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# JOHN F. KENNEDY

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**ABSTRACT:** John Fitzgerald Kennedy (May 29, 1917 – November 22, 1963), often referred to by his initials JFK and by the nickname Jack, was an American politician who served as the 35th president of the United States from 1961 until his assassination in 1963. He was the youngest person to assume the presidency by election and the youngest president at the end of his tenure.<sup>[2]</sup> Kennedy served at the height of the Cold War, and the majority of his foreign policy concerned relations with the Soviet Union and Cuba. A Democrat from Massachusetts, Kennedy served in both houses of the U.S. Congress prior to his presidency.

**KEYWORDS:** Kennedy, American, president, youngest, cold war

## I. INTRODUCTION

Born into the prominent Kennedy family in Brookline, Massachusetts, Kennedy graduated from Harvard University in 1940 before joining the U.S. Naval Reserve the following year. During World War II, he commanded a series of PT boats in the Pacific theater. Kennedy's survival following the sinking of PT-109 and his rescue of his fellow sailors made him a war hero and earned the Navy and Marine Corps Medal, but left him with serious injuries. After a brief stint in journalism, Kennedy represented a working-class Boston district in the U.S. House of Representatives from 1947 to 1953. He was subsequently elected to the U.S. Senate and served as the junior senator for Massachusetts from 1953 to 1960. While in the Senate, Kennedy published his book, *Profiles in Courage*, which won a Pulitzer Prize. Kennedy ran in the 1960 presidential election. His campaign gained momentum after the first televised presidential debates in American history, and he was elected president, narrowly defeating Republican opponent Richard Nixon, who was the incumbent vice president.

Kennedy's administration included high tensions with communist states in the Cold War. As a result, he increased the number of American military advisers in South Vietnam. The Strategic Hamlet Program began in Vietnam during his presidency. In April 1961, he authorized an attempt to overthrow the Cuban government of Fidel Castro in the failed Bay of Pigs Invasion. In November 1961, he authorized Operation Mongoose, also aimed at removing the communists from power in Cuba. He rejected Operation Northwoods in March 1962, but his administration continued to plan for an invasion of Cuba in the summer of 1962. The following October, U.S. spy planes discovered Soviet missile bases had been deployed in Cuba. The resulting period of tensions, termed the Cuban Missile Crisis, nearly resulted in the breakout of a global thermonuclear conflict. He also signed the first nuclear weapons treaty in October 1963. Kennedy presided over the establishment of the Peace Corps, Alliance for Progress with Latin America, and the continuation of the Apollo program with the goal of landing a man on the Moon before 1970. He also supported the civil rights movement but was only somewhat successful in passing his New Frontier domestic policies.

On November 22, 1963, Kennedy was assassinated in Dallas. His vice president, Lyndon B. Johnson, assumed the presidency upon Kennedy's death. Lee Harvey Oswald, a former U.S. Marine, was arrested for the assassination, but he was shot and killed by Jack Ruby two days later. The FBI and the Warren Commission both concluded Oswald had acted alone, but conspiracy theories about the assassination still persist. After Kennedy's death, Congress enacted many of his proposals, including the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Revenue Act of 1964. Kennedy ranks highly in polls of U.S. presidents with historians and the general public. His personal life has also been the focus of considerable sustained interest following public revelations in the 1970s of his chronic health ailments and extramarital affairs. Kennedy is the most recent U.S. president to have died in office.

Avoiding surrender, the remaining crew swam towards Plum Pudding Island, 3.5 miles (5.6 km) southwest of the remains of PT-109, on August 2.<sup>[42][51]</sup> Despite re-injuring his back in the collision, Kennedy towed a badly burned

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crewman through the water to the island with a life jacket strap clenched between his teeth.<sup>[52]</sup> From there, Kennedy and his subordinate, Ensign George Ross, made various forays through the coral islands, searching for help.<sup>[53]</sup> When they encountered an English-speaking native with a canoe, Kennedy carved his location on a coconut shell and requested a boat to rescue them. Seven days after the collision, with the coconut message delivered, the PT-109 crew were rescued.<sup>[54][55]</sup>

Almost immediately, the PT-109 rescue became a highly publicized event. The story was chronicled by writer John Hersey in *The New Yorker* in 1944 (decades later it was the basis of a successful film).<sup>[55]</sup> It followed Kennedy into politics and provided a strong foundation for his appeal as a leader.<sup>[56]</sup> Hersey portrayed Kennedy as a modest, self-deprecating hero.<sup>[57]</sup> For his courage and leadership, Kennedy was awarded the Navy and Marine Corps Medal, and the injuries he suffered during the incident also qualified him for a Purple Heart.<sup>[58]</sup>

After a month's recovery Kennedy returned to duty, commanding the PT-59. On November 2, Kennedy's PT-59 took part with two other PTs in the successful rescue of 40–50 marines. The 59 acted as a shield from shore fire and protected them as they escaped on two rescue landing craft at the base of the Warrior River at Choiseul Island, taking ten marines aboard and delivering them to safety.<sup>[59]</sup> Under doctor's orders, Kennedy was relieved of his command of PT-59 on November 18, and sent to the hospital on Tulagi.<sup>[60]</sup> But by December 1943, with his health deteriorating again, Kennedy left the Pacific front and arrived in San Francisco in early January 1944.<sup>[61]</sup> After receiving treatment for his back injury at the Chelsea Naval Hospital in Massachusetts from May to December 1944, he was released from active duty.<sup>[62][41]</sup> Beginning in January 1945, Kennedy spent three more months recovering from his back injury at Castle Hot Springs, a resort and temporary military hospital in Arizona.<sup>[63][64]</sup> On March 1, 1945, Kennedy retired from the Navy Reserve on physical disability and was honorably discharged with the full rank of lieutenant.<sup>[65]</sup> When later asked how he became a war hero, Kennedy joked: "It was easy. They cut my PT boat in half."<sup>[66]</sup>

On August 12, 1944, Kennedy's older brother, Joe Jr., a navy pilot, was killed while on a special and hazardous air mission for which he had volunteered; his explosive-laden plane blew up when its bombs detonated prematurely over the English Channel.<sup>[67]</sup> His body was never recovered. The devastating news reached the family's home in Hyannis Port, Massachusetts a day later. Kennedy felt that Joe Jr.'s reckless flight was partly an effort to outdo him.<sup>[68][69]</sup> To console himself, Kennedy set out to assemble a privately published book of remembrances of his brother, *As We Remember Joe*.<sup>[70]</sup>

## II.DISCUSSION

### Journalism

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In April 1945, Kennedy's father, who was a friend of William Randolph Hearst, arranged a position for his son as a special correspondent for Hearst Newspapers; the assignment kept Kennedy's name in the public eye and "expose[d] him to journalism as a possible career".<sup>[72]</sup> He worked as a correspondent that May and went to Berlin for a second time,<sup>[73]</sup> covering the Potsdam Conference and other events.<sup>[74]</sup>

