

John F. Kennedy
History, Memory, Legacy:
An Interdisciplinary Inquiry
Introduction

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On September 25, 1963, President John F. Kennedy traveled to Grand Forks, North Dakota, greeted its citizens while touring the city, and delivered a speech at the University of North Dakota Field House, which addressed important issues still vital today: environmental protection, conservation of natural resources, economic development, the struggle between democracy and totalitarianism, and the importance of education and public service. The University conferred on the President an honorary Doctor of Laws degree. Over 20,000 people assembled on campus that day to see JFK -- the largest campus gathering in UND history. Tragically, less than two months later, the thirty-fifth President of the United States was assassinated in Dallas.

To commemorate the forty-fifth anniversary of the President's Grand Forks visit, and in tandem with the University's one hundred and twenty-fifth anniversary, UND organized a September 25-27, 2008 conference to foster interdisciplinary discussion and analysis of the issues addressed in JFK's UND speech, as well as other significant issues of the Kennedy era, including civil rights, space exploration, the nuclear threat, and the influence of the media on presidential politics. The Conference also explored issues related to the President's assassination within weeks of his UND visit. With one of the finest aerospace schools in the country, a nationally renowned Energy & Environmental Research Center, an innovative Peace Studies Program and faculty expertise in areas as diverse as international law, Beat poetry, voting rights, supply-side economics, and forensic anthropology, the University of North Dakota was an ideal venue for this interdisciplinary exploration of the Kennedy era.

Moreover, scholars from institutions as varied as Grinnell College and the University of Maryland joined UND faculty in examining Kennedy-era themes through various academic lenses, including literature, political science, film, economics, philosophy, law, history and the sciences. Critical contributions were also made by a former Deputy Assistant Attorney General for the U.S. Department of Justice, Civil

Rights Division, a United States District Court Judge, and academics from other countries, such as Britain and Germany.

Anchoring the Conference were keynote addresses by President Kennedy's Special Counsel, Ted Sorensen, the last living member of JFK's inner-circle, and Richard Reeves, his biographer and award-winning author of what is considered by many to be the authoritative work on JFK's administration – *President Kennedy: Profile of Power*. Finally, the UND Eternal Flame, at the heart of campus, provided a fitting locale for a JFK memorial service.

From all the scholarship and discussion of those three scintillating days, we present this publication of Conference proceedings, which includes the papers presented and transcripts of significant addresses and discussions. We are very pleased to make this scholarship easily accessible to the public through this on-line format.

The materials presented here represent a fascinating mix of eyewitness personal accounts of the Kennedy years and scholarly analysis of perhaps the era's most critical issues. Some of the papers offer ground-breaking research into such topics as East German intelligence gathering in connection with JFK's Berlin visit, the impetus behind development of a consular relations treaty, and the Kennedy administration's policy on civilian use of nuclear power. Other papers suggest compelling revisions of conventional wisdom on familiar topics such as the Cuban Missile Crisis and the Vietnam War. And, when viewed in their entirety, the papers have great breadth.

That breadth is apparent from the beginning. Part II of the compilation covers the topic "JFK, Literature, and the 1960s." This section features works on the poetry of the early portion of the decade, including Dr. Heidi Czerwiec's insightful look at the period's Confessional and Beat poets ("The Long Shadow of the Confessional and Beat Poets") and Katie Stephenson's brilliant exposé on the relationship between Allen Ginsberg and the music of the era ("A Revival of Poetry and Song: Allen Ginsberg, Rock and Roll, and the Return to the Bardic Tradition"). Other papers in the section touch on the JFK assassination, including Lucia Cimpean's trenchant analysis of Don DeLillo's Lee Harvey Oswald *roman à clef*, *Libra* ("Living and Writing on the Edge in Don DeLillo's *Libra*"), and Michael Snyder's fascinating examination of alleged assassination conspirator Clay Shaw's work as a playwright and its connection to Shaw's possible involvement in the conspiracy.

