The American Presidency: The Kennedy concept.

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THE AMERICAN PRESIDENCY: THE KENNEDY CONCEPT

Submitted to the Department of Economics and Political Science of the University of Windsor in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts.

by

Mary Angela Marr

Faculty of Graduate Studies
1965
ABSTRACT

The extent to which the duties and functions of the President of the United States, as set down by the Constitution, are fulfilled depends on the man holding office and on his concept of that position. In studying the political career of John F. Kennedy it is possible to trace his concept of that office, changes in that view, and the action taken to fulfill all aspects of that notion.

A study of President Kennedy's speeches, press interviews, literary efforts, and governmental actions point out the changes in Kennedy's concept of the office in both its domestic and international aspects. These primary sources extend from his first Congressional term in 1946 through his Presidential term ending in 1963.

It is the aim of this thesis to discuss the conceptual changes that occurred before and after President Kennedy was elected to that office and to examine some factors influencing these diverse opinions. An attempt will be made to discuss the relationship of President Kennedy's idea of the presidency to (1) the Constitutionally-based traditional concept; (2) his own gradually changing notion of the office; and (3) the manner in which his view of the presidential role was implemented.
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I

INTRODUCTION

John F. Kennedy: The Man

The personal biography of John F. Kennedy as well as various accounts of the years he spent in the House of Representatives, in the Senate, and in the White House have become fairly well known to the individual interested in current events and in American history.

John Fitzgerald Kennedy was the 35th President of the United States. That fact alone would serve to explain some of the interest people have found in this man and in his life history. The fact does not, however, present the entire picture. Kennedy was more than a President to the American people or a political leader to the peoples of the free world. His thoughts and actions were constantly beamed to the American nation and to other areas of the world through radio, television and newspaper services. The American citizen was made aware of the fact that Kennedy was concerned with the continued success of the political system under which the United States had operated since 1789 and with the harnessing of the energy of America's young people to ensure future progress. This concern also served to make Kennedy understood and comprehensible to the ordinary citizen of an age where politics seemed
confused and confusing. His goals for himself and for the nation were high, but idealism seemed to be the answer. The young are inclined to be idealistic, and youth responded to Kennedy.

To idealistic young people, to skeptical intellectuals, to Americans weary of the materialism and mass culture of their society, he struck all the right notes. They listened to his eloquence, were fascinated by his style, approved his distinction and his wit.¹

Kennedy was a young man driving to the top. His push for the presidential nomination and for eventual election won him both criticism² and admiration. His name became a household word not only in the United States but in many countries throughout the world. Mistakes were made, but they were explained away as mistakes. Responsibility was accepted by the President. He did not suffer from such acceptance. It became a matter of honour. The abortive attempt to rid Cuba of Castro, culminating in the Bay of Pigs fiasco, and the resultant furor caused by American complicity was a low point in a political career that never seemed to reach a zenith, but seemed to keep climbing. Setbacks occurred, but the Kennedy name rose above them.

The explanation of the Kennedy "phenomenon" and of the Kennedy popularity lies in the man himself. The president became the living image of a young man on the move.³ He was

¹Tom Wicker, "Kennedy was a Demander, Johnson is an Accomplisher", Detroit Free Press, January 20, 1965.


³See Jim Bishop, A Day in the Life of President Kennedy, (New York, 1964).
the All-American boy, the Superman of Politics, capable of achieving the impossible and sometimes more, but he was not a man one could deal with objectively.

Kennedy's opponents held the Bay of Pigs up for scrutiny and recalled the so-called double dealing that occurred. His supporters studied that same incident and stated that such action could be explained. Kennedy's advisors were misinformed, he trusted that information, and he had no reason to question the advice of governmental experts.

The domestic crisis over civil rights, the riots in Mississippi, the use of federalized troops in Alabama and the governmental pressure exerted on the steel companies led to charges of a growth in the power of the central government, a growth that, unchecked, could mean an end to the private enterprise system on which the United States was founded. Those same incidents and the actions taken in response to those events were cited by Kennedy supporters as necessary for the welfare of the United States and as the result of conscientious thinking and strong conviction.

John F. Kennedy was the man to be admired, copied, criticized when things did not go as well as some thought they should. He was the man of the sixties, the man of the hour. The exact worth of that hour will not be decided in the years or decades immediately following its destruction, but an attempt will be made here to discuss some of the aspects that might possibly shed some light on Kennedy's significance.
II

THE CHANGING CONCEPT OF THE PRESIDENCY

The Constitutional Basis of the Office

No foreign institution compares with the American Presidency. It has been said that the President of the United States is both more and less than a king, more and less than a prime minister, and may act as either or both at the same time, when necessary... The President's high office is a unique amalgam of prerogatives that make him, if he chooses to exercise these, the most powerful elected official on earth.4

The personality, the forcefulness of the man elected to the office of President determines, to a large extent, the prestige and power of the Presidency. The American Presidency is more than the sum of its parts or the aggregation of the powers and functions of that office. The Presidency is an elective office, established by Constitutional provision, and molded by the man in office.5 The Presidency is not restricted to the Constitutional concept envisioned by the Framers of that document, but has become the product of an historical evolution.

Every man who has ever served as President of the United States has added something to -- and perhaps subtracted something from -- the role of the Presidency during his incumbency.6


6Ibid., p. 2.
The Presidency, as established by the Constitution, does, in fact, stand out in stark contrast to the actual progressive development of that office.

The authority of the Chief Executive today rests on far more than the loose constitutional foundation. It is the composite of the powers asserted by Presidents during the history of the Republic, which have, by dint of repeated exercise, attained the status of powers authorized by constitutional usage or convention.7

This progressive expansion of the Presidency can be traced from the first Constitutional concept to that of present day politicians.

The Original Concept

The office of the American Presidency, as established in 1789, was designed to "reproduce the monarchy of George III, with the corruption left out."8 This reproduction was not intended to be an exact duplication of the British monarchy, but was to be a revised edition of the British executive. Colonial experience had dictated the need for revision. The abuses inherent in the reign of George III were to be avoided at all cost. The Framers of the Constitution were apprehensive about anything that was strictly British in nature as well as toward anything presenting even the possibility of a corrupt usurpation of power on the part of


the executive.\textsuperscript{9}

The opponents of a strong Chief Executive based their stand on the English Whig belief that the legislative power, by its very nature, served the popular will, while the executive power was, by nature, monarchial. At this time the image presented by the monarchy of George III equated monarchial rule with tyrannical rule.\textsuperscript{10} The conclusion reached by these men rested on the belief that "the President should be nothing more than an institution for carrying the will of the Legislature into effect."\textsuperscript{11}

On the other hand, supporters of a strong Presidency held a view consistent with that expressed by Gouverneur Morris:

\begin{quote}
It is necessary that the Executive Magistrate should be the guardian of the people, even of the lower classes, against Legislative tyranny, against the Great and the wealthy who, in the course of things, will necessarily compose -- the Legislative Body. Wealth tends to corrupt the mind and nourish its love of power, and to stimulate it to oppression. History proves this to be the spirit of the opulent ... The executive therefore ought to be so constituted as to be the great protector of the Mass of the people.\textsuperscript{12}
\end{quote}

The decision finally reached at the Constitutional Convention called for a Chief Executive whose powers were to be limited by Constitutional provision. The limitations placed on the President followed, to some extent, the theories

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{9}Ibid., pp. 15-16.
\item \textsuperscript{10}Eggar & Harris, \textit{op.cit.}, p. 6.
\item \textsuperscript{11}Ibid., p. 6.
\item \textsuperscript{12}Ibid., p. 6, ln.
\end{itemize}
developed by both Montesquieu and Blackstone. This concept of a balanced constitution exhibited the idea of "a divided initiative in the matter of legislation and a broad range of autonomous executive power or prerogative." The President, for example, was given the power to make treaties, provided he had obtained the advice and consent of the Senate, two-thirds of those Senators present and voting agreeing to the terms of the treaty. This dependency on Senate approval of treaties strengthened the existence of the system of checks and balances and, at the same time, provided the machinery necessary for the development of the separation of powers doctrine.

