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Oxford Scholars
13 November 2023

Oxford Scholars Essay

Sixty years after the assassination of John Fitzgerald Kennedy and the one thing that can be agreed upon is that the United States lost its innocence with the sound of three gunshots and the news our president had been killed.

Born on May 29, 1917, John F. Kennedy, often referred to as JFK, was the youngest man to ever be elected president. On his journey to becoming president, he attended Harvard in 1940 and then later joined the navy and served during World War II. He was also elected as a Congressman out of Massachusetts and later served in the United States Senate. When he was elected president of the United States, he was only forty three years old. This meant that the United States would have a different and more modern perspective in the White House, as thought processes change through generations. His perspectives were mainly centered around the idea of the "New Frontier," which focused on civil rights, economic reform, and space exploration. This agenda was refreshing to the people of the United States, and is remembered as a time of optimism and idealism. This time period is often referred to as "Camelot." While it is impossible to predict the exact course of history, one can speculate on potential changes in the United States if JFK had not been assassinated in 1963.

President Kennedy was the first Catholic president of the United States. Although Church and State are fundamentally separate, there was an intrinsic set of moral values that the president fought for and upheld during his time in the senate and as president. JFK was

supportive of the Civil Rights Movement and made every effort to bring morality to the forefront of the fight for equality. May and June of 1963 had seen a desperate upturn of violence for the African American population of the South with JFK feeling his work had been failing. He passionately announced that he would send a comprehensive civil rights legislation package to Congress. "The heart of the question," the president said, "is whether all Americans are to be afforded equal rights and opportunities." Unfortunately, Kennedy was assassinated five months later and this package he so passionately wanted to bring to fruition had not yet passed in Congress and Lyndon B. Johnson would have to take up the Civil Rights battles that were being fought all around the country. The Civil Rights Act of 1964 might have been enacted earlier or faced much less opposition if President Kennedy had not been assassinated and had been able to see his package adopted by Congress. As JFK stated, "One hundred years of delay have passed since President Lincoln freed the slaves, yet their heirs, their grandsons, are not fully free. They are not yet freed from the bonds of injustice. They are not yet freed from social and economic oppression. And this Nation, for all its hopes and all its boasts, will not be fully free until all its citizens are free." One might even argue that larger moments in the Civil Rights movement might not have occurred if JFK had not been killed. Peace between all peoples may have been brokered in a way that would have changed the nation if those three shots had not rung out that day.

Another part of John F. Kennedy's presidency that stood out was his unwavering support for the space program, thus propelling the United States forward in space race endeavors. In a speech delivered on May 25, 1961, President Kennedy proclaimed that the US will put a man on the moon before the end of the decade. In this speech he said, "We choose to go to the moon. We choose to go to the moon in this decade and do the other things, not because they are easy, but

because they are hard, because that goal will serve to organize and measure the best of our energies and skills, because that challenge is one that we are willing to accept, one we are unwilling to postpone, and one which we intend to win... ”. This vision, which was expressed at the height of the Cold War, sought to show the ideological and technological dominance of the United States over the Soviet Union in addition to scientific achievement. He appealed to a nation's sense of patriotism, adventure, and cause of freedom in order to rally pride in his people to support a race to get to the moon. Kennedy's call to action resulted in the start of NASA's Apollo program. This program was eventually successful in achieving its objective, of getting to the moon, with the 1969 Apollo 11 mission. A nation watched and listened to three men step foot on the moon, something that would not have come to fruition without JFK putting into motion the US space program. Kennedy's dedication to space exploration resulted in the first moon landing, which will be forever remembered as an extraordinary achievement in human history. It also paved the way for later developments in space science and technology. Had Kennedy lived, his continued focus on space exploration could have resulted in even more ambitious projects and goals. There could have been more comprehensive advances in space exploration and the NASA program. If it had not been for Kennedy's call to action in creation of the space program it is possible that Johnson might not have had the same priorities for space exploration and men from the United States might not have stepped foot on the moon on July 20, 1969.

