



JOHN F. KENNEDY

AMERICAN
LEGEND

Charles River Editors

Biography

American Legends: The Life of John F. Kennedy

By Charles River Editors

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Introduction

A lot of ink has been spilled covering the lives of history's most influential figures, but how much of the forest is lost for the trees? In Charles River Editors' American Legends series, readers can get caught up to speed on the lives of America's most important men and women in the time it takes to finish a commute, while learning interesting facts long forgotten or never known.

In many ways, John Fitzgerald Kennedy and his young family were the perfect embodiment of the '60s. The decade began with a sense of idealism, personified by the attractive Kennedy, his beautiful and fashionable wife Jackie, and his young children. Months into his presidency, Kennedy exhorted the country to reach for the stars, calling upon the nation to send a man to the Moon and back by the end of the decade. In 1961, Kennedy made it seem like anything was possible, and Americans were eager to believe him. The Kennedy years were fondly and famously labeled "Camelot," by Jackie herself, suggesting an almost mythical quality about the young President and his family.

As it turned out, the '60s closely reflected the glossy, idealistic portrayal of John F. Kennedy, as well as the uglier truths. The country would achieve Kennedy's goal of a manned moon mission, and the landmark Civil Rights Act of 1964 finally guaranteed minorities their civil rights and restored equality, ensuring that the country "would live out the true meaning of its creed." But the idealism and optimism of the decade was quickly shattered, starting with Kennedy's assassination in 1963. The '60s were permanently marred by the Vietnam War, and by the time Robert F. Kennedy and Martin Luther King, Jr. were assassinated in 1968, the country was irreversibly jaded. The events of the decade produced protests and countercultures unlike anything the country had seen before, as young people came of age more quickly than ever.

American Legends: The Life of John F. Kennedy humanizes the nation's youngest elected president, explaining the roots of the Kennedy family, the basis for Kennedy's presidential ambitions, his war service and journalism, his political career and assassination, and all of the accomplishments and

shortcomings inbetween. Along the way, you will learn interesting facts about JFK you never knew, like which famous relative also died on November 22, and see pictures of the important people and events in Kennedy's life.

Learn about President Kennedy like you never have before, in no time at all.

[American Legends: The Life of John F. Kennedy](#)

[About Charles River Editors](#)

[Introduction](#)

[Chapter 1: Early Life and Education, 1917-1945](#)

[Birth and Education](#)

[The Kennedy Family](#)

[Military Service and PT-109](#)

[Chapter 2: Early Political Career, 1946-1959](#)

[Journalism](#)

[House of Representatives](#)

[U.S. Senator and Marriage](#)

[Health and Profiles in Courage](#)

[Election of 1956](#)

[Chapter 3: Running for President, 1960](#)

[Winning the Democratic Nomination](#)

[The General Election](#)

[Chapter 4: Presidency, 1960-1963](#)

[Cuba and the Bay of Pigs](#)

[The Space Race Begins](#)

[Vietnam](#)

[Cuban Missile Crisis](#)

[Nuclear Testing and West Berlin](#)

[The Civil Rights Movement](#)

[Chapter 5: Kennedy's Assassination](#)

[Chapter 6: Kennedy's Legacy](#)

[Camelot](#)

[The Kennedy Legacy](#)

[Selected Bibliography](#)

Chapter 1: Early Life and Education, 1917-1945

Birth and Education

John F. Kennedy was always intended for greatness, or at least one male in his family was. On May 29th, 1917, John Fitzgerald Kennedy was born into a prominent Boston political family in Brookline, Massachusetts. The second son of Joseph P. Kennedy and Rose Fitzgerald, young John spent the first 10 years of his life in Brookline attending prominent private schools in the Boston area.

In 1927, the family left Massachusetts for the Bronx. While in the New York area, the Kennedy's moved around, but John remained a student at the Riverdale School in the Bronx.

Later, John's high school experience put him in one of the most elite schools in the country. Kennedy enrolled first at the Canterbury School and then later at the Choate School in Wallingford, Connecticut. This was hardly unusual for the Kennedy clan, which had enrolled many of its children at Choate, alongside some of the nation's most important political families. Choate was a member of a group of elite preparatory schools in New England, including Deerfield, Hotchkiss and St. Paul's.

After graduating from Choate in 1935, Kennedy had the opportunity to select from a list of prestigious universities. He travelled abroad to consider studying at the London School of Economics but ultimately chose to enroll at Princeton, though only for a few weeks due to illness. He transferred to Harvard, where he remained until graduating.

In fact, illness would be one of the defining features of John's life, disrupted Kennedy's education throughout his early life. Many of his problems during this time were gastrointestinal, and he was hospitalized repeatedly to recuperate. He often spent time at his family vacation home in Hyannisport, Massachusetts, to recover.

Despite illness, Kennedy was a star student at Harvard, and he graduated on time. Although he had ties to the America First Committee, the famous isolationist group that advocated steering clear of World War II, Kennedy's undergraduate thesis focused on England's appeasement policy towards Nazi Germany, and how it had led to the outbreak of World War II. This was an important piece of scholarship, and it was later published into a book in 1940 under the title *Why England Slept*. Young Kennedy took a prominent interest in foreign affairs and was now contributing to the intellectual discussion of the topic.

The Kennedy Family

John Kennedy's family prominence was of enormous importance in spearheading his political career. Among American presidents, Kennedy stands out for being raised in a family that was intent on producing at least one President of the United States. The family reared its children with a political dynasty in mind, so understanding the Kennedy family's origins is crucial to understanding President Kennedy himself.

John Kennedy was a descendant of a man named Patrick Kennedy, an Irish Catholic who immigrated to Boston from County Wexford, Ireland in 1849 amid the Irish Potato Famine. In Boston, Patrick married another Irish immigrant named Bridget Murphy. The couple had five children, among them PJ Kennedy, John F. Kennedy's grandfather. Tragedy, however, struck the family when Patrick died of cholera on November 22nd, 1858, exactly 105 years before his great grandson was assassinated.

Afterwards, Bridget tended the family by opening a small but modestly successful stationary and liquor store. Her son PJ Kennedy capitalized on this liquor-selling business and became enormously wealthy. He began importing whisky, often illegally, and reaped enormous profits selling to upper class Bostonians in bars he owned throughout the city.

PJ Kennedy was the first among John Kennedy's ancestors to engage in politics. He was elected five times to the Massachusetts House of Representatives, and twice to the Massachusetts State Senate. Though these were relatively modest accomplishments in light of his descendents, PJ lit the flame of political ambition within the Kennedy family.