Part III of the compilation, "JFK and the World," considers President Kennedy's impact on foreign policy and space exploration. Some of the topics covered here one would expect to find, such as the Peace Corps, Vietnam, the Cuban Missile Crisis, and the Space Program. "Experiencing the Peace Corps" captures an interdisciplinary panel discussion moderated by UND Professor Robin David. The interlocutors were UND

Professors and Peace Corps volunteers Kathy Gershman (Bolivia, 1967-69, healthcare), Michael Beard (Iran, 1968-70, English education), Joe Vacek (Georgia, 2006, judicial reform and English education), and Cory Enger (Niger, 2006-08 sustainable agriculture). Each described his or her individual Peace Corps experiences, which provide great perspective as they took place during the bookend decades of the program in the 1960s and the 2000s.

Many wonder if the United States would have descended into the bloody abyss of the Vietnam War if President Kennedy had been reelected in 1964. In "JFK and Vietnam: An Unanswered Legacy in Film and History," Scott Racek focuses on the CIA-sponsored November 1963 assassination of Vietnamese President Ngo Dinh Diem in trying to disabuse readers of the notion, accepted in the popular imagination and in the cinema, that JFK would have withdrawn all American troops from Vietnam had he lived. This analysis is rounded out by Albert Berger in his paper "The Indochina Bind: John Kennedy and Vietnam." Dr. Berger explains that the Vietnam quagmire was the unfortunate byproduct of Democrats' worst fears about the potential of a new McCarthyism that might have turned them out of office had they abandoned Indochina to the Communists.

Dr. Berger also demythologizes the thirteen most dramatic days of the Kennedy presidency in his paper "The Cuban Missile Crisis and New Narratives of the Cold War." The paper reveals that, far from the omnipotent nuclear menace portrayed by the American press and politicians in the period leading up to and during the Crisis, the U.S.S.R. was in a vastly inferior military position to the United States. Dr. Berger establishes that Khrushchev used bluff and bluster to compensate for the inferiority but after his ouster -- due in large part to the Crisis -- the Soviets invested in closing the vast military gap and inaugurating the policy of Mutually Assured Destruction (MAD).

Finally, there has always been much speculation about President Kennedy's motives in ramping up the American space program for a 1960s moon launch. In "'We Choose to Go to the Moon': JFK and the Race for the Moon," Richard Collin details and analyzes the Cold War strategic thinking behind President Kennedy's push to land a man on the moon by decade's end. Given the decline of NASA in recent years and its fight to remain relevant, this is a valuable and timely contribution.

The balance of Part III occupies ground less trodden. Much scholarship on JFK's Cold War foreign policy has centered on the administration's dealings with the Soviet Union. But President Kennedy never lost sight of the era's other Communist behemoth, China. In his paper "There Are Bigger Issues at Stake": The Administration of John F. Kennedy and United States-Republic of China Relations, 1961-63," Dr. Charles Pellegrin explores the evolution of JFK's China policy. His is a well researched examination of how that policy began to veer away from total support of Chiang Kai-shek's Republic of

China and position itself to improving relations with Mao Tse-tung's People's Republic of China.

Similarly, foreign policy experts have shed relatively little light on the Kennedy administration's achievements in the area of consular relations. Cindy Buys helps fill this void by offering fascinating insights on the Kennedy State Department's pivotal role in codifying the international law of consular relations. "JFK's Legacy Regarding Consular Relations Law," explores the JFK-orchestrated negotiation of the Vienna Convention on Consular Relations, the bilateral U.S.-U.S.S.R. Consular Convention, and the continued importance of consular treaties today.

Finally, Dr. Robert Waite's ground-breaking scholarship in his paper "JFK, Berlin and the Berlin Crises: 1961-1963" rounds out this Part of the compilation. Based on his original primary-source research of East German Secret Police ("Stasi") archives, as well as reviews of East German newspapers from the period, Dr. Waite shows that East German officials and the media considered President Kennedy's summer 1963 "*Ich bin ein Berliner*" visit to Berlin quite provocative. He also demonstrates the surprising level of grief East Germans experienced shortly thereafter in the wake of JFK's assassination.

Part IV of this compilation, "JFK and the United States," turns the focus inward and examines some of JFK's domestic policies. It begins with perhaps the most important domestic issue JFK faced -- civil rights. From the Freedom Riders to the March on Washington, with its famous "I Have a Dream" speech, there are many powerful associations between the Kennedy years and the Civil Rights Movement. This section benefits from the scholarship of Brian Landsberg, a former Deputy Assistant Attorney General of the Department of Justice's Civil Rights Division. As a Division line-attorney in the 1960s, Professor Landsberg operated on the Movement's front lines and provides his insights about it in his paper "The Kennedy Justice Department's Enforcement of Civil Rights: A View from the Trenches."

