

Reality vs. Image
A Look at the Evolution of the Kenney Image

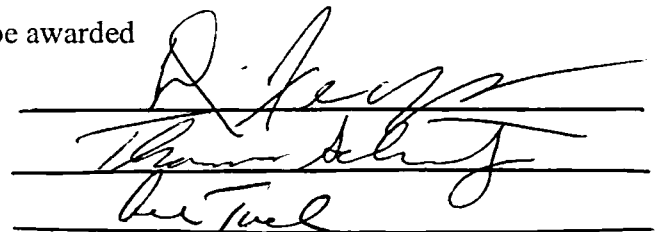
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Thesis Submitted to the Faculty of the Department of History of Vanderbilt University in
Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for Honors in History

On the basis of this thesis
And of written and oral examinations
Taken by the candidate on

4-15-2005 and on 5-3-2005

we, the undersigned, recommend that the candidate be awarded
HONORS in History



Introduction

On January 20, 1961, the American public watched as its new president was sworn into office. Snow had fallen on the nation's capitol the night before and it had left a stern chill in the air. As former president Eisenhower stood in the background bundled in a long winter coat, the newly elected John F. Kennedy stepped to the forefront wearing no coat at all.¹ He appeared strong and solid as he spoke of liberty, democracy, hope and peace, stating forcefully the famous words: "ask not what your country can do for you-ask what you can do for your country."² This was the public's first image of Kennedy as their president. It was poignant and deliberate; it ushered in a new era in politics, symbolizing a new generation of politicians who wielded freshness and vitality.

The manner in which Kennedy presented himself at his inauguration demonstrated his awareness of the importance of image. From the very beginning of his political career he set out to define himself in a certain manner, conscientiously building relations with members of the media and presenting himself to the public in a particular way. During his brief time in office, Kennedy created images that, paired with his policy, helped to heighten his popularity with the American public.³ He proliferated these perceptions through the new medium of television and through his relationships with members of the mass media. He allowed reporters, journalists, cameramen and photographers to capture and report on some of the most intimate moments in the White House. Through these pictures as well as other productions of the mass media, the public

¹ "John F. Kennedy: Inaugural Address." www.bartleby.com/124/pres56.html.

² Ibid.

³ John Hellmann, The Kennedy Obsession: The American Myth of JFK. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997).

was able to gain a closer look at the day-to-day life of the President and because of this they felt closer to President Kennedy than they had to any president before.⁴

When Kennedy was assassinated on November 22, 1963, these feelings were strengthened due to the fact that people could indirectly bear witness to his assassination and funeral through television.⁵ The personal bond was so strong that in several surveys taken in the days after the assassination, people reported that they felt as though a member of their family had passed away.⁶ Indeed it seemed to many Americans as if their white knight had been slain, ending all of his hopes and dreams for the United States. In the days following the assassination, people were bombarded with glorified depictions of Kennedy, as it was considered uncouth to slander the lost President. It was during this time that *the* Kennedy image rose to the forefront.

In order to fully comprehend this thesis, two terms need to be defined: the Kennedy image and Kennedy legacy. The Kennedy image during JFK's actual presidency served as a way for the President to convey his style to the public. However, following his assassination, the Kennedy image came to encompass all things associated with his presidency: style, substance and sentiments.⁷ The Kennedy legacy developed after JFK's assassination. As the president was cut down in his prime, just as he was beginning to catch his stride in office, he left much of his vision for America unfinished. Those unfulfilled dreams for America came to represent the Kennedy legacy. Americans

⁴ John Hellman, *The Kennedy Obsession*, 142.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Jacob J. Feldman and Paul B. Sheatsley, "The Assassination of President Kennedy: A Primary Report on Public Relations and Behavior," *Public Opinion Quarterly* Vol. 28, No. 2 (Summer, 1964), 190.

⁷ This refers to the policy, style (glamour, wit, charisma) and sentiments (hope, trust, optimism) that were associated with the Kennedy administration.

looked for the heir to the legacy, who would be able to recreate the spirit and atmosphere of the 1960s as well as accomplish what Kennedy had set forth to do.

As 1963 passed, the United States slipped into a “time of troubles” beginning in the Johnson administration. This included the Vietnam War, the Nixon’s Watergate scandal, stagflation, unemployment, etc. During these times, people looked back to the Kennedy image with great nostalgia.⁸ However, the 1960s and 1970s produced a group of revisionist historians who did not buy into the Kennedy image. Their work proved that there was little reality to the substance of the image, serving to weaken the Kennedy image.⁹ Without any solid substance to back it up, the image relied on style and sentiment. By detaching the image from policy and politics, it became malleable. Any politician could use it as propaganda in order to help whatever cause they so chose.

