

## **Fairytale Presidency**

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In the 245 years that America has been a country, over 45 presidents have served in office. Some presidents have had notable accomplishments, such as Abraham Lincoln's ability to lead America out of slavery and into freedom, or George Washington's role as commander and chief of the Colonial army during the Revolutionary War. There have also been some incompetent presidents, such as Donald Trump, who was impeached twice, and Richard Nixon, who was involved in the Watergate scandal while in office. However, among all of the presidents, one man left a legacy that proved to be more iconic than any other: John F. Kennedy. He was the 35th President of the United States, serving from 1961 until 1963, when he was infamously assassinated in a motorcade in Dallas, Texas. Despite the media's favorable outlook on Kennedy, people still somehow doubt that Kennedy was the great president that he was portrayed to be. Many people believe that because his term was cut short due to his tragic assassination, he underachieved on his promises. The main argument was the fact that his campaign was based on civil rights, and in the end, he did not do as much as he expected. However, this was not true and Kennedy still had a major impact on civil rights in the country. John F. Kennedy is one of the best presidents in US history because he achieved more significant accomplishments, in three years than most presidents have: such as, ratifying the Nuclear Ban Test Treaty, peacefully resolving the Cuban Missile Crisis, beginning the Civil Rights Movement, and creating the Peace Corps program.

John F. Kennedy was born on May 29th in 1917. He grew up in a wealthy family with eight siblings, in Brookline, Massachusetts during the 1910s and 1920s. It is evident that intelligence ran in the family, as most of the nine Kennedy children went on to achieve success. His brother Ted Kennedy is a former United States senator from Massachusetts. In addition to

that his brother, Robert F. Kennedy, formerly was a United States Attorney General. Jean Smith Kennedy, their sister, is a former United States Ambassador to Ireland. Eunice Kennedy, another sister of his, is the founder of the Special Olympics too. Kennedy's father was also big in the political scene. He dreamed that his kids would make a name for themselves, and his dream came true.

Kenedy first made a name for himself, during his time in the army. In WWII, the boat PT-109 was shot down by a Japanese marine shot it down. Stranded in what seemed like the middle of nowhere, the boat began sinking. Unsure of what to do, Kennedy looked around in panic. He saw his injured fellow marine beside him, and instinctively knew what he had to do. He got engineer Patrick McMahon on his back and started swimming to safety. He knew that the nearest island, Olanoketui Island, was still a very long swim. After what seemed like an eternity of swimming, Kennedy, with a man on his back, swam a staggering amount of 3.75 miles, saving the life of McMahon.

John F. Kennedy was a gentlemanly, well-educated, and respectful man. He attended Choate Rosemary Hall for high school, one of the best schools in the country. Leaving your family to attend a school at the age of 14 is difficult for any child, but it was especially difficult for him given the circumstances. Choate Rosemary Hall was a rigorous and highly selective high school, so getting accepted into it was an accomplishment in its own right. He was a bright young man who was accepted to both Princeton and Harvard Universities. In 1935, he attended Princeton for only about two months before being forced to leave due to a gastrointestinal illness that landed him in the hospital for several days. Following that, he enrolled at Harvard University, where he eventually graduated, receiving a Bachelor of Arts in Government and leaving as one of the class of 1940's most notable alumni.

Kennedy declared his presidential candidacy in early 1960 and was inaugurated the following year. He was unique even in the way he was elected. This was an interesting administration since it was the only one in which only the 50 states voted. With Hawaii and Alaska not having voted in the previous election and the District of Columbia not being added until the next election. This is where he developed his polite and professional demeanor. Because of the political climate in the early 1960s, his Catholic faith was also a barrier in his presidential election. However, at the same time, it was an opportunity for him to build a positive reputation for Catholics in the public eye. His assertive demeanor and professionalism drew the public's attention despite Kennedy being very young for presidential standards. He was inaugurated at the age of 43 making him the second-youngest president ever, only behind Theodore Roosevelt who was inaugurated at the age of 42 back in 1901. Kennedy was a candidate who believed in democracy and had democratic promises prior to his election. He made some claims that appeared to be very bold at the time, such as his involvement in leading space achievements to the national security and prestige of the United States. He believed that America could send a man to the moon, which may not seem crazy today, but it was a very bold and seemingly unrealistic idea back in the 1960s. Although he did not accomplish this during his three-year presidency, he paved the way for American space exploration in 1969, when Neil Armstrong became the first man to land on the moon. During his campaign, John F. Kennedy borrowed key details from Franklin D. Roosevelt's beliefs. They were both Democrats who gained a majority of the Catholic population, due to their rather traditional character. He mentioned ethnic voting blocks, urban minorities, and organized labor. Kennedy's strategy was also to pull similar ideas to that of Dwight D. Eisenhower in that he hoped to gain support from Catholic voters who had voted for him. During his campaign, Kennedy was most well-known for his support for civil

rights. Civil rights are rights that protect individuals and their freedom from infringement. He also had many unusual encounters as president, forcing him to have to solve the unthinkable. However, Kennedy was the right man for this since he was a man of great respect with great and lifesaving negotiation skills, due to the fact that he was always an outcast in society.