The Constitution stated the functions and duties of the President in general rather than specific terms; for example, Article II, Section I, paragraph 1 states that "the executive power shall be vested in a President of the United States of America." The definition of the office itself is expressed in broad terms, the limits of authority left almost completely to the interpretation desired by the man in office. The President had been vested with the executive power in the government, "the vulnerable part of any republic." He had been limited to some extent in the exercise of powers ranging from the making of treaties to the appointment of ambassadors, public consuls and ministers, judges of the Supreme Court, and all other officers.

14 Schwartz, op.cit., p. 3.
of the United States. And yet, he had been named Commander-in-Chief of "the army and the navy of the United States, and of the militia of the several States, when called into the actual service of the United States." (Article II, Section II, paragraph 1.) The powers of the President, while considered necessary for the preservation of the union, as outlined by the Constitution, lack the detailed precision characteristic of the articles defining the authority of the other governmental branches. A personal development of the office, of its powers and functions, was implicitly called for in the Constitution.

This implied self-determination of action has enabled the office to develop along the lines considered most beneficial in reference to the needs of the nation at any particular time.

The prevailing American dream in 1789 conjured a predominately rural republic, with a President to execute and administer the laws; but these laws were to be passed by a Congress of elected representatives of the people, in which reposed the real governmental power.

The intent of the Framers of the Constitution then was to establish an executive with specific powers and to place restrictions on those powers in the form of a legislative body duly elected and authorized by the citizen population, with the added safeguard of an independent judicial

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15 Schwartz, op.cit., pp. 1-3.
16 Ibid., pp. 1-3.
17 LaCossitt, op.cit., p. 17.
body. This was the original concept of the presidency. The Constitution resolved the problem of setting up a national executive "which was both potent enough to deal effectively with the problems facing the nation and, at the same time, not so strong that it would overwhelm the other two departments."\(^{18}\) The basic security against an abuse of power on the part of the President was placed in reliance on the tenet of public responsibility.

Where all power is derived from the people, and public functionaries, at short intervals, deposit it at the feet of the people, to be resumed again, only at their will, individual fears may be alarmed by the monsters of imagination, but individual liberty can be in little danger.\(^{19}\)

**Progressive Changes in Position and Concept**

The presidency today follows the outlines set down in general terms by the Constitution in 1789, but the demands of time, the pressure of the constantly changing international and national political scenes have enlarged the scope of power and influence and have served to clearly affirm the impact of personality on the prestige and might of the office itself.

The presidency is distinctly more powerful. It cuts deeply into the powers of Congress; in fact, it has quite reversed the expectations of the framers by becoming itself a vortex into which these powers have been drawn in massive amounts. It cuts deeply into the lives of the people ... whether as legislator, opinion-maker, commander,

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\(^{18}\) Schwartz, *op. cit.*, pp. 2-3.

\(^{19}\) Ibid., p. 3.
or administrator, the President molds lasting policy in every sector of American life.\textsuperscript{20}

The office of the President of the United States held a position of dignity during Washington's term as Chief Executive. The prestige of the man himself served as a spotlight on the office and focused attention on the presidency at a time when the preponderance of an elected legislative body, the Congress of the United States, was uppermost in the minds of the young nation's leaders. The struggle for legislative supremacy as opposed to presidential autonomy had been resolved, to some extent, by the Constitution. A controversy involving the nature of executive power occurred in spite of the stature and prestige of Washington.\textsuperscript{21} The Proclamation of Neutrality in 1793 serves as a precise case in point of this controversy.

Jefferson, Secretary of State in Washington's Cabinet, held that such a proclamation could not be made on the constitutional grounds that "such a declaration was a declaration of no war and it was not for the Executive to decide the question of war on the negative or the affirmative side."\textsuperscript{22} This notion that the power of the executive was faced with limitations in regard to authority carried through into Jefferson's own term as President, at least on


\textsuperscript{22}Committee on Government Operations, \textit{op.cit.}, p.16.
a theoretical basis.23

Alexander Hamilton, also a member of Washington's Cabinet, held a view directly opposing Jefferson's. In essence Hamilton argued that the executive power clause in Article II of the Constitution was a grant of power in itself and authorized Washington's action in the matter of neutrality.24

In the years following Washington's term of office, the concept of the presidency and the extent of presidential powers remained comparatively static. The election of Andrew Jackson was to alter radically the earlier ideas of the President and his authority. The Jacksonian concept of the presidency revolved around the notion of presidential autonomy. He contended that "the President's duty to the Constitution is solely the duty of conscience that his oath imposes."25

In defending his position concerning presidential supremacy Jackson stated that:

... it was settled by the Constitution, the laws and the whole practice of the government that the entire executive power is vested in the President of the United States.26

The Jacksonian concept provided the basis on which Abraham Lincoln was to defend his presidential actions.

23Corwin, op.cit., p. 307. In theory Jefferson supported the supremacy of the legislature over executive autonomy. In reality, his personality controlled Congress.

24Committee on Government Operations, op.cit., p. 18.

25Corwin, op.cit., p. 311.

Lincoln, in claiming that the president had the power to meet an emergency without waiting for Congressional action, derived his authority from the notion held by Jackson and from the precedent set by the Supreme Court decision, in Luther v. Borden (1839), that insurrection is war.  

Lincoln's claim was not accepted without opposition. Chief Justice Taney held that

...to suppose that the President could act on his own judgment is to suppose that he had had conferred upon him more regal and absolute power over the liberty of the citizen than the people of England have thought it safe to intrust to the Crown -- a power which the Queen of England cannot exercise at this day and which could not have been lawfully exercised by the sovereign even in the reign of Charles the First.

Lincoln, on the other hand, saw the President as a leader answerable to the people.

He must choose the hard duty of preserving the Union, even if it meant the violation of every other precept of the Constitution. Those precepts were not written into the document to enable those who, invoking their literal meaning, would destroy the whole of which they were part. Because he had been elected by all the people, he must, even without the consent of Congress or Court, do what was necessary.

In the years following Lincoln, the presidential role and the various concepts governing that position revolved mainly around the controversy of legislative supremacy versus executive autonomy. Legislative power became the dominant element on the American political scene and

27Corwin, op.cit., pp. 310-311.
28Tugwell, op.cit., p. 160.
29Tugwell, op.cit., p. 157.
remained so until the arrival of Theodore Roosevelt in the White House.

Roosevelt was a staunch supporter of what became known as the stewardship theory of the presidency. According to this concept, the President may take any action in the interest of the nation which is not forbidden by the laws or the Constitution. Roosevelt made the presidency "the centre of the American political system".30

I am inclined to adopt the view that what was imperatively necessary for the Nation could not be done by the President unless he could find some specific authorization to do it. My belief was that it was not only his right but his duty to do anything that the needs of the Nation demanded unless such action was forbidden by the Constitution or by the law. I did not usurp powers, but I did greatly broaden the use of Executive power.31

President Franklin Delano Roosevelt expressed the same general view along stronger lines. He stated:

I cannot tell what powers may have to be exercised in order to win this war. The American people can be sure that I will use my powers with a full sense of my responsibility to the Constitution and to my country. The American people can also be sure that I shall not hesitate to use every power vested in me to accomplish the defeat of our enemies in any part of the world where our own safety demands such defeat. When the war is won, the powers under which I act automatically revert to the people - to whom they belong.32

Franklin D. Roosevelt’s theory of the presidency was made manifest in the executive initiative taken with

31 Ibid., p. 15.
32 Committee on Government Operations, op.cit., p. 15.
the introduction of the New Deal and later in his direction of the American war effort. The President and his office became the focal point of American political thought and action. This same concept of a strong Chief Executive carried over into the Kennedy view of the presidency.

