennedy was elected president by approximately 112,827 votes—34,220,984 votes to 34,108,157.

One of the most pervasive political myths of modern times blamed religious intolerance for Kennedy's narrow victory in the 1960 presidential election. Kallina, weighed-in about the election results:

Religion remains one of the great conundrums of 1960. It involved two great paradoxes. The first was the intensity of religious feelings but the lack of decisive impact. This issue inflamed people like no other issue in 1960. Protestants voted overwhelmingly for Nixon, and Catholics even more overwhelmingly for Kennedy. Yet, there is no good evidence that religion affected the final totals in the popular vote. Thousands opposed Kennedy because of his religion, but just as many thousands were willing to vote for him because of it.<sup>67</sup>

Kennedy insiders, Democratic aides and politicians, and pollsters were invested in casting blame on religion for the reason why Kennedy did not sweep the election. Meanwhile, the Republicans sought to blame Nixon and looked to alleged voting fraud in Chicago, Illinois to explain their loss. In the end, Republicans were unable to provide convincing evidence that voting irregularities denied them the election. However, Nixon found comfort in believing that voter fraud had cost him the election, but the effects were negligible at the national level and he nearly won the presidency.

Published in June 1961, Theodore H. White's popular book, *The Making of the President 1960*, chronicled Kennedy's rise to power. White's account of

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<sup>67</sup> Kallina, *Kennedy v. Nixon*, 206.

the presidential election contained glowing portrayals of Kennedy, but rendered mean-spirited, personal characterizations of his opponent, Richard Nixon. Kennedy did not win the 1960 election by a landslide as predicted by the media and other political observers. Despite Kennedy's image management, he spent a fortune and won the election by about 113,000 votes.

Kallina's suggested that many journalists and historians were so enthralled with White's account of the 1960 election that no one dared to point out his flawed interpretation of events. Many different groups were personally, professionally, and financially invested in the election's outcome, so it did not make sense to them that Richard Nixon received nearly as many votes as John F. Kennedy, who by White's account ran a magnificent campaign.<sup>68</sup> Kallina believed that Kennedy's religion was used as a convenient scapegoat by some in his campaign to cover-up their own ineffectiveness or ineptness. As a result, many Kennedy insiders including White seemed unable or unwilling to credit Nixon's efforts and blamed religious prejudice for the election results.

A number of things contributed to Kennedy's victory. He was intelligent, hardworking, personally appealing, and charismatic. He won the first presidential debate and held his own against Vice President Nixon who possessed more executive experience and was a collegiate debate champion. Kennedy displayed compassion and political savvy but won over the black community with his call to Mrs. Coretta King, wife of Martin Luther King, Jr. He

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<sup>68</sup> Kallina, *Kennedy v. Nixon*, 214.

personally selected Lyndon Johnson as a running mate who carried Texas for him and wielded credibility and influence in the South. Kennedy represented the hope and promise for a brighter future. He and his young family looked like a picture of the ideal American family. Kennedy was a youthful break from America's past and the doldrums of the Eisenhower years.

## CHAPTER TWO

### CREATING THE KENNEDY IMAGE

It's not what you are that counts, but what people think you are.  
--Joseph P. Kennedy

“Kennedy’s sudden rise to power itself reveals much about the times. At the beginning of 1960, half of Americans had never heard of the senator from Massachusetts. Before the year ended, he had won the nation’s highest office. Along the way, he invented media-oriented, televisual, celebrity politics,” observed Rorabaugh.<sup>1</sup> Popular appeal shaped Kennedy’s life and his presidency. His heightened concern with personal appearance and image was continually cited by news sources. “He was the first president who fully understood and used the media for its political potential,” noted Joseph Berry.<sup>2</sup> Kennedy was able to devise ways to influence the public’s image of him as a man and as a leader. Utilizing the “honeymoon effect” in popular approval that he received as a newly elected president, Kennedy worked to manage and control the flow of information so that his popularity increased and he could maintain his high approval ratings.

According to Thomas Brown, “The assertion that Kennedy brought a certain “style” to the office and the life of the nation was perhaps the most

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<sup>1</sup> Rorabaugh, *Kennedy and the Promise*, 1.

<sup>2</sup> Joseph P. Berry, Jr., *John F. Kennedy and the Media: The First Television President* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1987), 1.

common yet also the most elusive, claim made on his behalf.”<sup>3</sup> Kennedy created his own style but a public persona that was not commonplace or average. He portrayed confidence and grace in the midst of the ease of great wealth. Eloquence, charisma, charm, and wit are often cited as characteristics of a “mystique” and were often-used descriptions of how portrayed Kennedy himself. Many Americans admired the president’s personal style, projecting their hopes and aspirations onto Kennedy as someone who could help fulfill their own dreams. On the other hand, some rejected the Kennedy mystique. The Kennedy mystique was advanced by some journalists, historians, and politicians, including members of his administration and the Kennedy family.

“One of the most universal cravings of our time is the hunger for compelling and creative leadership,” wrote Burns.<sup>4</sup> Kennedy was born into a powerful, wealthy family which led him, apparently, to see himself as a leader. While many young, wealthy, educated men did not see themselves as president of the United States, he was different in that regard. He was a leader from a very young age and learned how to get others to respond to him. Kennedy was often bedridden in his youth which led him to encourage others to visit and spend time with him. The genius of Kennedy’s leadership was his ability to harness others to do what he wanted, whether it be beckoning them to join him or urging us to get the country moving forward again. “Some individuals have

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<sup>3</sup> Thomas Brown, *JFK: History of an Image* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1988), 12.

<sup>4</sup> James MacGregor Burns, prologue to *Leadership* (New York: Harper & Row, 1978), 1.

traits that make them stand out even at an early age. At least some charismatic leaders, such as Charles de Galle and John Kennedy, are blessed with a striking appearance that draws others to them,” noted Howard Gardner.<sup>5</sup>

The early 1960s were the perfect time for a charismatic leader like Kennedy as television began to supplant the political stronghold of newspapers. “Television shifted peoples’ attention from issues, and caused them to focus on the personal qualities of a candidate, his ability to speak, and his style of presentation,” explained Berry.<sup>6</sup> Kennedy was handsome, knowledgeable, and well-spoken which created an effective media image. Television enhanced his inherent likeability and enabled him to utilize the medium to persuade others to see his point of view. Kennedy’s utilized his physical attractiveness and his awareness of the importance of image to advance his rise to the presidency.

Kennedy grew up in a family which was keenly aware of public image. Jack’s father, Joseph Kennedy had long sought advice and help from public relations firms. “The family had a strong sense of the power of publicity long before it was commonly understood outside of Hollywood,” wrote Ralph Martin.<sup>7</sup> In the early 1950s, Representative John Kennedy appeared on political news discussion shows like *Meet the Press* and participated in live broadcast interviews to comment on his position on laws and bills. Although his style was

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<sup>5</sup> Howard Gardner, *Leading Minds: An Anatomy of Leadership* (New York: Harper Collins, 1995), 33.

<sup>6</sup> Berry, *JFK and the Media*, 75.

<sup>7</sup> Ralph G. Martin, *Seeds of Destruction: Joe Kennedy and His Sons* (New York: G.P. Putnam’s Sons, 1998), 29.

stilted by the broadcast format used at that time, he displayed a natural ease before the camera. In 1956, Senator Kennedy rose to national prominence at the Democratic National Convention in Chicago, Illinois. Although he lost his party's vice-presidential nomination to Senator Estes Kefauver of Tennessee, he impacted delegates and television viewers with the grace and aplomb of his speech nominating presidential candidate Governor Adlai Stevenson. Shortly thereafter, Kennedy was solicited for numerous speaking engagements including guest spots on radio and television talk shows. After the 1956 convention, he gained the attention of his fellow Democrats and was one of its brightest hopes.

Mary Ann Watson, author of *The Expanding Vista: American Television in the Kennedy Years*, believed that Kennedy's 1957 Pulitzer Prize for *Profiles in Courage* elevated his status to statesman and intellectual, thus he was deferred to by those in the media as a presidential candidate long before he announced his candidacy.<sup>8</sup> On January 2, 1960, amidst criticisms by some who perceived his religion, youth, and inexperience to be stumbling blocks to his seeking higher office, Kennedy announced himself as a candidate for president. In April 1960, he astutely confronted the religious issue head-on and sought to prove his meddle in the West Virginia primary. To meet that objective, the campaign bought air-time and Kennedy appeared on television on the Sunday

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<sup>8</sup> Mary Ann Watson, *The Expanding Vista: American Television in the Kennedy Years* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), 5.

night before the election to discuss his religion. Watson concluded that Kennedy's television appearance was the "turning point" in that state's primary. "He looked directly into the lens of the camera, into the eyes of the voters, as he delivered an impassioned statement on the separation of church and state. He was deeply persuasive," she observed.<sup>9</sup> Kennedy, who had been trailing his opponent Minnesota Senator Hubert Humphrey, won over 60 percent of the vote in West Virginia.

In July 1960, John Kennedy accepted his party's nomination for president in the Los Angeles Coliseum as 35 million people watched on television. Although Kennedy has been called the "first television president," in 1952, Eisenhower was the first presidential candidate to appear on television commercials, which was a rare occurrence for political candidates in those days. Like Kennedy, he was popular, polished, and skilled in using the fledgling medium, but the technology in President Eisenhower's time was not advanced and few people owned televisions. As noted by Watson though, "In 1960, 87 percent of American homes, more than 46 million, were equipped with television—at least 25 percent more TV households than existed in 1956."<sup>10</sup>

Indeed, the Democratic convention in Los Angeles was the "first media extravaganza staged for the nationwide television audience," said Rorabaugh.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Watson, *The Expanding Vista*, 6.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 8.

<sup>11</sup> Rorabaugh, *Kennedy and the Promise*, 14.