PJ's son, Joseph P. Kennedy, further expanded the family's political alignment by marrying the daughter of Boston Mayor John F. "Honey Fitz" Fitzgerald,

another member of Boston's growing Irish Catholic political elite. Together, Rose Fitzgerald and Joseph P. Kennedy had nine children, among them John F. Kennedy, Robert F. Kennedy and Edward M. Kennedy, all destined to be major figures in national American politics.



Joseph Kennedy Sr.

Joseph P. Kennedy did not simply pass politics onto his children, however. He first invested heavily in liquor, real estate and movies, and increased the family's wealth. He was then appointed by President Franklin Roosevelt to become the first chairman of the Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC), a department created by the New Deal to combat illicit investment. Kennedy, however, was something of a crook, having dealt in the illegal import of whisky during Prohibition. Regardless, Roosevelt thought Kennedy suited to Chair the SEC, which fought such criminality, because "it takes one to know one."

Joseph Kennedy's political prominence reached a peak when Roosevelt selected him to be the war-time Ambassador to Great Britain, the United States' most important World War II ally. Kennedy's appointment came amid

John Kennedy's time at Harvard and inevitably influenced his senior thesis on English foreign policy.

After serving as Ambassador to Great Britain, Joseph Kennedy began to harbor ambitions of sitting in the White House himself. These dreams, however, were capped by his own personal destruction. During the war, Joseph was something of a defeatist, having repeatedly argued that the war was futile, that Hitler would dominate Europe, and that democracy in England would cease to exist. He became increasingly isolationist, arguing that affairs in Europe were unrelated to American international prominence, and that the defense of Britain was not done in the name of democracy, but only in the interest of British national self-preservation. Roosevelt detested these views, and removed Kennedy from the position of Ambassador to Great Britain.

This removal and the aftermath destroyed Joseph Kennedy's Presidential hopes. Information was leaked that he had actually thought that Nazi genocide against the Jews was deserved; the Jews, he thought, had brought it upon themselves. He didn't morally oppose the extermination of the Jews – he was an anti-Semite – but he merely thought the Germans should have reduced the Jews in a way that generated less negative publicity.

With the US and its allies winning the war, Kennedy's opinions were horribly untenable. Shortly after victory, the American public learned of the gruesome details of the Holocaust and was outraged. A man who had essentially endorsed such extermination would never hold political office in the United States, and Joseph P. Kennedy never did.

His presidential hopes squashed, Joseph Kennedy passed his Presidential ambitions onto his children, creating enormous expectations for the family. His eldest son, namesake Joseph Kennedy Jr., was the primary target of these lofty goals, and he was primed for a future in politics. However, Joseph Jr. died in combat during World War II, forever altering the Kennedy family's

destiny. Joseph Sr. now turned his attention to his second-eldest son, John, to become the family's Presidential standard-bearer.



Joseph Kennedy Jr.

Military Service and PT-109



Military service was a necessary component in John F. Kennedy's political preparation, and John did have political ambitions of his own. When he enlisted in the military, however, his elder brother Joseph was still the family's prize and the one made of presidential material. Kennedy thus tried to join the army, but was disqualified because of his health issues. He was, however, admitted to the Navy despite objections, due to family connections. His father's attaché in Great Britain was now a director in the Navy, and gave John the position of ensign.

Like much of Kennedy's life, Kennedy's service during the war is still a topic of controversy. Kennedy's service in the Navy was focused in the Pacific Theatre of World War II. By 1943, Kennedy was a commander of a patrol torpedo (PT) boat, number 109. In August of 1943, Kennedy's boat, PT-109, was cut in half by a Japanese destroyer. In addition, boats 162 and 169 were also destroyed in the Solomon Islands.

Kennedy survived the attack and famously saved nearly a dozen of his crew, one of whom he saved by swimming for several miles while clenching the

crew member's lifejacket with his teeth. A member of the swim team at Harvard, Kennedy also did the bulk of the swimming when looking for food after the survivors reached a deserted island. For this, Kennedy received the Navy and Marine Corps Metal.

Ultimately, Kennedy and the survivors were rescued, but he had suffered a severe injury to his spine that would plague him for the rest of his life. He was sent to Boston to undergo surgery and recover. While in the hospital, he and his family learned that his elder brother Joseph had been killed in a bombing mission.

After recovering, Kennedy re-enlisted in the Navy and served on PT-59. He was honorably discharged in 1945, just before Japan's surrender and the end of the War. Kennedy received numerous military awards, among them a Purple Heart and a World War II Victory Metal. Though he was not yet President and perhaps only held that ambition in the back of his mind, Kennedy had already seen more combat than most Presidents.



Kennedy (far right) and the PT-109 crew

Chapter 2: Early Political Career, 1946-1959

Journalism

Kennedy's first non-military professional experience was in journalism. John's father arranged for Kennedy to work with the Hearst Chicago-Herald American, an international news service, in April of 1945. His first assignment was in San Francisco, where he covered the United Nations Conference, an historic moment that witnessed the formation of the modern United Nations.

John was a prolific writer, and newspaper mogul William Randolph Hearst was pleased with John's work. After his stint at the U.N., John was sent to London to cover the post-war British Parliamentary elections. John predicted that Winston Churchill and the Conservatives would lose the elections; the British people, Kennedy thought, were yearning for change. His prediction proved correct. The Labour Party swept the British elections that year, and the great Prime Minister Winston Churchill was removed from Downing Street.



William Randolph Hearst

Kennedy enjoyed his work with Hearst. He had numerous opportunities to learn about the effects of World War II on Europe, touring devastated German cities, and he had the opportunity to meet with Supreme Allied Commander Eisenhower. Throughout his time abroad, Kennedy honed his foreign policy bona fides.

House of Representatives

After less than a year with Hearst, Kennedy's father began to prod John about his prospects for a career in politics. John returned to America in the fall of 1945, and his father gave him ample opportunities to give speeches throughout Massachusetts. Though they were generally well-received, Joseph had concerns that his son's more reserved and quiet style was not fitting of a politician. John was generally shy than the typical politician, often refusing to hob-nob with voters after giving a speech.

Nonetheless, Joseph thought his son was suited for a more administrative sort of government job. He suggested John begin his career by running for Massachusetts Lieutenant Governor. Family friends and other Massachusetts politicians, however, were less certain. At just 28 years old, John Kennedy would be strongly criticized for his lack of experience. The Lieutenant Governorship was a position that demanded expertise.

Besides, Kennedy had other ideas for himself. In 1946, the strongly Democratic 10th District House of Representatives seat in Massachusetts was vacated when its holder decided to run for Mayor of Boston. John Kennedy thus seized the opportunity and ran for the seat. It was his first political campaign.