### U.S. House of Representatives (1947–1953)

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JFK's elder brother Joe Jr. had been the family's political standard-bearer and had been tapped by their father to seek the presidency. Joe's death during the war in 1944 changed that course and the assignment fell to JFK as the second eldest of the Kennedy siblings.<sup>[75]</sup> In the summer of 1945, Joe Kennedy Sr. made a special effort to renew the family's presence in Massachusetts (i.e., a ship-launching ceremony for the USS Joseph P. Kennedy Jr. to remind voters that two of his sons were war heroes). Boston mayor Maurice J. Tobin discussed the possibility of John becoming his running mate in 1946 as a candidate for lieutenant governor, but Joe Sr. preferred a congressional campaign that could send his son to Washington, where he could have national visibility.<sup>[76]</sup>

At the urging of Kennedy's father, U.S. Representative James Michael Curley vacated his seat in the strongly Democratic 11th congressional district of Massachusetts to become mayor of Boston in 1946. Kennedy established his legal residency at a three-room apartment on 122 Bowdoin Street across from the Massachusetts State House.<sup>[77]</sup> With his father financing and running his campaign under the slogan "The New Generation Offers a Leader",<sup>[78]</sup> Kennedy

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won the Democratic primary with 42 percent of the vote, defeating nine other candidates.<sup>[79]</sup> His father joked after the election, "With the money I spent, I could have elected my chauffeur."<sup>[80]</sup> Campaigning around Boston, Kennedy called for better housing for veterans, better health care for all, and support for organized labor's campaign for reasonable work hours, a healthy workplace, and the right to organize, bargain, and strike. In addition, he campaigned for peace through the United Nations and strong opposition to the Soviet Union.<sup>[81]</sup> Though Republicans took control of the House in the 1946 elections, Kennedy defeated his Republican opponent in the general election, taking 73 percent of the vote. Along with Richard Nixon and Joseph McCarthy, Kennedy was one of several World War II veterans elected to Congress that year.<sup>[82]</sup>

Kennedy served in the House for six years, joining the influential Education and Labor Committee and the Veterans' Affairs Committee. He concentrated his attention on international affairs, supporting the Truman Doctrine as the appropriate response to the emerging Cold War. He also supported public housing and opposed the Labor Management Relations Act of 1947, which restricted the power of labor unions. Though not as vocal an anti-communist as McCarthy, Kennedy supported the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1952, which required communists to register with the government, and he deplored the "loss of China".<sup>[83]</sup> In a speech in Salem, Massachusetts on January 30, 1949, Kennedy denounced Truman and the State Department for contributing to the "tragic story of China whose freedom we once fought to preserve. What our young men had saved [in World War II], our diplomats and our President have frittered away."<sup>[84][85]</sup>

In November 1947, Kennedy delivered a speech in Congress supporting a \$227 million aid package to Italy. He maintained that Italy was in danger from an "onslaught of the communist minority" and that the country was the "initial battleground in the communist drive to capture Western Europe." This speech was also calculated to appeal to the large Italian voting bloc in Massachusetts as Kennedy was beginning to position himself for statewide office. To combat Soviet efforts to take control in Middle Eastern and Asian countries like Indochina, Kennedy (speaking to a Massachusetts Taxpayers Foundation meeting in Boston) wanted the United States to develop nonmilitary techniques of resistance that would not create suspicions of neoimperialism or add to the country's financial burden. The problem, as he saw it, was not simply to be anti-communist but to stand for something that these emerging nations would find appealing.<sup>[86][87]</sup>

"His stand on the St. Lawrence project had the effect of making him a national figure," Ted Sorensen later remarked.<sup>[109]</sup>

At the 1956 Democratic National Convention, Kennedy gave the nominating speech for the party's presidential nominee, Adlai Stevenson II.<sup>[110]</sup> Stevenson let the convention select the vice presidential nominee. Kennedy finished second in the balloting, losing to Senator Estes Kefauver of Tennessee but receiving national exposure as a result.<sup>[111]</sup>

In 1957, Kennedy joined the Senate's McClellan Committee with his brother Robert (who was chief counsel) to investigate racketeering in labor-management relations.<sup>[112]</sup> The Kennedy brothers engaged in dramatic arguments with controversial labor leaders, including Jimmy Hoffa, of the Teamsters Union. The following year, Kennedy introduced a bill (S. 3974) to prevent the expenditure of union dues for improper purposes or private gain; to forbid loans from union funds for illicit transactions; and to compel audits of unions, which would ensure against false financial reports. It was the first major labor relations bill to pass either house since the Taft–Hartley Act of 1947 and dealt largely with the control of union abuses exposed by the McClellan Committee but did not incorporate tough Taft–Hartley amendments requested by President Eisenhower. It survived Senate floor attempts to include Taft–Hartley amendments and gained passage but was rejected by the House.<sup>[113]</sup> "Honest union members and the general public can only regard it as a tragedy that politics has prevented the recommendations of the McClellan committee from being carried out this year," Kennedy announced.<sup>[114]</sup>

That same year, Kennedy joined the Senate's Foreign Relations Committee. There he supported Algeria's effort to gain independence from France and sponsored an amendment to the Mutual Defense Assistance Act that would provide aid to Soviet satellite nations. Kennedy also introduced an amendment to the National Defense Education Act in 1959 to eliminate the requirement that aid recipients sign a loyalty oath and provide supporting affidavits.<sup>[115]</sup>

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A matter demanding Kennedy's attention in the Senate was President Eisenhower's bill for the Civil Rights Act of 1957.<sup>[116]</sup> Kennedy cast a procedural vote against it and this was considered by some to be an appeasement of Southern Democratic opponents of the bill.<sup>[116]</sup> Kennedy did vote for Title III of the act, which would have given the Attorney General powers to enjoin, but Majority Leader Lyndon B. Johnson agreed to let the provision die as a compromise measure.<sup>[117]</sup> Kennedy also voted for Title IV, termed the "Jury Trial Amendment". Many civil rights advocates at the time criticized that vote as one which would weaken the act.<sup>[118]</sup> A final compromise bill, which Kennedy supported, was passed in September 1957.<sup>[119]</sup>

## III.RESULTS

### Presidency (1961–1963)

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John F. Kennedy was sworn in as the 35th president at noon on January 20, 1961. In his inaugural address, he spoke of the need for all Americans to be active citizens: "Ask not what your country can do for you—ask what you can do for your country." He asked the nations of the world to join to fight what he called the "common enemies of man: tyranny, poverty, disease, and war itself".<sup>[150]</sup> He added:

"All this will not be finished in the first one hundred days. Nor will it be finished in the first one thousand days, nor in the life of this Administration, nor even perhaps in our lifetime on this planet. But let us begin." In closing, he expanded on his desire for greater internationalism: "Finally, whether you are citizens of America or citizens of the world, ask of us here the same high standards of strength and sacrifice which we ask of you."<sup>[150]</sup>

The address reflected Kennedy's confidence that his administration would chart a historically significant course in both domestic policy and foreign affairs. The contrast between this optimistic vision and the pressures of managing daily political realities at home and abroad would be one of the main tensions running through the early years of his administration.<sup>[151]</sup>

Kennedy brought to the White House a contrast in organization compared to the decision-making structure of former General Eisenhower, and he wasted no time in scrapping Eisenhower's methods.<sup>[152]</sup> Kennedy preferred the organizational structure of a wheel with all the spokes leading to the president. He was ready and willing to make the increased number of quick decisions required in such an environment. He selected a mixture of experienced and inexperienced people to serve in his cabinet. "We can learn our jobs together", he stated.<sup>[153]</sup>

Much to the chagrin of his economic advisors, who wanted him to reduce taxes, Kennedy quickly agreed to a balanced budget pledge. This was needed in exchange for votes to expand the membership of the House Rules Committee in order to give the Democrats a majority in setting the legislative agenda.<sup>[154]</sup> Kennedy focused on immediate and specific issues facing the administration and quickly voiced his impatience with pondering deeper meanings. Deputy National Security Advisor Walt Whitman Rostow once began a diatribe about the growth of communism, and Kennedy abruptly cut him off, asking, "What do you want me to do about that today?"<sup>[155]</sup>

Kennedy approved Defense Secretary Robert McNamara's controversial decision to award the contract for the F-111 TFX (Tactical Fighter Experimental) fighter-bomber to General Dynamics (the choice of the civilian Defense department) over Boeing (the choice of the military).<sup>[156]</sup> At the request of Senator Henry Jackson, Senator John McClellan held 46 days of mostly closed-door hearings before the Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations investigating the TFX contract from February to November 1963.<sup>[157]</sup>

During the summer of 1962, Kennedy had a secret taping system set up in the White House, most likely to aid his future memoir. It recorded many conversations with Kennedy and his Cabinet members, including those in relation to the "Cuban Missile Crisis".<sup>[158]</sup>

### Foreign policy

Kennedy's foreign policy was dominated by American confrontations with the Soviet Union, manifested by proxy contests in the early stage of the Cold War. In 1961 he anxiously anticipated a summit with Soviet Premier Nikita

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Khrushchev. He started off on the wrong foot by reacting aggressively to a routine Khrushchev speech on Cold War confrontation in early 1961. The speech was intended for domestic audiences in the Soviet Union, but Kennedy interpreted it as a personal challenge. His mistake helped raise tensions going into the Vienna summit of June 1961.<sup>[159]</sup>

On the way to the summit, Kennedy stopped in Paris to meet French President Charles de Gaulle, who advised him to ignore Khrushchev's abrasive style. The French president feared the United States' presumed influence in Europe. Nevertheless, de Gaulle was quite impressed with the young president and his family. Kennedy picked up on this in his speech in Paris, saying that he would be remembered as "the man who accompanied Jackie Kennedy to Paris".<sup>[160]</sup>

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On June 4, 1961, Kennedy met with Khrushchev in Vienna and left the meetings angry and disappointed that he had allowed the premier to bully him, despite the warnings he had received. Khrushchev, for his part, was impressed with the president's intelligence but thought him weak. Kennedy did succeed in conveying the bottom line to Khrushchev on the most sensitive issue before them, a proposed treaty between Moscow and East Berlin. He made it clear that any treaty interfering with U.S. access rights in West Berlin would be regarded as an act of war.<sup>[161]</sup> Shortly after Kennedy returned home, the U.S.S.R. announced its plan to sign a treaty with East Berlin, abrogating any third-party occupation rights in either sector of the city. Depressed and angry, Kennedy assumed that his only option was to prepare the country for nuclear war, which he personally thought had a one-in-five chance of occurring.<sup>[162]</sup>

In the weeks immediately following the Vienna summit, more than 20,000 people fled from East Berlin to the western sector, reacting to statements from the U.S.S.R. Kennedy began intensive meetings on the Berlin issue, where Dean Acheson took the lead in recommending a military buildup alongside NATO allies.<sup>[163]</sup> In a July 1961 speech, Kennedy announced his decision to add \$3.25 billion (equivalent to \$31.83 billion in 2018) to the defense budget, along with over 200,000 additional troops, stating that an attack on West Berlin would be taken as an attack on the U.S. The speech received an 85% approval rating.<sup>[164]</sup>

A month later, both the Soviet Union and East Berlin began blocking any further passage of East Germans into West Berlin and erected barbed wire fences, which were quickly upgraded to the Berlin Wall, around the city. Kennedy's initial reaction was to ignore this, as long as free access from the West to West Berlin continued. This course was altered when West Berliners had lost confidence in the defense of their position by the United States. Kennedy sent Vice President Johnson and Lucius D. Clay, along with a host of military personnel, in convoy through East Germany, including Soviet-armed checkpoints, to demonstrate the continued commitment of the U.S. to West Berlin.<sup>[165][166]</sup>

Kennedy gave a speech at Saint Anselm College on May 5, 1960, regarding America's conduct in the emerging Cold War. His address detailed how he felt American foreign policy should be conducted towards African nations, noting a hint of support for modern African nationalism by saying, "For we, too, founded a new nation on revolt from colonial rule."<sup>[167]</sup>

#### **Cuba and the Bay of Pigs Invasion**

The Eisenhower administration had created a plan to overthrow Fidel Castro's regime in Cuba. Led by the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), with help from the U.S. military, the plan was for an invasion of Cuba by a counter-revolutionary insurgency composed of U.S.-trained, anti-Castro Cuban exiles<sup>[168][169]</sup> led by CIA paramilitary officers. The intention was to invade Cuba and instigate an uprising among the Cuban people, hoping to remove Castro from power.<sup>[170]</sup> Kennedy approved the final invasion plan on April 4, 1961.