The convention's schedule was arranged for television viewing and featured technological advances to make events more interesting and lively for viewers. Also, the convention was about image and hobnobbing with Hollywood stars. Stars like Frank Sinatra and Judy Garland mingled with Kennedy and other delegates at one of the largest fundraising dinners. The transference of celebrity to the politician was beginning to take place.<sup>12</sup>

Following his nomination, Kennedy began campaigning against the Republican nominee and two-term, Eisenhower vice president, Richard Nixon. Although Kennedy's use of television appeared polished and effortless, his successes resulted from hard work and reliance upon professional advice. "Throughout the campaign, and especially in regard to the debates, John Kennedy sought and respected the expertise of media professionals,"<sup>13</sup> said Watson. For example, the Kennedy campaign hired political pollster, Lou Harris to provide detailed analyses and contracted for video-taping of each of his campaign stops. While Kennedy demonstrated a natural affinity and grace for television, he, nonetheless, trained with a voice and speech coach, a former opera singer, to improve his vocal timbre. He took advantage of opportunities to appear on television talk shows like Jack Paar's *Tonight Show* to engage in friendly, non-political banter which showcased his personality and enhanced his image. Even Kennedy's paid political ads blended his image and substance

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<sup>12</sup> Rorabaugh, *Kennedy and the Promise*, 14.

<sup>13</sup> Watson, *The Expanding Vista*, 13.

into short, attention-getting segments, which contrasted Nixon's longer ads, laden with issues.<sup>14</sup> As a result, Kennedy generated much interest, energy, and enthusiasm for his campaign because of how he looked and sounded and came across to people.

Kennedy's concern with image was evident in the preparation he undertook for the four televised debates with Nixon. To this end, he hired J. Leonard Reinsch, a broadcast strategist to meet with CBS telecast director, Don Hewitt, to discuss layout of the set and shooting arrangements. Kennedy familiarized himself with the set and reviewed the conduct procedures for the debate. The same offer was provided to Nixon who declined to meet with the director or spend time on-site. According to Watson, "Nixon had savvy media advisors on this staff and at his disposal as well, but he did not make good use of their knowledge. Nixon's style was insular. He dismissed the advice of men who had impressive credentials and track records in the broadcast media."<sup>15</sup> This was an important difference between the two men. Kennedy sought advantages and used them whereas Nixon was content to rely upon his experience.

On September 26, 1960, the first debate took place in Chicago, Illinois. Kennedy was tanned, relaxed, and comfortable in his surroundings while Nixon appeared nervous, sick, and sweating. Most television viewers thought

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<sup>14</sup> Watson, *The Expanding Vista*, 14-15.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 13.

Kennedy outperformed Nixon. “The first and most important debate belonged to television,” claimed Watson.<sup>16</sup> Kennedy prepared for the three remaining debates under the tutelage of Fred Coe, a theater and television producer who supervised his rehearsals. Despite his practicing, studying, and listening to audio-tapes of Nixon’s speeches, the final debates generated little interest from television viewers. Kennedy was fortunate to have performed so well against Nixon in their initial outing.

To observers, Kennedy’s demeanor and personality appealed to young voters. His national grassroots campaign based its efforts, in part upon “popular appeal and youthful volunteers,” wrote Rorabaugh.<sup>17</sup> As such, he represented a new generation of young people and returning veterans eager to push aside the stodginess and stillness of the Eisenhower years. “Kennedy was in many ways an exemplar of the brand of pragmatic liberalism which emerged after World War II,” observed James Piereson.<sup>18</sup> As early as 1956, Kennedy demonstrated that he was not beholden to the old ways of doing things. He broke with the political tradition of waiting one’s turn and moving up through the congressional ranks. Instead, Kennedy made a new path to the presidency with his own brand of politics based on wealth and charm. “The key

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<sup>16</sup> Watson, *The Expanding Vista*, 12.

<sup>17</sup> Rorabaugh, *Kennedy and the Promise*, 15.

<sup>18</sup> James Piereson, introduction to *Camelot and the Cultural Revolution: How the Assassination of John F. Kennedy Shattered American Liberalism* (New York: Encounter Books, 2007), xi.

to his new kind of politics was image-making based on polls, travel, speeches, media, and person contacts,” said Rorabaugh.<sup>19</sup> Thus, Kennedy appealed to the sensibilities of many that the world remained open to innovation and change—not limited to the old ways of seeing the world.

On November 8, 1960, Kennedy was elected by a narrow margin—49.7 percent of the popular vote, so he openly challenged the post-World War II generation to break with the past and urged them to support his “New Frontier.” Skeptics had questioned Kennedy’s youth but “he insisted that his youth was an advantage, because the nation required a leader with energy and new ideas...The contrast with Eisenhower, however, was clear. Ike, about turn 70, would leave office the oldest president in history,” noted Rorabaugh.<sup>20</sup> Kennedy, though, was in his early forties with an attractive, young family. Later that same month, the President-elect and Mrs. Kennedy’s second child, a son, John F. Kennedy, Jr. was born. Three-year old Caroline and her newborn brother would be the first young children in the White House since Theodore Roosevelt’s family. Kennedy’s spirited campaign speeches beckoned the electorate “to get the country moving again.” Many Americans now looked to him as their hope and promise for a brighter future.

Richard Rose, an acknowledged expert on Presidential politics wrote, “The President invariably appoints strangers to many Cabinet and sub-Cabinet

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<sup>19</sup> Rorabaugh, *Kennedy and the Promise*, 11.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*

posts because he is looking for people who appear to be capable of handling the job at task.”<sup>21</sup> Kennedy, like most presidents before him, was more comfortable with personal associates and friends, but appointed others who he did not know personally to Cabinet positions. In the case of his brother, Robert Kennedy, however, he wanted someone even more than a friend or an expert in the field. Thus, in mid-November, following the election, Kennedy began considering potential Cabinet appointments. He looked to recruit a select group of highly capable men for key positions in his administration. He joked that he knew people to assist with his election but he did not know people to assist him now that he was president. Dallek, observed the following:

Just as Eisenhower’s selection of so many businessmen proved to be a clear signal of policies favoring less government regulation and influence, so Kennedy’s choice of so many highly intelligent, broad-minded men indicated that his presidency would be open to new ideas and inclined to break with conventional wisdom in search of more effective actions at home and abroad.<sup>22</sup>

Kennedy selected Douglas Dillon, the chairman of a Wall Street firm to serve at the Treasury where he could be counted upon to provide sound fiscal advice. He balked on selecting Adlai Stevenson to run the State Department and placed him into a less prominent position as the United States representative to the U.N. Ultimately, Dean Rusk, a college professor and former State Department aide, was appointed as secretary of state. For

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<sup>21</sup> Richard Rose, *The Postmodern President: The White House Meets the World* (Chatham, NJ: Chatham House Publishers, 1988), 146.

<sup>22</sup> Dallek, *An Unfinished Life*, 320-321.

defense, Kennedy chose Robert McNamara, the brilliant, young president of the Ford Motor Company. He was impressed by McNamara's quickness and decisiveness. "The most controversial cabinet appointment turned out to be that of attorney general," noted O'Brien.<sup>23</sup> Joseph Kennedy implored the president to select his own brother, Robert for the position. Despite the president's first-hand knowledge of his brother's exceptional organizational skills and work ethic, he feared coloring his new administration with nepotism charges. Kennedy, however, became convinced of the value of a trusted insider and appointed his brother, Robert Kennedy as attorney general.

According to O'Brien, "The major positions on the White House staff all went to longtime, loyal members of Kennedy's Senate and campaign staff...."<sup>24</sup> Kennedy appointed Mrs. Evelyn Lincoln as his White House secretary who worked in his Senate office as the legislative secretary. Pierre Salinger was retained as press secretary, the position for which he was hired during the 1960 campaign. Kennedy brought Lawrence O'Brien, Kenneth O'Donnell, and Dave Powers to the White House where collectively, the three men were known as the "Irish Mafia." O'Brien was named as special assistant for congressional relations to work with Congress on behalf of the White House agenda for the New Frontier. Kennedy selected O'Donnell to serve as the appointments secretary responsible for scheduling and logistical arrangements. Ted

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<sup>23</sup> O'Brien, *Rethinking Kennedy*, 113.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*

Sorensen's duties now included planning domestic policy and working with the legislative program in addition to speechwriting. He was assisted in speechwriting by Richard Goodwin. Dave Powers occupied the dubious role of serving as the president's side-kick. Powers voluntarily sought out women for liaisons with Kennedy. Arthur Schlesinger, a noted historian was selected to serve as a Kennedy's special assistant. He selected Harris Wofford for Civil Rights and McGeorge Bundy for the National Security Council on foreign policy where he was assisted by Walt Rostow. The staff of the New Frontier became known for their hard-work, drive, enthusiasm, and devotion to duty.

In early January 1961, John F. Kennedy stayed at his parents' estate in Palm Beach, Florida where he revised his inaugural speech. He wanted a healthy tan for his inauguration, so Kennedy worked on finishing his speech while he lounged by the pool. About two weeks later, cold temperatures and a covering of snow in Washington, DC for Inauguration Day contrasted the previous warmth of the Florida sunshine. On the morning of January 20, 1961, John F. Kennedy was sworn in as the thirty-fifth president of the United States. Despite the freezing cold, Kennedy removed his topcoat during his inaugural address as he wished to appear vigorous and impervious to the temperature. His confident, flawless delivery was honed by months of preparation with a speech coach.<sup>25</sup> Kennedy said, "Let the word go forth...that the torch has been

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<sup>25</sup> Thurston Clarke, *Ask Not: The Inauguration of John F. Kennedy and the Speech that Changed America* (New York: Henry Holt, 2004), 6.

passed to a new generation of Americans....”<sup>26</sup> His words encouraged all Americans to aspire to the highest ideals of innovation and service. The new administration began work the next day.

