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*John F. Kennedy And The New
Frontier*

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Dedication

I would like to dedicate this Extended Essay to my beloved parents, my sisters: Yousra and Yasmine, my little brother Mohamed Abd El-Karim.

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Abstract

In essence, the present dissertation seeks to highlight President Kennedy's political career with a particular focus on his domestic and foreign policies. To this end, the study has used a historical approach to trace back these important issues. At the domestic level, President Kennedy introduced a host of proposals with the aim and intention of improving the living standards of the American people notably at the level of: economy, education, healthcare and Civil Rights. As for the president's foreign policy, the study has pinpointed to The Bay of Pigs and the Vienna summit, the Cuban missile crisis in addition to some other global challenges that the President faced in different corners of the world, namely in Africa, Middle East and Northern America.

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General Introduction

GENERAL INTRODUCTION

Much has been written about President Kennedy's political, as well as private life; about both his great achievements and his blemishes. John F. Kennedy, who has become a historic figure in the US history, has been to this day an admired personality that gained the respect of and popularity among several generations. His political career evolved between the end of the fifties and the early sixties. This period of time is considered as the most stunning era of the twentieth century since it marked multiple social and political changes. The Cold War was fought as well as the Vietnam War, Berlin Wall was constructed and the globe faced the threat of nuclear war. Regardless of these challenges in foreign affairs, Kennedy was also concerned with domestic issues during his presidency, particularly those related to economy, poverty, and Civil Rights issues. The United States' Thirty Five President managed to solve most of these economic and social problems under his New Frontier's policy. The New Frontier of the sixties is referred to huge challenges and opportunities for the United States in the fields of economy, technology, as well as in social relationships.

Kennedy's New Policy has been subject of heated debates and hard talks by numerous politicians, scholars, and writers. While some see Kennedy as a myth, being the youngest person ever to be elected for the highest office of the American nation, and whose policy brought about a number of undeniable successes, many others, however, argued that his presidency was filled principles 'statements and photo opportunities than with real concrete initiatives to treat long-neglected domestic issues such as poverty and race discrimination.

Within this course of thought, the present dissertation examines Kennedy's administration and the programs he undertook during his presidency. So, the questions that seem important to ask are:

1. What did Kennedy believe was the essence of good leadership?

2. What were the strategies he adopted to boost the economy and to fight poverty and inequality?

In order to answer the questions mentioned above the study makes use of “the’ historical approach”. The general layout of the study comprises two parts.

The first former part provides background information relevant to John F. Kennedy, his childhood and early life, his early political career, his election as a president and most importantly his strategies in shaping the US Foreign policy.

The latter part deals with the economic and social programs that Kennedy suggested and introduced during his administration. More specific attention is devoted his role as a president to some sensitive issues that are of equal weight in setting welfare in the American society, not least Civil Rights. Besides, the issue of space program that was a matter of rivalry between the USA and the Soviet Union is also touched on.

In essence, the aim of this dissertation is to highlight Kennedy’s New Frontier, and his major achievements in both economic and social grounds.

Chapter One

John F. Kennedy Timeline: From Childhood to Presidency

1.1. Introduction

This chapter presents an overview about John F. Kennedy's life from childhood to presidency. Kennedy who descended from an Irish, wealthy, and politically committed family, earned several awards for his bravery and his heroic actions after serving in the U.S. Navy during the Second World War. He also served for fourteen years as Senate, building a real name for himself in the Democratic Party. In 1960, overcoming anti-Catholic prejudice, he won the presidency to become the youngest president ever to be elected in the history of United States, defeating his opponent Richard Nixon in one of the most competitive presidential election in the American history. Though during his presidency Kennedy faced a number of foreign crises, especially in Cuba, he managed to secure such achievements as the Cuban Missile Crisis.

1.2. Family Background and Education

John Fitzgerald Kennedy or "Jack," as his friends and family preferred to call him, was born on 29 May 1917 in Brookline, Massachusetts. He was the second of nine children born to Rose and Joseph Kennedy, he was also the grandson of John Francis Fitzgerald; the popular mayor of Boston known as Honey Fitz. His parents were members of two Boston's most prominent Irish Catholic, and political families. They were preoccupied with social status and legitimizing their place in Boston's privilege society. Joseph the father was a successful businessman, stock trader, movie producer, and U.S. Ambassador to England in 1937. The Kennedy children lived a privileged lifestyle that included sailing, summer homes on the coast, lavish meals, and aristocracy boarding schools.

During his childhood, little Jack often suffered from health problems and several illnesses such as diphtheria, appendicitis, whooping cough, jaundice, asthma, and pneumonia. With just four weeks before his third birthday, Jack contracted scarlet fever¹ and was hospitalized for two months. Although he made a full recovery, he was never very healthy; sickness would remain a constant in Jack's life, torturing him throughout college, military service, his appointment in Congress, And during his presidency. And because he was most of the time unhealthy his family used to joke about the great risk a mosquito took in biting him "with some of his blood the mosquito was almost sure to die!" (Darraj18).

In 1936, Jack graduated from Choate, a private school in Connecticut; while he was there he enjoyed Sports: he played tennis, basketball, football and golf. But he seemed to prefer reading. Though he was not the best student, his schoolmaster has been quoted as saying that he did not perform to his best ability. Once he graduated and with the help of his father connections, he was immediately accepted to Harvard following "the path of his father and brother..." (Kenney12). During the time his father served as the U.S Ambassador to Great Britain², he traveled in Europe and gathered information for his senior thesis later became the basis for his

¹ Jack became sick with Scarlet Fever; a highly contagious and then potentially life-threatening disease.

² Joe Kennedy served as Ambassador to Great Britain from 1938 to 1940

first bestselling book entitled Why England Slept³.