The varying views of the American Presidency point to the development of that office, its powers and its functions as a variable, dependent on the personality of the man in office, on the crises with which he must cope, on the attitude of the Congress toward the Chief Executive, and on the influence exerted by previous Presidents.\textsuperscript{33}

The concept of presidential power had changed gradually through the years because of the responses of strong presidents to national crises. As John F. Kennedy prepared himself for the presidency he became more convinced that strong leadership would be necessary to meet the challenge of the 1960's. He took his cue from the initiatives of the most forceful presidents in American history.

\textsuperscript{33}The importance of the attitude of the Congress toward the President is clearly shown in a comparison of the legislative aspirations of Kennedy and the legislative accomplishments of Johnson and their respective relations with Congress. "Kennedy made demands; Johnson makes promises. Circumstances that he quickly seized, together with his own approach, gave Johnson a chance to create a different atmosphere. His leadership may not seem so bold or demanding or inspiring as Kennedy's but it has persuaded some men to do what they ought to do without persuasion." Wicker, op.cit., editorial page.
Kennedy's Early Position

Kennedy, as a student, as an athlete, as the son of the Ambassador to the Court of St. James, and as the grandson of not one but two political legends, was influenced in his reasoning and in his persistent drive to reach the top in American politics by the circumstances of his descent and by the precedents set, over the years, by his predecessors. Kennedy was also influenced in the development of his own individual concept of the presidency by his years on Capitol Hill as both a Representative and a Senator, and as a potential vice-presidential candidate in 1956.

Influence of Family Background

The widely publicized history of the Kennedy family has aroused admiration in some quarters and censure in others. It was this background, however, that made John F. Kennedy the competitor he proved to be, and drove him to search for the answers to any number of problems whose solutions he sought in the office of the president.

Taking the Kennedy family as a whole, it might be said that family unity and strength revolved around politics.
Born of a political family, in one of the most political of cities, Kennedy ... is very much the product of political combat. To him, politics is the art of the possible.\textsuperscript{34}

Survival within the Kennedy Clan is dependent on the rough-and-tumble give and take characteristic of any number of large American families, and yet, the Kennedy Clan was unique in many respects.

Everybody who knows the Kennedys talks about the fierceness of the deep competitive drive that the father has instilled in the sons. A close friend of the family says, "Whether it's a subcommittee hearing or a game of touch football at the Washington Monument, they're out for blood." A Washington reporter sums up the Kennedy's with a line from a pep talk that he overheard Bob giving to one of his seven small children. "Let's swing higher and try for a new record. A Kennedy shouldn't be scared."\textsuperscript{35}

This competitive drive was not limited to the field of athletics or physical ability, but extended into all fields of activity. The Kennedys were made constantly aware of affairs in the world of politics and were expected to keep abreast of events as they occurred, forming their own reasoned opinion of the significance of those events.\textsuperscript{36}

Joseph P. Kennedy, Jr. was being groomed for the presidency. "The ambition for the presidency in the Kennedy household was born with Joe Jr. History cut Joe Jr.'s career short; his kid brother, his closest rival, his closest

\textsuperscript{34}James M. Burns, \textit{John Kennedy: A Political Profile}, (New York, 1960), pp. ix,xii.


friend took up that ambition."

While still a student, planning to go to Princeton University, Kennedy was asked by his father, "What would you do if you were President of the United States?" His answer was, "I'm not sure, I don't know enough to answer that." The question asked referred to the impending threat of Hitler and his one-thousand-year Reich. The reference itself was specific, and yet the answer given could be applied to any area of politics with which the president might be concerned. John Kennedy was thorough in his academic research and the competitive drive instilled in him by his father drove him to get all the facts, to know all the circumstances before making any generalization or any decision.

Like a good poker-player, a master broker (Kennedy) must be cool-headed and clear-minded, utterly realistic about his own hand and that of his opponents, unflustered and unwilling to be hurried ... He has dealt so long with intractable problems that he resists sweeping judgments and doctrinaire solutions.

It might therefore be said that John Fitzgerald Kennedy's family background, the political inheritance of his ancestry, and the competitive spirit among his immediate family led him to view the presidency as the goal toward which he had to canal his ambitions. The presidency represented a political battle to be won. The stakes were high, but

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37 Ibid., p. 22.
38 Schoor, op. cit., p. 49.
39 Burns, op. cit., p. xii.
the position was there for the taking, and who could fill that position better than a Kennedy?

Position Taken as a Representative and as a Senator

The concept each individual holds of the President and of his functions, duties and powers varies, to a certain extent, with his vantage point. To the voter, the presidency is the highest office in the land. If legislation fails to become law it is the responsibility of the Chief Legislator, the President. To the serviceman, the President is his Commander-in-Chief, and military allocations and benefits are made available through his efforts. To the Representative and to the Senator, legislators in their own right, the President is both friend and foe. The degree to which the President is able to exercise his powers is dependent on the degree to which he is able to control the Legislative Houses.

The men who share in governing this country frequently appear to act as though they were in business for themselves. There is no reason to suppose that ..., men of large but differing responsibilities will see all things through the same glasses. On the contrary, it is to be expected that their views will vary with the differing perspectives their particular responsibilities evoke.

The position held by John F. Kennedy during his terms as Representative and Senator differed somewhat from the concept he held as President. His view differed not in regard to what the office was, but in regard to the

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manner in which the powers of that office were to be implemented. In setting out to reach his objective in the political field, Kennedy held to the belief that "they don't give prizes for being second best." The motivation driving him to his political goal can be explained rather simply. He wanted to be in the front line of battle. At the outset of his first congressional campaign in 1946 he said:

It is interesting enough watching. There's some sense of gratification writing about the big men, about all this manoeuvring. It's a lot more interesting being part of the game, doing some manoeuvring on your own. It's like the difference between watching a football game from the fifty yard line and running a football down the field with the good blocking in front of you.

Kennedy was cautioned by his father that "you don't play on the Varsity the first time you get into scrimmage." Kennedy's answer was to set the guideline along which his political career was to proceed. "This is one game in which I am going to get my letter."

The general attitude of members of the Legislature cannot be termed one of indifference; it is an attitude that calls for a jockeying for position. "The struggle between the executive and the legislative is endless. The President will master Congress if he can; the Congress will make the

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41 Schoor, obit., p. 161.
42 Ibid., p. 156.
43 Ibid., p. 157.
President its servant, if it can. And yet, while this attitude continues to prevail, members of Congress often hold to the view that the Administration's proposed policies will succeed if the nation is given strong, creative leadership by its president. Kennedy was not one to dismiss the importance of a strong executive and he was moved by the U-2 incident and the subsequent collapse of the Eisenhower-Khrushchev summit meeting to write:

May 17, 1960, marked the end of an era -- an era of illusion -- the illusion that platitudes and slogans are a substitute for strength and planning -- the illusion that personal good will is a substitute for hard, carefully prepared bargaining on concrete issues -- the illusion that good intentions and pious principles are a substitute for strong, creative leadership.

The creative leadership emphasized by Kennedy was not considered the sole possession of the Chief Executive. This leadership was considered desirable in any political representative. His stand on this issue was made quite clear. He did not advocate a specific line of action or recommend any way in which this quality of leadership might be realized by the leaders in the government, but he did state the necessity for political courage, action, and leadership on the part of any elected official.