Kennedy's first political candidacy was ultimately successful, but not without enormous challenge. Opponents charged that Kennedy was a snob who could not relate to the working class constituents of the 10th District. Others said he had barely spent any time in the 10th since he was a child. Together with the Kennedy family, however, John countered these attacks effectively. His campaign lauded his position as a war hero. The Boston Catholic Church, perhaps prompted by Joseph's expensive contributions, loudly endorsed John for the seat. With the Kennedy fortune funding his campaign, John won the Democratic nomination and the election by rousing margins.

When Kennedy arrived in Congress in early 1947, he was surprised to find himself in the minority party. The 1946 elections had swept the Republicans into a majority that they hadn't held in over a decade. Regardless, Kennedy's initial participation in Congress gave the nation its first glimpse into his political positions. Unlike many post-New Deal Democrats, Kennedy was actually fairly conservative on fiscal issues. He opposed budget deficits and opposed tax cuts that would worsen deficits. Though many of his fellow Democrats drafted legislation supported by unions, Kennedy thought unions were ultimately self-interested in the same way corporations were; to Kennedy, they supported the interests of union leadership, not workers themselves. Kennedy's time in Congress reflected a mixed voting record. He was not a very partisan Democrat, and often voted with Republicans.

U.S. Senator and Marriage

Kennedy was reelected to the House twice and served there until 1952, but by then Kennedy had the presidency on his mind. Thus, he looked to climb the political ladder by deciding to run for a spot in the U.S. Senate, a better platform from which to gain national attention and run for President. Though the Senate had not typically produced many Presidents in recent years, it nonetheless seemed a viable option. Kennedy also considered the Governorship, but ultimately he thought the Senate suited him better, given his interest in international relations. The current Governor of Massachusetts, a Democrat, was considering running for the Senate as well. Kennedy waited for the Governor to make his decision before announcing his intent to run. When the Governor decided against the Senate, Kennedy opted in.

Kennedy's Republican opponent, Henry Cabot Lodge Jr., was running for reelection. Like Kennedy, the iconic Republican Senator was himself a war hero during World War II, and he was all the more noteworthy for being the first sitting Senator since the Civil War to serve in active duty. He was also from a prominent New England political family, perhaps one even more prominent than the Kennedy's. Predictably, both were Harvard alums.

Despite the stiff challenge, Kennedy prevailed by a narrow margin on Election Day, defeating Lodge 51.3 to 48.3%. His victory was due in large part to his appeal to "white ethnics," particularly Jews and Catholics throughout Massachusetts.

As a Senator, Kennedy's positions were relatively conservative. A major moment in Kennedy's career came in 1957, when his procedural votes on Eisenhower's 1957 Civil Rights Act were seen as appeasements of Southern Democrats. He also made comments about the French War in Indochina, a precursor to the Vietnam War, and the French attempt to maintain its Algerian colony, which Senator Kennedy opposed. Senator Kennedy also refused to

condemn Senator McCarthy's "red baiting," perhaps because McCarthy was a family friend. A final and controversial stance Senator Kennedy took was his position in favor of the St. Lawrence Seaway, a transportation system between Canada and the Great Lakes. The position was not favored in Massachusetts because many thought it would move economic productivity away from Massachusetts and send it westward towards upstate New York. His position received national attention as a courageous act, and partly inspired his later authoring of *Profiles in Courage*.

Apart from the Senate, Kennedy found time for marriage. John Kennedy and Jacqueline Bouvier first met in 1951 and began dating after Kennedy's election to the Senate. Jackie was also from a prominent and wealthy family. They were married in Newport, Rhode Island, in 1953. The first years of their marriage, however, were largely spent apart, with John busy with his duties in the Senate.



Health and Profiles in Courage

Despite his meteoric rise politically, Kennedy continued to suffer bad back issues as a result of his war wounds. Since the war, his spine had deteriorated, to the point that he needed crutches to navigate the halls of the US Senate. By 1954, Kennedy needed a potentially life-threatening surgery, which was performed at the Lahey Clinic. A metal plate was inserted into his spine to further prevent the deterioration of his lumbar vertebrae.

Though ultimately successful, the surgery nearly killed Kennedy. Within days of the operation, Kennedy developed a urinary tract infection. This was complicated by his Addison disease, which lessened his ability to fight infection. Antibiotics were not working, and Kennedy fell into a coma in late 1954. His father Joe called in a priest to administer Catholic last rites.

Kennedy, however, recovered slowly. By the following spring, he was able to return to the Senate. In total, he spent over half a year away from Congress. During his recovery, however, Kennedy authored a Pulitzer-Prize winning book, *Profiles in Courage*. The book detailed the lives of historical American politicians who had to walk tight lines between personal convictions and constituent interests. Although Kennedy won accolades for his book, it was widely suspected that it had actually been co-written by longtime speechwriter Ted Sorenson, who finally verified the rumor 45 years after Kennedy's death.

Election of 1956

At the Democratic convention in 1956, Kennedy's name was thrown into the ring as an attractive Vice Presidential candidate. Putting Kennedy on the ticket would help keep “white ethnics,” who were tempted by Eisenhower, in the Democratic column. Additionally, Kennedy could deliver Massachusetts and other parts of the Northeast, which was considered “battleground” territory in the mid-1950's.

Kennedy didn't win the nomination; he came in second. Delegates thought his Catholicism was still a liability, and his father privately believed the loss was a good thing because the chances of the incumbent Eisenhower losing were slim. Moreover, though he had won in Massachusetts with his local appeal, it was widely believed Kennedy was still too young for such a prominent position. As it turned out, the Democrats would lose the 1956 election to Eisenhower, while Kennedy had the good fortune of giving his name a national spotlight while not being associated with defeat.

Kennedy's Presidential ambitions were further hardened two years later, when he was reelected to the Senate by a landslide margin. The Republicans didn't even both to nominate an opponent. With no incumbent in the 1960 election, the Kennedys had laid the groundwork for a presidential run.

Chapter 3: Running for President, 1960



Winning the Democratic Nomination

Privately, John and his father Joe had discussed the 1960 Presidential Election since Kennedy's Vice-Presidential hopes in 1956. John thought his Catholicism was the biggest barrier to the Presidency, while his father thought otherwise. To Joe Kennedy, the nation had grown beyond its anti-Catholic sentiments and was ready to accept a Catholic President. Furthermore, since the 1956 Convention, the media had viewed Kennedy as the frontrunner for the Democratic nomination. Polls of Democratic voters confirmed this view, showing Senator Kennedy in a tie with former nominee Adlai Stevenson for the 1960 nomination. In late 1959, John Kennedy announced his candidacy for the Presidency of the United States.

Members of the Democratic Party elite, however, held reservations. Coming off the popular Eisenhower Presidency, the Democrats felt they had no room to nominate a “risky” candidate. Many still saw Kennedy's youth and his Catholicism as liabilities that could give the election to the Republicans in a close race. President Eisenhower's Vice-President, Richard Nixon, was favored to win the Republican nomination. Having successfully rehabilitated his image with the infamous “Checkers Speech”, the experienced Nixon seemed a formidable candidate against the youthful and seemingly inexperienced Kennedy.