Professor Landsberg's paper calls into question the notion that, despite some of the powerful symbolism of its era, the Kennedy administration was ultimately ineffectual with respect to promoting and securing equal rights for America's black citizens. He demonstrates that, without Congressional authorization, and in addition to its Herculean efforts to secure voting rights and equal access to interstate transportation for African-Americans, the Division was active in devising ways to combat racial segregation of public schools. To place all that in context, Professor Landsberg has also contributed to Part IV a "Civil Rights Chronology: January 1961-November 1963."

This section concludes by analyzing a topic little explored until now: JFK's energy policy. In "Atomic Power, Fossil Fuels, and the Environment: Lessons Learned and the Lasting Impact of the Kennedy Energy Policies," Joshua Fershee contributes

innovative research and analysis regarding the complexity of President Kennedy's energy policy and its visionary global approach. Professor Fershee demonstrates that JFK sought to promote conservation while appropriating nuclear steam generation for civilian energy use and expanding American infrastructure for coal and electricity. He concludes that, from a strategic perspective, JFK's bold and expansive vision should still serve as a model for modern policymakers.

Many commentators have noted that, for politically strategic purposes and unlike any president before him, John F. Kennedy used the media to establish a glamorous image and style, posthumously embodied in the term "Camelot." Part V of the compilation, "JFK – Media, Image and Legacy," considers the implications of this trend-setting presidential phenomenon. It begins by chronicling early opposition views of Camelot in Laura Jane Gifford's paper "Kennedy's Loyal Opposition: *National Review* and the Development of a Conservative Alternative -- January-August 1961." Next, Dr. Richard M. Filipink examines the evolution of JFK's image over time in "Primarily a Political Problem": Constructing the Image of the Kennedy Presidency, 1961-Present." Using the Cuban Missile Crisis and Vietnam as analytic prisms, Dr. Filipink traces the development of JFK's public persona from Cold Warrior-icon, as crafted by Kennedy biographers and historians in the 1960s and 1970s, through a 1980s transition period, to a new statesman-figure created for the 1990s and 21st century.

In the Section's third paper "JFK: The Exceptional Idea," Dr. James Boys explains how the term "*Kennedyesque*" entered into our political and cultural lexicon and how it continues to exert considerable influence on the American national psyche. Dr. Boys demonstrates how all office seekers and statesmen try, to one degree or another, to partake of or co-opt the Kennedy style but ultimately come up short because their efforts are measured against what Boys describes as the "sentimental constructs of the Kennedy golden age." Finally, Mary Stromme concludes Part V by specifying the Kennedy impact on the most recent presidential contest. In her paper "Rhetoric in the Campaign Website of Barack Obama," Stromme recalls the central role of television in JFK's political fortunes and compares it to the comparable role played by the internet in the political rise of our most recent president, Barack Obama.

Part of the Kennedy mystique is inextricably bound up in his assassination – the poignancy of a vibrant leader violently and graphically cut down in the prime of life amid an adoring public. Part VI, "The Death of the President," attempts to measure what happened that day in Dallas, both in terms of emotional impact and forensic investigation. With regard to the former, Eleanor Williams connects her personal anguish of that day to the iconography of the Kennedy presidency and to larger national themes in her paper "That Day in Dallas." Similarly, Dr. Steve Andrews's paper "'I Looked Up and I Looked Down': JFK, Mrs. D, and the Space of Citizenship," explains how November 22, 1963's collective grief brought the first glimmerings of an American identity to a

young adopted boy taken from his foreign birthplace and brought to an unwelcoming rural America. Finally, in "The Day Kennedy Was Assassinated," David Marshall describes the moment that time and all of humanity seemed to stand still in Grand Central Station when it was announced that President Kennedy had been killed.