After graduating from Harvard in 1940, Jack went to Stanford University for graduate studies. In early 1941, at America's entry into World War II, Jack tried to join the U.S. Army, but he was rejected for physical reasons⁴. Yet after contacting some of his father's friends in the military, he could finally enter the Navy in October of 1941. At first, Kennedy was assigned to desk job in Washington D.C. and Charleston, South Carolina. Later, he was transferred to the South Pacific where he was made Lieutenant (Lt.) and assigned to as commander of a patrol torpedo boat: the PT-109.

Life in the South Pacific was tranquil and easy until 2 August 1943, when a Japanese destroyer struck PT 109, killing two of Jack's men and severely injuring nearly everyone else on the crew. Though Jack suffered major back injuries in the collision, "... he conducted himself with courage, poise, and stoicism" (Darraj34). Despite his own severe back pain Jack still helped other men swim to a nearby island, where the crew hid. Almost immediately, he began to explore the land and the surrounding area searching for help. Three days went by without any sign of life. Fortunately, on the fourth day, Jack met two natives and asked them to deliver a message he had proficiently carved into the shell of a coconut. The two men brought the coconut to a military post and thereafter Jack and his crew were rescued shortly.

Jack "was a unifying example of American egalitarianism" (Dallek98). For his leadership and courage, he received the Navy and Marine Corps Medal with the following citation:

For extremely heroic conduct as Commanding Officer of Motor Torpedo Boat 109 following the collision and sinking of that vessel in the Pacific War Theater on August 1-2, 1943. Unmindful of

³ It was written by Kennedy in 1940 and reprinted in 1961. The book presents in depth analysis with the intention of aiding his country to learn from England's mistakes.

⁴ Kennedy had a back injury received while playing football.

personal danger, Lieutenant (then Lieutenant, Junior Grade) Kennedy unhesitatingly braved the difficulties and hazards of darkness to direct rescue operations, swimming many hours to secure aid and food after he had succeeded in getting his crew ashore. His outstanding courage, endurance and leadership contributed to the saving of several lives and were in keeping with the highest traditions of the United States Naval Service (Donovan124).

In August of 1944, two years after the PT 109 incident, Jack and his family suffered the loss of his oldest brother Joe⁵ who was described as handsome, athletic, intelligent and ambitious. Joseph had been the one nominated by his father to become President one day. Upon his death, all the Kennedys' political ambitions were dropped on Jack's shoulders, as he explained: "I never thought at school or college that I would ever run for office myself. One politician was enough in the Family and my brother Joe was obviously going to be that politician" (Dallek117).

1.3. Early Political Career

By the end of Second World War, Jack was building a career of writer or a journalist. In 1945, he was offered a job as a journalist at the United Nations Conference in San Francisco⁶. After a brief occupation in journalism, Jack shifted his attention toward politics, though he felt ambivalent about running for public office, James MacGregor Burns said that, his friend "Jack did have political views, and strong political views, but for his own psychological reason he wished to hide them from his family, friends, and perhaps even from himself" (Schwab 59).

With some heavy pushing from his father, Jack finally decided to run for Congress in Massachusetts' eleventh district, which was inhabited by "liberal and conservative Harvard intellectuals" (Silvestri17). But most of its citizens were dock workers, fishermen and blue collar workers living in quite poor housing conditions

⁵ Navy pilot, who was killed when his plane, carrying over two tons of dynamite, suddenly exploded.

⁶ This was the founding conference of the United Nations.

in the industrial areas of the District. In order to win over working-class voters, Jack campaigned hard; meeting with local organizations, spotlighting his military service, and appearing with his grandfather, Honey Fitz, who had represented the same congressional district forty years earlier. Joe Sr. “handled all money matters” (Ibid 18) hiring a public relations to manage Jack's image and “bombard voters with pro-Kennedy billboards and mailings.” (Lasky98).

Given the amount of money put into the campaign, it was no surprise when Jack, only 29 years old, was elected to Congress on June, 1946. “People saw Kennedy, heard Kennedy, ate Kennedy, drank Kennedy, slept Kennedy...” (Ibid98).

Jack was viewed by many as “...millionaire’s son from Harvard trying to come into an area that is longshoremen, waitresses, truck drivers, and so forth...” (Dallek127). Some of his opponents called him a carpetbagger. And many others of them criticized on how young and inexperienced Jack was. The twenty nine years old won the primary election. “He earned forty percent of votes” (Silvestri24) and on November 5, 1946, Jack won the election against his Republican opponent, Lester Brown (O’Brien 205). Through the event, “Eighty three years old Honey Fitz danced a gig on a table when the news came in.” (Darraj44).

Jack served three terms in the House of Representatives ⁷. In the House, he formed himself as a moderate within the Democratic Party; he took a neutral stance towards fiscal issues, though he consistently supported social programs such as, housing and unemployment insurance. Once again with the help of his father's connections, Jack was appointed to the House Education, Labour Committee, and the Veterans' Affairs Committee; by these appointments his political visibility had been increased.

With six years of congressional experience, Jack was too ambitious to remain in the House; he decided to run for a more prominent position in the federal government. Another time, Joe Sr. played a large role in Jack's campaign by supplying his son with money and vast array of powerful connections, and

⁷ Kennedy served in the House from 1947 to 1953.

assembling a talented team of strategists for effort of beating Jack's Republican opponent, Henry Cabot Lodge, Jr.⁸.

In November 1951, Jack was elected to the Senate, his competitor candidate in this election was Senator Henry Cabot Lodge. Due to his family's efforts, Senatorial campaign was well organized, they "played a critical role, not only in terms of financial support but also with Robert Kennedy as campaign manager and the Kennedy sisters along with Rose Kennedy hosting a series of tea parties throughout the state..." (Kenney28).