The Bay of Pigs Invasion began on April 17, 1961. Fifteen hundred U.S.-trained Cubans, dubbed Brigade 2506, landed on the island. No U.S. air support was provided. CIA director Allen Dulles later stated that they thought Kennedy would authorize any action that was needed for success once the troops were on the ground.<sup>[171]</sup>

By April 19, 1961, the Cuban government had captured or killed the invading exiles, and Kennedy was forced to negotiate for the release of the 1,189 survivors. Twenty months later, Cuba released the captured exiles in exchange for \$53 million worth of food and medicine.<sup>[172]</sup> The incident made Castro feel wary of the U.S. and led him to believe that another invasion would take place.<sup>[173]</sup>



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Biographer Richard Reeves said that Kennedy focused primarily on the political repercussions of the plan rather than military considerations. When it proved unsuccessful, he was convinced that the plan was a setup to make him look bad.<sup>[174]</sup> He took responsibility for the failure, saying, "We got a big kick in the leg and we deserved it. But maybe we'll learn something from it."<sup>[175]</sup> He appointed Robert Kennedy to help lead a committee to examine the causes of the failure.<sup>[176]</sup>

In late-1961, the White House formed the Special Group (Augmented), headed by Robert Kennedy and including Edward Lansdale, Secretary Robert McNamara, and others. The group's objective—to overthrow Castro via espionage, sabotage, and other covert tactics—was never pursued.<sup>[177]</sup> In November 1961, he authorized Operation Mongoose.<sup>[178]</sup> In March 1962, Kennedy rejected Operation Northwoods, proposals for false flag attacks against American military and civilian targets,<sup>[179]</sup> and blaming them on the Cuban government in order to gain approval for a war against Cuba. However, the administration continued to plan for an invasion of Cuba in the summer of 1962.<sup>[178]</sup>

#### Cuban Missile Crisis

On October 14, 1962, CIA U-2 spy planes took photographs of the Soviets' construction of intermediate-range ballistic missile sites in Cuba. The photos were shown to Kennedy on October 16; a consensus was reached that the missiles were offensive in nature and thus posed an immediate nuclear threat.<sup>[180]</sup>

Kennedy faced a dilemma: if the U.S. attacked the sites, it might lead to nuclear war with the U.S.S.R., but if the U.S. did nothing, it would be faced with the increased threat from close-range nuclear weapons. The U.S. would also appear to the world as less committed to the defense of the hemisphere. On a personal level, Kennedy needed to show resolve in reaction to Khrushchev, especially after the Vienna summit.<sup>[181]</sup>

More than a third of U.S. National Security Council (NSC) members favored an unannounced air assault on the missile sites, but for some of them this conjured up an image of "Pearl Harbor in reverse".<sup>[182]</sup> There was also some concern from the international community (asked in confidence), that the assault plan was an overreaction in light of the fact that Eisenhower had placed PGM-19 Jupiter missiles in Italy and Turkey in 1958. It also could not be assured that the assault would be 100% effective.<sup>[183]</sup> In concurrence with a majority-vote of the NSC, Kennedy decided on a naval quarantine. On October 22, he dispatched a message to Khrushchev and announced the decision on TV.<sup>[184]</sup>

The U.S. Navy would stop and inspect all Soviet ships arriving off Cuba, beginning October 24. The Organization of American States gave unanimous support to the removal of the missiles. Kennedy exchanged two sets of letters with Khrushchev, to no avail.<sup>[185]</sup> United Nations (UN) Secretary General U Thant requested both parties to reverse their decisions and enter a cooling-off period. Khrushchev agreed, but Kennedy did not.<sup>[186]</sup>

One Soviet-flagged ship was stopped and boarded. On October 28, Khrushchev agreed to dismantle the missile sites, subject to UN inspections.<sup>[187]</sup> The U.S. publicly promised never to invade Cuba and privately agreed to remove its Jupiter missiles from Italy and Turkey, which were by then obsolete and had been supplanted by submarines equipped with UGM-27 Polaris missiles.<sup>[188]</sup>

This crisis brought the world closer to nuclear war than at any point before or after. It is considered that "the humanity" of both Khrushchev and Kennedy prevailed.<sup>[189]</sup> The crisis improved the image of American willpower and the president's credibility. Kennedy's approval rating increased from 66% to 77% immediately thereafter.<sup>[190]</sup>

#### Latin America and communism

Believing that "those who make peaceful revolution impossible, will make violent revolution inevitable,"<sup>[191][192]</sup> Kennedy sought to contain the perceived threat of communism in Latin America by establishing the Alliance for Progress, which sent aid to some countries and sought greater human rights standards in the region.<sup>[193]</sup> He worked closely with Puerto Rican Governor Luis Muñoz Marín for the development of the Alliance of Progress and began working to further Puerto Rico's autonomy.

The Eisenhower administration, through the CIA, had begun formulating plans to assassinate Castro in Cuba and Rafael Trujillo in the Dominican Republic. When Kennedy took office, he privately instructed the CIA that any plan must include plausible deniability by the U.S. His public position was in opposition.<sup>[194]</sup> In June 1961, the

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Dominican Republic's leader was assassinated; in the days following, Undersecretary of State Chester Bowles led a cautious reaction by the nation. Robert Kennedy, who saw an opportunity for the U.S., called Bowles "a gutless bastard" to his face.<sup>[195]</sup>

In April 1962, the State Department issued new guidelines on Iraq that were intended to increase American influence there. Meanwhile, Kennedy instructed the CIA—under the direction of Archibald Bulloch Roosevelt Jr.—to begin making preparations for a military coup against Qasim.<sup>[276]</sup>

The anti-imperialist and anti-communist Iraqi Ba'ath Party overthrew and executed Qasim in a violent coup on February 8, 1963. While there have been persistent rumors that the CIA orchestrated the coup, declassified documents and the testimony of former CIA officers indicate that there was no direct American involvement, although the CIA was actively seeking a suitable replacement for Qasim within the Iraqi military and had been informed of an earlier Ba'athist coup plot.<sup>[277]</sup> The Kennedy administration was pleased with the outcome and ultimately approved a \$55-million arms deal for Iraq.<sup>[278]</sup>

#### **Ireland**

During his four-day visit to his ancestral home of Ireland beginning on June 26, 1963,<sup>[279]</sup> Kennedy accepted a grant of armorial bearings from the Chief Herald of Ireland, received honorary degrees from the National University of Ireland and Trinity College Dublin, attended a State Dinner in Dublin, and was conferred with the freedom of the towns and cities of Wexford, Cork, Dublin, Galway, and Limerick.<sup>[280][281]</sup> He visited the cottage at Dunganstown, near New Ross, County Wexford, where his ancestors had lived before emigrating to America.<sup>[282]</sup>

Kennedy also was the first foreign leader to address the Houses of the Oireachtas, the Irish parliament.<sup>[281][283][284]</sup> Kennedy later told aides that the trip was the best four days of his life.<sup>[285]</sup>

#### **Nuclear Test Ban Treaty**

Troubled by the long-term dangers of radioactive contamination and nuclear weapons proliferation, Kennedy and Khrushchev agreed to negotiate a nuclear test ban treaty, originally conceived in Adlai Stevenson's 1956 presidential campaign.<sup>[286]</sup> In their Vienna summit meeting in June 1961, Khrushchev and Kennedy both reached an informal understanding against nuclear testing, but the Soviet Union began testing nuclear weapons that September. In response, the United States conducted tests five days later.<sup>[287]</sup> Shortly afterwards, new U.S. satellites began delivering images that made it clear that the Soviets were substantially behind the U.S. in the arms race.<sup>[288]</sup> Nevertheless, the greater nuclear strength of the U.S. was of little value as long as the U.S.S.R. perceived itself to be at parity.<sup>[289]</sup>