This point can be seen in the presidencies of Ronald Reagan in the 1980s and William Clinton during the 1990s. By evaluating these two presidents, one can see how a conservative Republican during the Cold War and a Democrat after the Cold War used the Kennedy image. While both Reagan and Clinton appropriated the Kennedy image in very different situations, the reasons behind it are very similar. They invoked Kennedy’s policies, not because they wanted to copy them, but rather because in doing so, they were able to tap into the style and sentiments associated with those particular policies and Kennedy. However, both Reagan and Clinton were selective in their discussions of Kennedy’s policy. They ignored aspects of JFK’s legislation because it did not work in their favor. This raises the main issue regarding the social question of image versus reality. What we, as Americans, are told to base our opinions, beliefs and decisions on

⁸ James T. Madore. “Kennedy Kitsch/ 40 Years After Dallas. JFK Still Sells.” Newsday. November 21, 2003, A6.

⁹ Thomas H. Brown, JFK: History of an Image. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988) 67-69.

are half-truths and manipulated images. However, if we can see how politicians are blurring the line between image and reality in regards to Kennedy, then this makes us wonder about what other situations Reagan and Clinton blurred these lines. The result of either of these scenarios is unacceptable; Americans are either misinformed on politics or they become cynical and untrusting of the President.

This thesis looks at the history of the Kennedy image in a fashion different than what any scholars before have done. While there are many studies on presidential image, including Kennedy's image, there is no literature that discusses how modern politicians appropriate the image and for what means. However, two books on Kennedy's image have been helpful in providing a base understanding about the development of the image over time. Thomas Brown, in JFK: History of an Image, explains the rise of the Kennedy image following the President's assassination. He accredits much of this to the Kennedy family, who were adamant about preserving JFK's name in history. The rest of the book details how, through during different times in America's history, the Kennedy image has been viewed. Brown believes that by examining the Kennedy image, one can gain an understanding of the "shifting American ideals and values in the last quarter century."¹⁰ While JFK: History of an Image is extremely well written and thorough, it falls short on three accounts. First, Brown never discusses how John F. Kennedy himself was partially responsible for the establishment of the Kennedy image. This is shortsighted as Kennedy was a man who deliberately contrived an image of himself during his entire political career. Second, Brown never really discusses the role that the media played in the proliferation of Kennedy's image. This makes Brown's argument seem weak at times; Kennedy's relationship with the media was extremely important in regards to his image.

¹⁰ Brown, JFK, 5.

Third, since the book was published in 1988, there is seventeen years of new data and information to consider.

The second book that discusses the Kennedy image The Kennedy Obsession: The American Myth of JFK by John Hellman. Hellmann's book provides a glimpse into the development of the Kennedy image (which he calls the Kennedy or Camelot myth). Unlike Brown, Hellmann details how Kennedy began to construct a public image of himself at a very young age; Hellmann believes that Kennedy was creating an image of himself as an intellectual as far back as his senior year at Harvard, when he wrote, and later published, his senior thesis entitled *Why England Slept*. The thesis, on why it took England so long to rearm after WWI, demonstrated, in Hellmann's mind, Kennedy's first projection of his own ideal image. Hellmann spends the rest of his book explaining certain images that Kennedy presented of himself and how these images attracted the attention of the American public.

While both Brown and Hellman present the establishment and history of the Kennedy image, neither of them focus on how the image has been appropriated by modern presidents as a propaganda tool. Brown touches on this in the last four pages of his last chapter, discussing the use of the Kennedy image in the 1984 election. However, this short analysis does not do justice to the numerous invocations throughout the years since Kennedy's assassination.

Much like the texts on the development of the Kennedy image, in my research I found one book on the development of Clinton's image as a president: Constructing Clinton, by Shawn Parry-Giles and Trevor Parry-Giles. The book goes into great detail regarding Clinton's use of the Kennedy image. Unfortunately, the book only spans the

1992 presidential campaign, and thus lacks any analysis of Clinton's presidency, when numerous appropriations were made.

