

# About kennedys presidency



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John F. Kennedy, son of the prior ambassador of Great Britain Joseph P. Kennedy and grandson of the mayor of Boston John F.

Fitzgerald, was deliberately prepared for public service and politics by his father and was instilled with a sense of pride for the Kennedy image. When he was discharged from the Navy for medical reasons after being awarded the Navy and Marine Corps Medal, along with the Purple Heart, Kennedy was thrust into politics by his father who had made it his goal to have one of his sons be the first Roman-Catholic president of the United States. Although somewhat detached in personality, Kennedy served with distinction and proved a dynamic leader, especially through the crisis of the Cold War. Had he not been assassinated only a little under three years into his first term as president, Kennedy would have accomplished so much more.

Kennedy rose to the presidency in 1961 due in large part to his fathers transfer of presidential ambitions from Johns older brother, Joe, to John himself. As children, the Kennedys enjoyed a privileged life thanks to their rich and politically connected Boston family, attending mostly elite, Protestant affiliated boarding schools to equip them for the challenges of Harvard. Their access to notable tutors and leaders like Arthur Krock and Sir Winston Churchill propelled them ahead, reflecting their patriarchs drive that later determined a great deal of the familys political fortune. Before being elected, Kennedy served three terms in the U. S House of Representatives for Bostons Eleventh Congressional district and then proceeded to serve in the Senate from 1952 until his presidential victory. As President Kennedy recalled to journalist Bob Considine, I was drafted. My father wanted his eldest son in politics. ? Wanted isnt the right word. He

demanded it. You know my father. Ambassador Kennedy admitted to telling John it was his responsibility to run for Congress and pushing him to do so (Watson 3-5; Simsung 467).

In the Campaign of 1960, Kennedy benefited from a well financed and well-organized campaign, his fathers wealth allowing him to outspend his opponents in the primaries while still remaining competitive in the general election. Kennedys campaign was the first to include professional pollsters and experts in television advertising, and as he won primary elections in New Hampshire, Wisconsin, and West Virginia, many of the losers claimed his fathers money bought the elections. Despite these accusations, Kennedy managed to convince Democratic leaders that he was a viable candidate, securing the nomination of the first ballot at the Los Angeles Democratic National Convention with 806 delegate votes (Sisung 469).

In terms of his running mate, Kennedy chose Texas Senator Lyndon Baines Johnson; this was a surprising move for many as Johnson had previously attacked Kennedy personally at the convention, bringing attention to his lack of experience, his poor health, and his fathers preference to steer away from the affairs or interests of other groups before World War II. However, once everyone got passed the initial shock, Kennedys choice proved to be wise; Johnson effectively balanced the ticket as he has strong support among white southerners, an area in which Kennedy as a New Englander had little (Sisung 470).

Talk of the Cold War and the nuclear arms race with the Soviet Union dominated the 1960 presidential campaign and were vital international

issues through Kennedys political career; both Kennedy and Nixon pledged to strengthen American military forces, promising a tough stance against the Soviet Union and international communism. Kennedy warned of the enemys growing arsenal of international ballistic missiles and gave his word that he would revitalize American nuclear forces and criticized the Eisenhower administration for allowing a pro-Soviet government in Cuba. Kennedys inaugural address stressed the contest between the free world and the communist world, and he vowed that the American people would, pay any price, bear any burden, meet any hardship, support any friend, oppose any foe to assure the survival and success of liberty (The Cold War).

During his campaign, Kennedy faced opposition from the leading Protestant clergy who argued that a Catholic couldnt be president as they couldnt put the United States over the Roman Catholic Church. Knowing that he had to confront this issue, Kennedy told the clergy that he wasnt the Catholic candidate for president and promised that he would sooner resign the presidency than allow religious pressures to infringe the national interest. He also announced that he was not interested in whatever glory was attached to being the first Catholic President, that he just wanted to hold the position and happened to be Catholic, and that he didnt regard every Democrat who doubted the electability of a Catholic as a bigot. However, Kennedys religion did give him certain political assets as it gave him the chance to recapture a portion of Catholic voters who has previously stopped voting Democratic nationally, but he was never under the impression that all Catholics would willingly support him. After all was said and done, while Kennedy may have only gotten 38-46 percent of the Protestant vote, the 78-80 percent of the

Catholic vote and other ethnic groups helped him carry several of the urban-industrial states in the electoral college (Sisung 470, Sorenson 126-127).

Support from African American voters, which he had won from Nixon after he made phone calls to get Martin Luther King Jr. released from police custody, also helped push Kennedy ahead in the election. By helping the most influential civil rights leader, Kennedy carried 70 percent of the African American vote, which later proved crucial in several northern cities (Sisung 471).