In July 1963, Kennedy sent W. Averell Harriman to Moscow to negotiate a treaty with the Soviets.<sup>[290]</sup> The introductory sessions included Khrushchev, who later delegated Soviet representation to Andrei Gromyko. It quickly became clear that a comprehensive test ban would not be implemented, due largely to the reluctance of the Soviets to allow inspections that would verify compliance.<sup>[291]</sup>

Ultimately, the United States, the United Kingdom, and the Soviet Union were the initial signatories to a limited treaty, which prohibited atomic testing on the ground, in the atmosphere, or underwater, but not underground. The U.S. Senate ratified this, and Kennedy signed it into law in October 1963. France was quick to declare that it was free to continue developing and testing its nuclear defenses.<sup>[292]</sup>

#### **Peace Corps**

In one of his first presidential acts, Kennedy asked Congress to create the Peace Corps. His brother-in-law, Sargent Shriver, was its first director.<sup>[293]</sup> Through this program, Americans volunteered to help developing nations in fields like education, farming, health care, and construction. The organization grew to 5,000 members by March 1963 and 10,000 the year after.<sup>[294]</sup> Since 1961, over 200,000 Americans have joined the Peace Corps, representing 139 countries.<sup>[295][296]</sup>

#### **Domestic policy**

Kennedy called his domestic program the "New Frontier". It ambitiously promised federal funding for education, medical care for the elderly, economic aid to rural regions, and government intervention to halt the recession. He also

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promised an end to racial discrimination,<sup>[297]</sup> although his agenda, which included the endorsement of the Voter Education Project (VEP) in 1962, produced little progress in areas such as Mississippi, where the "VEP concluded that discrimination was so entrenched".<sup>[298][299]</sup>

In his 1963 State of the Union address, he proposed substantial tax reform and a reduction in income tax rates from the current range of 20–90% to a range of 14–65% as well as a reduction in the corporate tax rates from 52 to 47%. Kennedy added that the top rate should be set at 70% if certain deductions were not eliminated for high-income earners.<sup>[297]</sup> Congress did not act until 1964, a year after his death, when the top individual rate was lowered to 70%, and the top corporate rate was set at 48%.<sup>[300]</sup>

To the Economic Club of New York, he spoke in 1963 of "... the paradoxical truth that tax rates are too high and revenues too low; and the soundest way to raise revenue in the long term is to lower rates now."<sup>[301]</sup> Congress passed few of Kennedy's major programs during his lifetime but did vote them through in 1964 and 1965 under his successor Johnson.<sup>[302]</sup>

#### Economy

Kennedy ended a period of tight fiscal policies, loosening monetary policy to keep interest rates down and to encourage growth of the economy.<sup>[303]</sup> He presided over the first government budget to top the \$100 billion mark, in 1962, and his first budget in 1961 resulted in the nation's first non-war, non-recession deficit.<sup>[304]</sup> The economy, which had been through two recessions in three years and was in one when Kennedy took office, accelerated notably throughout his administration. Despite low inflation and interest rates, the GDP had grown by an average of only 2.2% per annum during the Eisenhower administration (scarcely more than population growth at the time), and it had declined by 1% during Eisenhower's last twelve months in office.<sup>[305]</sup>

The economy turned around and prospered during Kennedy's years as president. The GDP expanded by an average of 5.5% from early-1961 to late-1963,<sup>[305]</sup> while inflation remained steady at around 1% and unemployment eased.<sup>[306]</sup> Industrial production rose by 15% and motor vehicle sales increased by 40%.<sup>[307]</sup> This rate of growth in GDP and industry continued until 1969 and has yet to be repeated for such a sustained period of time.<sup>[305]</sup>

Attorney General Robert Kennedy took the position that steel executives had illegally colluded to fix prices. He stated, "We're going for broke. [...] their expense accounts, where they've been and what they've been doing. [...] the FBI is to interview them all. [...] we can't lose this."<sup>[308]</sup> The administration's actions influenced U.S. Steel to rescind the price increase.<sup>[309]</sup> The Wall Street Journal wrote that the administration had acted "by naked power, by threats, [and] by agents of the state security police".<sup>[310]</sup> Yale law professor Charles Reich opined in The New Republic that the administration had violated civil liberties by calling a grand jury to indict U.S. Steel for collusion so quickly.<sup>[310]</sup> An editorial in The New York Times praised Kennedy's actions and said that the steel industry's price increase "imperil[ed] the economic welfare of the country by inviting a tidal wave of inflation".<sup>[311]</sup> Nevertheless, the administration's Bureau of Budget reported the price increase would have caused a net gain for the GDP as well as a net budget surplus.<sup>[312]</sup> The stock market, which had steadily declined since Kennedy's election in 1960, dropped 10% shortly after the administration's action on the steel industry took place.<sup>[313]</sup>

#### Federal and military death penalty

During his administration, Kennedy oversaw the last federal execution prior to *Furman v. Georgia*, a 1972 case that led to a moratorium on federal executions.<sup>[314]</sup> Victor Feguer was sentenced to death by an Iowa federal court and was executed on March 15, 1963.<sup>[315]</sup> Kennedy commuted a death sentence imposed by a military court on seaman Jimmie Henderson on February 12, 1962, changing the penalty to life in prison.<sup>[316]</sup>

On March 22, 1962, Kennedy signed into law HR5143 (PL87-423), which abolished the mandatory death penalty for first degree murder suspects in the District of Columbia, the only remaining jurisdiction in the United States with such a penalty.<sup>[317]</sup> The death penalty has not been applied in the District of Columbia since 1957 and has now been abolished.<sup>[318]</sup>



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#### Civil rights movement

The turbulent end of state-sanctioned racial discrimination was one of the most pressing domestic issues of the 1960s. "Jim Crow" segregation was the established law in the Deep South.<sup>[319]</sup> The U.S. Supreme Court had ruled in 1954 in *Brown v. Board of Education* that racial segregation in public schools was unconstitutional. Many schools, especially those in southern states, did not obey the Supreme Court's decision. The Court also prohibited segregation at other public facilities (such as buses, restaurants, theaters, courtrooms, bathrooms, and beaches) but it continued nonetheless.<sup>[320]</sup>

Kennedy verbally supported racial integration and civil rights; during his 1960 presidential campaign, he telephoned Coretta Scott King, wife of the Reverend Martin Luther King Jr., who had been jailed while trying to integrate a department store lunch counter. Robert Kennedy called Georgia governor Ernest Vandiver and obtained King's release from prison, which drew additional black support to his brother's candidacy.<sup>[320]</sup> Upon taking office in 1961, Kennedy postponed promised civil rights legislation he made while campaigning in 1960, recognizing that conservative Southern Democrats controlled congressional legislation.<sup>[321]</sup> During his first year in office, Kennedy appointed many Black people to office including his May appointment of civil rights attorney Thurgood Marshall to the federal bench.<sup>[322]</sup>