John F. Kennedy successfully and peacefully resolved the Cuban Missile Crisis, which prevented an unnecessary war from happening in America. In the October of 1962, the world seemed to be right on the edge of a nuclear war occurring. An American U-2 spy plane was sent to Cuba for an investigation and what they found was the Soviet Union had been building missiles at sites in Cuba. Kennedy did not want the Soviet Union and Cuba to find out that he is now aware of these missile sites so he decided to privately meet with his presidential advisors to discuss the problem (GARTHOFF, 2000). Kennedy's first plan was to place a naval blockade around Cuba. With a big ring of ships that surrounding a country, all possible trading routes were blocked. To avoid any war or outbreak, "...the Kennedy Administration initially rejected an airstrike on the missiles because it could not be surgical and the problem of advance warning was unsolvable. An attack without warning would not be understood by the world..." (Medland, 1990, p. 434). Several major powers were opposed to Kennedy's initial plans at the time, such as his vice-president at the time, Lyndon B. Johnson. Americans were wondering why we had not responded to the Soviet Union, and it appeared that no one supported Kennedy. Also if the United States were to attack back it would go against what America was meant to be. America was intended to be a great place of freedom and justice, so possibly starting a nuclear war that could end the world would not be the best choice. This was also a very big part of Kennedy's campaign, the American Dream. "Therefore, the President supported a quarantine, for such action provided, according to Hilsman, 'a step by step progress'" (Medland, 1990, p. 434).

Nobody was certain about how the Soviets would respond to the naval blockade placed around the place that has their missile sites. Many people were still in fear of a nuclear war happening, despite John F. Kennedy and the U.S. not wanting to launch a missile. But then the leaders of the two powerful countries, Khrushchev and Kennedy came to an agreement due to Kennedy's ability to negotiate and settle problems. The Soviets agreed to dismantle all of the missiles in their sites in Cuba because they, along with the United States, had the power and possibility of ending the world. Because the world was relatively peaceful, no leader wanted to disrupt it. JFK was a very peaceful negotiator, but he had great influences in other ways too

John F. Kennedy ratified the Nuclear Ban Treaty, which prohibited nuclear-weapons tests in the atmosphere, outer space, and beneath the sea ultimately helping the world control nuclear weapons. The bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki began the "era" of nuclear weapons. Even though that marked the end of WWII, the use of atomic weapons, even if they are just testing them, became a common occurrence (Boers, 2012). In the late 1950s, there were several scientific reports arguing against the testing of nuclear weapons in the environment. Many people of the public disapproved of this, but many others approved, it was a controversial topic. Leaders of other countries began talking about this issue but nobody was able to fully resolve it. Kennedy had been against nuclear weapon testing for a long period of time now, but he had no opportunity to come to an agreement with anyone. "On 28 October [of 1961], a U.S. reconnaissance plane strayed into Soviet air space while on a mission monitoring nuclear tests in the Far East" (Mastny, 2008, p. 8). As the U.S. president at the time, Kennedy knew that he should be the one to apologize regardless of the fact that it was not his fault in particular. While apologizing Kennedy took the opportunity to negotiate nuclear test bans with the Soviet Union. However, the Soviet Union was hesitant to come to an agreement with the United States because

of Moscow. Moscow, the capital of the Soviet Union, has never been on good terms with the United States. Because of this the United States and John F. Kennedy especially knew what they had to do. They would have to create peace with each other if they would like a treaty banning nuclear tests to occur. After a two-year period of being on good terms with Moscow, Kennedy was able to reach an agreement with Moscow. "As 1963 began, the Soviet Union became more accommodating. Moscow's relations with the United States took a turn for the better as the two governments announced publicly that their dispute over Cuba was resolved" (Mastny, 2008, p. 11). In 1963, JFK was finally able to come to an agreement with Khrushchev which prohibited all nuclear tests from happening, regardless of where they wanted to do so (Herzog, 2017). Kennedy got a lot of praise and a lot of backlash from this because a good portion of people still wanted nuclear tests to be allowed but Kennedy held firm and although he upset a large portion of people, he did what showed to be the option that benefited the country the most. However, ratifying this treaty was not the only life-changing action of Kennedy.