John F. Kennedy's handling of the Cuban Missile Crisis during the Cold War showcased a balanced, diplomatic, and even tempered political response in a time our country was terrorized by a potential war. Strengthened military, posed a tough stance against Soviet Union and international communism, Kennedy warned of the Soviet's growing arsenal of intercontinental ballistic missiles and pledged to revitalize American nuclear forces. To assist him in handling the

issue, Kennedy established the Executive Committee of the National Security Council, also known as ExComm. Important figures including Secretary of State Dean Rusk and Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara were both a part of this group. Kennedy then announced a naval quarantine, or blockade, of Cuba as a less confrontational option than launching an immediate military attack. “The argument for the blockade,” he told the Chiefs, “was that what we want to do is to avoid, if we can, nuclear war by escalation or imbalance. The Soviets increase; we use [force]; they blockade Berlin. They blockade for military purposes. Then we take an initial action.” The additional firepower that the missiles in Cuba added to the Soviet arsenal didn’t add “particularly to our danger,” he insisted. “The real danger is [any] use of nuclear weapons.” This action offered both sides an opportunity to pull back from the brink of war and stopped more Soviet missiles from being delivered. Kennedy also maintained a firm public position and informed the Soviet Union that the United States was ready to use military force if necessary, even while he sought alternate diplomatic solutions. In order to communicate seriousness, this delicate balance of steely resolution and diplomacy was essential. Kennedy consented to a covert agreement to declare openly the withdrawal of American missiles from Turkey. Kennedy was careful not to take any steps that would cause the situation to worsen and turn into a full-scale conflict or war. He supported a methodical and measured strategy, even in the face of pressure for more forceful action from some military and political groups. Negotiations ultimately resulted in the resolution of the crisis. Both countries took action to lower tensions, including setting up a hotline between the White House and the Kremlin, and the situation was resolved without a nuclear exchange. JFK’s leadership during times of immense tension are looked back upon as thirteen days that October that could have changed the course of history by many

historians. There were many alternatives that JFK could have easily chosen that would have changed that decade and the course of history.

The 35th President of the United States is dead. The words were screamed and echoed throughout Novato High School and my Nana, JoAnne Ricco burst into tears. She was thirteen years old and a freshman in high school and the first Catholic president was dead. The students of Novato High School were rapidly pulled into classrooms to finish their days and deliberate about what had happened. She compared people's reactions that day to those of the reactions of the attacks on 9/11. People were crying, shocked, dismayed and panicked that something of this magnitude could happen to "our" president. As details emerged, students were held in one classroom for the remainder of the school day. "The President of the United States had been shot in Texas, he was dead. His wife was right next to him when he died and she had blood all over her pink dress when they swore in Lyndon B. Johnson." My Nana, explained that she and her devout Catholic family had followed the Catholic Camelot of the Kennedy administration and the ideals JFK was meant to uphold during his time as president. Hearing about his death in the hallways of her high school meant that Camelot was over, and the reign of Catholic ideologies were too. Her father constantly talked about the Kennedy family and the sense that it was not just one man running the country but a family and a man who believed in God. My Nana (and her family) felt like you were not just getting one Presidential leader and mind, rather a President who brought Catholic social teachings to the Oval Office and a family to support him and a country to the White House. This was the game changer for her and many across the country who placed trust in the Camelot era. It was not just President John Fitzgerald Kennedy you were getting, but a set of values and a family to back them up when he may have faltered. With the rest of the nation, my Nana and her siblings sat glued to the television on November 25th, 1963

as John F. Kennedy took his final ride down Pennsylvania Avenue in his casket on the caisson head for Saint Matthews Cathedral. Her mother prayed the rosary, her father quoted conspiracies and they all watched as little John Kennedy saluted his father for the last time (an iconic image that would be studied in history books). It should be noted that my Nana still has a painting of JFK hanging in her dining room. Together the nation and world mourned for a President who had the ability to change the world if only he had been given the opportunity.

In conclusion, one could spend their lifetime speculating about the conspiracy theories that may or may not have killed John Fitzgerald Kennedy that fateful day sixty years ago but that would not change the fact that the world lost a President that day that had the potential to change the world if had had been given the chance to see his presidency to fruition. What can be speculated on however, is the potential for his presidency. The Civil rights movement, the Cuban missile crisis, our involvement in Vietnam, the space race and so many other pivotal moments in the 1960's might have had different outcomes had President John Fitzgerald Kennedy lived that day in Dallas, Texas. As Martin Luther King Junior said, "I am shocked and grief stricken at the tragic assassination of President Kennedy. He was a great and dedicated President. His death is a great loss to America and the world. The finest tribute that the American people can pay to the late President Kennedy is to implement the progressive policies that he sought to initiate in foreign and domestic relations". The greatest tribute we can pay to JFK and his presidential legacy sixty years after his brutal assassination would be to continue to hunger and fight for what is right and moral, be compassionate and work together to put people's needs in front of our own.

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