One book on Presidential image that has been especially helpful in my study of Kennedy's image is The Image-Is-Everything Presidency by Richard W. Watterman, Robert Wright, and Gilbert St. Clair. The book discusses all aspects of presidential image including public expectations of the president, historical images of presidents, and personal images. It also details the causes of the modern presidency being so image conscious: constant campaigning and the media. However, there were two sections that contributed most to my thesis. One of those was on Kennedy, Reagan and Clinton's personal images. These sections gave a behind the scenes look at the people who helped the presidents shape their image and for what purposes. It discusses specific images that each of the presidents was trying to achieve. The second section, called "What If This is as Good as It Gets?" discusses the effects that political image-obsession has had on politics and Americans.

Thus, in writing the chapters on Reagan and Clinton, I have relied heavily on primary sources, mostly public speeches and addresses found in the public papers of the Presidents. I have also relied on the responses of the media, found in newspaper and magazine articles, to both Clinton and Reagan's invocations. By using such sources I have been able to evaluate how Clinton and Reagan invoked the Kennedy image and how the mass media perceived those appropriations.

This thesis consists of three main chapters and a conclusion. Chapter one explores Kennedy's presidency, beginning with the image that JFK established of himself during the 1960 election. The chapter then presents how the reality of the Kennedy

image did not measure up to his 1960 image. Kennedy's policies including both the failures and accomplishments in the economic, domestic and Cold War/defense realms are detailed. Following, Kennedy's style and relationship with the media is explored in order to explain how JFK maintained his image once in office. The chapter then discusses how, following Kennedy's assassination, his image rose to mythical proportions and how, in the 1960s and 1970s, the image became weak and malleable. Chapter two begins the main analysis of the paper, examining President Ronald Reagan's appropriation of the Kennedy image and for what reasons. The same can be said for chapter three in regards to President William Clinton. Both of these chapters will show how these Presidents appropriated the Kennedy image as a propaganda tool, using it to help their respective causes.

Chapter 1: The Development and Evolution of the Kennedy Image

John F. Kennedy once said in a speech on June 11, 1962, “For the greatest enemy of the truth is very often not the lie- deliberate, contrived and dishonest- but the myth- persistent, persuasive and unrealistic.”¹¹ These words seem ironic given the mythical proportions to which Kennedy’s image has grown. However, despite its larger than life appearance, the Kennedy image has become weak and malleable. This was not always the case, but rather one of the most recent developments in the history of the Kennedy image. Accordingly, this chapter will discuss the rise and evolution of the Kennedy image, beginning with the 1960 presidential election. It was at this time that JFK created images of himself for public consumption. However, he found, once in office, that these images were hard to live up to; the substance did not always add up to the images. Thus in order to present a certain reality behind the images, the major achievements and failures of the Kennedy image will be highlighted. Following will be a discussion of how Kennedy maintained his image while in office and how, following his assassination, it grew to mythical proportions. Finally, the evolution of the Kennedy image in the 1960s and 1970s will be shown, demonstrating how the image came to be weak and malleable.

1960 Election

When John F. Kennedy ran for president in 1960, the wheels of change were turning in the United States. As historian Terry Anderson stated: “By the late 1950s, then, a careful observer would have noticed that behind the smiles of Happy Days there were seeds of discontent in America- social discrimination at home and intense anti-

¹¹ Cited in Victor Lasky, *JFK: The Man and the Myth*. (The Macmillan Company: New York, 1963). 1.

Communism abroad- which would germinate for the next few years..."¹² A great amount of change had already begun during the second Eisenhower administration and the country seemed to be growing restless. The Civil Rights movement had gained momentum, the Soviets launched Sputnik, Castro took power in Cuba, students were becoming more involved in politics, and a recession had begun to take hold of the country.¹³

In 1960, the Kennedy campaign took a cue from the events over the past five years and tapped into American feelings of unrest and desire for change and security. JFK built his presidential image around what he felt Americans needed at the time. According to Historian Dewey Grantham, "John F. Kennedy came to the presidency by taking advantage of the vague discontents that had begun to spread through American society and by identifying himself with the growing desire for a renewed sense of national purpose, for the restoration of U.S. prestige in the world, and for a more dynamic administration in Washington."¹⁴ Thus his 1960 presidential campaign centered around revival, strength and change, or as columnist Walter Lippmann phrased the themes of Kennedy's campaign:

The military power of the United States is falling behind that of the Soviet Union: we are on the wrong end of a missile gap. The American economy is stagnating: we are falling behind the Soviet Union and behind the leading industrial nations of Western Europe in our rate of growth. The United States is failing to modernize itself: the public services, education, health, rebuilding of the cities, transportation, and the like, are not keeping up with a rapidly grown urbanized population.¹⁵

¹² Terry Anderson, The Sixties. (New York: Longman, 1999). 1.