In his first State of the Union Address in January 1961, President Kennedy said, "The denial of constitutional rights to some of our fellow Americans on account of race—at the ballot box and elsewhere—disturbs the national conscience, and subjects us to the charge of world opinion that our democracy is not equal to the high promise of our heritage."<sup>[323]</sup> Kennedy believed the grassroots movement for civil rights would anger many Southern whites and make it more difficult to pass civil rights laws in Congress, including anti-poverty legislation, and he distanced himself from it.<sup>[324]</sup>

Kennedy was concerned with other issues in the early part of his administration, such as the Cold War, Bay of Pigs fiasco, and the situation in Southeast Asia. As articulated by his brother Robert, the administration's early priority was to "keep the president out of this civil rights mess". Civil rights movement participants, mainly those on the front line in the South, viewed Kennedy as lukewarm,<sup>[322]</sup> especially concerning the Freedom Riders, who organized an integrated public transportation effort in the south, and who were repeatedly met with white mob violence, including by law enforcement officers, both federal and state. Kennedy assigned federal marshals to protect the Freedom Riders rather than using federal troops or uncooperative FBI agents.<sup>[322]</sup> Robert Kennedy, speaking for the president, urged the Freedom Riders to "get off the buses and leave the matter to peaceful settlement in the courts".<sup>[325]</sup> Kennedy feared sending federal troops would stir up "hated memories of Reconstruction" after the Civil War among conservative Southern whites.<sup>[322]</sup>

On March 6, 1961, Kennedy signed Executive Order 10925, which required government contractors to "take affirmative action to ensure that applicants are employed and that employees are treated during employment without regard to their race, creed, color, or national origin".<sup>[326]</sup> It established the President's Committee on Equal Employment Opportunity. Displeased with Kennedy's pace addressing the issue of segregation, Martin Luther King Jr. and his associates produced a document in 1962 calling on Kennedy to follow in the footsteps of Abraham Lincoln and use an Executive Order to deliver a blow for civil rights as a kind of Second Emancipation Proclamation. Kennedy did not execute the order.<sup>[327]</sup>

In September 1962, James Meredith enrolled at the University of Mississippi but was prevented from entering. In response to that, Attorney General Robert Kennedy sent 127 U.S. Marshals and 316 U.S. Border Patrol and 97 Federal correctional officers who were deputized as marshals.<sup>[328]</sup> The Ole Miss riot of 1962 left two civilians dead and 300 people injured, prompting President Kennedy to send in 3,000 troops to quell the riot.<sup>[329]</sup> Meredith did finally enroll for a class, and Kennedy regretted not sending in troops earlier. Kennedy began doubting as to whether the "evils of Reconstruction" of the 1860s and 1870s he had been taught or believed in were true.<sup>[322]</sup> The instigating subculture during the Ole Miss riot, and many other racially ignited events, was the Ku Klux Klan.<sup>[330]</sup> On November 20, 1962, Kennedy signed Executive Order 11063, which prohibited racial discrimination in federally supported housing or "related facilities".<sup>[331]</sup> Despite this, in Boston, the Boston Housing Authority (BHA) Board would continue to

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actively segregate the public housing developments in the city during the John F. Collins administration (1960–1968), with BHA departments engaging in bureaucratic resistance against integration through at least 1966 and the Board retaining control over tenant assignment until 1968.<sup>[332]</sup>

#### Civil liberties

In February 1962,<sup>[350]</sup> FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover, who was suspicious of civil-rights leader Martin Luther King Jr. and viewed him as an upstart troublemaker,<sup>[351]</sup> presented the Kennedy administration with allegations that some of King's close confidants and advisers were communists. Concerned by these allegations, the FBI deployed agents to monitor King in the following months.<sup>[350]</sup> Robert Kennedy and President Kennedy also both warned King to discontinue the suspect associations. After the associations continued, Robert Kennedy issued a written directive authorizing the FBI to wiretap King and other leaders of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, King's civil rights organization, in October 1963.<sup>[350]</sup>

Although Kennedy only gave written approval for limited wiretapping of King's phones "on a trial basis, for a month or so",<sup>[352]</sup> Hoover extended the clearance so his men were "unshackled" to look for evidence in any areas of King's life they deemed worthy.<sup>[353]</sup> The wiretapping continued through June 1966 and was revealed in 1968.<sup>[354]</sup>

#### Immigration

During the 1960 campaign, Kennedy proposed an overhaul of American immigration and naturalization laws to ban discrimination based on national origin. He saw this proposal as an extension of his planned civil rights agenda as president.<sup>[355]</sup> These reforms later became law through the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965, which dramatically shifted the source of immigration from Northern and Western European countries towards immigration from Latin America and Asia. The policy change also shifted the emphasis on the selection of immigrants in favor of family reunification. The late president's brother, Senator Edward Kennedy of Massachusetts helped steer the legislation through the Senate.<sup>[356]</sup>

#### Native American relations

Construction of the Kinzua Dam flooded 10,000 acres (4,000 hectares) of Seneca nation land that they had occupied under the Treaty of 1794, and forced 600 Seneca to relocate to Salamanca, New York. Kennedy was asked by the American Civil Liberties Union to intervene and to halt the project, but he declined, citing a critical need for flood control. He expressed concern about the plight of the Seneca and directed government agencies to assist in obtaining more land, damages, and assistance to help mitigate their displacement.<sup>[357][358]</sup>

#### Personal life, family, and reputation

The Kennedy family is one of the most established political families in the United States, having produced a president, three senators, three ambassadors, and multiple other representatives and politicians, both at the federal and state level. While a Congressman, Kennedy embarked on a seven-week trip to India, Japan, Vietnam, and Israel in 1951, at which point he became close with his then 25-year-old brother Robert, as well as his 27-year-old sister Patricia. Because they were several years apart in age, the brothers had previously seen little of each other. This 25,000-mile (40,000 km) trip was the first extended time they had spent together and resulted in their becoming best friends.<sup>[398]</sup> Robert would eventually play a major role in his brother's career, serving as his brother's attorney general and presidential advisor.<sup>[398]</sup> Robert would later run for president in 1968 before his assassination, while another Kennedy brother, Ted, ran for president in 1980. Kennedy's nephew and Robert's son, Robert Jr., is running for president in 2024.<sup>[399][400][401][402]</sup>

Kennedy came in third (behind Martin Luther King Jr. and Mother Teresa) in Gallup's List of Widely Admired People of the 20th century.<sup>[403][404]</sup> Kennedy was a life member of the National Rifle Association.<sup>[405][406]</sup>

#### Wife and children

Kennedy met his future wife, Jacqueline Lee "Jackie" Bouvier (1929–1994), when he was a congressman. Charles L. Bartlett, a journalist, introduced the pair at a dinner party.<sup>[407]</sup> They were married a year after he was elected senator, on

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September 12, 1953.<sup>[408]</sup> After suffering a miscarriage in 1955 and a stillbirth in 1956 (their daughter Arabella), their daughter Caroline was born in 1957 and is the only surviving member of JFK's immediate family. John Jr., nicknamed "John-John" by the press as a child, was born in late November 1960, 17 days after his father was elected. A graduate of Brown University, John Jr. died in 1999 when the small plane he was piloting crashed off the coast of Martha's Vineyard.<sup>[409]</sup> In 1963, months before JFK's assassination, Jackie gave birth to a son, Patrick. However, he died after 2 days due to complications from birth.