On June 1952, Jack's younger brother, Robert F. Kennedy named also "Bobby", was called upon to manage Jack's campaign. Under Bobby's leadership, large groups of supporters were enlisted and assembled, and Jack's "I'll do more for Massachusetts" message thrived. One observer of Jack's campaign wondered, "What is there about Kennedy that makes every Catholic girl in Boston between eighteen and twenty-eight think it's a holy crusade to get him elected?"(Wolffe191).

As in the previous campaigns, Jack drew attention to his heroism during the Second World War. Despite frequent attacks of Addison's disease and increasing back pain Jack campaigned harder than he ever had in his life.

After four years in the Senate, Jack began to grow restless⁹. In 1956, hoping for higher political office, he sought to secure the Democratic vice presidential nomination to run alongside presidential hopeful Adlai Stevenson. Despite warnings from his father Joe Sr. who considered Jack to be "an idiot who was ruining his political career"(Dallek207). In August Jack faced difficulties to campaign for the position at the Democratic Convention. Even though he was ultimately unsuccessful¹⁰, the experience was a positive one in the long term. Stevenson's defeat by President Eisenhower in the 1956 election covered up Jack's loss. Moreover, his attempt for vice president granted him greater visibility within both

⁸Henry Cabot Lodge (1850-1924) was an American Republican Senator whose father had been a sworn political Enemy of Honey Fitz and historian from Massachusetts

⁹back problems forced him to use crutches, which he tried to hide from the media. In 1954 and 1955 he underwent two major spinal surgeries.

¹⁰Bobby attributed the loss to disorganization

the Democratic Party and the nation at large. After the convention, "John F. Kennedy" gained its popularity among the public.

During his Senate years, Jack fought for labor reform, and supported Civil Rights legislation. In one of his first speeches concerning Civil Rights issues, he declared:

I want to go to the Senate to join those who are really fighting for a change in the present Senate rules – which permit empty words to kill all attempts to protect the constitutional rights of minority groups of Americans. I want to go to the Senate to continue my fight for Civil Rights legislation (Bryant 36).

Moreover, in the 1950s as a member of Senate Committee on foreign relations, he advocated assistance to the emerging nations in Africa and Asia; his friends were surprised when he called upon France to grant Algerian independence.

At the age of thirty five, the successful politician was on top of the world, the only thing he was missing, everyone agreed, was a wife. On 12, 1953 Jack married Jacqueline Bouvier, a George Washington University student, writer, and photographer. The wedding was celebrated at St Mary's Roman Catholic Church in Newport. The couple looked not only noticeably attractive but quintessentially American as well, they seemed perfect to each other "...she loved literature and the arts. She seemed to be a perfect match for Jack, who also loved to read and had once dreamed of becoming a writer... Rather than court her with flowers and jewelry, Jack often gave her his favorite books as gifts."(Darraj51)

However, Jack, as his father, was unfaithful; he had several relations with numerous women. In 1958, Jack was unknowingly recorded as saying: "being married didn't really mean that you had to be faithful to your wife. Though Jackie as Rose was aware of Jack's womanizing, and felt both hurt and humiliated...she did not demand that he stop."(Dallek198)

In 1954, Jack was inspired by Herbert Agar's The Price of Union¹¹; it was a passage from that book, about an act of courage by an earlier senator from Massachusetts, caught Jack's attention, and gave him the idea of writing an article about political courage. Jack's "article" idea quickly became a book idea; he began working on his book during his time of recuperation from surgery. Jackie, as a good wife, helped her husband research it, making the countless trips to the library that Jack's health weakened situation prevented. The book, Profiles in Courage was published in 1956 and won the Pulitzer Prize for Biography in 1957, and quickly became a bestseller. Jack was quoted as saying "I would rather have the Pulitzer than be President" (Darraj59). Jack started to think he might achieve both.

1.4. Presidency

Although Jack failed to win the vice presidential nomination in 1956, his ambition for higher political position only raised; by the end of the 1950s numerous speculations had occurred about Kennedy's presidential nomination. Thus it was not surprising when he announced his candidacy on 2 January 1960. Though Jack's higher percentage to win, he, Bobby, and Joe Sr. were concerned about the Democratic competitors that included Adlai Stevenson, Hubert Humphrey, and Lyndon B. Johnson.

Running for president presented several obstacles for Jack, the major one was religion. Roman Catholicism was a very prominent issue in the USA. Most of Americans were worried that the Roman Catholic Church did not recognize the separation of church and state, and that nominating a Catholic for presidency might shape a risk because it would impact his decision making. Though Jack was occasionally criticized and discouraged by many¹², he campaigned with confidence, winning over voters across the country with his charm and easy nature. Therefore his chances of becoming the presidential nominee enhanced noticeably. (Schlesinger11).

¹¹ Agar's (1897-1980) book The Price of Union was one of John F. Kennedy's favorite books.

¹² Jack was told that America was a Protestant country unwilling to elect a Catholic to presidency.

Additionally, when Joseph Kennedy served as the ambassador to Britain, he had not supported the involvement of United States' in World War II and had gained enemies and friends alike in his business dealings. This fact didn't work for Jack's good. People saw Joe Sr. as a domineering man who wanted to control his children's political futures.

Jack's health struggle also made an issue. However Jack masked his pain, letting people to think he was in a good health, and whenever he had to be hospitalized, the press was told that his sickness was related back to old war injuries.

Kennedy surrounded himself with a very skilled team "his campaign organization may well have been the most efficient in American political history" (Heath39). Jack's brother Bobby played a key role in managing Jack's campaign, he focused on Jack's role as a congressman, war hero, accomplished author, and loving father¹³.