¹³ Ibid, 9-18.

¹⁴ Dewey W. Grantham, Recent America: The United States Since 1945, second edition. (Wheeling: Harlan Davidson. Inc., 1998), 234.

¹⁵ Richard Reeves. President Kennedy: Profile of Power. (New York: Simon & Schuster. 1994). 17.

Kennedy vowed to accomplish this platform through a series of challenges: “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... The New Frontier of which I speak is not a set of promises- it is a set of challenges.”¹⁶ What Kennedy presented was a set of what could be considered new burdens and sacrifices that Americans would have to make in order to improve the state of the country. In presenting his platform in such a way Kennedy was admitting that under his administration the country would most likely suffer from some growing pains, but that he was confident that in the end the United States would be a better place, socially, economically and defensively.

Accordingly, John F. Kennedy established an image of himself that in a way symbolized how he believed Americans wanted to view their country: young, powerful, vigorous, optimistic, and selfless. Kennedy himself seemed to be the image of change: young, charismatic, and intelligent, he represented the entrance of a new generation into the political arena.¹⁷ He symbolized a movement away from old school politics and politicians. As stated by Grantham, “In his favour, Kennedy was strikingly charismatic. Much of his appeal rested on the idea, as much as the image, of a youthful, dynamic, and, above all, promising leader possessing the energy and vision to lift America out of the stalemated 1950s.”¹⁸

As seen from above, a good part of Kennedy’s image during the 1960 campaign relied on Kennedy’s youth and all that was associated with it: optimism, hope, strength,

¹⁶ Cited in Anderson, The Sixties, 23.

¹⁷ Brown, JFK, 41.

¹⁸ T.G. Fraser and Donette Murray, America and the World Since 1945, (Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002). 87.

energy, freshness, etc. However, as came to be seen in Kennedy's term in office, this youth also brought with it many faults: inexperience, recklessness, uncertainty, and weakness. At moments when these faults were exposed, mostly through policy blunders, Kennedy used his style to rebuild a positive image of himself. During campaigns, most candidates create images of themselves that they strive to live up to while in office. John F. Kennedy was no exception. However, because Kennedy had been so aware of image throughout his life, during his campaign and beginning of his administration, he created such a significant image of himself that it was very difficult to live up to. When Kennedy was elected by an extremely narrow margin, winning only 119,450 more votes than Nixon, it shattered the aura of invincibility around him.¹⁹ As a result of this lack of a mandate the new president was hesitant and lacked the confidence that he had shown during the campaign, feeling that the election results signaled that perhaps the country was not ready for parts of his progressive platform.²⁰ This put on hold many of Kennedy's campaign promises, such as civil rights legislation. It also affected the new President's confidence, and instead of taking stands, he chose to take the middle of the road in order to not alienate anyone.²¹ This led, in part, to many of the setbacks that Kennedy encountered in his first year in office. However, after that point, he began to gain more conviction and confidence, achieving great success in several areas. While many believe that Kennedy was, in 1963, just beginning to reach his full potential as president, his record, as it stood, was for the most part fairly average; it had some serious blemishes, but it also had many accomplishments as well.

¹⁹ Out of 68.8 million votes cast. Grantham, Recent America, 209-210.

²⁰ Ibid. 235.

²¹ Ibid.

Economy & Trade

When John F. Kennedy inherited the presidency in January of 1961, he also inherited the recession that had started in 1960. Kennedy said of the recession in his State of the Union address, “We take office in the wake of seven months of recession, three and one-half years of slack, seven years of diminished economic growth, and nine years of falling farm income.”²² During the campaign, JFK had pledged to remedy the economic malaise and get the country moving again.²³ Thus, during his first months in office, he passed a series of measures set to help Americans deal with the recession. This included lowering interest rates, and supporting Congressional legislation that raised the minimum wage, allowed states to temporarily extend unemployment benefits, and expanded public works programs. Due, in large part, to the increased government spending, the economy pulled itself out of the recession by the end of 1961.²⁴

In 1962, the Kennedy administration continued to push economic measures. One of its greatest successes was the Trade Expansion Act. The act was designed to stimulate both American business and the American economy through trade and competition with the European Economic Community and Japan.²⁵ It also provided Kennedy with, as author Dewey Grantham explained, “...the largest tariff-cutting power ever granted an American president.”²⁶ With the Trade Expansion Act passed, Kennedy also set forward legislation to protect the American worker. The Manpower Development and Training

²² Cited in Theodore C. Sorenson, Let the Word Go Forth: The Speeches, Statements, and Writings of John F. Kennedy, (New York: Delacorte Press, 1988), 147.