Few of Kennedy’s colleagues, many who dismissed him earlier in his career as a rich playboy, would have anticipated his strikingly beautiful words or that his inaugural address would be deemed to be one of the finest speeches of the twentieth-century. “Praise for the address was so extravagant that it was difficult to believe almost half of the electorate had preferred Nixon,” said Thurston Clarke.<sup>27</sup> Some critics and commentators believed that Kennedy’s speechwriter, Ted Sorensen, wrote the inaugural address for him since they assumed that was the speechwriter’s job. Generally, it has been considered bad form for a staff member to claim authorship for writing performed for a superior. However, in the context of an inverse situation, then one would question why others sought to publically credit Sorensen? It was entirely reasonable to assume that Kennedy and Sorensen collaborated on such an important speech. One must wonder too, if others’ personal or professional jealousies prompted them to dismiss Kennedy’s ability to draft such a stirring speech.

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<sup>26</sup> President John F. Kennedy, “The Inaugural Address,” Washington, DC, January 20, 1961, in Sorensen, *Let the Word Go Forth*, 12-15.

<sup>27</sup> Clarke, *Ask Not*, 7.

In *Kennedy*, Sorensen claimed that “the principal architect for the Inaugural Address was John F. Kennedy.”<sup>28</sup> Even though Sorensen’s personal admission did not quell the skeptics, no writers or critics offered evidence that he wrote Kennedy’s inaugural address. To deny Kennedy full-credit for writing his inaugural was to deny that his speech was the distillation of his background and life experiences. For some, his inaugural speech merged the classical eloquence and stately cadence of Winston Churchill’s speeches. Many believed that Kennedy compiled a lifetime of historical knowledge and experience into the drafting of his address. However, Kennedy was unlikely to have left the subject of his authorship of his inaugural address to interpretation or conjecture. Even years later, he was sensitive to claims that *Profiles in Courage* was ghostwritten by Sorensen. “He knew his speech represented an extraordinary opportunity to present himself, as he chose to be seen, for the pages of history, and few presidents in the twentieth-century care more about history, or its perspective, than John F. Kennedy,” added Clarke.<sup>29</sup> He must have foreseen that the inaugural ceremony would influence opinions and invite judgments about his speech, his administration, and his ability to lead the country. To this end, Kennedy ensured broadcasters received preferential treatment and their elevated press box was constructed right in front of the

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<sup>28</sup> Sorensen, *Kennedy*, 241.

<sup>29</sup> Clarke, *Ask Not*, 10.

inaugural lectern. He confidently delivered his inaugural address to the audience in attendance as he looked directly into the cameras.

The Kennedy years—in the early 1960s—were not yet dubbed “Camelot” but interestingly *Camelot*, the Lerner and Loewe musical opened on Broadway about six weeks before Kennedy’s inauguration. On inauguration evening, the President and First Lady looked radiant and glamorous to onlookers and attendees at galas and balls. The handsome pair, forty-three and thirty-one years old, respectively, was one of the youngest presidential couples to occupy the White House. An iconic photo taken that night by Paul Schutzer showed President Kennedy bathed in light as he pointed the way while the First Lady gazed up lovingly at him. Schutzer’s photograph of the Kennedys captured “Western culture’s most deeply ingrained notions about youthful grace, leadership, and nobility,” wrote David Lubin.<sup>30</sup>

Many saw Jacqueline Kennedy’s image as first lady as one of modern elegance, good taste, and style. She appeared to infuse the Kennedy White House with cultural sophistication and the arts. Hamish Bowles, fashion Editor at *Vogue* magazine and renowned interior-designer added:

Jacqueline Kennedy’s image as first lady was as carefully constructed as the stage she set for her husband’s presidency in her scrupulous restoration of the White House. Her personal taste gracefully spanned the divide that separated the 1950s America from John F. Kennedy’s ‘New Frontier.’ She was at once a paradigm of old-fashioned dignity, sharing with her husband a love

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<sup>30</sup> David M. Lubin, *Shooting Kennedy: JFK and the Culture of Images* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2005), 97.

of history and a keen appreciation of ceremony, and a reluctant pop-culture icon, who, like John F. Kennedy had an intuitive understanding of the power of image in an age when television was becoming a potent medium.<sup>31</sup>

The elegant tone for the Kennedy Administration was established during the ceremony and pageantry of the inaugural festivities. In February 1961, Jacqueline Kennedy created the White House Fine Arts Committee to oversee and restore the White House with privately donated funds. Simultaneously, Mrs. Kennedy was able to build interest in the White House while quenching her own interests in antiques and interior design.

Like her husband, the President, Mrs. Kennedy was independent and bookish, but unlike him, she was not politically inclined. She did not care for campaigning and did not vote until she married the then Senator Kennedy in 1953. Mrs. Kennedy succeeded in her role as First Lady by capitalizing on her own strengths. Through her passion for the arts, the Kennedy White House became associated with artistic achievement and cultural events. During her husband's presidency, Mrs. Kennedy arranged many performances which added excellence, sophistication, and fun for White House guests.

In June 1961, Mrs. Kennedy accompanied the President to Paris where her reception by the French people was overwhelming and overshadowed that of her husband. "Her appearance, her accomplishments, and most of all, her

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<sup>31</sup> Hamish Bowles, "Defining Style: Jacqueline Kennedy's White House Years," in *Jacqueline Kennedy: The White House Years; Selections from the John F. Kennedy Library and Museum* (New York: Bulfinch Press, 2001), 17.

ability attract crowds and cameras made her a critical asset,” noted Rubin.<sup>32</sup> Increasingly the media’s attention focused on her hair, her designer wardrobe, and her jewelry. Suddenly, Mrs. Kennedy’s “look” was an enviable style to be copied by other women. As a result, newspapers’ and magazines’ sales rose dramatically whenever they featured stories about Mrs. Kennedy and pictures of the Kennedys’ children, Caroline and John Jr. However, Mrs. Kennedy, intensely private and protective of her children, grew tired of the media’s intrusions. Despite her objections, the President sometimes took advantage of the First Lady’s absences and requested for his personal photographer, Jacques Lowe to take pictures of the children. “Unquestionably, however, Kennedy used his children to enhance the presidential image, as countless magazine stories, most of them with White House cooperation, focused on the most pursued children since Shirley Temple,” said James Giglio.<sup>33</sup>

On the afternoon of January 25, 1961, Kennedy hosted the first live television broadcast of a presidential news conference. Over four hundred reporters jammed into the State Department’s auditorium for the news conference and over 60 million watched at home. White House press secretary, Pierre Salinger recalled suggesting changes to handling the press:

I also felt very strongly that the President himself should be more accessible to the press....I found him totally receptive to my

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<sup>32</sup> Rubin, *Forty Ways to Look*, 82.

<sup>33</sup> James N. Giglio, *The Presidency of John F. Kennedy* (Lawrence, KS: University of Kansas Press, 1991), 258.

suggestion that he remove many of the traditional obstacles that have stood between the President and the press. The rule against live television at his press conferences was the first to go. His greater availability for exclusive interviews on TV and in all other media was another advance....<sup>34</sup>

During his presidency, Kennedy held sixty-two news conferences and made nine televised appearances to discuss important issues, and conducted numerous televised interviews. Kennedy's news conferences became popular events at which he showcased his humor and his uncanny ability to process information and spout facts. Moreover, news conferences demonstrated his great confidence in his skills.

Kennedy did away with the Eisenhower administration's requirement for reporters to work solely through the press secretary. He gave them direct access to his administration officials and department heads. Also, Kennedy began inviting members of the press and their wives to attend White House luncheons and official functions. Continuing in the spirit of cooperation, Salinger conducted two press briefings per day and provided printed hand-outs of as much releasable information as possible. During his first-term, Kennedy personally met with over fifty White House correspondents and reporters. He established friendly relationships with Ben Bradlee of *Newsweek* and Hugh Sides of *Time*. "Kennedy loved to shoot the breeze with reporters," said

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<sup>34</sup> Pierre Salinger, *With Kennedy* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1966), 129.

associate Ben Bradlee.<sup>35</sup> Some journalists were charmed by the president's attention and the dazzled by the access to power, but others found out that Kennedy could be harsh when reacting to information he thought resulted from their sloppy or biased reporting. Bradlee and his wife, Tony experienced this situation for themselves when the Kennedys dropped them for several months from their usual outings because the president was displeased with one of Bradlee's comments. Kennedy apparently took umbrage at Bradlee's characterization that he wanted only favorable press and was critical of that.

"The press coverage of the Kennedys' long weekends confirmed the public image of an ideal marriage. The photographs were happy-family ones, involving gleeful children and laughing parents. The couple's relationship remained less than idyllic, however," wrote Giglio.<sup>36</sup> President and Mrs. Kennedy were devoted to their children but it was likely their marriage was affected by his philandering. His extramarital affairs had occurred during their marriage and continued throughout his presidency but the media in that era did not report on a politician's private life. "The White House press, at that time, either knew or suspected such activity but remained silent," noted Giglio.<sup>37</sup> Thus, Kennedy did worry that reporters would publicize his womanizing. His

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<sup>35</sup> Benjamin C. Bradlee, *Conversations with Kennedy* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1975), 19.

<sup>36</sup> Giglio, *The Presidency of JFK*, 266-267.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 267.

public image as a faithful, loving husband and family man remained intact during his presidency.