At the Democratic Convention, Jack was successful in securing the nomination. He selected Lyndon B. Johnson, an experienced Southern Democrat and the Senate Majority Leader, as his vice presidential running mate. In his acceptance speech on 15 July, Kennedy delivered his famous "New Frontier" speech that would set the tone for the rest of his presidential campaign: "We stand today on the edge of a New Frontier...the frontier of the 1960s...a frontier of unknown opportunities and perils...a frontier of unfulfilled hopes and threats."(Darraj61).

In the general election, Jack's Republican opponent was Richard Nixon, vice president of Dwight Eisenhower. In order to easily defeat Nixon, Jack suggested a series of televised debates between the two candidates; it was the first televised presidential debates in the U.S history. Compared to Jack, who looked youthful and exuded a sense of leadership and health¹⁴, Nixon appeared unhealthy, cold, and altogether unexciting. Radio's listeners to the debate thought Nixon had won, but

¹³Jack's daughter, Caroline, had been born in 1957.

¹⁴though he was actually quite ill at the time.

those who watched on TV; where Kennedy appeared confident, relaxed, and good looking, preferred to favor Kennedy as a winner. Jack's charisma and oratory charmed viewers across the country.

After the first debate Jack's campaign won more momentum. On November, Jack won over Nixon in one of the closest presidential elections of the twentieth century. (Dudley, Shiraev83).

At noon, on 8 November 1960, John F. Kennedy was sworn in as the thirty five President. In his inaugural address on 20 January 1961, Jack delivered an impassioned speech that confirmed his status not only as a great rhetorician but also as an iconic symbol of a new era in American life. With millions watching, Jack asserted what the New Frontier might necessitate to unite the nation behind his new aggressive attitude to cold politics "only a few generations have been granted the role of defending freedom in its hour of maximum danger. I do not shrink from this responsibility...I welcome it."(Darraj67).

He also declared his well known saying about the need for all Americans to be active citizens, "Ask not what your country can do for you; ask what you can do for your country". He also asked all the nations of the world to collaborate together to fight "common enemies of man: tyranny, poverty, disease, and war itself". He added:

All this will not be finished in the first one hundred days. Nor will it be finished in the first one thousand days, nor in the life of this Administration, nor even perhaps in our lifetime on this planet. But let us begin... Finally, whether you are citizens of America or citizens of the world ask of us here the same high standards of strength and sacrifice which we ask of you (Ibid67).

Jack's legendary address still stands as one of the greatest in American history; even Eisenhower's speechwriter noted that Kennedy "truly inspired the excitement of the people."(Dallek326) the address reflected that Jack's administration would draw a historically noteworthy path in both domestic policy and foreign affairs.

Jack's victory was safe. However, more recent evidence suggests that Joe Sr. played a major role in the "stolen" election in Illinois, using his ties to the mafia and the Chicago political machine to ensure union votes, collect campaign funds from corrupt organizations, and guarantee a Kennedy landslide by any means necessary

1.5. Kennedy's Foreign Policy

Jack had a strong interest in foreign policy since his undergraduate days at Harvard; he was interested in the issues of war and peace. During his short tenure as President, his foreign policy saw diplomatic and military strategies in Europe, Southeast Asia, Latin America and other regions amid considerable Cold War tensions. In his inaugural address Jack summarized his attitudes toward the cold war as follows: "Let us never negotiate out of fear. But let us never fear to negotiate"(Meagher, Gragg145).

The United States faced several international challenges in Africa, Asia, Latin America, and the Middle East. Jack was eager to take on the challenges.

1.5.1. Bay of Pigs and Vienna Summit

Within just a month of becoming President, Jack faced the Communist challenge on every front. On America's southern boundary, the new communist authority of Fidel Castro's¹⁵ Cuba challenged the United States; he ordered the running of a watered-down plan that the previous president, Eisenhower, had approved to topple Cuban leader Fidel Castro. The CIA¹⁶ was anxious to take swift action and urged Kennedy to authorize an invasion. Kennedy gave the green light and expected that the invasion would succeed. The mission was set to start on 15 April 1961, unfortunately for Kennedy the news of approaching invasion was leak in several newspapers. The newspapers' leak was only one in series of stumbling, and luckless development from the beginning. On 17 April 1961, when approximately 1,500 Cuban refugees landed at Bahia de Cochinos on Cuba's southern coast, they met a strong, well organized Cuban army, Castro forces

¹⁵Fidel Castro was a Cuban politician and revolutionary who served as Prime Minister of Cuba from 1959 to 1976.

¹⁶The Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) is an external intelligence service of the U.S. Government, tasked processing and analyzing national security information from around the world.

quickly defeated the refugee force, and announcing the failure of Jack's mission; hundreds of Cuban refugees were killed and thousands were captured. The Bay of Pigs' disaster was a humiliation for the new president. Throughout the rest of his presidency, Jack was cursed by the missteps made in the Bay of Pigs fiasco.

Still recovering from this humiliating political defeat, two months after the Bay of Pigs, Jack had regained confidence, and was set to meet in Vienna with Nikita Khrushchev, the leader of the Soviet Union. On June 1961, Kennedy travelled to Vienna for the Summit with the Soviet leader. During the Summit, Khrushchev criticized American foreign policy, defending communist revolution in Southeast Asia and described the United States as a domineering force in world politics, and renewed his threat to cut off Allied access to West Berlin. Jack was shocked by Khrushchev's aggressive style and tone, and responded in turn by ordering a fundamental increase in American intercontinental ballistic missile forces, adding five new army air divisions, and increasing the nation's air power and military reserves. The summit not only ended without resolution, but it also increased tension between the two powers.