Richard Nixon

Other members of the Democratic elite stirred factions of the party against Kennedy. Among the most important anti-Kennedy leaders was Eleanor Roosevelt, who despised Joe Kennedy and thought his son to be too conservative. In part because of Mrs. Roosevelt, liberal Democrats were increasingly deterred from the Kennedy candidacy.

At the start of the campaigning, a poll of Congressional Democrats put Kennedy in fourth behind Lyndon Johnson, Adlai Stevenson and Stuart Symington for the nomination. Stevenson had long been a national figure, and Lyndon Johnson was one of the most influential members in Congress. Kennedy thus had a difficult campaign on his hands. Winning the nomination would require convincing Democratic liberals of his candidacy (despite his fairly conservative Congressional voting record), ensuring his religion would not be a distraction or a negative, and beating several potentially tough opponents.

Kennedy ultimately prevailed over all of these issues. Throughout the few primaries that were conducted that year, Kennedy had the opportunity to prove his broad appeal to the Convention's party elders. His win in the largely white and Protestant state of West Virginia seemed to clinch his claim that he did not

just appeal narrowly to fellow Catholics. At the Democratic Convention in Los Angeles, Kennedy won the nomination on the first ballot. Senate Majority Leader Lyndon Johnson was selected as his running mate, with the hope that he would help secure conservative and Protestant parts of the South.

The General Election

In the general election, Kennedy and Johnson faced Vice President Richard Nixon and Former Senator Henry Cabot Lodge, who Kennedy had defeated for the Senate seat in Massachusetts 8 years earlier. To open the campaign, Kennedy gave his famous New Frontier Speech at the Democratic Convention. In it, he branded his forward-looking ambitions for the United States.

Nevertheless, the 1960 election focused heavily on John Kennedy's Roman Catholicism. He was only the second Catholic nominated for President, after Al Smith in 1928. Groups for religious freedom contended that Kennedy's Catholicism would make governing the nation as President difficult. Many were suspicious that he would accept demands from the Pope and the Catholic Hierarchy. By September, Kennedy closed the issue in a speech in Houston, where he said he was running to be a "President who happens to be Catholic," not a "Catholic President." For the remainder of the campaign, Kennedy's religion no longer fascinated the media, though it was still privately on the minds of many voters.

Undoubtedly the most important moment in the 1960 campaign came when Kennedy and Nixon faced off in the first-ever televised Presidential debate. On September 26, 1960, a little over a month until Election Day, the two candidates met in Chicago for a CBS-sponsored debate. Though Nixon went into the debate favored to win, by the end of the night it was clear that Nixon had yet to master television media. 70 million tuned in, while millions more listened on radio. Those who only heard the debate on radio believed Nixon had won the contest, but those watching saw a pale, sickly looking older man standing next to a young, tan man who looked invigorated. Americans trusted their eyes instead of their ears, and the debate turned a slight Nixon lead in the polls into a slight Kennedy lead.



After the debate, Kennedy spent the remaining month of the campaign patching together a viable Election Day coalition. African-Americans were an important piece of the Democratic coalition, but Kennedy's past hesitance on civil rights issues put that voting bloc in jeopardy. He decided to risk losing Southern white segregationists, and opted to come out more loudly in support of civil rights. This eventually won him the endorsement of Martin Luther King Jr.

By November, the gap between the two candidates was paper thin. Kennedy remained strong among “white ethnics,” labor and African-Americans, while Nixon appealed to rural Protestants, the West Coast, and parts of the South. On Election Day, the popular vote was as close as polls suggested: Kennedy won by a hair, with 49.7% to Nixon's 49.5%. The Electoral College vote, however, was a different story, with Kennedy winning with 303 votes to Nixon's 219. The vote was so close that many still accuse Kennedy and his surrogates of fixing the election, with charges of fraud clouding matters in Texas and Illinois. Nixon would later be praised for refusing to contest the election, but in the following decades it was made clear how much his surrogates had tried to overturn the election.

Regardless, Kennedy had just become the youngest man ever elected President, and the first Roman Catholic. He was sworn in as the 35th President of the United States on January 20, 1961. In his inaugural address, he famously asked Americans to “ask not what your country can do for you, but ask what you can do for your country.”

The Kennedy family’s dream of a President Kennedy had finally come true.

Chapter 4: Presidency, 1960-1963

In many ways, John F. Kennedy and his young family were the perfect embodiment of the '60s. The decade began with a sense of idealism, personified by the attractive Kennedy, his beautiful and fashionable wife Jackie, and his young children. Months into his presidency, Kennedy exhorted the country to reach for the stars, calling upon the nation to send a man to the Moon and back by the end of the decade. In 1961, Kennedy made it seem like anything was possible, and Americans were eager to believe him. The Kennedy years were fondly and famously labeled "Camelot," by Jackie herself, suggesting an almost mythical quality about the young President and his family.

Cuba and the Bay of Pigs

Within just a month of becoming President, the issue of communist Cuba became central to the Kennedy Presidency. On February 3rd, 1961, President Kennedy called for a plan to support Cuban refugees in the U.S. A month later, Kennedy created the Peace Corps, a program that trained young American volunteers to help with economic and community development in poor countries. Both programs were integral pieces of the Cold War: each was an attempt to align disadvantaged groups abroad with the United State and the West, against the Soviet Union and its Communist satellites.

Cuba and the Cold War boiled over in April, when the Kennedy Administration moved beyond soft measures to direct action. From April 17-20, 1,400 CIA-trained Cuban exiles landed on the beaches of Western Cuba in an attempt to overthrow Fidel Castro. This plan, which Kennedy called the “Bay of Pigs,” had been originally drafted by the Eisenhower Administration. The exiles landed in Cuba and were expected to be greeted by anti-Castro forces within the country. After this, the US was to provide air reinforcement to the rebels, and the Castro regime would slowly be overthrown.

By April 19th, however, it became increasingly clear to Kennedy that the invasion would not work. The exiles were not, as expected, greeted by anti-Castro forces. Instead, the Cuban government captured or killed all of the invaders. No U.S. air reinforcement was ever provided, flummoxing both the exiles and American military commanders. The Bay of Pigs had been an unmitigated disaster.

On April 21st, in a White House press conference, President Kennedy accepted full responsibility for the failure, which had irreparably damaged Cuban-American relations. From then on, Fidel Castro remained wary of a U.S. invasion, which would have serious implications when the USSR began planning to move missiles into Cuba, precipitating another crisis a year and a

half later. Between April and the following year, the U.S. and Cuba negotiated the release of the imprisoned exiles, who were finally released in December of 1962, in exchange for \$55.5 million dollars worth of food and medicine.