²³ Kennedy’s Acceptance of Presidential Nomination Speech at the Democratic National Convention, July 15, 1960 Cited in Theodore C. Sorenson, Let the Word Go Forth: The Speeches, Statements, and Writings of John F. Kennedy, (New York: Delacorte Press, 1988), 96-102.

²⁴ Grantham, Recent America, 231.

²⁵ Reeves, President Kennedy, 331.

²⁶ Grantham, Recent America, 231.

Act used \$435 million to train unemployed Americans with new skills that would help them remain qualified and perhaps even help them obtain better jobs.²⁷

Despite all the measures that Kennedy had taken to help the economy, things were still not as good as they could be. Dewey Grantham detailed this problem, saying, “Unemployment remained at a disappointing 5.5 percent. The annual increase in the gross national product for the period 1960-1962 was only about 3.6 percent, as compared with a growth rate in Western Europe of from 4 to 6 percent.”²⁸ In January of 1963, proposed a reduction in taxes over a three-year period, claiming that a large tax cut would stimulate the economy by increasing demand and growth.²⁹ While the House passed the bill, it would take Kennedy’s successor, Lyndon Johnson, invoking the Kennedy image in order to get it to pass in the Senate. Despite President Kennedy’s troubles in passing the tax cut, the American economy turned around; between 1962 and 1964 the annual rate of growth rose to 5.3 percent.³⁰

Cold War Defense

The Cold War had been waging for almost 15 years when Kennedy took office; during his administration, it reached new levels. After chastising Eisenhower for not being strong enough on communism and allowing the communist threat to enter our hemisphere in Cuba, Kennedy knew that he had to strengthen US defense. He believed that the only way to bring the Soviets to the discussion table was through defensive

²⁷ James N. Giglio, *The Presidency of John F. Kennedy*, (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1991), 106.

²⁸ Grantham, *Recent America*, 234.

²⁹ *Ibid.* 233-34.

³⁰ *Ibid.* 234.

equality or supremacy.³¹ Thus, in the first year of his presidency, Kennedy increased the defense budget by \$7 billion, the Marine Corps and Air Force were enlarged, and missile programs were accelerated.³² Kennedy and his Secretary of Defense, Robert McNamara, also developed a strategy of “flexible response,” which included nuclear weapons, guerilla forces and conventional arms, allowing the United States to have more options for which to meet aggression.³³ However, all of this planning proved useless in the situations that Kennedy faced during his first year in office.

Kennedy’s first year was far from flawless, especially in the Cold War arena. 1961 was marred by foreign dilemmas. To begin, Kennedy had inherited a plan from the Eisenhower administration to oust Fidel Castro in Cuba. The plan called for US and Cuban revolutionaries to team up and stage a coup.³⁴ However, Kennedy wavered on the issue and in the end refused to provide the full support of the US military, which was a crucial to the success of the operation. This, paired with other CIA miscalculations, caused the invasion at the Bay of Pigs to fail miserably. The Bay of Pigs incident was a complete humiliation for the Kennedy administration.³⁵ It made the new President seem foolish, belligerent and weak not only to Americans, but to the rest of the world as well. The event could have tarnished Kennedy’s image as a responsible, strong and mature leader. However, the President saved his credibility when he went on television and, in a national address, took full responsibility for the event, saying, “There is an old saying that victory had one hundred fathers and defeat is an orphan... I’m the responsible officer

³¹ Reeves. President Kennedy, 245-246.

³² Grantham. Recent America, 213.

³³ Giglio. The Presidency of John F. Kennedy, 321-322.

³⁴ Ibid. 48-49.

³⁵ Reeves. President Kennedy, 90-95.

of the government and that is quite obvious.”³⁶ President Kennedy saved face by taking his plea directly to the public through television. He could thus deliver his message as he wished to, without journalists or opponents adding in their two cents. It allowed him to restore his image, and thus the trust of the American people.