John F. Kennedy had a significant impact on civil rights changes and was a figure in influencing what became known as the Civil Rights Movement. During Kennedy's presidency, society was drastically different from what it is today. Segregation and racial biases were much more present and played a major role during this time period. Blacks were far from equal to whites during this time. "The President's Committee on Equal Employment Opportunity, headed by Vice President Johnson, investigated seventeen hundred complaints of discrimination in employment by companies receiving government contracts and found in 70 percent of them that discrimination existed" (Lord, 1978, p. 152). Issues like this were central to Kennedy and his campaign. There was no way for Kennedy to immediately correct all of these injustices, but he did take small steps that helped him lead America out of segregation. The first step was to have,

“The government forced state and federal agencies to stop racist practices, eliminate segregated services, and also hired an unprecedented number of blacks” (Lord, 1978, p. 152). Although this may appear unethical and unfair to all other races, it was only a temporary act to allow America to take a step forward in its fight against racism. The same committee was used during Eisenhower's presidency, but he was unable to use it as effectively as Kennedy. Later that year, the civil rights bill began through many hurdles in Congress and received the support of House and Senate Republican leaders. However, it was not passed before President John F. Kennedy was assassinated on November 22, 1963. Lyndon B. Johnson was left in charge of the bill. Johnson had spent more than two decades in Congress as a congressman and senator from Texas before becoming vice president. With the help of Robert Kennedy's Justice Department and the outpouring of grief following the president's assassination, he utilized his contacts with southern white legislative leaders to pass the Civil Rights Act as a means to remember President Kennedy. (Fairclough, 1990). However, Kennedy's efforts to improve living circumstances in the United States were not limited to this.

John F. Kennedy introduced the Peace Corps program which eventually proved to be a great accomplishment. The Peace Corps program was a program that any country was able to participate in. This program proved to be a very important and relevant program that helped shape America today. The program was for 3 main purposes. To help people of interested countries and areas meet their needs of trained workers. Promoting a better understanding of Americans was important too. And the final reason was to promote a better understanding of people's part of the Americans. To be a volunteer for the program, you had to meet three qualifications. To be able to continue the program, a country must first invite the Peace Corps. Following that, the program will prioritize various countries based on characteristics such as



their economies. The Peace Corps volunteers must also be safe, which is the third and last criterion (Coffey, 1962). “Life as a Peace Corps volunteer is not easy and volunteers face many challenges, from language barriers to poor living conditions. There is no salary. Volunteers receive a monthly stipend for room, board, and few essentials—’enough to be at a level sufficient only to maintain health and basic needs.’” (John F. Kennedy Presidential Library Staff., 1979, para. 11). The purpose of the Peace Corps was to outgrow the Cold War. Kennedy talked about how the Soviet Union had hundreds of men and women, of many different professions ready to spend their lives in the world of communism. Kennedy wanted the United States to involve Americans more actively in the cause of global democracy, peace, development, and freedom. The Peace Corps was officially established on March 1st, 1961. R. Sargent Shriver reluctantly accepted the president’s request to lead the organization. Shriver was very successful with his tasks, as he recruited a team of volunteers that were motivational, visionary, and hardworking leaders. On his first trip as director, he received invitations from the leaders of India, Ghana, and Burma (a country in Asia, bordering India, China, Laos, Bangladesh, Thailand, more modernly known as Myanmar) almost immediately. The very first country was Ghana, where Tanganyika invited the Peace Corps program. Kennedy welcomed the inaugural group of volunteers to the White House on August 28, 1961. After their welcoming, they were sent to Ghana to be the very first volunteers to participate in this program. This was the start of a program that would change the world. Even to this day the Peace Corps is active and impact society. Because of Kennedy over 200,000 volunteers have served in 139 countries, satisfying millions of people (Wimberly, 2005). Kennedy accomplished all of this in his three years as president, cementing his reputation as one of the greatest leaders of all time. Consider what he could have accomplished if he had been in office for eight years like the majority of presidents.

From 1961 through 1963, John F. Kennedy, a brilliant leader, led a period of significant change. During those three years, he achieved some of the most significant achievements in recent US history, such as sparing the world from a possibly world-ending nuclear war. John F. Kennedy signed the Nuclear Ban Treaty, which prohibited nuclear-weapons tests in the atmosphere, outer space, and beneath the sea. He successfully and cordially ended the Cuban Missile Crisis, preventing the Soviet Union and the United States from possibly ending the world. If Kennedy was not in office during this time, the world would likely be in a nuclear war, and from the peaceful land that it is today. He was the driving force behind the Civil Rights Movement, a movement that would define America in the modern-day. It was the most significant step forward in America's fight against racism. He also founded the Peace Corps, which has been a major success since its inception. He has proven to be a one-of-a-kind president who thinks differently than anyone else. His presidency was amazing, unheard of, fairy-tale-like. Without the great John F. Kennedy, America would not be the same country or the land of opportunity that it is today. Kennedy's presidency was a fairytale presidency.

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