Just months into his Presidency, Kennedy was severely embarrassed. Hailed as a foreign policy expert with heroic military experience during the campaign, Kennedy's ability to conduct American foreign policy was now firmly in question, and it was eagerly put to the test by the Soviet Prime Minister, Nikita Khrushchev. When the two leaders negotiated in June 1961 at Vienna, Kennedy later told his brother Robert that it was "like dealing with Dad. All give and no take."



Khrushchev and Kennedy meet at Vienna

The Space Race Begins

In 1957, at a time when people were concerned about communism and nuclear war, many Americans were dismayed by news that the Soviet Union was successfully launching satellites into orbit. Among these concerned Americans was President Eisenhower, whose space program was clearly lagging a few years behind the Soviets' space program. In 1957, the Soviets successfully launched Laika the dog into orbit, while NASA just seemed to be dogging it. Americans who could view Soviet rockets in the sky were justifiably worried that Soviet satellites in orbit could soon be spying on them, or, even worse, dropping nuclear bombs on them.

April 1961 was certainly a bad month for President Kennedy's Cold War bona fides. Even before the Bay of Pigs, America's Cold War prospects seemed even bleaker when the Soviet Union launched Yuri Gagarin into space, making him the first human to travel outside of earth. It was an enormous scientific and technologic feat, and it showcased the industriousness of the USSR. The Cold War was not merely a contest over economic and military power; it was also a battle for prestige. On this final point, the Soviet Union's entry into space gave it an enormous lead.

In response, President Kennedy spoke to a joint session of Congress in May, in which he proposed one-upping the Soviets by not only sending a man to space, but by sending a man to the moon. On May 25, 1961, President Kennedy asked the nation to "commit itself to achieving the goal, before this decade is out, of landing a man on the Moon and returning him safely to the Earth." While Kennedy is still hailed today for his push to land a man on the moon within a decade, Eisenhower's administration had already been designing plans for the Apollo space program by 1960, a year before Gagarin orbited the Earth and two years before John Glenn became the first American to orbit the Earth.

President Kennedy's commitment to space initiatives prior to Yuri Gagarin's mission was mixed, however. As a Senator, he had opposed the Eisenhower Administration's research funding to space exploration. As President, he changed his position in response to the Soviet Union's advances.

Though Kennedy was not alive to witness the U.S. achieve this mission, his efforts laid the groundwork for Apollo 11's July 20th, 1969, landing on the moon.

Vietnam

At the end of Kennedy's first year in office, the U.S. sent its first direct military support to South Vietnam, with two Army Helicopters arriving to the country on December 11th, 1961. This move was part of a long-standing commitment, begun by the Eisenhower Administration, to prevent the spread of communism into Southeast Asia. Furthermore, South Vietnam was one of the Southeast Asian countries that the United States vowed to help defend during negotiations over the armistice that ended the Korean War. Kennedy was initially reluctant to devote a full-scale military presence to the country, but his position was continually evolving throughout his Presidency.

Kennedy also felt that the South Vietnamese themselves did not want an American presence in their country. By 1963, this was increasingly apparent to the president, but, on the other hand, he felt the Southeast Asian territory was critical to preventing the spread of communism. This concept was fueled largely by the "Domino Theory" that had dominated Cold War foreign policy thinking. Kennedy also worried that giving up on Vietnam would further weaken his foreign policy credentials and chances at reelection in 1964.

Throughout 1962 and 1963, Kennedy's primary interest in Vietnam was to better understand how much the South Vietnamese wanted or did not want an American presence. He sent numerous ambassadors, among them his former opponent Henry Cabot Lodge Jr., to the country to investigate. Kennedy, however, was frustrated when multiple investigations returned widely different accounts. The issue remained unresolved until Kennedy's death in November of 1963, at which point President Johnson took over the policy and dramatically increased the American military presence.

Cuban Missile Crisis

The issue of communist Cuba came to a head in a big way in October of 1962. With the help of spy planes, U.S. intelligence discovered the Soviets were building nuclear missile sites in Cuba. Kennedy officially learned of this on October 16th.

It went without saying that nuclear missile sites located just miles off the coast of the American mainland posed a grave threat to the country, especially because missiles launched from Cuba would reach their targets in mere minutes. That would throw off important military balances in nuclear arms and locations that had previously (and subsequently) ensured the Cold War stayed cold. Almost all senior American political figures agreed that the sites were offensive and needed to be removed, but how? Members of the U.S. Air Force wanted to take out the sites with bombing missions and launch a full-scale invasion of Cuba, but Kennedy, however, was afraid that such an action could ignite a full-scale escalation leading to nuclear war.

Instead, President Kennedy thought a naval blockade of all Soviet ships to be the better option. On October 22, 1962, Kennedy addressed the nation to inform them of the crisis. He told Americans that the “purpose of these bases can be none other than to provide a nuclear strike capability against the Western Hemisphere.” Speaking of the threat to the nuclear weapon balance maintained in previous years, Kennedy stated, “For many years, both the Soviet Union and the United States, recognizing this fact, have deployed strategic nuclear weapons with great care, never upsetting the precarious status quo which insured that these weapons would not be used in the absence of some vital challenge.” Thus, Kennedy announced a blockade, warning, “To halt this offensive buildup a strict quarantine on all offensive military equipment under shipment to Cuba is being initiated. All ships of any kind bound for Cuba from whatever nation or port will, if found to contain cargoes of offensive weapons, be turned back.”

Beginning on October 24th, the US began inspecting all Soviet ships traveling in the Caribbean. Any ships carrying missile parts would not be allowed to enter Cuba. Additionally, President Kennedy demanded that the Soviets remove all nuclear missile sites from Cuba. In response, Soviet premier Khrushchev called the blockade "an act of aggression propelling humankind into the abyss of a world nuclear-missile war".



Kennedy speaking to the country about the Cuban Missile Crisis

For the next four days, President Kennedy and Soviet Premier Khrushchev were engaged in intense diplomacy that left both sides on the brink. Europeans and Americans braced for potential war, wondering whether any day might be their last. During that time, however, the Soviets used back-channel communications through Attorney General Robert F. Kennedy seeking a way for both sides to reach an agreement and save face. Finally, on October 28th, Khrushchev and Kennedy agreed to the removal of the missiles, under U.N. supervision. In exchange, the U.S. vowed never to invade Cuba, while privately agreeing to remove intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs) that had been stationed in Turkey, near the Soviet border, under the Eisenhower

Administration. Realizing how close they had come to disaster, the Americans and Soviets agreed to establish a direct communication line, known as the "Hotline", between the two sides in an effort to avoid nuclear catastrophe resulting from miscommunication.