The Kennedy Administration during its brief tenure posted some notable policy achievements and proved increasingly adept at crisis management and foreign affairs. When surveyed dispassionately, Kennedy accomplished much in his abbreviated presidency despite an early misstep at the Bay of Pigs:

On March 1, 1961, Kennedy signed an executive order which created the Peace Corps. Shortly after inauguration, he asked his brother-in-law, Eunice's husband, Sargent Shriver to put together a task force to lobby Congress for approval of a bill to establish the Peace Corps. Shriver shrewdly advised Kennedy to sign an executive order while the presidential task force conducted its lobbying. Four months later, Shriver's successful efforts resulted in Congress establishing a permanent, independent Peace Corps. "...Kennedy was proudest of a unique institution he had advocated in his 1960 campaign, created in his first hundred days and staffed with Americans motivated by the kind of dedication he had urged—the Peace Corps," wrote Sorensen.<sup>38</sup> The Peace Corps was staffed with volunteers, many of them young, who brought their energy and skills to improve the lives of those in poor nations. The volunteers received no salary for their work and their willingness to help those less fortunate demonstrated Americans' compassion and idealism. "The youth of America also seemed especially attracted to Kennedy. The proposal for a

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<sup>38</sup> Sorensen, *Kennedy*, 531.

Peace Corps seemed to epitomize the idealism and hope which young people could invest in the new administration,” observed Lewis Paper.<sup>39</sup> Shriver served as the first director of the Peace Corps which flourished under his energetic leadership. “A special bond grew up between the President and the Peace Corps volunteers. Today they are known in some areas as ‘Kennedy’s Children’...,” noted Sorensen.<sup>40</sup> The agency continued to grow and thrive as one of the enduring legacies of the New Frontier.

On March 13, 1961, Kennedy gathered at the White House with ambassadors from Latin America to give a speech promoting a ten-year plan called the Alliance to Progress. Kennedy’s first foreign-policy address was simultaneously broadcast in Spanish, Portuguese, French, and English across Latin America by the Department of State’s, Voice of America. He implored people of the hemisphere to join and support this new Alliance of Progress—*Alianza para el Progreso*—a far-reaching, long-range undertaking to meet peoples’ basic needs while lifting them out of poverty and malaise. “Throughout Latin America, a continent rich in resources...millions of men and women suffer the daily degradations of poverty and hunger. They lack decent shelter or protection from disease...,” said the President.<sup>41</sup> He requested \$500

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<sup>39</sup> Lewis J. Paper, *The Promise and the Performance: The Leadership of John F. Kennedy* (New York: Crown Publishers, 1975), 318.

<sup>40</sup> Sorensen, *Kennedy*, 532.

<sup>41</sup> President John F. Kennedy, Address to Latin American Diplomatic Corps, White House, Washington, DC, March 13, 1961, in Sorensen, *Let the Word Go Forth*, 351-357.

million dollars from Congress to begin the first steps to alleviate poverty in Latin America.

Economic disparity in Latin America disturbed Kennedy in part because two percent of the population owned more than fifty percent of the resources. In doing so, they influenced or controlled the press, the military, and the government. However, what angered him most was the attitude of the privileged elite who protected the status quo through friendly sources who represented their interests in the United States and in Washington, DC. "They saw no reason to alter the ancient feudal patterns of land tenure and tax structure, the top-heavy military budgets, the substandard wages and the concentrations of capital," observed Sorensen.<sup>42</sup> Despite his frustrations, Kennedy continued emphasizing in speeches in Costa Rica, Mexico, Venezuela, and Colombia that the Alliance was a peaceful revolution to make unnecessary a more violent revolution.

Deeply entrenched problems in Latin America challenged the Alliance's viability as a short-term solution or even a long-term one. "Resistance to reform in Latin America itself was an even greater obstacle," noted Dallek.<sup>43</sup> The ruling elite did not understand the program or the sacrifices required by reform. In May 1961, the assassination of military dictator Trujillo incited revolt in the Dominican Republic and caused instability. Corruption, coups, and brutality

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<sup>42</sup> Sorensen, *Kennedy*, 535.

<sup>43</sup> Dallek, *An Unfinished Life*, 436.

thwarted private investment in the region. However, the Alliance provided some improvements to land use, tax laws, food distribution, and housing and education programs. “Despite its limited success, the Alliance for Progress helped establish a great affection for Kennedy among Latin Americans,” wrote Paper.<sup>44</sup> The President continued to express support for the Alliance for Progress throughout his time in office.

At a press conference held on April 21, 1961, Kennedy took responsibility for the failed Bay of Pigs landing. “By taking the full blame upon himself, he was winning the admiration of both career servants and the public...But his assumption of responsibility was not merely a political device or a constitutional obligation. He felt it strongly, sincerely...,” said Sorensen.<sup>45</sup> Despite President Kennedy’s willingness to shoulder the blame for the Cuban operation, the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) plan to get rid of Castro began in secret in January 1960 during the Eisenhower administration. At that time, Kennedy was still campaigning for president and stuck to the standard United States platform that Castro was an anti-American, communist menace who betrayed his people and turned Cuba into a communist satellite.

The CIA came up with the plan which was presented to President Kennedy in March 1961. “The CIA had won a reputation as the government’s covert-action experts, the agency that arranged quick fixes for awkward foreign

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<sup>44</sup> Paper, *The Promise and the Performance*, 335.

<sup>45</sup> Sorensen, *Kennedy*, 309.

difficulties,” wrote O’Brien.<sup>46</sup> CIA director, Allen Dulles and Richard Bissell, his deputy were responsible for running and planning the Cuban operation. The two men, experienced in clandestine operations, possessed credible professional reputations gained through successful missions. Hence, there was little reason to question the CIA’s expertise in planning the Cuban operation.

Over the course of thirteen months, the original plan morphed from a slow, deliberate, covert buildup of guerilla troops selected, trained, and secreted into Cuba by the CIA, to a significantly altered plan utilizing fourteen-hundred heavily armed, Cuban-exile soldiers with military experience to stage an outright attack by amphibious landing. Eisenhower had signed-off on the original plan for arming and supporting a covert guerilla force to free Cuba. According to Sorensen, “Shortly before the Presidential election of 1960, it was decided (although Eisenhower was apparently not informed of the decision) that this should be a conventional war force, not a guerilla band, and its numbers were sharply increased.”<sup>47</sup> Thus, Kennedy ended up with a drastically changed plan from the one authorized by his predecessor.

A couple of occurrences forewarned the ill-fated Cuban operation. Namely, information about the clandestine mission appeared on the front page of the *New York Times* on January 10, 1961 and CIA director Allen Dulles privately advised senators that Cuba was aligning with the Soviets, thereby

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<sup>46</sup> O’Brien, *Rethinking Kennedy*, 116.

<sup>47</sup> Sorensen, *Kennedy*, 295.

potentially affecting neighboring countries. On January 28, 1961, Kennedy received his first official briefing on the Cuban operation. Basically, the President's choices ran the gamut of being labeled an imperialist by toppling the Cuban government or risking Soviet reaction in West Berlin by using military forces to invade Cuba or being labeled soft on communism by Republican opponents for doing nothing about Castro. In addition, "the CIA's intelligence claimed broad anti-Castro resistance in Cuba: as many as three thousand rebels, supported by twenty thousand sympathizers," noted O'Brien.<sup>48</sup>

At a meeting held on March 11, 1961, Dulles and Bissell briefed the President on the Cuban operation. Dulles urged Kennedy that the time to act on the plan was at hand because the fighters were ready to go and the Guatemalans wished to close the fighters' secret training camps. He presented the President with the choice of sending the fighters to Cuba or bringing them to the United States where they could spread their disappointment and discontent. Dulles stressed to the President that the Soviets would begin to supply arms to Castro and their plan represented the remaining opportunity for Cubans to liberate Cuba. Bissell then discussed the particulars of his plan code-named "Operation Trinidad" which provided for an amphibious assault with tactical air support. Before the meeting's end, Kennedy was inclined to proceed with the operation but requested two revisions to Bissell's plans. According to O'Brien, the President told Bissell that "the invasion must be an

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<sup>48</sup> O'Brien, *Rethinking Kennedy*, 117.

unspectacular landing at night in an area with a minimum of opposition. And if ultimate success depended on tactical air support, that support must appear to come from a Cuban air base, meaning the landing site must have an existing airfield nearby.”<sup>49</sup>

On March 15, 1961, Bissell briefed the newly revised plan which entailed launching an attack at the Bay of Pigs, also known as Zapata, which had an airstrip located close by. Neither the administration nor the Joint Chiefs of Staff questioned the validity of CIA intelligence information or the rapidity with which the agency revised its plan. However, revising the plan to land at the Bay of Pigs removed the option for the Cuban-exile fighters to blend into the mountains. The area beyond the beachhead was swampy and the mountains were located nearly eighty miles away. At the time, no one noticed that the crucial guerilla option was missing from the revised plan. Although Bissell initially agreed to Kennedy’s requests for deniability, he failed to inform him that the sheer size of the Cuban operation might make it impossible to deny United States involvement.<sup>50</sup>

The fourteen-hundred soldiers of the Cuban-exile brigade landed at the Bay of Pigs on April 17, 1961 but experienced many tactical and logistical mishaps. Castro’s forces responded quickly to attack the beach and the following day, his air force sank the ships loaded with the fighters’ supplies and

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<sup>49</sup> O’Brien, *Rethinking Kennedy*, 117-118.

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*, 118-119.

ammunition. Three days later, the Cuban-exile fighters surrendered to Castro. In its failed liberation effort, the brigade suffered 140 casualties with 1,189 men taken prisoner.

The disastrous Bay of Pigs landing was a blow to America's reputation and tarnished Kennedy's new presidency. Some supporters became disillusioned with the new president but many others responded favorably to the televised address in which he accepted responsibility for the failed operation. Public support for President Kennedy rose in the week following the Bay of Pigs invasion. "Despite his high approval ratings, Kennedy was disappointed with the results of his first hundred days. To be sure, he had established himself as an attractive and even inspirational leader..." noted Dallek.<sup>51</sup> To his credit, Kennedy did not publically blame anyone but himself for the Bay of Pigs invasion. Later in the year, he removed both Dulles and Bissell.