Today the challenge of political courage looms larger than ever before. Our political life is becoming so expensive, so mechanized, and so dominated by professional politicians and public relations men that the idealist who dreams of

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44LeGossitt, op. cit., p. 21.

independent statesmanship is rudely awaked by the necessity of elections and accomplishment. Only the very courageous will be able to take the hard and unpopular decisions necessary for our survival in the struggle with a powerful enemy — an enemy with leaders who need give little thought to the popularity of their course, who need pay little tribute to the public opinion they themselves manipulate, and who may force, without fear of retaliation at the polls, their citizens to sacrifice present laughter for future glory. And only the very courageous will be able to keep alive the spirit of individualism and dissent which gave birth to this nation, nourished it as an infant and carried it through its severest tests upon the attainment of maturity.46

Kennedy's concept of the presidency during his years as a representative from the state of Massachusetts, held firmly to the view that the presidency itself was an office second to none, that the accomplishments of the president were dependent on his ability to mold rather than control Congress, and to see clearly the issues of greatest importance to the nation as a whole. As John F. Kennedy rose through the political hierarchy of the United States Government, his concept changed, but not radically. As a member of the national legislature, it was Kennedy's political obligation to see that the interests of the people he represented were not ignored and to see that the policies advocated by the Administration were not encroaching on the interests of his constituents or on the interests of the nation as a whole. His position was one of a check on the executive. As a result of the "checking" feature of his position, it was Kennedy's responsibility

to investigate, analyze, and distinguish between those executive actions taken for the good of the nation, and those actions taken for the future advantage of the Administration. Because of the President's position in the government, the failure of specific policies advocated by the Administration rested squarely with the Chief Executive. The President's moves were to be questioned, and advocated only after the Chief Executive had proved their worth. A strong leader could accomplish this. The House of Representatives and the Senate were the chief safeguards against executive control of the government, but the President should be able to prove to the nation that the national interest would be served by his policies. This attitude too was to change as Kennedy shifted from the legislative branch to the executive.

"I used to wonder when I was a member of the House how President Truman got in so much trouble. Now I am beginning to get the idea. It is not difficult."  

**A Candidate's Concept**

John F. Kennedy sought the presidency because that office provided the means through which he might participate in the front line of the world's political battle even though he conceded that the American President was "the most heavily burdened officer in the world."  

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in one pre-election speech:

I do not run for the office under any expectation that it is an easy, honorary job. I run because the power and responsibility which the force of events have thrust upon the President make this the wellspring of American action. A Senator's voice is important. As a Senator I speak for Massachusetts; the President speaks not only for the United States but for all who desire to be free, and who are willing to bear the burdens of freedom.49

Some months prior to the Democratic National Convention, Kennedy expressed his concept of the Presidency. At this stage he had still to gain primary victories in Wisconsin and West Virginia. In formulating this view Kennedy actually set down the guidelines along which he was expected to develop the office to its fullest potential.

Today a restricted concept of the Presidency is not enough, for underneath today's surface gloss of peace and prosperity are increasingly dangerous, unsolved, long-postponed problems -- problems that will inevitably explode to the surface during the next four years of the next Administration -- the growing missile gap, the rise of Communist China, the despair of the underdeveloped nations, the explosive situations in Berlin and in the Formosa Strait, the deterioration of NATO, the lack of an arms control agreement, and all the domestic problems of our farms, cities, and schools.50

The promises made in the heat of the presidential campaign and the platforms approved at the National Conventions supposedly add to the image the candidate wishes to

49Ibid., p. 91.

place before the American electorate. This "image", often distorted by the circumstances of the campaign, the heat of the battle, and the issues involved, is held up, for comparison, to the actual action of the man after he has been elected to office. The President's biggest problem has been attributed to the acquisition and maintenance of support for his program. To achieve this program, the President is forced to rely, to some degree, on the image he has projected to the public, on the "image" that was elected to that office. As a result, the President molds and alters the presidential office to fit his image, and to follow, as far as is possible given the present situation, the precedents and prerogatives established by his predecessors.

A striking feature of our recent past has been the transformation into routine practice of the actions we once treated as exceptional ... And what has escaped statutory recognition has mostly been accreted into presidential common law, confirmed into custom, no less binding; the 'fireside chat' and the press conference, for example, or the personally presented legislative program, or personal campaigning in congressional elections.

Kennedy's concept of the presidency was exceptionally vivid during the campaign of 1960. This view was the result of the political experience gained in the House of Representatives and in the Senate, as well as the result of political expediency.


52 Neustadt, op.cit., pp. 5-6.
The Democratic National Convention, 1960

The Platform approved by the Democratic National Convention of 1960 was entitled "The Rights of Man". The first article of the platform states, in part, that:

It is our continuing responsibility to provide an effective instrument of political action for every American who seeks to strengthen these rights — everywhere in America, and everywhere in our 20th century world.

It was the object of this platform to place before the American electorate the problems and issues considered most important in the campaign of 1960. The proposals ranged from the areas of national defense to those of civil rights. John F. Kennedy’s presidential campaign was waged along these same lines. His nomination acceptance speech in July, 1960 called for a New Frontier. The fact that Kennedy felt the presidency faced a new and critical struggle in the 1960’s was borne out in this same speech.

The times are too grave, the challenge too urgent, and the stakes too high — to permit the customary passions of political debate. We are not here to curse the darkness, but to light the candle that can guide us through that darkness to a safe and sane future. As Winston Churchill said on taking office some 20 years ago, if we open a quarrel between the present and the past, we shall be in danger of losing the future. Today our concern must be with that future. For the world is changing. The old era is ending. The old ways will not do.\textsuperscript{53}

Kennedy called for action, on the part of Congress

and on the part of the electorate itself. He went directly to the public with a set of proposals, not a set of promises.

The New Frontier of which I speak is not a set of promises -- it is a set of challenges. It sums up not what I intend to offer the American people, but what I intend to ask of them.54

The Democratic candidate and the platform on which he ran placed emphasis on the responsibilities facing the nation as a whole, and on the need for a president who could not only recognize those responsibilities but was prepared to sacrifice what was necessary for the attainment of those goals. Kennedy's concept of the presidency was one enveloping the growth of that office in the areas of world prestige, world responsibility, and national welfare. His concept was broad, as was his proposed program of action. A dynamic president was considered necessary and the campaign trail was to provide the means of projecting the image of a dynamic Kennedy to the American electorate.

The Presidential Campaign, 1960

The Democratic National Convention provided the initial impetus for the presidential campaign. The campaign itself provided the setting for the presentation of Kennedy and his views to the public.

The theme of this campaign is going to be action, action here at home to keep peace with the growing needs of an expanding country, and action abroad to meet the challenge of our adversaries. I believe the American people elect a President to act. He is the only one who can speak for

54Ibid., p. 6.
On a number of occasions Kennedy was asked to list the qualifications he considered necessary for the Presidency. At other times he was asked to give his view of the office and the responsibilities encompassed in that position. His answers to both sets of questions give a general outline of the office as a candidate might see it. As in all election campaigns, the candidates talk "issues" and tend to steer the campaign talk to the successes or failures of the party presently holding office. In presenting himself to the public, Senator John F. Kennedy talked "issues", expressed his opinion on Quemoy and Matsu, Cuba, and federal intervention in labour-management disputes, and stated rather forcefully the duties of the presidency as he saw it, as well as the qualifications needed by an American leader of the Sixties.

On September 29, 1960, Senator Kennedy was asked, "What do you think are the qualities in a President which make a great President?" He answered:

Well, I think, of course, great times make Presidents and great men. That is a factor. Washington, Lincoln, Wilson, Roosevelt -- I think that they lived in times of crises and met the crises. In addition I would say vitality. Theodore Roosevelt had that; so did Jefferson, a sense of the future and the past and a wide cultural experience which makes it possible for them to draw on the lives of other men and the experiences of other men and apply it to a particular situation, moral courage, a

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sense of the future, a sense of the past, a physical vitality, intellectual vitality, intellectual curiosity and purpose.56

On the following day, September 30, Kennedy stated that,

The President is really the center of Government, of opinion. He molds it. That is the function of the President. The President is the only one who speaks for all the people, and ... on a great issue, he should speak to the people.57

On November 5, 1960, three days before the American public was to go to the polls, both candidates, Richard M. Nixon and John F. Kennedy, provided statements outlining their individual views of the Presidency.