Despite the foreign policy failures of Kennedy's first year and a half in office, the Cuban Missile Crisis significantly increased the Administration's credibility on foreign policy matters. By fending off Soviet aggression, Kennedy renewed the America's commitment to defending the Western Hemisphere and repositioned the nation with strength. Prior to the crisis, the Soviets had viewed the Kennedy Administration as weak, especially for its timidity on Fidel Castro. The Cuban Missile Crisis was in part a result of Kennedy's prior failure; the Soviets thought they could push the Americans in Cuba. By averting nuclear war and removing the Soviet missiles from Cuba, Kennedy's political popularity improved, and he was again lauded for his foreign policy achievements.

Nuclear Testing and West Berlin

Throughout his presidency, Kennedy made repeated efforts to negotiate a treaty banning nuclear testing with the Soviets. At Vienna in June 1961, Kennedy held his ground until he and Khrushchev reached an informal agreement against nuclear weapons testing. While this was initially hailed as a success, it fell apart just months later when the Soviets began testing nuclear weapons in September, and began sending them to Cuba the following year. In 1962, after almost 40 months of negotiations led by the United Nations Disarmament Commission, negotiations between the US and the Soviets again failed to come to a conclusion on nuclear weapons testing.

By the summer of 1963, however, after nearly five years of talks, the US, Great Britain and the Soviet Union finally agree to a limited ban on nuclear testing. This treaty halted testing in the atmosphere, outer space and under water, but not underground. It was quickly ratified in Congress.

During that same summer, another East-West controversy had come to the fore: the Berlin Wall. Build in 1961 to prevent East Berliners from venturing into West Berlin, the Wall had come to serve as a symbol for global division.

In June of 1963, Kennedy travelled to West Berlin, where he gave his famous Berlin Wall Speech. In it, he said “All free men, wherever they may live, are citizens of Berlin, and, therefore, as a free man, I take pride in the words: Ich bin ein Berliner.” In the speech, Kennedy reiterated the American commitment to Berlin and West Germany. It was very well received by Germans, and it helped to solidify the alignment of Western Europe with the United States against the Soviets.

The Civil Rights Movement

It took a lawsuit, but finally he was set to attend the University of Mississippi. James Meredith was still a young man in 1962, and thousands of young men attended the university each year. But as he repeatedly attempted to enter campus that September, he was prevented by a mob, which included Mississippi Governor Ross Barnett. Governor Barnett had earlier attempted to stop Meredith's admission by changing state laws to ban anyone who had been convicted of a state crime. Meredith's "crime" had been false voter registration. On September 30, Meredith was escorted by U.S. Marshals sent in by Attorney General Robert Kennedy. A white mob attacked the marshals, and nearly 200 people were injured. President Kennedy had to send in the Army to allow Meredith to stay at school. Meredith would receive a bachelor's degree in political science in August 1963. He would later be shot in the back and legs during a civil rights march in 1966 by a white man attempting to assassinate him.

While the bulk of Kennedy's legacy deals with foreign policy, significant domestic upheavals were occurring in the United States during his Presidency. Most important among these was the Civil Rights Movement.

Kennedy's record on civil rights is mixed. In the House and Senate, he often sided with conservative Southern Democrats. And though he ran for President in favor of civil rights, he didn't believe his narrow victory gave him a mandate for decisive action on the issue. For most of 1961 and part of 1962, Kennedy essentially made no movement on civil rights, despite the spread of protest and action, led by Martin Luther King, throughout the South.

Nevertheless, Kennedy and his brother Robert often found themselves forced into action by conflict between authorities and minorities and protesters in the South. After ensuring Meredith's attendance in 1962, a similar situation broke out in 1963, when Alabama's Governor George Wallace personally prevented

two African-American students from enrolling in the University of Alabama. Again, Kennedy sent in federal troops against the state's Governor.

In between these events, Kennedy had proposed a limited civil rights act that focused primarily on voting rights, but it avoided more controversial topics of equal employment and desegregation. Kennedy was toeing the line between maintaining political support in the South while also holding liberal Democrats. Until the end of his Presidency, however, a coalition of Southern Democrats and Republicans prevented any action on the bill, and Kennedy was never able to sign it into law.

Apart from civil rights, Kennedy made some headway on other domestic policy issues. He successfully passed an increase of the minimum wage and aid to public schools. Otherwise, though, most of Kennedy's New Frontier proposals failed to pass through Congress, including his Medicare bill. It would fall upon his successor, Lyndon Johnson, who had spent the 1950s mastering Senate parliamentarianism, to enact much of the New Frontier in the form of the Great Society. And it would be Johnson who pushed forth more stringent protections on civil rights than Kennedy had ever proposed.

Chapter 5: Kennedy's Assassination

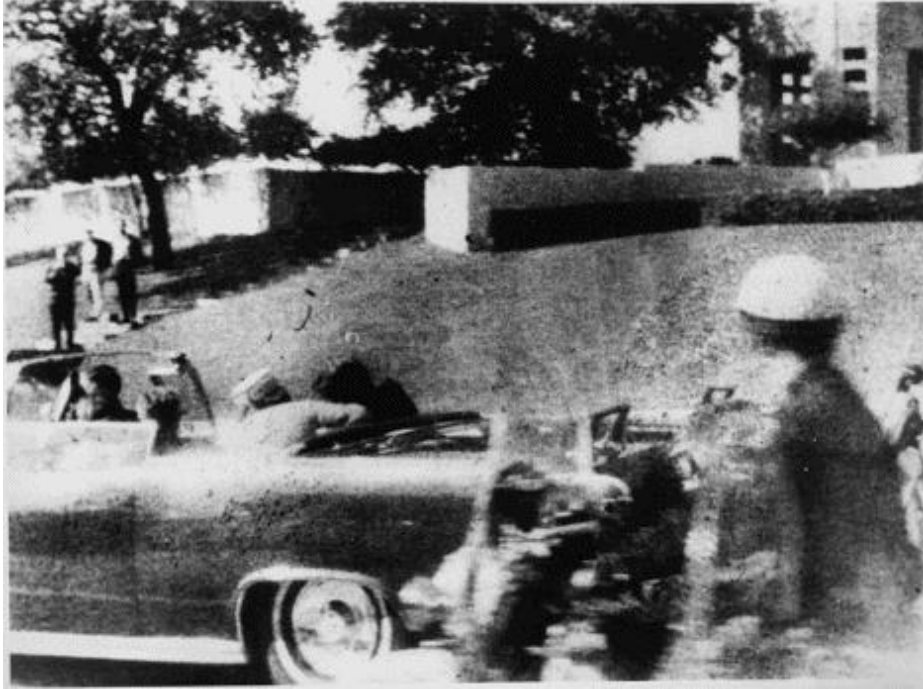
By November of 1963, President Kennedy was not overly popular nationwide. His foreign policy had a number of successes, but Americans had also not forgotten the failures of 1961 and early 1962. Furthermore, his tepid support of civil rights was dividing his own party, between liberals and conservatives. Southern conservatives thought Kennedy had proposed too much, while liberals didn't think voting rights went far enough. The strains would eventually undo the former Democratic coalition of the previous 80 years, done in with the help of Richard Nixon's "southern strategy" in the late 1960s, which saw the South turn solidly Republican at the expense of losing minority support.