1.5.2. Cuban Missile Crisis

After the disastrous Bay of Pigs Invasion, the Soviet Union began sending its weaponry and military personnel to Cuba, under the intent of protecting Cuba from further invasions. On October, 1962 President Kennedy was shown photographs about the installation of nuclear missiles in Cuba. It was clear that the Soviet Union was searching to provoke the United States and endeavoring to shift the balance of power in the West.

After their discovery Kennedy found himself under pressure, he had to act decisively and wisely. Thus he formed with his top advisers an emergency working group named the EX-COMM in the White House, conducting top-secret meetings. The main point of disagreement was whether to initiate with a military attack against the Cuban missile sites or to send a letter of warning to Khrushchev

notifying him of a U.S blockade. On October 22, 1962 Kennedy made a televised speech informing the public of the crisis demanding the removal of Soviet missiles.

By 26 October, the blockade had proved effective; Soviet ships that contain nuclear weapons turned back before facing American battleships off the coast of Cuba. However, the tensions continued to rise between the two nations. On 27 October, Khrushchev offered Kennedy a deal that the Soviet Union would remove its missiles from Cuba, only if the United States would remove its own nuclear missiles from Turkey¹⁷. Jack accepted the deal, he sent Bobby to arrange for the removing of U.S. missiles from Turkey, under the condition that the plan remains secret. Khrushchev responded by agreement and assured the world that the Soviet Union would begin removal of the missiles on 30 October. Jack's strategy to negotiate Khrushchev's deal ended in success. (Meagher, Gragg101)

By early November 1962 Jack's handling of the Cuban Missile Crisis was considered by most Americans as a political success in foreign policy in which Jack showed talent as a leader, decision-making abilities, and crisis management skills.

1.5.3. Global Challenges

Jack faced many other foreign policy challenges that reflected the concerns he raised about the objectives for self-determination in Africa continent. During his presidency he met with twenty eight African leaders and increased economic assistance to several nations of the continent. Guinean leader Ahmed Sékou Touré described President Kennedy as "a man quite open to African problems and determined to promote the American contribution to their happy solution". He added expressing his contentment about the "firmness with which the United States struggles against racial discrimination." (Dallek68).

In the Middle East, though Jack firmly believed in the U.S. commitment to Israeli security, he sought for closer relations with Gamal Abdel Nasser who had merged Egypt with Syria in 1958 to form the United Arab Republic. By furthering help to Nasser, Kennedy hoped that it would lead Nasser to take a more neutral

¹⁷ in 1961, the U.S. had installed Jupiter missiles in that country along the USSR's southern border.

stance in the Cold War and to distance him from the Eastern Bloc. By the end of 1963, Kennedy sent some U.S. forces to Saudi Arabia in order to reassure the critical source of Middle East stability. (Meagher, Gragg86)

President Kennedy made several visits to Latin American nations seeking to improve relations with them. Through his Alliance for Progress, the United States provided One Billion Dollars for the construction of roads, hospitals, and schools in addition to the promises of land reform.

Kennedy's attention was overwhelmed by China and India in Asia. His relationship with India was much better than with China because India followed a noncommunist model of economic growth and was a member of the Nonaligned Movement. Unlike China which shape dangerous expansionist communist power.

Despite his struggles with the Soviet leader, the situation in Southeast Asia certainly was Jack's biggest foreign policy challenge. The tiny nation of Laos which was a key nation in the region surrounded by Vietnam, China, Thailand, and Cambodia was in the center of a Civil War between powers supporting the royal family and the Communist Pathet Lao, "Jack brokered the establishment of a neutral Laotian government with the Pathet Lao and noncommunists holding cabinet posts" The war in Vietnam attracted Jack's attention too. In January, In 1961 Kennedy assigned on millions of dollars to enlarge the South Vietnamese army and to enhance the civil guard. In 1961 the subject of Vietnam was raised at the meeting of Kennedy and Charles de Gaulle in Paris. De Gaulle warned that Southeast Asia would become a "bottomless military and political quagmire". In 1963 Kennedy decided to pull his military out of Vietnam. This decision was influenced particularly by Ngo Dinh Nhu's interview to Washington Post, where he noted that there were too many military advisers in his country. (Meagher, Gragg88).

1.6. Conclusion

John F. Kennedy is considered as one of American's most admired presidents. During his short tenure as president, the United States faced a number of international challenges in Europe, South Asia, and Latin America. Apart from these foreign challenges, Kennedy was also confronted with domestic issues such as sluggish economy, poverty, and inequality.

The next chapter examines Kennedy's economic and social programs.

Chapter Two

Kennedy's Economic And Social Programs

2.1. Introduction

In addition to his charismatic look and confidence, it was President Kennedy's devotion to domestic policy actions that turned him to a historic figure. During his thousand days in office, Kennedy supported many social as well as economic programs. He fought poverty and social inequality and strived to save economy from recession by advocating tax-cut, health insurance for the elderly and for education, raising the minimum wage and improving the American welfare .In addition to his outstanding role in reducing social discrimination. Kennedy greatest challenge, however, was "to put a man on the moon and bring him back safely."

2.2. Economy Stimulation

President Kennedy strongly believed that increased prosperity would help fix some of the nation's social problems. Therefore, when he took office, his first priority was to reinforce economic growth. Unfortunately, his ability to take potent actions to stimulate the economy were hampered by the congress. It is worth noting that his most famous economic actions were: steel price roll-back, and tax cut.

2.2.1. Steel Price fixing

Steel was a key raw material used in many products, and when the cost of steel increases, every steel-made product such as cars and tanks increased in price. As Walter Heller had explained to the president in summer 1961, "Steel bulks so large in the manufacturing sector of the economy that it can upset the applecart all by itself." (Reeves 294). Thus, President Kennedy was very anxious about the inflation. That is why he did his utmost to stabilize the steel price; he asked labour negotiators to make simple demands to improve wages. However, the labour negotiators brought few improvements in pension contributions by the companies and did not, on the ground, push for extra wage increases. In so doing, Kennedy expected that steel industry would forgo a steel price increase.