On May 25, 1961, Kennedy gave his second State of the Union Message before a joint session of Congress and announced his goal of placing man on the moon before the end of decade. However, three months prior, the Soviets successfully launched the first man into space. On April 12, 1961, Cosmonaut Yuri Gagarin became the first man to orbit the earth. The Soviets touted their technological success which became an effective tool of communist propaganda.

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<sup>51</sup> Dallek, *An Unfinished Life*, 371.

Despite the President's enthusiasm for space exploration, liberal critics and labor unions balked at putting \$5 billion into space when there were problems at home to solve: housing, education, transportation, and jobs. "As time progressed, Kennedy became increasingly concerned with the price tag of the space effort...But aspiring to place a man on the moon was a palatable political gesture in 1961. And in Kennedy's eyes at least, it could demonstrate dramatically that he was in fact getting the country moving again," said Paper.<sup>52</sup> The first moon landing took place on July 21, 1969. Kennedy's original goal was achieved after his presidency.

On June 3 and 4, 1961, President John Kennedy met for an open-ended discussion with Soviet Chairman Nikita Krushchev in Vienna, Austria. This was the first in-person meeting between the two men. "This image of Kennedy as a reluctant cold war warrior was probably reinforced when he with met with Krushchev in Vienna....," wrote Paper.<sup>53</sup> Krushchev initially dominated the conversation with drawn-out ideological lecturing to Kennedy about popular revolutions which stood to engulf capitalism. Kennedy attempted to speak to the necessity for peaceful accommodations but instead, Krushchev turned the discussion toward the inevitable nature of violent change in the world.

During the second session, President Kennedy improved his tack. When the Chairman Krushchev commented on the United States' support for non-

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<sup>52</sup> Paper, *The Promise and the Performance*, 369.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, 338.

democratic countries like Iran and Spain, the president countered with the example of Soviet-dominated Poland, which when given the freedom of choice, would not sound their praises for the communists or remain under their rule. Kennedy, however, made some head-way with the chairman who agreed with him on the nature of the crisis in Laos. Krushchev agreed they needed a cease-fire and a neutral Laos. Many times during the summit, Krushchev simply changed the subject or lashed out. Late in the second session, Krushchev vehemently requested withdrawal of U.S. troops from West Germany.

During the third session on June 4, 1961, Krushchev began with discussions about disarmament and nuclear testing. Specifically, he disagreed with the inordinate number of annual on-site inspections of underground nuclear tests demanded by the United States. He believed the number of inspections facilitated spying. According to O'Brien, "Krushchev linked the issue of nuclear tests with disarmament. He had repeatedly argued that the USSR wanted general and complete disarmament."<sup>54</sup> Kennedy argued the United States would not consider a limited number of inspections or undertake a test ban without a system of controls to prevent dishonesty. However, Krushchev doubled-back and appeared to agree with inspections if accompanied by complete disarmament.

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<sup>54</sup> O'Brien, *Rethinking Kennedy*, 126.

On the subject of Berlin, Krushchev wanted agreement with the West to sign a treaty to recognize the two Germanys or barring that effort, the Soviet Union was prepared to sign a treaty with East Germany before the end of 1961. Kennedy realized the ramifications of the ultimatum since the United States had encumbered itself to West Berlin by treaty since World War II. “Kennedy understood that a treaty acknowledging two Germanys would cancel all existing commitments—occupation rights, administrative rights, and rights of access,” wrote O’Brien.<sup>55</sup> In essence, Krushchev’s demand meant signing the peace treaty kept Berlin open but refusing meant the encroachment of Communist East Germany into West Berlin. Krushchev’s refusal to budge on this point rattled Kennedy during their exchanges. As a result, he was upset with himself and the situation. “For the second time in three months, he believed that he acted unwisely—first in approving the Bay of Pigs attack, and now in thinking he could reduce differences with Krushchev by rational explanation,” said Dallek.<sup>56</sup>

In the following weeks, Kennedy continued focusing on his performance in Vienna while ruminating on the possibility of an East-West war. He solicited advice from former secretary of state Dean Acheson, who proffered recommendations for handling the emerging crisis in Berlin. Kennedy realized the use of nuclear weapons may arise but preferred to wait for the Soviets to

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<sup>55</sup> O’Brien, *Rethinking Kennedy*, 127.

<sup>56</sup> Dallek, *An Unfinished Life*, 414.

sign the treaty or impede access to West Berlin. He disagreed with Acheson's stance that the Soviets viewed negotiations as weak. Kennedy chose not to declare a state of emergency as suggested by Acheson, but heeded his recommendations for a buildup and greater presence of military troops and aircraft in Europe.

On July 25, 1961, President Kennedy, in a televised address, delivered a strongly worded message without implicit threats about the freedom of Berlin:

We cannot and will not permit the Communists to drive us out of Berlin, either gradually or by force...We cannot negotiate with those who say, "What's mine is mine and what's yours is negotiable." But we are willing to consider any arrangement or treaty in Germany consistent with the maintenance of peace and freedom, and with the legitimate security interests of all nations.<sup>57</sup>

A majority of Americans approved of Kennedy's actions and were willing to go to war to keep Berlin open and wanted to maintain U.S. troops there. However, Kennedy's resolve forced Krushchev's hand because East Germany's depressed economic situation had been worsened by the fleeing professional class who had been leaving for the West since the mid-1940s. Not only did the professionals' leaving drain the German Democratic Republic of badly needed resources and talent, but their departures created a public image problem for the Soviets because people showed that they wanted to flee communism.

On August 13, 1961, the East Germans began constructing barriers to the access between East and West Berlin. "The Berlin Wall—sealing off the

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<sup>57</sup> President John F. Kennedy, Televised Address on the Berlin Crisis, White House, Washington, DC, April 25, 1961, in Sorensen, *Let the Word Go Forth*, 257-263.

border between the two cities with a high, grim barrier of concrete and barbed wire, separating families and friends, keeping East Germans in, free Germans out and Western access to East Berlin on a more limited basis—shocked the free world,” observed Sorensen.<sup>58</sup> Although the situation was a dire one for the people of West Berlin and West Germany, Kennedy determined it not be a cause for war because the German Democratic Republic had the right to control its borders with West Germany. He resolved the situation with a cool-head which did not escalate to crisis. In doing so, Kennedy showed improvements to his statecraft and gained support from the media and with Republicans. Moreover, the wall had demonstrated to Kennedy and his advisors that Krushchev did not intend to occupy or encroach upon West Berlin.

On August 13, 1962, Kennedy delivered a televised, nationwide address on the results of an economic report and promised a permanent tax cut bill in 1963. Despite the overt blandness of his economic speech, Kennedy announced that he intended to request Congress to reduce taxes by \$13.5 billion to stimulate the economy. Kennedy’s rationale was consumers would stimulate the economy by spending more money. “That speech...offered without experiencing or even predicting for the immediate future any of the three traditional reasons for a tax cut: a Budget surplus, a reduction in spending or a recession,” said Sorensen.<sup>59</sup> Kennedy’s proposal to cut taxes harkened to

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<sup>58</sup> Sorensen, *Kennedy*, 593.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, 427.

a report issued by his pre-inaugural task force on taxation which concluded that broad, long-reaching tax reform and closing tax loopholes would result in lower tax rates for everyone. The Kennedy tax-cut bill passed in September 1963 and was enacted by President Johnson in 1964 as The Revenue Act. As noted by O'Brien, "The Kennedy "boom," begun unspectacularly in the spring of 1961, became the longest peacetime period of prosperity in modern U.S. history."<sup>60</sup>

On September 30, 1962, three hundred federal marshals from the Department of Justice arrived in Oxford, Mississippi in anticipation of providing protection for James Meredith, a twenty-eight year old, black transfer student, as he registered for classes the next day at the University of Mississippi, known as "Ole Miss." Meredith, an air force veteran with college credits, applied to all-white Ole Miss on January 21, 1960, the day after President Kennedy's inauguration, but was rejected for admission. Meredith's right to enroll at Ole Miss was upheld in federal court with the help of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People but three times his federally ordered admission efforts were blocked. "The Kennedy Administration wanted to uphold the integrity of federal courts and federal laws without resorting to an armed confrontation like the one at Central High School in Little Rock, Arkansas," noted Watson.<sup>61</sup> Ross Barnett, the Mississippi governor defied federal orders to

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<sup>60</sup> O'Brien, *Rethinking Kennedy*, 145.

<sup>61</sup> Watson, *The Expanding Vista*, 95.

admit Meredith and openly expressed his opposition Meredith's presence at all-white Ole Miss, but wanted to operate on both sides of the political issue. Barnett realized Meredith's enrollment was inevitable given White House involvement and the presence of U.S. Marshals to enforce federal law, but he also desired to save face with his white constituency. He admitted to the President and Attorney General that he intended to allow the peaceful enrollment of Meredith at Ole Miss, but Barnett voiced remarks on statewide television which incited anger and resentment.

Approximately 2,500 people gathered on the campus of Ole Miss to protest Meredith's enrollment. "Roughnecks carried clubs, rocks, pipes, bricks, bottles, bats, and rifles," said O'Brien.<sup>62</sup> Violence broke out while President Kennedy appeared on a special televised address to speak about the situation in Oxford. During the night, Kennedy ordered a unit of Army military policemen to muster from Memphis, Tennessee stop the mayhem in Oxford. The military unit restored the peace but the skirmish resulted in two deaths and hundreds of injuries to bystanders, protesters, members of the press, and federal marshals. Meredith was registered without incident the next day at Ole Miss and was guarded by federal marshals as he attended classes.