Such division was showcased especially in the state of Texas. Liberal and conservative Democrats were divided there, which threatened to reduce Kennedy's chances of carrying the state's 25 electoral votes in the 1964 election. To shore up reelection prospects, the President travelled to the state to cool disagreements and rebuild his support.

November 22, 1963 started as a typical Friday, and many Americans were unaware that President Kennedy was heading to Dallas, Texas in preparation for his reelection campaign. Jackie and the President arrived in Dallas in the morning, and were surprised by their warm reception. Kennedy's meetings with top Democratic officials also went well, and Kennedy felt reassured that Texas would be behind him in 1964.



That day, Kennedy chose to keep the presidential limousine's top down to feel connected to spectators. Around 12:30 p.m., Texas Governor Connally's wife turned behind to the first couple and said, "Mr. President, you can't say Dallas doesn't love you." But as the motorcade slowed down while turning a corner to enter Dealey Plaza, it came into the sightlines of a sixth floor window at the School Depository building. There, Lee Harvey Oswald, a Communist sympathizer, had set up a sniper's nest with a high-powered rifle. With the motorcade traveling at low speed, Oswald's first shot hit Kennedy in the upper back, traveled through his body, and struck Governor Connally's arm in the front passenger seat. The bullet would come to be referred to by conspiracy theorists as the "Magic Bullet".



As Kennedy hunched over, a confused Jackie moved toward him to check on him. Oswald's next shot missed the motorcade, but Oswald's next shot was a direct hit, shattering Kennedy's skull. Of course, chaos reigned supreme as the motorcade quickly sped out of the Plaza and headed for a hospital, with a Secret Service agent famously jumping onto the back of the limousine as it sped away. But it was far too late.

Aside from the spectators who turned out to greet Kennedy and his wife at Dealey Plaza, some of the first people to find out about the shooting in Dallas were those watching the soap opera *As the World Turns* on CBS. In the middle of the show, around 1:30 p.m. EST, Walter Cronkite cut in with a CBS News Bulletin, announcing that President Kennedy had been shot at and was severely wounded.

The news began to spread across offices and schools across the country, with watery eyed teachers having to inform their schoolchildren of the assassination in Dallas. Most Americans left school and work early and headed home to watch the news. Even the normally stoic Cronkite couldn't

hide his emotions. Around 2:40 p.m., misty eyed and with his voice choked up, Cronkite delivered the news that the president was dead.

That day, stunned Americans wondered if the assassination was a Soviet conspiracy, a Cuban conspiracy, or the actions of a lone nut. Time and investigations haven't fully resolved all of the questions. The country never fully recovered from the President's assassination, which still remains one of the most mysterious and controversial events in American history.

Oswald was arrested hours after Kennedy's shooting, after he shot and killed Officer J.D. Tippit. In fact, Oswald was initially arrested for Tippit's death, not Kennedy's, and he claimed he was a "patsy" who had killed neither man. Two days later, Oswald was being transported through the basement of the police's headquarters when nightclub owner Jack Ruby stepped out of the crowd and shot Oswald point blank in the chest, killing him on live TV. The Warren Commission later investigated the Kennedy assassination and ruled that Oswald was the lone assassin, but the bizarre sequence of events have ensured that the Kennedy assassination is still widely considered one of the great mysteries of American history, with conspiracy theories accusing everyone from Fidel Castro to the mob of orchestrating a hit.



Ruby shooting Oswald

After a state funeral that mimicked Abraham Lincoln's of a century earlier, Kennedy was buried in Arlington National Cemetery with an Eternal Flame marking his gravesite.



Chapter 6: Kennedy's Legacy

Camelot

John Kennedy's legacy is intimately intertwined with that of his own family. Even before his White House years, John Kennedy and Jackie Kennedy fascinated the media and became integral parts of American popular culture. Few Presidents acquire the sort of celebrity status that Kennedy maintained, and the Kennedy family was wrapped in a sort of regality normally reserved only for untouchable stars. The continued popular fascination with the Kennedys suggests that Americans are still clamoring for the rare type of celebrity that John and Jackie embodied. Their celebrity lives on most strongly in the Kennedy family.

With his death, the Kennedy legacy hardened. Just five years after his assassination, John's brother Robert took hold of the Kennedy torch and began his own run for the White House. In the summer of 1968, however, his dream was also cut short by an assassin's bullet. A little over a decade later, another Kennedy brother made a much less successful bid for the Presidency when Ted Kennedy challenged the incumbent Jimmy Carter in 1980. Throughout the past few decades, other Kennedy relations have vied for the top executive office, among them Sargent Shriver, who was the Democratic Vice Presidential nominee in 1972 and sought the party's Presidential nomination in 1976.

The Kennedy family has been called "America's Royal Family," and the family's political history adds credence to the designation. Apart from Presidential hopefuls, the family has produced Senators, Congressman and many other office holders. From John Kennedy's election to the Senate in 1952 until Ted Kennedy's death in 2009, a Kennedy continually occupied a Senate seat from Massachusetts. At least one Kennedy served in the House and Senate between 1952 and 2011, when Ted Kennedy's son Patrick left his seat as a Congressman from Rhode Island. Since 2011, no Kennedy has served in the House or Senate, but this vacancy may prove to be only a brief interregnum: today, Robert Kennedy's grandson Joe Kennedy III is seeking a

seat in Congress representing the Massachusetts 4th District, which today includes parts of Joe's great uncle John F. Kennedy's former 10th District seat.

Other politicians abound in the Kennedy family, including Maria Shriver, former First Lady of California and ex-wife of Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger and Kathleen Kennedy, former Lieutenant Governor of Maryland and one-time candidate for Governor. John Kennedy's daughter Caroline also considered a run for US Senate from New York, but opted out.

John F. Kennedy's personal glamor and premature death helped solidify the Kennedy political dynasty and the concept of a "Kennedy Curse." So many of the Kennedys experienced personal hardship – through death, disease and drugs – that the media has labeled the family afflicted by a curse. With this narrative, John Kennedy has been heralded as a martyr for his family's cause of public service. Not only was he a celebrity, but a heroic one at that.