#### Popular image

Kennedy and his wife were younger than the presidents and first ladies who preceded them, and both were popular in the media culture in ways more common to pop singers and movie stars than politicians, influencing fashion trends and becoming the subjects of numerous photo spreads in popular magazines. Although Eisenhower had allowed presidential press conferences to be filmed for television, Kennedy was the first president to ask for them to be broadcast live and made good use of the medium.<sup>[410]</sup> In 1961 the Radio-Television News Directors Association presented Kennedy with its highest honor, the Paul White Award, in recognition of his open relationship with the media.<sup>[411]</sup>

Mrs. Kennedy brought new art and furniture to the White House and directed its restoration. They invited a range of artists, writers and intellectuals to rounds of White House dinners, raising the profile of the arts in America. On the White House lawn, the Kennedys established a swimming pool and tree house, while Caroline attended a preschool along with 10 other children inside the home.

Kennedy was closely tied to popular culture, emphasized by songs such as "Twisting at the White House". Vaughn Meader's First Family comedy album, which parodied the president, the first lady, their family, and the administration, sold about four million copies.

In an interview a week after JFK's death, Jacqueline Kennedy mentioned his affection for the Broadway musical Camelot and quoted its closing lines: "Don't let it be forgot, that once there was a spot, for one brief, shining moment that was known as Camelot." The term "Camelot" has come to be used as shorthand for the Kennedy administration and the charisma of the Kennedy family.<sup>[412][413]</sup>

#### Health

Despite a privileged youth, Kennedy was plagued by a series of childhood diseases, including whooping cough, chicken pox, measles, and ear infections. These ailments compelled him to spend a considerable amount of time in bed (or at least indoors) convalescing. Three months prior to his third birthday, in 1920, Kennedy came down with scarlet fever, a highly contagious and life-threatening disease, and was admitted to Boston City Hospital.<sup>[414][11]</sup>

Years after Kennedy's death, it was revealed that in September 1947, while Kennedy was 30 and in his first term in Congress, he was diagnosed by Sir Daniel Davis at The London Clinic with Addison's disease, a rare endocrine disorder. Davis estimated that Kennedy would not live for another year, while Kennedy himself hoped he could live for an additional ten.<sup>[415]</sup> In 1966, White House physician Janet Travell revealed that Kennedy also had hypothyroidism. The presence of two endocrine diseases raises the possibility that Kennedy had autoimmune polyendocrine syndrome type 2 (APS 2).<sup>[416]</sup>

Kennedy also suffered from chronic and severe back pain, for which he had surgery. Kennedy's condition may have had diplomatic repercussions, as he appears to have been taking a combination of drugs to treat severe back pain during the 1961 Vienna Summit with Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev. The combination included hormones, animal organ cells, steroids, vitamins, enzymes, and amphetamines, and possible potential side effects included hyperactivity, hypertension, impaired judgment, nervousness, and mood swings.<sup>[417]</sup> Kennedy at one time was regularly seen by three doctors, one of whom, Max Jacobson, was unknown to the other two, as his mode of treatment was controversial<sup>[418]</sup> and used for the most severe bouts of back pain.<sup>[419]</sup>

Into late 1961, disagreements existed among Kennedy's doctors concerning his proper balance of medication and exercise. Kennedy preferred the former because he was short on time and desired immediate relief.<sup>[289]</sup> During that time, the president's physician, George Burkley, did set up some gym equipment in the White House basement, where

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Kennedy did stretching exercises for his back three times a week.<sup>[420]</sup> Details of these and other medical problems were not publicly disclosed during Kennedy's lifetime.<sup>[421]</sup> The President's primary White House physician, George Burkley, realized that treatments by Jacobson and Travell, including the excessive use of steroids and amphetamines, were medically inappropriate, and took action to remove Kennedy from their care.<sup>[422]</sup>

In 2002, Robert Dallek wrote an extensive history of Kennedy's health. Dallek was able to consult a collection of Kennedy-associated papers from the years 1955–1963, including X-rays and prescription records from the files of Travell. According to Travell's records, during his presidential years Kennedy suffered from high fevers; stomach, colon, and prostate issues; abscesses; high cholesterol; and adrenal problems. Travell kept a "Medicine Administration Record", cataloging Kennedy's medications: "injected and ingested corticosteroids for his adrenal insufficiency; procaine shots and ultrasound treatments and hot packs for his back; Lomotil, Metamucil, paregoric, phenobarbital, testosterone, and trasentine to control his diarrhea, abdominal discomfort, and weight loss; penicillin and other antibiotics for his urinary-tract infections and an abscess; and Tuinal to help him sleep."<sup>[19]</sup>

#### Family incidents

Kennedy's older brother Joseph P. Kennedy Jr. was killed in action in 1944 at age 29 when his plane exploded over the English Channel during a first attack execution of Operation Aphrodite during World War II.<sup>[423]</sup> His sister Rose Marie "Rosemary" Kennedy was born in 1918 with intellectual disabilities and underwent a prefrontal lobotomy at age 23, leaving her incapacitated until her death in 2005. Another sister Kathleen Agnes "Kick" Kennedy died in a plane crash en route to France in 1948. His wife Jacqueline Kennedy suffered a miscarriage in 1955 and a stillbirth in 1956: a daughter informally named Arabella.<sup>[424]</sup> A son, Patrick Bouvier Kennedy, died two days after birth in August 1963.