The President's speech dismayed some civil rights leaders and activists who thought he missed an opportunity to exert moral leadership. Despite Kennedy's campaign assurances for legislation for civil rights and voting rights,

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<sup>62</sup> O'Brien, *Rethinking Kennedy*, 156.

and an end to housing discrimination, a number of initiatives languished. Originally his goal was to contain and moderate the civil rights movement. To achieve his goal, Kennedy planned to apply federal authority to broaden civil rights and emphasize voting rights, while attempting to head-off strife and instability in the South. Regionalized opposition and hostility toward the President for promoting civil rights was not uncommon. Likewise, some critics misunderstood the significance of Kennedy's use of executive orders to effect change.

Although some were disappointed with the president's speech with regard to situation in Oxford, few could have foreseen the power of network television's images of ugly racism to affect people in ways that words and constructs could not. Some southern whites unaccustomed to seeing blacks stand up for their rights were angered and directed their hostility toward media outlets. Southern blacks too, were unused to seeing televised coverage of racial issues. "Not only did television force northern viewers to take notice of the struggle for segregation, but it also engendered a solidarity among southern blacks," added Watson.<sup>64</sup>

In the summer 1962, the Kennedy Administration withstood criticism from Republicans for a noticeable increase in the number of arms shipments by the Soviets to Cuba. Some protested the Soviets' actions amounted to violations of the Monroe Doctrine which prohibited European countries from

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<sup>64</sup> Watson, *The Expanding Vista*, 94.

encroaching upon and interfering in the Western Hemisphere. However, no one contemplated that the Soviets were moving nuclear weapons to Cuba with the goal of positioning missiles within striking distance of the continental United States. In doing so, Krushchev provided protection for a communist satellite and achieved a measure of nuclear parity by Cuba's proximity to the United States.

On October 15, 1962, President Kennedy was informed by McGeorge Bundy, his special assistant for national security affairs that a reconnaissance aircraft detected medium-range ballistic missiles in Cuba. Kennedy convened a group of trusted men which included amongst others, Douglas Dillon, Robert Kennedy, Robert McNamara, Dean Rusk, Ted Sorensen, General Maxwell Taylor, the newly appointed Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, McGeorge Bundy, Undersecretary of State George Ball, CIA Director John McCone, and Ambassador Llewellyn Thompson, an expert in Soviet relations. The group of advisers were tagged the ExComm, short for the Executive Committee of the National Security Council. The ExComm was outraged over Krushchev's audacity to install offensive missiles in secret when the United States' placement of Jupiter missiles in Turkey was out in the open. More worrisome was the Soviet intention to make the offensive missiles fully operational without detection.

The crisis lasted for thirteen days as the group discussed options and strategies in secret sessions. The Jupiter intermediate-range ballistic missiles

installed in Turkey in the late 1950s became a potential negotiation tool for the president. President Kennedy reasoned that he may bargain the United States' removal of the Jupiter missiles in Turkey for the Soviet removal of missiles in Cuba. Indeed, the removal of Jupiter missiles was not a huge concession on the part of the U.S. as the missiles were outdated technology and not reliable or accurate. On October 18, the ExComm weighed the details of undertaking an air attack to destroy the Cuban missiles in tandem with a follow-on invasion or blockade. It became clear to the ExComm that air strikes and invasions were aggressive and fraught with logistical issues and collateral concerns. Either way, an aerial attack or an invasion might provoke the Soviets to retaliate by attacking the United States. The ExComm decided the blockade or quarantine was the best way to show our resolve and avert Soviet nuclear arms shipments to Cuba without resorting to all-out aggression. Moreover, the quarantine did not turn away ships bound for Cuba laden with food and supplies.

On October 20, President Kennedy advised the American people of the crisis via televised address. It was a tense time in the United States and for the ExComm as nuclear war a realistic possibility. "The Presidency was never<sup>65</sup> lonelier than when faced with its first nuclear confrontation. John Kennedy never lost sight of what either war or surrender would do to the whole human race," advised Sorensen. The quarantine placed into effect on October 24 was

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<sup>65</sup> Sorensen, *Kennedy*, 705.

closely monitored by the President, who placed troops, missiles, bombers, and nuclear subs on combat alert.

On October 25, Krushchev ordered Soviet ships carrying nuclear arms to turn back from Cuba but the ExComm chose to hold in abeyance their original plans for an air strike or an invasion because offensive missiles still resided on Cuban soil. On October 26, however, a letter arrived from Krushchev in which he proffered the terms of a deal. The Soviets agreed to remove missiles from Cuba if the Americans agreed not to invade. Elation was short-lived though because a second letter arrived from Krushchev, who changed the terms of the Soviets' deal. Instead, the Soviets now demanded the removal of the Jupiter missiles from Turkey in exchange for removal of their missiles from Cuba. On October 27, Robert Kennedy met with the Soviet ambassador, Anatoly Dobrynin to negotiate our agreement not to invade Cuba in exchange for the Soviet withdrawal of missiles from Cuba. In addition, we offered quiet removal of our Jupiter missiles from Turkey within the span of a half a year's time. The Soviets agreed to the deal and the crisis was resolved. The president exhibited restraint and showed the willingness to deliberate at each juncture. Kennedy demonstrated considerable growth to his crisis management skills since the Bay of Pigs. Respectful of Krushchev's reputation with the Soviet people, the president muted celebrations or declarations of victory. "He laid down the line we were all to follow—no boasting, no gloating, not even a claim of victory, We

had won by enabling Krushchev to avoid complete humiliation—we should not humiliate him now,” Sorensen recalled.<sup>66</sup>

On April 3, 1963, Martin Luther King, Jr. and Reverend Fred Shuttlesworth facilitated a campaign of marches and protests in downtown Birmingham, Alabama in an effort to break the city’s stranglehold of racial segregation. The demonstrations had little effect when suddenly Martin Luther King, Jr. was arrested and placed into jail for a week. With their leader jailed, James Bevel, one of King’s young associates, organized black youths to begin demonstrating in Birmingham’s streets beginning on May 1, 1963. Eugene “Bull” Connor, the Birmingham City Commissioner resorting to using police dogs and fire hoses against the young protesters. Almost a thousand black children were arrested. “The willingness of Birmingham’s black citizens to demonstrate and be arrested, baffled and frustrated segregationist authorities...and first time, children joined he protest. Thousands of black children marched, added Watston.<sup>67</sup> As a result of the numerous arrests, the jails overflowed with occupants, so Bull Connor and the Birmingham Police Department used night-sticks, high-pressure water hoses, and German Shepherds to physically intimidate the demonstrators. “The violence committed against the demonstrators in Birmingham, so many of whom were children, was captured by news photographers and soon became symbolic of the American

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<sup>66</sup> Sorensen, *Kennedy*, 717.

<sup>67</sup> Watson, *The Expanding Vista*, 102.

struggle for civil rights,” wrote Watson.<sup>68</sup> The shocking scenes of racism were broadcast around the world. President Kennedy disgusted by what he saw began to understand why blacks were no longer patient with the pace of civil rights legislation. The president exercised federal authority and sent troops to Alabama to restore order.

On June 11, 1963, black students, Vivian Malone and James Hood sought to register at the University of Alabama. To avoid a repeat of the violence in Oxford, Mississippi, the President and the Attorney General worked behind the scenes with college officials in preparation for registration. However, their plan was foiled when Alabama Governor George Wallace showed up and physically blocked the two students’ passage. Wallace remained in place and would not yield despite confrontations and orders to step aside. Eventually, Wallace acquiesced and the two students were registered. Fortunately, the situation ended peacefully without confrontations between troops and rioters. On the evening of June 11, 1963, the president gave a televised speech to the nation in which he categorized civil rights as a moral issue:

We are confronted primarily with a moral issue. It is as old as the Scriptures and is clear as the American Constitution.

The heart of the question is whether all Americans are to be afforded equal rights and equal opportunities, whether we are going to treat our fellow Americans as we want to be treated. 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 schools available, if 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

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<sup>68</sup> Watson, *The Expanding Vista*, 102.

his skin changed, and stand in his place? Who among us would then be content with the counsels of patience and delay?<sup>69</sup>

His speech was direct and emotional. The President voiced his intention to send civil rights legislation to the Congress for voting rights, equal access to public facilities, and to end segregation in public schools. Some black leaders thought Kennedy's speech was masterful.

On July 25, 1963, after negotiations for just twelve days, the United States and the Soviet Union agreed to ban nuclear testing in space, underwater, and in the atmosphere. The Limited Nuclear Test Ban Treaty was officially signed in Moscow on August 5, 1963. President Kennedy signed the ratified treaty on October 7, 1963 which banned testing and explosions in space, underwater, or in the atmosphere. Also, the treaty allowed underground testing provided no radioactive debris fell outside borders of the nation conducting the test. The treaty's signers pledged to seek disarmament and to end the fouling of the environment with radioactive byproducts and substances.

During his all-too-short administration, Kennedy established the Peace Corps and created the Alliance for Progress. He expanded the space program with the stated goal to place a man on the moon. He resolved emerging crises in Berlin. Kennedy cut taxes and initiated actions which led to the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965. Kennedy successfully managed the Cuban Missile Crisis in October 1962, which was one of the finest examples

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<sup>69</sup> President John F. Kennedy, Televised Address, Washington, DC, June 11, 1963, in Sorensen, *Let the Word Go Forth*, 192-197.

of crisis management in United States history. He negotiated the Nuclear Test Ban Treaty with the Soviet Union and signed the ratified treaty in October 1963.

CHAPTER THREE  
ASSASSINATION AND THE KENNEDY MYTH

He belongs to the country now.  
--Jacqueline Kennedy

On Thursday, November 21, 1963, the President and Mrs. Kennedy departed for Texas. With an eye toward re-election in 1964, Kennedy planned trips to Florida and Texas in November. The president's political standing was hurt in the southern states by his promotion of civil rights. Thus, during his trip to Texas, he hoped to raise campaign funds and resolve differences. Kennedy's final formal speech as president took place that evening at the Houston Coliseum where he spoke about the city's new space center. Their itinerary began the next day, Friday, November 22, 1963 with a Chamber of Commerce breakfast meeting in Fort Worth.