Vice-President Nixon held that greatness in a President was not the result of that individual's ambition. "A President will be great, only to the extent that he represents and articulates the ideals -- the highest ideals -- of the people of the nation."58 Nixon held that the ideals of the American people would determine the degree of greatness achieved by the President, regardless of his individual ambition, but dependent on his ability to mold and represent the ideals of the nation.

Senator Kennedy viewed the President and the presidency as an individual in a singular situation, his actions

56 Kennedy, Nixon, Television Debates, p. 111.
57 Ibid., p. 116.
58 Ibid., p. 377.
and his success being dependent on his interpretation of the Constitution and on his ability to act when and where he deemed action necessary.

The powers given to the President of the United States by the Constitution are numerous, and in many ways, the powers are flexible. They leave it to the man. They leave it to his own good judgment. Some Presidents have been passive. Buchanan and Lincoln came within succeeding years. Buchanan did nothing and let the country drift toward the war of 1861; Lincoln did everything ... Theodore Roosevelt, Woodrow Wilson, Franklin Roosevelt, Harry Truman — all saw the Presidency as a strong, powerful voice of the United States. Only the President speaks for the American people ... In a free society he is the center of action. Only the President of the United States can place before the American people the unfinished business of our society, can serve to direct them toward the goal of great national purpose, can rally their forces and energy ... Only the President of the United States, in a very real sense, can place before us the public interest, can rally the people of the United States to compete successfully, which I believe we can do, against our adversaries ... The President must be for the people. He must sound the chord that is in all of us, of devotion to our country, and I believe, in the 1960's, the President of the United States must rally the people, must move them forward, must move our country, must place before the American people our unfinished business. I believe the Presidency can be the greatest possible importance — and is really the reason I run for the Presidency, after 14 years in Congress — can be the greatest possible importance in the great struggle for freedom which takes place here and all around the world. And for freedom to be successful requires a strong, progressive, and vital America. That's the kind of America that the next President of the United States must set before the world.59

Senator John F. Kennedy, in the closing days of the campaign and well into his term of office, saw the

presidency as the centre of activity, activity in both domestic and international fields. The President was the individual upon whom responsibility was to lie.

The American Presidency will demand more than ringing manifestos issued from the rear of battle. It will demand that the President will place himself in the very thick of the fight, that he care passionately about the fate of the people he lead; that he be willing to serve them at the risk of incurring their momentary displeasure.60

The views expressed during a political campaign are oftentimes regarded as merely the manifestation of political expediency. The proof of campaign pronouncements lies in the actualization, once the victor has accepted the decision of the electorate. What may seem clear-cut one day, in a specific instance, takes on an entirely new light, given new circumstances and new responsibilities. Senator Kennedy, in the days before his election as President, stated that the Chief Executive must be willing to serve the American public to the best of his ability and to act as he sees fit regardless of the political advantage or disadvantage to himself. In the first days after his election, Kennedy proceeded to select the men he considered most qualified to fill Cabinet positions. In selecting his Cabinet Kennedy was faced with a situation that called not for a retraction of a campaign statement but for a realization of the leadership and decisive action he deemed necessary in the President of the

60Kennedy, Nixon, Television Debates, p- 603.
Sixties.

On September 19, 1960, Senator Kennedy was asked if he would feel any restriction in naming a member of his immediate family to the Cabinet. Kennedy stated then that such a move would probably be unwise but that he did hope his brothers would be able to contribute their services to the new Administration. He also stated, however, that "we are going to need all the people of dedication we can get." Little over a month later, on October 21, 1960, Kennedy stated that "I am asking the people's support as President; we will select the best men we can get." The Senator from Massachusetts had stated throughout his campaign that "all appointments, both high and low, will be made on the basis of ability -- without regard to race, creed, national origin, sex, section or occupation." In December, 1960, President-elect Kennedy nominated his brother, Robert F. Kennedy, as Attorney General of the United States. On January 21, 1961, Robert Kennedy was sworn in as Head of the Department of Justice.

The appointment of his brother as Attorney General resulted in a deluge of critical comments, commentaries, and editorials. President-elect Kennedy, in answering the criticism leveled at one of his first decisions, and in standing

61Kennedy, Nixon, Television Debates, p. 54.
62Ibid., p. 267.
by his decision, enacted what he considered to be the most important demand placed before the President of the Sixties — that he be willing to serve the American people at the risk of incurring even their momentary displeasure.

Kennedy had stated that the new Administration needed men of competence, dedication, ability. They had to be the best men they could get. Of his brother he said, "Bobby's easily the best man I've ever seen ... I'll take his word over anybody's." 64

As President, Kennedy faced, in the 1960's challenges and demands that had to be met with instantaneous and correct answers. Mistakes were made, but the blame, whether deserved or not, rested squarely with the President. Kennedy met these challenges head-on. He incurred criticism and displeasure, but he acted from the front line, with the sole purpose of serving the American people he represented. The record of his years in the Presidency bears this out — on both the domestic and the international scene. He lived the Presidency as he saw that office.

I shall devote every effort of mind and spirit to fulfilling the oath of the Presidency — practically identical, I might add, with the oath I have taken for fourteen years in the Congress. For, without reservation, I can, and I quote, "solemnly swear that I will faithfully execute the office of President of the United States and will to the best of my ability preserve, protect and defend the Constitution, so help me God." 65

THE PRESIDENCY: THE YEARS IN OFFICE

Kennedy found soon after he assumed the presidency that the office presented a different picture to the incumbent than it did to even the most informed outsiders. Circumstances, and problems arising in both the domestic and foreign fields called for a solution and a decision on the part of the President. The solution could be offered by any number of advisors, but the decision rests with one man, the President. No amount of political know-how, political savvy, or specialized education can compensate for lack of experience in the office of the President. He alone is President, and he alone bears the burden of responsibility.

The American Presidency is a formidable, exposed, and somewhat mysterious institution. It is formidable because it represents the point of ultimate decision in the American political system. It is exposed because decision cannot take place in a vacuum; the Presidency is the center of the play of pressure, interest, and idea in the Nation ... A wise President ...

gathers strength and insight from the Nation. Still, in the end, he is alone. There stands the decision -- and there stands the President.

"I have accustomed myself to receive with respect the opinions of others," said Andrew Jackson, "but always take the responsibility of deciding for myself." 66

Kennedy realized that "there is no experience you can get that can possibly prepare you adequately for the Presidency." He gained his experience in office. The decisions he made were his, and his alone. Kennedy had the benefit of knowledgeable advisors, but even this did not prevent an unwise decision from being made. The Kennedy Administration made advances in the domestic field, particularly in the area of civil rights.

On the other hand, he was the recipient of criticism for his handling of the steel crisis in 1962. The Federal Government had intruded into an area supposedly confined to labor and to management. The international sphere seemed to dominate Kennedy's interest during his term of office. What advances did he make here? How did the actions of President Kennedy, in both domestic and international affairs, compare with the duties, and responsibilities of the President, as seen by that same man?

The Domestic Scene

In spite of the fact that actual Civil Rights Legislation was not formally passed until after his death, John F. Kennedy has been acknowledged as a leader in the fight for civil rights. He considered the issue of civil rights to be a moral issue, not merely a legal one.

This is not a legal or legislative issue alone ... We are confronted primarily with a moral issue.