On April 10, 1962, Kennedy was shocked when Roger Blough¹⁸ gave him a piece of paper announcing that "a 3.5 percent across-the-board increase in steel prices" (Meagher, Gragg120). Kennedy felt betrayed and was very angry and cursed the steel administrators. The following words expressed his public frustration and anger with steel administrators "My father always told me that all businessmen were sons of bitches, but I never believed it till now." (Giglio132). In addition to this, Kennedy declared at a press conference that "corporations, like individuals, have obligations to their country. Short-term gains by the corporation must be foregone in order to strengthen the nation. The long-term interest of the corporation was linked to the health of the national economy." (Meagher, Gragg121). He stated that the price increase announced by United States Steel was a "wholly unjustifiable and

¹⁸ Roger M. Blough (1904 –1985) was the chairman and chief executive of the United States Steel Corporation from May 1955 through January 1969.

irresponsible defiance of the public interest” (Ibid121) and ordered the Justice Department to investigate the steel companies, as he also asked the IRS¹⁹ to investigate the actions of the steel directors. Eventually, the pressure was too high for the steel administrators to resist. The efforts used by Kennedy were effective; the steel executives were forced to renounce and declare a price rollback.

2.2.2. Tax Cut

At the beginning and for fear of the effect on a stable budget, Kennedy refused the urging of his advisors to impose a tax cut to help the poor economy; he thought it was not the right time for a tax reduction. He could not demand big sacrifices from the people on the one hand, and permit a tax cut on the other. Kennedy was not yet prepared to gather enough support for more deficit spending, nor was he able to persuade the head of the Federal Reserve to reduce interest rates. Nonetheless to address and cope with the economy, Kennedy finally agreed to the tax cut.

By the end of 1962, Kennedy decided to invigorate the economy. In December, he delivered his famous speech on the tax cuts, stating that:

The final and best means of strengthening demand among consumers and business is to reduce the burden on private income and the deterrents to private initiative which are imposed by our present tax system; and this administration pledged itself last summer to an across-the-board, top-to-bottom cut in personal and corporate income taxes to be enacted and become effective in 1963. I am not talking about a 'quickie' or a temporary tax cut, which would be more appropriate if a recession were imminent. Nor am I talking about giving the economy a mere shot in the arm, to ease some temporary complaint. I am talking about the accumulated evidence of the last 5 years that our present tax system, developed

¹⁹The Internal Revenue Service (IRS) is responsible for collecting taxes and the administration of the Internal Revenue Code.

as it was, in good part, during World War II to restrain growth, exerts too heavy a drag on growth in peace time; that it siphons out of the private economy too large a share of personal and business purchasing power; that it reduces the financial incentives for personal effort, investment, and risk-taking (King, Vile95)

Kennedy assured to the economic club that lowering tax was the surest path for economic recovery; he stated that the impact expected from Tax Cut:

Profit margins will be improved and both the incentive to invest and the supply of internal funds for investment will be increased. There will be new interest in taking risks, in increasing productivity, in creating new jobs and new products for long-term economic growth (Congressional Quarterly, 434)

The battle over tax cut continued through 1963. Congressional leaders, commanded by Ways and Means Committee Chairman, Wilbur Mills²⁰, were suspicious. Mills believed that it was needless to take action, since there was no economic recession at the time. Unlike Gore²¹, who believed the decrease would be beneficial for the rich by increasing their net income, while doing nothing for the poor. But the President continued pressing. In August, the House Ways and Means Committee finally agreed on Tax Cut Bill. Ultimately, the bill was passed after the assassination of the President.

2.3. Social Programs

Beyond advancing the cause of equal rights, President Kennedy's objective from New Frontier contained new social programs, these included federal aid to education that was allocated for school construction and teachers' salaries, medical care for the elderly known as Medicare, and economic aid to rural regions. However, Like President Harry Truman, Kennedy was unable to get major parts of his domestic program approved with the conservative alliance of Southern Democrats and Republicans in control of Congress

^{20, 21} Wilbur Mills and Gore, were Democratic member of the United States House of Representatives.

2.3.1. Education

Kennedy had long supported affording financial aid to education. During his fourteen years in Congress, he proposed bills to support grants for school construction, pedagogical materials, and a group of supplementary services, such as medical equipment for school infirmaries and items for the disabled. When he ran for presidency in 1960, he was far more uttered than his competitor Nixon in calling for "general aid" to schools. Although Kennedy's victory was among the smallest of the century, he kept his numerous campaign promises he had made to schools. Indeed, he was a man of his word, shortly after his inauguration in 1961; he proposed a wide-range package of general aid for school construction and teacher salaries.

However, Kennedy proposal for education funding was opposed by both Democratic and Republican conservative forces and Catholic members of Congress as well "Catholic Democrats, many from the North and inclined to support education funding, objected to any proposal that did not provide funding for parochial schools" (Meagher, Gragg114)

Without the encouragement of Northern Catholic Democrats, Kennedy's 1961 proposal for providing funding for teachers' salaries and constructing public schools as well as constructing loans to parochial schools had no chance of success; both democratic and republican conservatives and Catholic Democrats voted against him.