Following that event, the presidential entourage flew to Dallas. "The late arrival of Air Force One at Love Field was broadcast live by WFAA-TV, the ABC affiliate in Dallas. For almost ten minutes the President and Jacqueline Kennedy walked along the fence that separated them from a crowd of thousands," observed Watson.<sup>1</sup> This is the last televised image of the President and First Lady together smiling and chatting with people in the crowd at Love Field. The local station ended televised coverage as the president's motorcade departed the airport en route through downtown Dallas to a scheduled luncheon event at Trade Mart. There was no planned television

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<sup>1</sup> Watson, *The Expanding Vista*, 214.

coverage along the parade route through Dallas, so the next live broadcast was scheduled to commence with the president's arrival at Trade Mart. About a half-hour later, the news wires reported that Kennedy had been shot as the motorcade passed the Texas School Book Depository. Within thirty-minutes of the initial United Press International bulletin, the networks pre-empted all of their regularly televised schedules and "without preparation or precedent, the most massive broadcast coverage of any event in history was underway," noted Watson.<sup>1</sup>

Televised confusion ensued. Facts and rumors were intertwined as information went directly on-air as it became available. Some stations had informed viewers that the President was alive but in grave condition. In fact, some watching in the White House had hoped to glean additional information from television. "At 1:00 P.M. central time, half an hour after the attack, doctors at Dallas's Parkland Memorial Hospital told Mrs. Kennedy that the president was dead," reported Dallek.<sup>2</sup> President Kennedy was dead and television assumed a new role in showing the continuance of governance and democracy.

His death was the first assassination to take place in the modern era of television. "The Kennedy story, however, was carried into more than 90 per cent of American homes by television so quickly that over half of all Americans

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<sup>1</sup> Watson, *The Expanding Vista*, 214.

<sup>2</sup> Dallek, *An Unfinished Life*, 694.

heard the news before the President was pronounced dead, only 30 minutes after the shooting...,” observed Wilbur Schramm.<sup>4</sup> By day’s end on Friday, November 22, 1963, President John F. Kennedy was dead and television networks respectfully instituted a moratorium on showing commercials and entertainment until after his funeral.

Understanding the need to demonstrate continuity at home and abroad, Lyndon Johnson, now-President requested White House photographer Cecil Stoughton to document the oath of office as he was sworn in aboard Air Force One. Mrs. Kennedy, looking dazed and staring blankly, was captured in the picture’s foreground. The return flight with the late president’s body aboard was awkward and tense. Kennedy’s aides sat in shell-shocked silence. During the flight, President Johnson voiced importance for his addressing the nation as soon as Air Force One landed in Washington, DC. Upon landing, Mrs. Kennedy disembarked the aircraft in her blood-encrusted suit to show people what had happened in Dallas. As noted by Watson, “Jacqueline Kennedy, too, had a dark awareness of the power visual imagery would wield in the hours and days to come. Urged to change her bloodstained suit and stockings, she refused.”<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Wilbur Schramm, "Communication in Crisis," in *The Kennedy Assassination and the American Public: Social Communication in Crisis*, ed. Bradley S. Greenberg and Edwin B. Parker (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1965), 3-4.

<sup>5</sup> Watson, *The Expanding Vista*, 215.

Many disparate pieces of information were reported upon during the first days. People got their first glimpses of the president's suspected killer, Lee Oswald and some members of the media heard about Abraham Zapruder's home movie footage showing the motorcade in Dallas after President Kennedy had been wounded. On Saturday, November 23, 1963, the President's flag-draped casket rested on a catafalque in the White House. Mrs. Kennedy, upon her return to Washington, immediately sent a couple of aides to the Library of Congress to research the historical details of President Lincoln's funeral. "The first martyred president of the television age, Jacqueline Kennedy resolved, would have a state funeral of grandeur and poignant symbolism," wrote Watson.<sup>6</sup> Mourners across the world voiced their reactions and expressed their sympathies. Televised images of throngs of people crowding streets throughout the world brought home how people in other countries had felt about Kennedy.

As planning continued, Arlington National Cemetery was chosen as Kennedy's burial site for the funeral on Monday. On Sunday, November 24, 1963, a procession was scheduled to move the president's casket from the White House to the Capitol rotunda, but breaking news from Dallas, Texas dominated the news. Lee Oswald, the man accused of Kennedy's murder, was killed by Jack Ruby, who stepped forward and shot Oswald as he was being transferred to county jail. According to Watson, "At the same time, in

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<sup>6</sup> Watson, *The Expanding Vista*, 215.

Washington, the parade was forming for the march to the Capitol. The networks had to cut away from the confusion in Dallas as the ritual was about to begin...and would produce indelible television imagery.”<sup>7</sup> Television coverage that weekend ran the gamut of showing heads of state arriving at Dulles Airport for the Kennedy’s funeral on Monday to members of the Kennedy family departing Hyannis Port, Massachusetts for Washington, DC. Most poignant were images of Mrs. Kennedy and daughter Caroline kneeling at the flag-draped coffin in the Capitol rotunda. During the day, throughout the night, and early into Monday morning, thousands of people waited and filed through the rotunda.

President Johnson official declared Monday, November 25, 1963, as a day of mourning. The cortege proceeded from the Capitol to the White House. Members of the Kennedy family, including Mrs. Kennedy walked behind the caisson to the funeral mass at Saint Matthew’s Cathedral. After the funeral mass, a caisson prepared to take the casket to Arlington National Cemetery. Upon cue from his mother, the president’s young son, John F. Kennedy Jr. saluted his father’s casket and suspended that iconic moment for all time. Television viewership of the funeral procession to Arlington reached the highest levels ever recorded with an estimated 93 percent of households with televisions tuned in to watch the coverage.<sup>8</sup> More importantly, noted Schramm,

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<sup>7</sup> Watson, *The Expanding Vista*, 220.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 223.

“There were times during those days when *a majority of Americans* were apparently looking and hearing the same words on their television sets—participating together, at least to an extent, in a great national event. Nothing like this on such a scale had ever occurred before.”<sup>9</sup>

Forty-six year old John F. Kennedy, the thirty-fifth American president was laid to rest at Arlington National Cemetery on Monday, November 25, 1963. Finalizing her husband’s funeral service, Mrs. Kennedy lit an eternal flame at Kennedy’s grave site. On January 14, 1964, Mrs. Kennedy gave a formal televised address from the Attorney General’s office to publically thank people who sent cards and letters to her and the children after the president’s death. Years and years later, many people recalled with striking clarity where they were and what they were doing when they learned that President Kennedy was shot.

On Tuesday, November 26, 1963, the networks resumed their schedules and newspapers and radio returned to regular reporting. However, the rebound to life-as-usual did not take place for many Americans. Hugh Sidey, a friend and associate of Kennedy’s, couched his death as a threefold tragedy:

First off, a friend’s been killed...I think America felt that....Then, secondly a President, the head of our government. He’s cut off. He’s dead. And then thirdly, an administration, a new frontier is gone, because that’s a very personal thing. The tone and the style

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<sup>9</sup> Schramm, “Communication in Crisis,” in *The Kennedy Assassination*, 4.

of any administration comes from the President. And that was gone instantly.<sup>10</sup>

Kennedy was personable and likeable and many responded to his death like losing a personal friend or a member of one's family. "The many family roles in which Kennedy was known--son, husband, father, and brother--permitted a wide range of familial identifications," observed James Barber.<sup>11</sup>

His assassination saddened blacks who felt particularly close to Kennedy because of his stance on civil rights. Young people and college students drawn to Kennedy's youth, idealism, and energy were upset and disillusioned by their sense of loss. The president forged a special bond with young people because he was youthful, vital, and optimistic about the future. Also, television conveyed the president's image—his style, his personality—into living rooms across America, so many felt as though they knew him personally. Brown observed the following about the impact of Kennedy's death:

Kennedy made skillful use of the media of mass communication to promote the appearance of intimacy between himself and the public, and his death was felt as a personal loss by millions of Americans, especially those who belonged to groups that were particularly sympathetic to Kennedy. Catholics, Democrats, blacks, and young people often compared his death to that of a close relative and unashamedly cried at the news of his demise.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> Hugh Sidey, *The Kennedy Mystique: Creating Camelot*, ed. Jon Goodman (Washington, DC: National Geographic, 2006), 195.

<sup>11</sup> James D. Barber, "Peer-Group Discussion and Recovery from the Kennedy Assassination," in *The Kennedy Assassination and the American Public: Social Communication in Crisis*, ed. Bradley S. Greenberg and Edwin B. Parker (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1965), 115.

<sup>12</sup> Brown, JFK: *History of an Image*, 3.

However, some white southerners angry with Kennedy for agitating blacks and facilitating the civil rights movement reacted with jubilation, cheering, and honking of horns. His death re-invigorated the civil rights movement but required President Johnson's effective skills in getting bills through Congress.

