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### JFK's Assassination: Catalyst for Change in America

The assassination of president John F. Kennedy on November 22, 1963 sent shockwaves through America, creating a pivotal moment which sparked a period of reflection in society. Concerns over topics such as civil rights, government transparency, and the Vietnam War became heavily influenced by the impact JFK left after his death. Many Americans found themselves reevaluating their views on racial equality and their trust in the government. People were left questioning the events of his violent death and the coverup that followed. American politics today is greatly influenced by JFK's assassination, as people honored his memory through quickly expanding civil rights, but also learned to hold their government accountable and question the events of the Vietnam war.

Before his assassination, Kennedy had become increasingly vocal about advocating for the rights of African Americans. During his election campaign in 1960, a crucial issue he'd addressed was civil rights, especially after aiding in the release of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. from jail on account of trespassing during a protest in Atlanta, Georgia. This gained Kennedy the "public endorsement by Martin Luther King Sr., the influential father of the civil rights leader. The publicizing of this endorsement, combined with other campaign efforts, contributed to increased support among Black voters for Kennedy"(JFK Library). JFK won the election because of the support from African Americans, who had high expectations in his administration to enact the reform they had so long been fighting for. By summer of 1963, JFK had been

working tirelessly to pass legislation for a civil rights bill, emphasizing that it wasn't just a constitutional issue, but a moral issue too. In an interview with my grandparents, Betty and Douglas Frampton, although in highschool at the time of his death, they mentioned how the two things they remembered JFK for were his actions in Vietnam, but more importantly his commitment to addressing civil rights.

The impact, both immediate and long-term, of JFK's assassination on the civil rights movement was profound. After the assassination, the loss and uncertainty about the future of civil rights created an atmosphere riddled with anxiety. People came to view JFK as an important and sympathetic figure who sought to correct racial injustice. Lyndon B. Johnson, now president, used this period of national mourning to push for the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, which "prohibits discrimination on the basis of race, color, religion, sex or national origin" (US Department of Labor), as a way to honor JFK's memory and continue what he'd been working so hard for. Many people view JFK's assassination as a catalyst for the rapid passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, and his assassination became an important wake up call to Americans to reexamine their attitudes towards racial equality. Support for the civil rights movement gained momentum as a result, with the passage of the Voting Rights Act of 1965 being an important example of this. The will to honor JFK's memory created a sense of moral imperative to politically address the racial injustices in American society.

The assassination of JFK led to heightened awareness of the need for transparency and accountability within the government. The investigation conducted by the Warren Commission and their subsequent report that Lee Harvey Oswald was the shooter was at first accepted by the general public, but over the years the credibility of this report and the release of classified

documents have caused people to question the facts of the assassination. Steven M. Gillon's article, *Why the Public Stopped Believing the Government about JFK's Murder*, conveys this when he stated, "before the 1970s most conspiracy theories focused on the Russians or possibly the Cubans. By the 1980s, polls showed that large majorities of Americans now believed their own government was involved in the assassination of President Kennedy." Furthermore, news spread that the CIA and FBI had failed to give evidence to the Warren Commission, leading to the belief that the American government and media had something to hide. Without a clear and conclusive explanation as to what really happened that day, Americans began to question the lack of transparency from the government.

Questions about the validity of the Warren Commission's investigation still persist today, as more classified documents continue to be released. Trust in government, as a result of the assassination, has become a leading issue in American politics today. Holding the government accountable allows the public to trust that their public officials will be transparent with them, a concern that developed after the assassination. Scandals such as Watergate or Bill Clinton's perjury case consequently were reported by the media and forced the government to release statements pertaining to the details of each case. Today we live in a society where we expect scandals such as those to be presented clearly to us and we expect the government to be transparent, whereas in the past before JFK's assassination this was almost never the case.

Furthermore, JFK's assassination led to questions regarding the future of America's involvement in the Vietnam War. During his presidency, JFK's policies toward Vietnam favored a more broad commitment toward aiding the Southern Vietnamese in which he stated, "We can help them, we can give them equipment, we can send our men out there as advisers, but they

have to win it, the people of Vietnam, against the Communists”(JFK Library). By fall of 1963, Kennedy and his administration started to consider the possibility of withdrawing from Vietnam, but he died before making the decision. Douglas Frampton, Vietnam war veteran, stated, “JFK was a war hero, so whatever he decided to do about Vietnam people would follow.” Therefore, had JFK decided to withdraw US troops from Vietnam, there would've been public support for this due to the vast influence JFK had because of his own military background. This leads to the continued debate today as to whether JFK's death is the reason America stayed in the war, considering Lyndon B. Johnson's sudden shift to send large amounts of troops into Vietnam caused an escalation in the war, an action that appears to be opposite of Kennedy's intentions. On the other hand, some believe that if Kennedy had lived, ended the war, and Johnson not become president, the 26th Amendment wouldn't have been passed or people would continue to blindly trust the government since the Pentagon Papers never would've been released.

President John F. Kennedy's assassination left a lasting impression on the US. His death triggered the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, a landmark legislation that was a huge step for racial equality. He was loved and admired by so many people, so this act was a way to honor his memory and find hope in the future of the US during a time of great loss. In addition, his assassination and the ensuing Warren Commission report revealed flaws within the US government, and sparked an era of advocating for accountability and transparency of the government which persists today. There are still many “what ifs” surrounding his death, especially concerning US involvement in the Vietnam War as to whether he had stayed president would the war have ended sooner or played out differently. Even in death, JFK has inspired crucial change in our society, and will continue to do so for generations to come.

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