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It is as old as the Scriptures and is as clear as the American Constitution. The heart of the question is whether all Americans are to be afforded equal rights and equal opportunities, whether we are going to treat our fellow Americans as we want to be treated ... This nation, for all its hopes and all its boasts will not be fully free until all its citizens are free ... We face therefore, a moral crisis as a country and as a people. It cannot be met by repressive police action. It cannot be left to increased demonstrations in the streets. It cannot be quieted by token moves ... It is a time to act in the Congress, in your state and local legislative body, and above all, in all of our daily lives.68

How did Kennedy's classification of civil rights, as a moral issue, enter into Presidential responsibility? Kennedy held that the President must be a moral leader. It is his responsibility, as President, to "set the moral imperative." Kennedy's federalizing of troops in June, 1963, was considered necessary to carry out an order of the United States District Court of the Northern District of Alabama. The use of the Alabama National Guard brought back memories of the use of federal troops in Arkansas in 1954. Where did the difference lie?

During the presidential campaign of 1960, Kennedy stated that President Eisenhower should have commented on the Supreme Court Decision of 1954 regarding the segregation of schools. He felt the President, as one who speaks for all the people, should speak to the people.

69Television Debates, 1960, p. 152.
The implementation of the Court decision is within the Court's judgment. They are the ones who have said by what speed and what manners the Court decision would be carried out. But I think that the President should, in the future, indicate his belief that we should work and strive toward equality of opportunity for Americans.

Kennedy carried out this thought in confronting the American public with the events in Alabama on June 11, 1963. He called then for specific Civil Rights legislation in the areas of employment, and of public education. He reversed what he considered a lapse on the part of President Eisenhower and went directly to the nation to express his conviction and to propose action on the issue at hand. The use of federalized troops was considered necessary in this instance but only after the facts surrounding the basic issue of equality and civil rights were made clear to the American public.

Kennedy was faced with several alternatives. He could have left the implementation of the court decision up to the officials of the state or he could have federalized the militia and taken action himself. He chose the second alternative because of the issues involved and because of his position as moral leader of the nation. Had he left the implementation of the court decision to the officials of the state there is little doubt that the decision would be ignored. The decision was, in fact, opposed

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by the state executive and implementation would have been virtually impossible.

The steel crisis in 1962 paralleled a situation, involving the steel industry, handled by Vice-president Nixon. Again, during the presidential campaign of 1960, Senator Kennedy was questioned as to his evaluation of the steel strike settled by Vice-president Nixon. Kennedy stated that he considered Federal intervention necessary but that the action taken by the Vice-president should have been taken sooner. He stressed the fact that he felt the influence and power position of the President should have been and could have been used more effectively at an earlier date, with the result being an earlier settlement. He did state that, "There is a place for Federal intervention, particularly in national emergency strikes." 71

In April, 1962, a settlement had been reached between the steel union and the management. At the same time, steel management announced an increase in steel price. President Kennedy, at a national press conference on April 11, 1962, denounced the price increase on the grounds that it was unjustified. Kennedy defended his intervention into this matter, which would usually have been considered beyond the scope of Federal interference in a free enterprise economy, in the following manner:

Price and wage decisions in this country, except for a very limited restriction in

71 Television Debates, 1960, p. 122.
the case of monopolies and national emergency strikes, are and ought to be freely and privately made. But the American people have a right to expect, in return for that freedom, a higher sense of business responsibility for the welfare of their country than has been shown.72

At the same time, a labor dispute involving the West Coast maritime industry posed a threat to national health and safety. In sizing up the situation on the West Coast, President Kennedy issued an executive order establishing a board of inquiry to investigate the issues involved. Federal intervention was deemed necessary and action was taken.

In two instances then John F. Kennedy, as President, entered into a labor dispute and into a dispute over price increases. The action taken in both cases was considered necessary to preserve the national welfare. The President had acted to serve the people of the nation, "even with the risk of incurring their momentary displeasure."

The International Scene

The American President is many men to many people. The sphere with which he primarily concerns himself will often determine the direction to which public interest will turn. In the case of President Kennedy, the international sphere of politics presented the biggest problems facing his Administration. At the end of the presidential

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campaign, Kennedy stated the qualifications he considered necessary in an American President of the 1960's. He also stated the position that should be held by the President.

Pennsylvania Avenue is no longer a local Washington thoroughfare. It runs through Paris and London, Ankara and Teheran, New Delhi and Tokyo. And if Washington is the capital of the free world, the President must be its leader; our Constitution requires it, our history requires it, our survival requires it.73

The isolationism of the 1920's and 1930's was considered a closed chapter in American history. The American political arena focused its attention on the international situation, with particular regard to national security, and international freedom.

These are extraordinary times. And we face an extraordinary challenge. Our strength as well as our convictions have imposed upon this nation the role of leader in freedom's cause. No role in history could be more difficult or more important. That is our conviction for ourselves; that is our only commitment to others. No friend, no adversary should think otherwise. We are not against any man, or any nation, or any system, except as it is hostile to freedom. And while no nation has ever faced such a challenge, no nation has ever been so ready to seize the burden and the glory of freedom.74

The Kennedy Administration faced a number of crises in the international sphere of politics during its first few years. The first such encounter with pro-

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Communist forces culminated in the abortive Bay of Pigs invasion in April, 1961. In August, 1961, a wall was erected in East Germany, separating East and West Berlin. In October, 1962, Cuba again took over the political spotlight as President Kennedy called for a quarantine of the island. In July, 1963, a nuclear test ban treaty was negotiated. The treaty was signed in October, 1963. Not all international crises were successes. The Bay of Pigs invasion was an unqualified failure that could have catapulted the world into a large-scale nuclear war. The second Cuban crisis was a successful venture on the part of the United States, but that, too, could have thrust nuclear war on the nations of the world. The erection of the Berlin Wall presented a crisis in itself, but the immediate deployment of troops to the area made clear the Western intention to honour commitments. This situation could also have resulted in full-scale war. The signing of the nuclear test ban treaty on October 25, 1963, less than a month before President Kennedy was assassinated, represented the culmination of years of attempts to negotiate such an agreement. It was "an important first step -- a step toward peace, a step toward reason, a step -- a step away from war." 75

The international scene was not quiet during the Kennedy years in the White House. Flare-ups occurred in

75The Burden and The Glory, p. 61.
the Congo, Laos, Vietnam, Cuba and Berlin. The last two areas were of primary concern to Kennedy and to the nation.

Cuba, a small island ninety miles south of the Florida coastline, presented an unpleasant picture to the United States. Fidel Castro had taken over control of the island in 1959. Since then Cuba had steadily moved toward an alliance with Russia. In April, 1961, Cuban refugees launched an invasion of the island. The invasionary force, backed by the Central Intelligence Agency of the United States, with the knowledge of the President and his advisors, attempted to gain a foothold in Cuba. The invasion attempt failed disasterously. Over 1,000 men were made prisoners of war.

Five days before the invasion attempt, President Kennedy had stated that "there will not be, under any conditions, an intervention in Cuba by the United States Armed Forces." Shortly after the invasion, the American public and the rest of the world was informed of American complicity in the action. The resulting failure of the invasion brought criticism from both sides. The rightists denounced the President for failing to provide the air-cover necessary to insure success. Others expressed concern that the President would accept such a plan. The President accepted

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full responsibility for the decisions made concerning the action and for its subsequent failure. His prime concern stemmed from the threat to American security and freedom, and ultimately to the security and freedom of the countries of the world, not merely the countries presently composing the free world.

Cuba is not an island unto itself, and our concern is not ended by mere expressions of nonintervention or regret ... It is clear that this Nation, in concert with all the free nations of this hemisphere, must take an ever closer and more realistic look at the menace of external Communist intervention and domination in Cuba. It is not primarily our interest or our security but theirs which is now, today, in the greater peril. It is for their sake as well as our own that we must show our will ... We must build a hemisphere where freedom can flourish; and where any free nation under outside attack of any kind can be assured that all of our resources stand ready to respond to any request for assistance ... Let me then make clear as the President of the United States that I am determined upon our system's survival and success, regardless of the cost and regardless of the peril.78

The Bay of Pigs invasion is recorded as a black mark, on the Kennedy record. Some measure of satisfaction can be derived from this failure, however, satisfaction that the public was presented with the facts, albeit after the invasion and its failure had been liberally publicized by the victorious Castro regime. The fact of the matter remains that the American public eventually received information of the CIA complicity and advice, of the President's

action on that advice, and of the President's full acceptance of responsibility for the entire action. The decision made was the President's alone and the responsibility rested with him. The buck stopped in the Oval Office of the White House.