On November 27, 1963, Johnson spoke to a joint session of Congress and to America in which he publically endorsed continuing John Kennedy's domestic agenda and his legacy. It was an uncomfortable inheritance of sorts. Johnson, who was not overwhelmingly embraced beforehand by the New Frontiersmen, was now the president and his Cabinet members and White House staff were devoted to Kennedy. In particular, Robert Kennedy was unmoored after his brother's death and spent considerable amount of time away from his duties at the Justice Department. The president urged them to stay and continue John Kennedy's work but Johnson possessed none of the former boss's style or grace. According to Paul Henggeler, "...the qualities that John Kennedy embodied were not to be found in Johnson. Youth, charm, grace, Ivy League background, a pleasing personality—these were characteristics alien to him."<sup>13</sup>

However, one must consider that none of Kennedy's major reform initiatives became law during his presidency. Johnson was elected president in 1964 and used his victory to push through the Great Society bills. In 1964, he applied his legislative skills to secure passage of the tax cut and the civil rights

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<sup>13</sup> Paul R. Henggeler, *The Kennedy Persuasion: The Politics of Style Since JFK* (Chicago, IL: Ivan R. Dee, 1995), 17.

bills. In 1965, he followed up with the antipoverty, aid to education, Medicare, and voting rights laws. In addition, Johnson facilitated the creation of cabinet-level departments for transportation and housing in 1966. As noted by Dallek, “The most important of the Great Society measures deserve to be described as Kennedy-Johnson achievements.”<sup>14</sup> Another facet of Johnson’s uncomfortable inheritance included Vietnam. According to O’Brien, “Arthur Schlesinger, Ken O’Donnell, and Ted Sorensen have claimed Kennedy would have avoided further involvement in Vietnam.”<sup>15</sup> Despite revisionist theories, Vietnam became Johnson’s political problem and a scourge to his image, but his predecessor, Kennedy was publically committed to defeating the communists and winning the war.

“Camelot” entered the American lexicon on December 6, 1963 and about a week following the president’s assassination. The “Camelot” myth began when Jacqueline Kennedy invited family friend and writer, Theodore “Teddy” White with her in Hyannis Port, Massachusetts to discuss the president’s legacy. White, a journalist at *Life* magazine, won the Pulitzer Prize in 1962 for his book, *The Making of the President 1960*. He became close to the Kennedy family while writing the favorable account of Kennedy’s campaign for president. Thus, he gladly ventured out to the Kennedy compound to speak with Mrs.

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<sup>14</sup> Dallek, *An Unfinished Life*, 708.

<sup>15</sup> O’Brien, *Rethinking Kennedy*, 187.

Kennedy. Upon his arrival, Jacqueline Kennedy solicited him to write an article for *Life* magazine heralding her husband's time in office as Camelot.

Not wishing to disappoint Mrs. Kennedy, White dictated an essay via telephone to his editors who held the printing presses as they awaited his call. Although his editors objected to the tone and the numerous references to Camelot, White, however, was unable to convince Mrs. Kennedy to acquiesce to suggested changes. Hence, White's essay, a back-of-the-magazine, two-page spread, entitled, "For President Kennedy: An Epilogue" appeared in *Life* magazine on December 6, 1963. Years later in 1978, White recanted his sentimentality about Camelot saying it was "a misreading of history. The magic of Camelot of John F. Kennedy never existed."<sup>16</sup> White explained, after the fact, of course, that while he thought Kennedy was a hero, the president was in no way a romantic. In other words, Camelot was not an apt description for the Kennedy years and he had caved under pressure to please Mrs. Kennedy.

One must wonder why Mrs. Kennedy rushed to associate her husband's legacy with the legend of King Arthur or the Broadway show *Camelot* when her husband deeply admired Raymond Asquith with whom he shared many parallels. Asquith's heroic death at the Battle of the Somme was rivaled, if not exceeded by Kennedy's giving his life for his country. Said Berry, "The Kennedy mystique and charisma charmed the country during the White House

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<sup>16</sup> Theodore H. White, *In Search of History: A Personal Adventure* (New York: Harper & Row, 1978), 545.

years. The image he portrayed to the public and the press reflected class, style, and excitement...Jacqueline Kennedy wanted those years to be remembered as the times of Camelot.”<sup>17</sup> Also, one must consider the timing of her conversation with White when her husband was so recently assassinated. Jacqueline Kennedy’s grief was understandable. She was thirty-four years old and faced life without her husband and the father to their young children. On the other hand, Jacqueline Kennedy may have feared information about the president’s private life could damage his legacy. Whatever the reason, Camelot was a handy, everyman reference which achieved great staying power.

The Kennedy and Camelot myths were cultivated from images of charm, grace, elegance, and style in the mass media. “Rising to power in front of the camera—and dying before it as well—made John F. Kennedy immortal,” reflected Jon Goodman.<sup>18</sup> Kennedy’s image cannot be separated from the annals of American history for the early 1960s. The era was filled with video and photographic images showing a smiling, handsome, happy president.

“When John F. Kennedy died in 1963, the Kennedy mystique was born. No other president, before or since, has had as many buildings, monuments, or schools named after him,” noted Scott Allison and George Goethals.<sup>19</sup> Regardless of culture, the inherent human need for tangible evidence of the

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<sup>17</sup> Berry, *JFK and the Media*, 227.

<sup>18</sup> Jon Goodman, ed., *The Kennedy Mystique: Creating Camelot* (Washington, DC: National Geographic, 2006), 197.

<sup>19</sup> Scott T. Allison and George R. Goethals, *Heroes: What They Do & Why We Need Them*. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011), 184.

departed has fueled the placement of monuments, memorials, statues, etc. Despite our continued affection for Kennedy, we created a mythological symbol devoid of who he was as an imperfect man. We attempted to make Kennedy greater than he was but in doing so, we cheapened how he has been remembered. Kennedy brought substance and style to his all-too-brief time in office, but he will be remembered primarily for his style.

## CONCLUSION

Kennedy's oratory may have reflected the aspirations of some idealistic Americans but he was neither a direct reflection nor an ordinary person himself. He was a Harvard-educated member of the upper class who spent some of his youth at the Court of St. James. He was born into a very wealthy family isolated from direct knowledge of the hard times like those of the Great Depression until studying about it at Harvard. He was an intelligent person, no doubt with an I.Q. considerably above average. He was politically adept and became a polished, eloquent speaker.

Many Americans responded favorably to Kennedy's rhetoric. His inaugural address was thought to be one of the greatest orations of the twentieth-century. Despite the aura of Camelot, the rise of the Kennedy myth was not entirely the result of public relations or even real accomplishments, but rather what was widely perceived as the loss of potentially great but unfulfilled promise and potential. Kennedy possessed the talent and ability to become a great leader, but was killed before he could fully actualize his talents and abilities.

Few revelations about Kennedy's personal life have been as startling to the public as his philandering and the cover-up of serious health problems. Despite his marriage and election to the nation's highest office, Kennedy was promiscuous and showed no inclination to change his behavior. He projected an image of athletic good-health but suffered from poor health from childhood

onward. Although according to Dallek, “Kennedy’s personal magnetism has had more enduring appeal than allegations of deceitfulness and immoral behavior.”<sup>1</sup>

Not everyone embraced the Kennedy myth and some publically sought to debunk Kennedy’s image. In 1960, writer Norman Mailer became enamored of Kennedy and obsessed about his potential to be an existential hero. Mailer was excited by Kennedy’s prospects following his nomination at the 1960 Democratic National Convention in Los Angeles. He observed this about Kennedy, which led to his writing the 1960 *Esquire* magazine story “Superman Comes to the Supermarket”:

It was Kennedy’s potentiality to excite such activity which interested me the most; that he was young, that he was physically handsome, and that he was attractive were not trifling accidental details, but, rather, new major political facts. I knew if he became President, it would be an existential event: he would touch depths in American life which were uncharted.<sup>2</sup>

However, Mailer later confessed—in print—that he was disillusioned with Kennedy even before writing his famous story “Superman Comes to the Supermarket.” Mailer claimed Kennedy turned out to conventional despite his unconventional personality. “So I swallowed my doubts, my disquiets, and my certain distastes for Kennedy’s dullness of mind and prefabricated politics, and

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<sup>1</sup> Dallek, *An Unfinished Life*, 701.

<sup>2</sup> Norman Mailer, *The Presidential Papers Of Norman Mailer* (New York: Bantam Books, 1964), 26.

did my best to write a piece which would help him get elected,” said Mailer.<sup>3</sup> He credited “Superman Comes to the Supermarket” with making Kennedy seem more exciting than he actually was. Mailer indicated that he continued to follow Kennedy’s career but felt guilty for creating the archetype which induced people to vote for him. One must wonder if Mailer developed a “man crush” on Kennedy and recovered by projecting shortcomings onto him to negate his initial attraction to Kennedy. Mailer’s comments demonstrated he did not fully understand the limitations of the postmodern presidency.

In 2003, William F. Buckley was asked to reflect upon the career of President John F. Kennedy. This proposition must have promised to yield some interesting results because historically speaking; Buckley had not been enthralled with the Kennedy mystique. Indeed, he had been an outspoken critic but offered this interesting yet tongue-in-cheek quip:

...the legacy of John F. Kennedy is his sheer...beauty. I have visited yurts in Mongolia, adobe huts in Mexico, and rural redoubts in Turkey and seen framed pictures of John F. Kennedy. He was all-American, splendid to look at, his expression of confident joy in life and work transfiguring. Add to this that he was slaughtered, almost always a mythogenic act, and what we came to know about the awful physical afflictions he suffered, making his appearances as a whole, vigorous man, the equivalent of seeing FDR rise from his wheelchair and play touch football.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Mailer, *The Presidential Papers of Norman Mailer*, 27.

<sup>4</sup> William F. Buckley, Jr., “Worshipping JFK: 40 Years Later,” *National Review Online*, November 21, 2003, <http://www.nationalreview.com/articles/208667/worshipping-jfk> (accessed September 20, 2012).

Many Americans responded to Kennedy whose idealized image seemed to reflect their hopes and dreams. He won the presidency by a narrow margin which showed that nearly half the voters were unmoved by Kennedy's idealism, youth, and promise. Television accentuated Kennedy. His image was often exaggerated but was largely representative of his considerable attributes. Despite revelations of unflattering information about his conduct, the majority of Americans demonstrated a willingness to look past his flaws. We looked at him and saw what we wanted to see or how we wanted Kennedy to be: a hero. "More importantly, he died at a young age, forever freezing that appealing image of him in our minds," intoned Allison and Goethals.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Allison and Goethals, *Heroes*, 52.

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