Nevertheless, Camelot is an apt name for the Kennedy presidency, because the notion of Camelot was certainly more myth than reality. Behind the façade of a vibrant young President was a man with a broken body. Kennedy had never recovered from wounds incurred in the Pacific during World War II, struggling mightily with a bad back, and he was diagnosed with Addison's disease in the '40s. Kennedy struggled so badly with his health that he had been given last rites more than a decade before becoming President, and at the time of his death, he was being administered a witch's brew of drugs on a daily basis.

The picture of a perfect First Family was also a myth. It was an open secret that Kennedy was a notorious womanizer, never made more apparent than when Marilyn Monroe seductively sang "Happy Birthday, Mr. President" to him in 1962. Kennedy's staff covered for him, and Jackie, who knew of her husband's extramarital affairs, had no recourse but to put on a happy face.

Details of Kennedy's trysts have continued to emerge in the nearly 50 years since his assassination. In February 2012, Mimi Alford, who was a 19 year old intern in the White House in 1962, began promoting her new book, *Once Upon a Secret: My Affair with John F. Kennedy and its Aftermath*. Alford publicized her affair with the 45 year old Kennedy, who seduced her just four days into her internship by giving her a private tour that led to and ended in Jackie's bedroom. Although it was the first time Alford went public with the affair, historians had already been aware of it for years.

The Kennedy Legacy

Apart from leaving America a political dynasty to love, Kennedy also left his country a President to admire. But should Americans be as enamored with Kennedy as they are?

Americans today consistently rank President Kennedy among the greatest Presidents in our nation's history. Academics, however, are not quite as eager to carve Kennedy into Mount Rushmore. Few Presidents face such a large disparity between their historical memory and the actual facts of their Presidencies. Kennedy's assassination – the first ever to be captured on video through the Zapruder Film – has caused Americans to selectively remember Kennedy through the prism of his assassination.

While President Kennedy was a generally popular President, at the point of his assassination roughly 55% of the country approved of the job he was doing, according to the historic Gallop Poll. While not bad, that number is hardly historic. A 55% approval rating was about the average for most Presidents during normal times after Kennedy left office. More importantly, Kennedy was in Texas due to worries about reelection. Despite this, Americans view President Kennedy as one of the nation's most influential and inspiring, and have done so since very shortly after his death. The country seems to be suffering from a sort of collective amnesia.

Reviewing the Kennedy Presidency in terms of its tangible accomplishments leaves much to be desired. After all, Kennedy's Presidency was one of the shortest in history, at less than three years in total.

On foreign policy, President Kennedy's first year and a half in office was not only unproductive, but outright disastrous. Botching the Bay of Pigs invasion had devastating results in the later Cuban Missile Crisis. Not until 1963 are

the US and USSR able to agree on a nuclear testing treaty, and a nimble one at that. The war Americans want to forget – the Vietnam War – began on Kennedy's watch, though Kennedy warned against further escalation, advice his successor did heed.

Without question the most successful foreign policy moment for President Kennedy came with his successful negotiation of the Cuban Missile Crisis. For this, he is rightly remembered fondly for avoiding nuclear war. On the other hand, would the Cuban Missile Crisis have happened were it not for Kennedy's failure with the Bay of Pigs? Arguably not. When the Bay of Pigs failed, the Soviets saw a weak American President unwilling to follow through on failures with Cuba, and so they saw an opening to station missiles in Cuba. Only because of Kennedy's failure did he have a chance to succeed.

On domestic policy, Kennedy only achieved negligible parts of his New Frontier policy. On the civil rights issue, he was timid, only coming around to mild concessions for African-Americans in the later months of his Presidency. Martin Luther King's March on Washington was partly a protest against Kennedy's limited proposal, and in favor of a stronger bill.

When Kennedy was assassinated on November 22nd, 1963, however, his death may have actually given his successor the necessary mandate to achieve the New Frontier – and then some – that Kennedy was unable to. Johnson defeated Barry Goldwater with over 60% of the popular vote in 1964, giving him a decisive mandate to govern. Johnson's more “down home” character arguably allowed him to appeal more broadly to Americans than John Kennedy's reelection might have. Most importantly, Johnson's relations with Congress were infinitely better than Kennedy's. On domestic policy, Kennedy achieved little beyond the Peace Corps, which was an executive order issued independent of Congress. Johnson, however, pushed groundbreaking legislation through Congress using his deep legislative knowledge. This included Medicare, a program originally proposed by President Kennedy.

A huge part of Kennedy's legacy, thus, is his death. November 22nd, 1963, has become a sort of historical transition point. For many, the moment marks the point when America threw away the conservative 50's and brought in the radicalism of the 60's. The Kennedy years, with their cultural conservatism and obsession with stability, were much more characteristic of the 1950's than the more tumultuous 60's.

Perhaps this marker serves to explain why Americans remember their JFK so fondly. When Americans remember John Kennedy, they recall an era when America kept its divisions quietly tucked away, unlike the post-Kennedy decades, when the upheavals of Civil Rights, drugs and anti-war movements shattered that ethic. Kennedy also harkens back to an era when government could be trusted: JFK is the last President to not endure a major scandal of some sort, although Bill Clinton learned the hard way that similar philandering could nearly destroy a presidency 30 years later. Indeed, Kennedy's womanizing is looked upon as a sign of the times and largely considered a quirk (or outright ignored), as opposed to being a sign of terrible immorality.

In the end, Americans are more than happy to remember Kennedy as an honest man who maintained a stable America, while offering the nation a bit of glamor and sophistication along the way, even if that narrative distorts his real accomplishments.

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Table of Contents

[American Legends: The Life of John F. Kennedy](#)

[About Charles River Editors](#)

[Introduction](#)

[Chapter 1: Early Life and Education, 1917-1945](#)

[Birth and Education](#)

[The Kennedy Family](#)

[Military Service and PT-109](#)

[Chapter 2: Early Political Career, 1946-1959](#)

[Journalism](#)

[House of Representatives](#)

[U.S. Senator and Marriage](#)

[Health and Profiles in Courage](#)

[Election of 1956](#)

[Chapter 3: Running for President, 1960](#)

[Winning the Democratic Nomination](#)

[The General Election](#)

[Chapter 4: Presidency, 1960-1963](#)

[Cuba and the Bay of Pigs](#)

[The Space Race Begins](#)

[Vietnam](#)

[Cuban Missile Crisis](#)

[Nuclear Testing and West Berlin](#)

[The Civil Rights Movement](#)

[Chapter 5: Kennedy's Assassination](#)

[Chapter 6: Kennedy's Legacy](#)

[Camelot](#)

[The Kennedy Legacy](#)

[Selected Bibliography](#)