

**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