What alternative courses of action were open to Kennedy when he was confronted with the Bay of Pigs operation? Kennedy could have called the plan off, he could have supported the plan, placing some restrictive considerations on it, or he could have further implemented the operation by providing full American military assistance, thus assuring the success of the venture.

If the plan had been stopped short of implementation, the 1400 Cuban exile in training would have been turned loose to "spread the word that Kennedy had betrayed their attempt to depose Castro." At the same time, it was also brought to Kennedy's attention that if the planned invasion was discarded, no similar attempt could be made in the future without specific American military assistance. The cause for alarm stemmed from the fact that the CIA expected a build up of arms in Cuba and an increase in the trained personnel necessary to build up Castro's forces. Russian aid to the Cuban dictator was felt inevitable in this respect.

If Kennedy had accepted the alternative calling for full American military assistance, the invasion attempt would likely have succeeded but American participation in such a venture would have meant a full-fledged invasion by the United States. Such action would have been contrary to American tradition and could have proven more harmful to the "cause of freedom throughout the hemisphere than even Castro's continued presence." In addition, American forces were already below strength and if any of these forces had been engaged in guerilla warfare in Cuba, the Communists could have then stepped-up moves in Berlin, or Laos or any other area of Contention.

The third alternative given Kennedy, and the one with which he concurred, called for implementation of the invasion plan on the part of Cuban exiles. American military assistance was not to be provided. The information made available to the President had assured him that American intervention was not considered essential to the success of the operation. The momentum of the Cuban exile movement would have supposedly drawn a good deal of support from the Cuban masses and would have triggered a large-scale revolution on the island. As was evident in April, 1961, this information was vastly misleading.

80Ibid., p. 44.
81Ibid., p. 44.
Kennedy accepted the information given him by the "experts". The result was the Bay of Pigs disaster. He could have taken various other courses of action, but the one course deemed feasible and consistent with U.S. non-intervention policy was the alternative selected. The fact that the President was misinformed of the true situation did not alter his decision to accept responsibility for the fiasco.

"There's an old saying that victory has a hundred fathers and defeat is an orphan ... I am the responsible officer of the Government, and that is quite obvious."\(^{82}\)

In August, 1961, the Berlin Wall was constructed. West Berliners were cut off completely from East Berlin. East Berliners were isolated from any contact with the free world and her representatives. United States Armed Forces had been moved into the area previous to the action taken by the East Berlin government. In July, 1961, Kennedy had made mention of the crisis in Berlin, and made specific reference to the Khrushchev aide memoire to end the abnormal division in Germany.

He (Khrushchev) intends to bring to an end, through a stroke of the pen, first our legal rights to be in West Berlin -- and secondly our ability to make good on our commitment to the two million free people of that city. That we cannot permit. We are clear about what must be done -- and we intend to do it ... We do not want to fight -- but we have fought before ... We must meet our oft-stated pledge to the free peoples of West Berlin -- and

\(^{82}\) Sorenson, op.cit., p.50.
maintain our rights and their safety, even in the face of force — in order to maintain the confidence of other free peoples in our word and our resolve. The strength of the alliance on which our security depends is dependent in turn on our willingness to meet our commitments to them ... We do not intend to abandon our duty to mankind to seek a peaceful solution ...

We shall always be prepared to discuss international problems with any and all nations that are willing to talk — and listen — with reason. If they have proposals -- not demands -- we shall hear them. If they seek genuine understanding -- not concessions of our rights -- we shall meet them ... We seek peace -- but we shall not surrender ... The freedom of that city (West Berlin) is not negotiable.\textsuperscript{83}

In August, Kennedy was faced with the physical manifestation of that "abnormal" division. The United States commitment in Berlin was made after the settlement of World War II. That commitment is still being upheld today. The decision of the President of the United States to call into action the National Reserves, to strengthen the U.S. military position in the divided city, and to protect American and West German rights in the city, stands to strengthen the political position of the United States in Europe and to dispel any fears that the United States, when faced with a threat to national security, will disregard the commitments to which she has bound herself.


The Kennedy decision in this instance was to bolster U.S. defensive forces in West Berlin. He could have ignored the Wall, or he could have sent troops in to prevent further Communist advancement.

If the Wall was ignored -- who could have possibly said what other Communist move might later go unchallenged. How far would the Communists have pushed before they reached the point where the U.S. would have been forced to resist such advances or withdraw? To have ignored the Wall would have opened the door for possible Communist gains in Germany.

In the event Kennedy sent troops to reinforce the American position in West Berlin and "face" was maintained by the American demonstration that her commitment would continue to hold. The Communists were thereby "reassured" that the U.S. under Kennedy, would not be forced back by moves such as the construction of the Berlin Wall.

In October, 1962, the American public was presented with the information that ninety miles south of the Florida coastline was a military installation capable of striking, with effective force, any major American city. The decision of the President was to establish and enforce a strict quarantine of the island until such time as the missiles and military weapons were removed from the island. The quarantine was proclaimed on October 23, 1962 and put into effect on October 24. The reason for the quarantine was, as in previous incidents, the security and freedom of the
Western hemisphere.

The cost of freedom is always high — but Americans have always paid it. And one path we shall never choose, and that is the path of surrender or submission. Our goal is not the victory of might, but the vindication of right — not peace at the expense of freedom, but both peace and freedom, here in this hemisphere, and, we hope, around the world.  

The stand taken by Kennedy raised the prospect that the tension existing between the U.S. and the Soviet Union might be escalated into a nuclear war. Action was considered necessary. Both the United States government and the government of the Soviet Union were faced with the possibility of confrontation with military destruction of the highest order. The resultant removal of Soviet missiles and military installations from the island of Cuba served to quiet the situation and to emphasize the American President's willingness to take the action he deems necessary, as President, for the safety of the American nation and, as leader of the West, for the safety of the nations of the free world.

In this second Cuban crisis, Kennedy was faced with six possible moves. He could: "(1) do nothing; (2) bring diplomatic pressures and warnings to bear on the Soviets; (3) undertake a secret approach to Castro, to split him off from the Soviets, to warn him that the alternative was his island's downfall and that the Soviets were selling him out; (4) initiate indirect military action by

means of a blockade; (5) conduct an air strike, pinpointed against the missiles only or against other military targets, with or without advance warning; or (6) launch an invasion.86

If Kennedy had done nothing, the security of the United States would remain at stake. In the same instance, if the missile buildup in Cuba had been ignored, how much further would the Communists have pushed to gain strength in the Americas? If Kennedy had merely issued a warning, through diplomatic channels, there would have been no actual pressure exerted on the Soviets other than the pressure of words. Actions would undoubtably be forthcoming, but the Soviets would have received advance warning and could possibly be prepared for any such move on the part of the United States. If Kennedy had merely taken Castro aside and stated that the fate of Cuba hung in the balance of power struggle, the way would be clear for Castro to denounce the United States as an aggressor, citing the "information" given him by Kennedy as proof.

The fourth course of action open to Kennedy was to initiate indirect military action in the form of a blockade. He took this course of action in the belief that such a show of strength and decisiveness on the part of the United States would serve to alert both the Soviets and Cubans and the nations of the West to the fact that the United States was prepared and willing to take the

action considered necessary to preserve her security.

If Kennedy had taken the fifth or sixth courses of action open to him he would have involved the United States in hand to hand combat in Cuba. Either of the moves could easily have escalated the Soviets into a show of nuclear strength and ultimate nuclear annihilation.