2.3.2. Medical Care

Throughout the 20th century, there had been notable demands for the need of national health insurance. In 1912, President Theodore Roosevelt was the first who proposed national health insurance for all Americans. In spite of this, nothing had been concretely done. Both the American Medical Association and the professional organization for the nation's doctors expressed their disapproval with Roosevelt's proposal. Yet, during Kennedy's campaign for presidency, public opinion polls showed that public health insurance for the elderly had highly been supported,

because of rising health care costs. As Irving Bernstein has elucidated “By the spring of 1960 health care under Social Security was probably the hottest issue of the gathering presidential campaign.” (Bernstein, 249)

Once Kennedy took office, the chances of success with Medicare were been limited by the Congress. The American Medical Association continued its strong opposition and refusal to any health bill. The House Ways and Means Committee led by Wilbur Mills strongly objected to the Medicare legislation. As a consequence, the plan for national health insurance for elderly failed. (Meagher, Gragg115)

Although Kennedy’s biggest defeat was Medicare, this last became law on July 30, 1965; when President Johnson signed the Social Security Act of 1965.

Despite the resistance Kennedy faced in Congress, he did push through: an increase in the minimum wage, an extension in social security benefits, alongside an improved welfare system during his thousand days in office.

2.3.3. Minimum Wage Rise

In February 1961, Kennedy proposed legislation to increase the minimum wage from \$1 to \$1.25 an hour, but the bill was immediately opposed by Southern Democrats and Republicans who considered the wage rise as being high. After much struggle Kennedy managed to sign into law an increase. (Meagher, Gragg114)

He rightly posited that he was greatly satisfied in signing the bill to increase the minimum wage and to spread the coverage to three million because thousands of people were not covered by what he thought it was important piece of national legislation. (Cited in Gerhard and Woolley, 1961)

By the end of 1963, The Minimum Wage Act (1961) raised the minimum wage to \$1.25 an hour and increased the number of workers qualified for minimum wage. Millions of workers benefited from a slightly higher minimum wage. (Meacher, Gragg111)

2.3.4. Welfare System

When President Kennedy took office, he was highly concerned about poverty in United States. The Congress approved at Kennedy's urging about raising welfare payments, and renaming the program Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC). Under the new program, states were allowed to require beneficiaries to do work of community and attend training programs. Kennedy state that the central goal of federal welfare policy was to eradicate poverty from its roots, not just reduce it. Welfare should be "a hand up, not a hand out" in Kennedy's words.

But, beyond renaming ADC to Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC), Kennedy, in fact, took little action on welfare. Yet Kennedy's broad support for increasing help to the poor set the stage for Lyndon Johnson's Great Society. (Tanner, DeHaven, par.8)

2.3.5. Presidential Commission on the Status of Women

On December 14, 1961, President Kennedy established Presidential Commission on the Status of Women (PCSW) to examine issues related to women, and to submit proposals that would address women's rights in the different walks of life, namely: education, federal Social Security, and employment policy.

President Kennedy established the Commission on the Status of Women so as to find agreements that advanced the equality of women's workplace opportunity without losing the support of organized labor and those feminists who supported protecting women workers from profiteering and protecting women's ability to serve in traditional roles in the home (Johnson Lewis).

The Commission was chaired by President Franklin D. Roosevelt's widow's Eleanor²². It was also composed of twenty members from a group of representatives and philanthropists who were active in women's rights issues. The central goal the committee was to investigate several issues of the employment policies in place for women, among the activities addressed by the group: labor acts concerning hours and wages, legal representation for women, the need of education, and federal insurance, in addition to tax laws that had impact on women's incomes.

2.4. Civil Rights

When Kennedy reached presidency in 1961, he did not give a much concern to Civil Rights during his early years of presidency. Some historians suggested that Kennedy's attitude vis-à-vis this sensitive issue was due to the fact that he did not want to expose America's negative image to the international community, particularly to the Soviet enemy, and alienating southern voters in his quest for reelection, as well as tensing relations with southern Democrats in Congress.

However, Civil Rights' concern could not be disregarded. Kennedy's first challenge of leading a socially chaotic nation was in May 1961, when a group of white and black Civil Rights advocates known as The Freedom Riders boarded buses and attempted to break separation codes by traveling through purely racist zones of the South. Once they reached Montgomery, Alabama, they were attacked by a large group of white people. Following the incident, President Kennedy intervened by ordering U.S. Marshals to protect the Freedom Riders. But he was reluctant to take any other federal action.

On September 25, 1961; an African American man, named James Meredith, attempted to register as a student at Ole Miss University of Mississippi, but the ruler of that University, Ross Barnett, was a purely racist man, he immediately blocked Meredith's effort. People were really anxious about the incident, and the tensions in the college town grew inflammably. Kennedy was looking for a solution to avoid such kind of bad publicity; he decided to negotiate with Governor Barnett by exercising some of his presidential authority. Unfortunately, Kennedy was incapable to reach any real concrete deal.

Five days later, President Kennedy delivered a televised speech, in which he guaranteed to the nation that the African American, James Meredith, was registered in the University and he was also living safely in the Campus. As reaction to Kennedy's speech, violence and riots broke out in the town and President Kennedy was obliged to call in the National Guard, something that he had longed to avoid. At

²² Eleanor chaired the commission from its beginning to her death in 1962.

four in the morning, as the rioting intensified in Mississippi, Kennedy deployed 16,000 military policemen to bring peace in the Campus. It was a success for the military policemen, but two people were killed, two hundred federal marshals and soldiers were injured by the rioters and two hundred people were arrested. Luckily for Kennedy; the nation was so focused on the drama of the crisis that he was not asked or blamed for his mishandling the situation. (Reeves263)

The summer of 1963 was synonymous of real change in Kennedy's attitude toward Civil Rights, when another Southern governor Alabama's George tried to stop and prevent two African American students, James Hood and Vivian Malone, from enrolling at the University of Alabama. Wallace declared in his inaugural speech "segregation now, segregation tomorrow, segregation forever" and he stood at the door of the main building of the University in order to physically prevent James Hood and Vivian Malone -the two African American- from getting in the campus. Once again President Kennedy was obliged to send the National Guard. The same day; 11 June 1963, John Fitzgerald Kennedy more known as JFK delivered a televised address in which he exposed the late incidents of violence that were racially motivated, as he outlined a general proposal for a Civil Rights Bill. Even though he secretly summed up his desire for the bill to include "the minimum they can ask for and the maximum they can stand behind" (Ibid518), it was not really a progressive attitude, but it was the first crucial and definitive action that firmly aligned him with the Civil Rights Movement.