With support from both of these parties, along with other voters, Kennedy had a realistic chance of victory. However, it was the young mans style during four nationally televised debates that propelled him over the finish line and into the presidency, his good looks projecting a confidence that Nixons demeanor did not. These debates revitalized Kennedys campaign and boosted him in the polls. By election day, Kennedy had 49.7 percent of the total vote with 22 states and 303 electoral college votes while Nixon had 49.6 percent of the total vote with 26 states and 219 electoral college votes (Sisung 471).

Towards the beginning of his presidency, Kennedy was faced with a conflicting choice on the matter of a CIA-sponsored invasion known as the Bay of Pigs; while he had reservations about the plan due to his concerns about its chances of success and how it would affect not only his image but the countrys as well, he failed to cancel the operation as he was reluctant to call off an anti-Castro effort that had been concocted during the Eisenhower administration. Kennedy falsely believed that the United States would have

plausible deniability in the affair and neglected to demand a thorough military review of the invasion plans, resulting in less than satisfactory results (Graff, 494).

Upon the day of the invasion, it was made clear that not only were the invasion plans based on false, unrealistic assumptions, but that Castros military forces were too strong and his regime too popular for a counterrevolution to succeed. Most of the invaders were captured and later ransomed, over a hundred were killed, and some were rescued from the sea by US Navy forces. In the end, Kennedy effectively picked up the pieces, accepting total responsibility, and began to regard the invasion as a lesson. He took from the incident the idea that the president has to have operational control during international crisis instead of heavily relying on experts and that there was a need for a better counterinsurgency capability in order to prevent future Castros from obtaining power in the first place. As time went on, Kennedy made high-level personnel changes in both the CIA and the military and strengthened oversight and coordinating functions, the lessons and these changes proving useful during the Cuban Missile Crisis (Graff, 494-495).

In June of 1961, shortly before the Bay of Pigs, Kennedy met with Soviet leader Nikita Khrushchev in Vienna, Austria to negotiate in terms of the arms race. Khrushchev threatened to cut off Allied access to Berlin and ordered the construction of the Berlin Wall to stop the flood of East Germans into West Germany just two months later. This was seen as a threat to Kennedy, spurring him into action as he ordered the substantial increase in American intercontinental ballistic missiles forces, added five new army divisions, and <https://assignbuster.com/about-kennedys-presidency/>

increased the nations air power as well as its military reserves. Meanwhile, the Soviets resumed their nuclear testing and Kennedy reluctantly followed suite in early 1962 (The Cold War).

After the Bay of Pigs, Secretary of State Dean Rusk placed himself closer to the president. Rusk believed the world during the 1960s to be caught up in revolutionary changes. He also believed that the U. S foreign policy should give new nations with both technical and humane assistance to help them achieve a more modern way of thinking and democracy. Rusk advocated diplomacy, highlighting civility and communication between the United States and the Soviet Union. This diplomatic attitude and ability to assess competing points of view eased not only the tensions during the Cuban Missile Crisis but also aided in the negotiation of the Limited Nuclear Test Ban Treaty in 1963 (U. S Department of State).

In October of 1962, an American U-2 spy plane photographed nuclear missile sites being built by the Soviet Union in Cuba. President Kennedy didnt want the Soviet Union nor Cuba to know that he has discovered the missiles and chose to meet in secret with his advisors to discuss the issue. Eventually, Kennedy came to a decision; a blockade was placed around Cuba to prevent the Soviets from delivering any more military supplies while Kennedy demanded the missiles be removed and the site destroyed. Everyone was unsure of how Soviet leader Nikita Khrushchev would react to these demands; however, both leaders recognized how devastating a nuclear war would be and publicly agreed to a deal in which the Soviets would disassemble both the missiles and the site in exchange for a pledge from the United States not to invade Cuba. In a separate deal that was kept

undisclosed for over 25 years, the United States also agreed to remove its nuclear missiles from Turkey (Cuban Missile Crisis).

Kennedy didnt have much influence with individual members of Congress and paid very little attention to the legislative process, seemingly lacking the energy and will to do so. He disliked the intense bargaining and time-consuming follow-ups and chose to establish a congressional liaison office headed by Lawrence F. OBrien rather than directly deal with Congress on normal legislative matters. However, OBrien was inexperienced on Capitol Hill and was seen as an unnecessary buffer between the president and Congress. This left members of Congress without the personal contact with the president that was expected and ultimately feeling shut out by Kennedy (Sisung 472).

Despite his evasion of certain legislative duties, Kennedy managed to pass three out of five high-priority bills that were on his 1961 legislative agenda; legislation for housing, aid to depressed areas, and increased minimum wage. Kennedy had also proposed a civil rights bill, but this didnt pass during his presidency as he didnt want to risk losing the support of the Democratic party, who held control over Congress, as well as Congress itself which was comprised of a conservative coalition of about 70 Republicans and southern Democrats by pushing too hard on the sensitive matter. This conservative coalition had been attempting to block any liberal-activist and federal expansion programs, along with any bill that may give African Americans civil rights, since 1938 and continued to do so during Kennedys presidency (Sisung 472-473).