The balance of Part VI deals with the evidentiary and forensic aspects of the assassination. Many Americans reject the conclusion of the Warren Report that Lee Harvey Oswald acted alone and believe there was a conspiracy behind President Kennedy's assassination. Gary Severson and John Williams point to possible North Dakota conspiracy links in their scholarship. In his piece "Three Gunshots at Life," Severson tells the story of *Life* magazine Managing Editor Edward K. Thompson, a native North Dakotan who was closely connected to the infamous "Zapruder film" – the most complete visual recording of JFK's murder. Does Thompson's connection to the Zapruder film leave possible clues about an assassination conspiracy? In a separate paper, "Lee Harvey Oswald: North Dakota and Beyond," Severson teams up with John Williams to demonstrate that there may have been a Lee Harvey Oswald double living in Stanley, North Dakota during the 1950s. They contend this doppelganger might have been controlled by the United States government for eventual use in the alleged assassination cabal. Looking at the bigger picture, James Fetzer presents a treasure trove of photographic and diagrammatic material that he believes points to a conspiracy to assassinate President Kennedy in "Dealey Plaza Revisited: What Happened to JFK?"

Finally, the Conference was honored and enriched by the presentation of U.S. District Judge John R. Tunheim, who had previously served as the Chair of the JFK Assassination Records Review Board. In "Workings of the Assassination Records Review Board," Judge Tunheim traces the Board's origins and explains how it pursued the painstaking work that led to the release of thousands of new assassination-related documents to the public.

Although it appears first in the compilation, I have reserved Part I for last here to highlight its moving and meaningful impact. Titled simply "The Presidency," it includes the timeless words of President Kennedy himself in the transcript of his address to the University of North Dakota on September 25, 1963. And it provides the insights of the man who wrote that speech for JFK, Special Counsel to the President Ted Sorensen. I felt privileged to have a discussion with Mr. Sorensen on the stage of the Chester Fritz Auditorium forty-five years to the day after President Kennedy's historic appearance on the UND campus. In that conversation, whose transcript is titled "I Was Chief of Staff for Ideas," Mr. Sorensen shared fascinating personal insights about his relationship with the president, his work at the White House, and his participation in some of the most significant events of the twentieth century, including the Cuban Missile Crisis.

Part I also includes the moving words of UND President Robert Kelley at the memorial to President Kennedy held at the campus's Eternal Flame. Finally, it concludes with the remarks of perhaps the finest chronicler of the Kennedy administration – award-winning author and journalist Richard Reeves. His remarks, titled "President Kennedy: Profile of Power," dig deeply into the territory covered by Reeves's acclaimed 1992 book of the same title. Focusing chronologically on one 48-hour period in June 1963, Reeves demonstrates that, unlike conventional presidential histories that handle themes individually in serial fashion, the actual experience of the presidency, in real time, consists of several themes intersecting simultaneously. In this case, he considers JFK's drafting and delivering the epochal "peace speech," the stand-off at the schoolhouse door with George Wallace as the University of Alabama was being desegregated, the drafting and delivering of JFK's great civil rights address immediately after the stand-off, the iconic self-immolation of the South Vietnamese monk, and the assassination of NAACP leader Medgar Evers. It is a fascinating exposition.

I would like to thank Drs. John Delane Williams and Robert G. Waite for their devotion and hard work on this project. Without them, and their fine organizational and editing skills, this publication would never have seen the light of day. I would also like to thank UND Conference Service's Robyn von Ruden, who was instrumental in helping us organize and conduct the conference, and Doris Boernhoft, UND Computer Services, who helped us integrate this material into the online format. I must also express my gratitude to those who worked with us on the JFK Conference Committee and to the University for its tremendous support. It has been a team effort from the beginning.

The University of North Dakota sesquicentennial celebration seemed a fitting framework in which to commemorate JFK's historic UND visit. We believe this publication beautifully captures the creative and interdisciplinary spirit of that commemoration. Americans in 1963 no doubt understood that President Kennedy chose UND for his North Dakota visit because it was the flagship university of a great state. More than four decades on, our national gathering to discuss JFK's life and legacy served as a welcome reminder that UND remains one of the premier higher learning and research institutions on the Great Plains. We are grateful and proud to be a part of this intellectually vibrant campus at the country's center and from this unique vantage point we are thrilled to reach out to the world at large and give it this publication about our nation's thirty-fifth president. We hope you will enjoy it.