In 23 September 1963, President Kennedy offered to the Congress the most radical Civil Right legislation since Reconstruction. He commented on the fact that fifty percent of the nation, thought he was pushing too fast on integration, saying "This is not a matter on which you can take the temperature every week or two... you must make a judgment about the movement of a great historical event which is taking place in this country... Change always disturbs." two months later, JFK was assassinated and the president who came after, Lyndon Johnson, pushed the bill through Congress and signed it into act in 1964.

2.5. Space Race

In his early years in the Senate, John Kennedy demonstrated a lot of support for the American space program. In his presidential campaign of 1960; he changed his position repetitively telling to his supporters that the United States must surpass and be better than the Soviet Union which had launched Sputnik, the first artificial satellite, three years earlier.

When the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA) suggested that the nation should place a man on the moon, Kennedy loved and jumped on the idea, even his interest increased when the Soviet cosmonaut, Yuri Gagarin, became the first human in space in April 1961. And thanks to this achievement; Nikita Khrushchev took the opportunity to ask for more voices from the communist system over American capitalism.

Two years later and despite the successful Project Mercury space flights including John Glenn's 1962 orbital flight, an international opinion poll showed that most people continued to believe that the Soviet Union was ahead in space exploration. (Meagher, Gragg121)

On May 25, 1961, President Kennedy proposed an interesting goal for his fellow citizens before his appearance in the Congress, calling the nation to "commit itself to achieving the goal, before this decade is out, of landing a man on the moon and returning him safely to earth" (Giglio153) the cost of the Project Apollo program is estimated at nearly \$40 billion.

American scientists and many liberals argued that such funding would be better spent on medical research and critical social programs, also a great majority of American citizens agreed with what had been said and they showed opposition to such an expensive project.

Without paying attention to what have been said, President Kennedy offered a number of rationales for the space program, then in 1962, he told to reporters in a press conference "I do not think the United States can afford to become second in

space because I think that space has too many militarily, politically, psychologically, and all the rest.”(Dallek651), he also believed that such an ambitious objective was appropriate for the theme of his administration “the New Frontier”; his call for the sacrifice for the greater good of the nation. Yet, it was the context of the Cold War that really pushes him more to contribute to the funding of the project. As the NASA director James Webb said “Everything we do ought to really be tied into getting on to the moon ahead of the Russians. Otherwise we shouldn’t be spending that kind of money.” (Ibid165)

Finally, the President convinced the nation and by 1965; almost 60 percent responding to a poll approved the project (Meagher, Gragg122).By July 1969, Kennedy achieved his Last Frontier, when Neil Armstrong and Buzz Aldrin became the first humans ever to set foot on Moon.

2.6. Conclusion

Although Kennedy's tenure as president was tragically short, he is extensively considered as one of the most influential presidents of all time. Through his brave actions and figurative language, Kennedy captured million hearts and minds of Americans. Even though his presidency did not grant wealth of concrete political achievements, his legacy and heritage in American politics has been deep. By New Frontier, Kennedy helped to set the phase for the major social, economic, and political alterations of the past half century.

General Conclusion

General Conclusion

During the presidential campaign of 1960, John F. Kennedy delivered his most influential and legendary “New Frontier” address in which he promised a package of reforms that would help regain America’s place in the world and lead it to a prosperous future. This very ambitious intention was clearly reflected in his “New Frontier” philosophy that basically sought to advance the country at all levels.

Once he reached the presidency, President Kennedy rolled up his sleeve and started working to solve U.S’ major domestic issues; his highest domestic priority was to save economy from recession of the Eisenhower’s years. But in 1962, Kennedy lost the confidence of business leaders when he sought to roll back an extreme price increase in the steel industry. After his undeniable success in rolling back steel prices, he called for a large tax cut to stimulate the economy. Although conservatives in congress opposed Kennedy’s tax cut proposal at the beginning, the tax bill ultimately became a law after his death.

The New Frontier of Kennedy’s administration was very ambitious to come up with a series of domestic improvement programs at the social sphere in particular. Kennedy provided significant financial support devoted to school construction and teachers’ salaries. He also showed a significant commitment to guarantee health care insurance for the elderly. What is more, he introduced an increase in the minimum wage aiming at extending social security benefits. In brief, he intended to set up a welfare system.

However, the conservative opposition in Congress destroyed any hopes of passing Kennedy’s proposals; Democratic and Republican conservative and Catholic members of Congress opposed education funding, The American Medical Association and the House Ways and Means Committee strongly objected the Medicare legislation, and only small increase in the minimum wage was made.

Race discrimination, as a sensitive issue in the American nation, had long been one of Kennedy’s major concerns. Though he made some gestures toward

Civil Rights, he did not handle the goals of the civil rights movement until almost the end of his presidency. In fact, it was only during the year 1963 that he presented the most extensive Civil Rights legislation since the time of Reconstruction.

Space industry had long been a matter of race between the U.S and the Soviet Union. Owing to this, Kennedy uncompromisingly supported space funding and challenged the American people and government by sending a man to the moon by the end of the decade. By 1969, Kennedy reached his last frontier when the Neil Armstrong, the famous astronaut, became the first man to set a foot on the moon.

In his short tenure as president, John F. Kennedy failed to achieve all he wished domestically. But the proposals and plans he supported survived after his death; all became part of President Johnson's Great Society.

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