The President had stated, in his campaign for the presidency and throughout his term, that the man in office had an obligation to the people to inform them of the facts. On the whole it can be said that such was the case with the Kennedy Administration. The first Cuban crisis of 1961 may dispute this, but, the American public was eventually given the facts. The Berlin crisis of 1961 was reported to the American people, and the need for decisive American build-up in military forces was explained. The Cuban missile crisis of 1962 was explained to the public; the action taken was also clarified. President Kennedy seems to have followed, perhaps not always consistently, the lines of conduct he posited as a candidate, as being applicable to the President of the United States.

Kennedy stated throughout his campaign and his years in the White House that peace was the objective of his action in the international arena. Peace was the objective as long as freedom was not denied. On July 26, 1963, Kennedy announced the conclusions of negotiations for a nuclear test ban treaty. That treaty was signed in October, 1963. It represented the culmination of years of
effort to reach an understanding and an agreement on the control of nuclear weapons. The treaty represented a step forward on the path toward eventual peace. The decision to accept the treaty was not, strictly speaking, Kennedy's alone, for it was the result of years of negotiation and effort on the part of a number of individuals. The final action was taken by the President. He informed the public of the treaty and of the implications of that agreement. It was an achievement of his Administration and of the President himself. It might also be termed the partial fulfillment of his inaugural address:

Let every nation know, whether it wishes us well or ill, that we shall pay any price, bear any burden, meet any hardship, support any friend, oppose any foe to assure the survival and the success of liberty ... To those nations who would make themselves our adversary, we offer not a pledge but a request: that both sides begin anew the quest for peace, before the dark powers of destruction unleashed by science engulf all humanity in planned or accidental self-destruction ... Let both sides explore what problems unite us instead of belabouring those problems which divide us. Let both sides, for the first time, formulate serious and precise proposals for the inspection and control of arms -- and bring the absolute power to destroy other nations under the absolute control of all nations ... And if a beach-head of cooperation may push back the jungle of suspicion, let both sides join in creating a new endeavour, not a new balance of power, but a new world of law, where the strong are just and the weak secure and the peace preserved.87

CONCLUSION

John F. Kennedy, The President

John F. Kennedy was elected President on November 8, 1960 and was inaugurated on January 20, 1961. Kennedy was destined to serve two years, ten months, and two days as President of the United States. During that time, the United States had managed to make noteworthy advances in the field of space exploration, some advance in the field of civil rights, and had become more deeply involved in seeking a détente with the Soviet Union. An adequate evaluation of Kennedy’s years in the White House cannot be made without consideration of the Alliance for Progress, the Peace Corps, and the wheat agreement with the Soviet Union. On the other hand, the Kennedy years were not all successful years. The failure of the Bay of Pigs invasion, the furor over a military installation on Cuba, the landing of troops in Laos and in Berlin, and increased American involvement in Vietnam served to draw criticism toward the Administration. During those same years, Kennedy saw, in retrospect, a difference in action possible on the part of the President and a difference in his own concept of the office.

The problems were more difficult than I had imagined they were. There is (also) a limitation upon the ability of the United States to
solve these problems ... There is a limitation on the power of the United States to bring about solutions ... I would say that the problems are more difficult that I had imagined them to be, and there are greater limitations upon our ability to bring about a favourable result than I had imagined them to be. And I think that is probably true of anyone who becomes President, because there is such a difference between those who advise or speak or legislate, and between the man who must select from the various alternatives proposed and say that this shall be the policy of the United States. It is much easier to make the speeches than it is to finally make the judgments, because unfortunately your advisors are frequently divided. If you take the wrong course, and on occasion I have, the President bears the burden of the responsibility quite rightly. 88

It is possible, in looking over the achievements of the Kennedy Administration and in considering the setbacks suffered during the Kennedy years, to conclude that Kennedy himself realized the responsibilities of his office, accepted those responsibilities, listened to his advisors, and made the final decisions himself. 89 He did not solve all the problems facing the United States and the Free World, and was not able to accomplish all he intended to, but Kennedy did gain a greater respect for the power of the Congress 90 and, at the same time, was able to evaluate his

89 See 26n, p.12 -- Jacksonian statement on Presidential power and responsibility.
90 "It is a tremendous change to go from being a Senator to being President ... The fact is I think the Congress looks more powerful sitting here than it did when I was there in the Congress ... When you are in the Congress you are one of a hundred in the Senate or one of 435 in the House, so the power is divided. But here I look at the Congress and I look at the collective power of the Congress, particularly the bloc action, and it is a substantial power." Ibid., December 17, 1962, p. 892.
own legislative program.

They are two separate offices and two separate powers, the Congress and the Presidency. There is bound to be conflict, but they must cooperate to the degree that is possible. But that is why no President's program is ever put in. The only time a President's program is put in quickly and easily is when the program is insignificant. But if it is significant and affects important interest and is controversial, therefore, then there is a fight, and the President is never wholly successful.91

President John F. Kennedy faced a number of setbacks but continued in the face of these disappointments to act as leader of the American nation and of the free world. He saw the Presidency as a goal to be gained; he gained that goal and saw then the responsibility of leadership. He managed to combine legislative experience, and some degree of executive leadership in fulfilling the responsibilities of the Presidency as he saw them: to serve the people of the nation, "even with the risk of incurring their momentary displeasure." He was aware of the problems of the office and aware that he was not the sole answer. "I had plenty of problems when I came in, but wait until the fellow that follows me sees what he will inherit."92

John F. Kennedy may not have been the greatest President the United States has seen or will see, but the Kennedy years in the White House will not soon be forgotten.

I want above all else to be a President known — at the end of four years — as one who not only prevented war but won the peace — as one of whom history might say: he not only laid the foundations for peace in his time, but for the generations to come as well ... I want to be a President known — at the end of four years — as one who not only held back the Communist tide but advanced the cause of freedom and re-built American prestige — not by words but by works — not by stating great aims merely as a good debater, but by doing great deeds as a good neighbour — not by tours and conferences abroad, but by vitality and direction at home ... I want to be a President who will regain that office for the people ... I want to be a President of all the people ... I want to be a President who has the confidence of the people — and who takes the people into his confidence — who lets them know what he is doing and where we are going, who is for his program and who is against .... I want to be a President who acts as well as reacts — who originates programs as well as study groups — who masters complex problems as well as one page memorandums ... I want to be a President who is the Chief Executive in every sense of the word — who responds to a problem, not by hoping his subordinates will act, but by directing them to act — a President who is willing to take the responsibility for getting things done, and take the blame if they are not done right ... I want to be a President who believes in working full time when millions of men and women are forced to work part time ... I want to be a President who cares ... I want to be a President who is concerned ... I want to be a President who recognizes every citizen's rights as well as his obligations ... I want to be the President of a country which raises the farmer's income instead of his costs ... I believe in a President who will formulate and fight for his legislative policies ... A President who will not back down under pressure ... A President who does not speak from the rear of the battle but who places himself in the thick of the fight ... I also believe in a President who fights for great ideals as well as legislation — a President who cares deeply about the people he represents — their right to a full-time job with full-time pay — to raise their children in decent neighbourhoods — to send their
children to a good school — to share in the benefits of our abundance and our natural resources — and to retire to a life of dignity and health ... Above all I believe in a President who believes in the national interest — who serves no other master — who takes no instruction but those of his conscience — who puts no personal interest, no public pressure, no political hopes, and no private obligation of any kind ahead of his oath to promote the national interest ... 93

History will decide whether or not John F. Kennedy was that President.

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VITA AUCTORIS

Family: Mary Angela Marr, eldest daughter of John S. Marr and his wife Angela Blaeser; born November 25, 1941, at Detroit.

Education:


1959-1963 Registered as an undergraduate in the Faculty of Arts and Science at the University of Windsor. Received Bachelor of Arts degree, May, 1963.


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