#### Affairs and friendships

Kennedy was single in the 1940s while having relationships with Danish journalist Inga Arvad<sup>[425]</sup> and actress Gene Tierney.<sup>[426]</sup> During his time as a senator, he had an affair with Gunilla von Post, who later wrote that the future president tried to end his marriage to be with her before having any children with his wife.<sup>[427]</sup> Kennedy was also reported to have had affairs with Marilyn Monroe,<sup>[428]</sup> Judith Campbell,<sup>[429]</sup> Mary Pinchot Meyer,<sup>[430]</sup> Marlene Dietrich,<sup>[31]</sup> White House intern Mimi Alford,<sup>[431]</sup> and his wife's press secretary, Pamela Turnure.<sup>[432]</sup>

The full extent of Kennedy's relationship with Monroe (who in 1962 famously sang "Happy Birthday, Mr. President" at Kennedy's birthday celebration) is not known, though it has been reported that they spent a weekend together in March 1962 while he was staying at Bing Crosby's house.<sup>[433]</sup> Furthermore, people at the White House switchboard noted that Monroe had called Kennedy during 1962.<sup>[434]</sup> J. Edgar Hoover, the FBI director, received reports about Kennedy's indiscretions.<sup>[435]</sup> These included an alleged East German spy Ellen Rometsch. According to historian Michael Beschloss, in July 1963, Hoover reportedly informed Robert Kennedy about the affair. Hoover told the attorney general that he had information that the president, as well as others in Washington, had been involved with a woman "suspected as a Soviet intelligence agent, someone linked to East German intelligence". Robert Kennedy reportedly took the matter sufficiently seriously to raise it with leading Democratic and Republican figures in Congress.<sup>[436][437]</sup> Former Secret Service agent Larry Newman recalled "morale problems" that the president's indiscretions engendered within the Secret Service.<sup>[438]</sup>

Kennedy inspired affection and loyalty from the members of his team and his supporters.<sup>[439]</sup> According to Reeves, this included "the logistics of Kennedy's liaisons ... [which] required secrecy and devotion rare in the annals of the energetic service demanded by successful politicians."<sup>[440]</sup> Kennedy believed that his friendly relationship with members of the press would help protect him from public revelations about his sex life.<sup>[441]</sup>

Lem Billings was Kennedy's "oldest and best friend" from the time they attended Choate together until Kennedy's death.<sup>[442]</sup>

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## Historical evaluations and legacy

### Presidency

The U.S. Special Forces had a special bond with Kennedy. "It was President Kennedy who was responsible for the rebuilding of the Special Forces and giving us back our Green Beret," said Forrest Lindley, a writer for the U.S. military newspaper Stars and Stripes who served with Special Forces in Vietnam.<sup>[b]</sup> This bond was shown at Kennedy's funeral. At the commemoration of the 25th anniversary of Kennedy's death, General Michael D. Healy, the last commander of Special Forces in Vietnam, spoke at Arlington National Cemetery. Later, a wreath in the form of the Green Beret would be placed on the grave, continuing a tradition that began the day of his funeral when a sergeant in charge of a detail of Special Forces men guarding the grave placed his beret on the coffin.<sup>[443]</sup> Kennedy was the first of six presidents to have served in the U.S. Navy,<sup>[444]</sup> and one of the enduring legacies of his administration was the creation in 1961 of another special forces command, the Navy SEALs,<sup>[445]</sup> which Kennedy enthusiastically supported.<sup>[446]</sup>

Kennedy's civil rights proposals led to the Civil Rights Act of 1964.<sup>[447]</sup> President Lyndon B. Johnson, Kennedy's successor, took up the mantle and pushed the landmark Civil Rights Act through a bitterly divided Congress by invoking the slain president's memory.<sup>[448][449]</sup> President Johnson then signed the Act into law on July 2, 1964. This civil rights law ended what was known as the "Solid South" and certain provisions were modeled after the Civil Rights Act of 1875, signed into law by President Ulysses S. Grant.<sup>[450]</sup>

Kennedy's continuation of Presidents Harry S. Truman and Dwight D. Eisenhower's policies of giving economic and military aid to South Vietnam left the door open for President Johnson's escalation of the conflict.<sup>[451]</sup> At the time of Kennedy's death, no final policy decision had been made as to Vietnam, leading historians, cabinet members, and writers to continue to disagree on whether the Vietnam conflict would have escalated to the point it did had he survived.<sup>[452][235]</sup> His agreement to the NSAM 263<sup>[238]</sup> action of withdrawing 1,000 troops by the end of 1963, and his earlier 1963 speech at American University,<sup>[240]</sup> suggest that he was ready to end the Vietnam War. The Vietnam War contributed greatly to a decade of national difficulties, amid violent disappointment on the political landscape.

Many of Kennedy's speeches (especially his inaugural address) are considered iconic; and despite his relatively short term in office, and the lack of major legislative changes coming to fruition during his term, he is considered by many presidential historians to be in the upper echelon of presidents.<sup>[453]</sup> Some excerpts of Kennedy's inaugural address are engraved on a plaque at his grave at Arlington. In 2018 The Times published an audio recreation of the "watchmen on the walls of world freedom" speech he was scheduled to deliver at the Dallas Trade Mart on November 22, 1963.<sup>[454][455]</sup>

In 1961, he was awarded the Laetare Medal by the University of Notre Dame, considered the most prestigious award for American Catholics.<sup>[456]</sup> He was posthumously awarded the Pacem in Terris Award (Latin: Peace on Earth). It was named after a 1963 encyclical letter by Pope John XXIII that calls upon all people of goodwill to secure peace among all nations. Kennedy also posthumously received the Presidential Medal of Freedom in 1963.<sup>[457]</sup>

## IV.CONCLUSION

The term "Camelot" is often used to describe his presidency, reflecting both the mythic grandeur accorded Kennedy in death, and the powerful nostalgia that millions feel for that era of American history.<sup>[458]</sup> According to Richard Dean Burns and Joseph M. Siracusa, the most popular theme surrounding Kennedy's legacy is its replay of the legend of King Arthur and Camelot from medieval England. In the days after JFK's death, his widow Jacqueline Bouvier Kennedy, who herself would play a central role in the myth, approached journalist Theodore H. White. Mrs. Kennedy emphasized an image that would shape the adoring memory of JFK and his administration, highlighting the president's love for the popular Broadway musical Camelot. She emphasized how her husband loved the music of Alan Jay Lerner, a former classmate of his. Mrs. Kennedy claimed that JFK admired heroes like King Arthur, presenting him as an idealist, although White knew this to be untrue. In her attempt to convey a positive message during a tragic event, she quoted her husband as repeating the end of the "Camelot" show: said, "There will be great presidents again, but there will never be another Camelot." White's influential essay, which included the Camelot story, was published in a special



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commemorative issue of Life magazine on December 3, 1963, reaching over 30 million people. To the grieving public, this uplifting message seemed logical. After all, JFK, the youngest person to enter the White House, displayed intelligence, articulation, and humor. Furthermore, his young, beautiful wife, who was revered internationally, along with his famous family, made it easy to associate Kennedy with the legend of King Arthur. Later, White expressed regret for his role in popularizing the Camelot myth. Over the years, critics, especially historians, have mocked the Camelot myth as a distortion of JFK's actions, beliefs, and policies. However, in the public memory, the years of Kennedy's presidency are still seen as a brief, brilliant, and shining moment.<sup>[459][460]</sup>

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