The Bay of Pigs was followed by another foreign diplomacy bumble when Kennedy and the Soviet Union’s leader, Premier Khrushchev met in Vienna from June third to the fourth of 1961. The meetings were supposed to help foster Soviet-American relations. However, Khrushchev arrived at the meetings with his attitude towards Kennedy swayed by the “weakness” Kennedy had shown during the Bay of Pigs invasion.³⁷ As a result, the Soviet Premier was dominant and defiant. Kennedy returned from Vienna shaken and upset that he had not been able to establish a good relationship with Khrushchev. The extent to which Kennedy’s confidence had been shattered was pointed out by authors Fraser and Murray: “[Kennedy] told journalist James Reston whom he met minutes after the talks had ended that he had been ‘savaged’ by Khrushchev. Reston thought the president was in shock.”³⁸

Following the Vienna summit, the tension over Berlin continued to grow. On August 13, 1961 the East German government began to construct a wall across the city. While Kennedy sent 1500 troops and Lyndon Johnson as a symbol that the United States wanted to keep Berlin open, he did not truly do anything to stop the wall from going up. He knew that allowing the wall to go up ensured a momentary peaceful end to the Berlin crisis, which had been brewing since he had taken office.³⁹

³⁶ Cited in Sorenson, Let the Word Go Forth, 30.

³⁷ Fraser and Murray, America and the World Since 1945, 95.

³⁸ Ibid, 95-96.

³⁹ Ibid, 99-100.

In response to the fear of the spread of communism in Latin America, the Kennedy administration created the Alliance for Progress. Passed by Congress in 1961, the alliance created a partnership in which the United States would provide money to develop nations in Latin America.⁴⁰ The theory at the time was that the conditions in underdeveloped nations were a breeding ground for communistic thought. By giving money to these countries to buy land, build homes and schools, and improve healthcare, the United States would not only win allies in Latin America, but also promote democracy and create conditions where it could flourish.⁴¹ However, the momentum for this program lost steam after the Cuban missile crisis due to increased military spending and bureaucratic battles in Washington.⁴²

Besides Latin America, the Kennedy administration also chose to try to stop the spread of communism in Southeast Asia. With China adopting a communist government, Kennedy believed he had to stop communism from spreading from North Vietnam to South Vietnam. After sending both Vice President Johnson in 1961 and General Maxwell Taylor and Walt Rostow in 1962 on visits to the region, the President listened to their reports on the current situation. They all believed that with US support, South Vietnam would not fall to the communists.⁴³ Kennedy thus increased assistance to Diem, the leader of the South Vietnamese government, by sending military technology, military advisers and the American guerilla-warfare trained Green Berets.⁴⁴ At the time of

⁴⁰ Grantham, Recent America, 223.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Ibid, 223-224.

⁴³ Fraser and Murray, America and the World Since 1945, 114-117.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

Kennedy's assassination, 16,000 American military men were stationed in South Vietnam compared to 650 when Eisenhower left office.⁴⁵

In October of 1962, the Cold War almost turned violently hot when the Cuban missile crisis began. Khrushchev decided in May of 1962 that he wanted to alter the strategic balance of power between the United States and the USSR. Accordingly he began to ship intermediate-range ballistic missiles to Cuba, just 90 miles off the coast of the United States.⁴⁶ US intelligence picked up on the arms movement and warned President Kennedy of the situation. JFK decided that America should impose a naval blockade on Cuba, instead of any sort of attempting to stage an immediate attack.⁴⁷ With his decision made, the President addressed the nation on the night of October 22, letting Americans know what was happening. He told the public that the United States would stand firm and not back down from the Soviet aggressors.⁴⁸ Over the next two days the world stood still wondering what would happen. Fortunately, the Soviets turned their ships around and headed home. On October 27 the crisis came to an end, as both parties agreed to make concessions: Kennedy pledged that the United States would not invade Cuba and Castro pledged to remove the missiles.⁴⁹

Following the crisis, many critiqued Kennedy for bringing the United States to the brink of nuclear war. They claimed that Kennedy's inexperience, foreign blunders, and poor relations with Khrushchev allowed the Soviets' confidence to build. These critics also claimed that Kennedy had made too many concessions in order to end the crisis,

⁴⁵ Grantham, Recent America, 225-226.

⁴⁶ Dino A. Brugioni, Eyeball to Eyeball: The Inside Story of the Cuban Missile Crisis, (Random House: New York, 1991), 202.

⁴⁷ Anderson, The Sixties, 33-35.

⁴⁸ Robert A. Divine, The Cuban Missile Crisis, (Markus Wiener Publishing: New York, 1988) 3-7.

⁴⁹ Anderson, The Sixties, 33-35.

citing how in January of 1963, Kennedy agreed to remove Jupiter missiles from Turkey as a delayed concession to Cuba.⁵⁰ However, the Kennedy administration denied these charges. This can be seen in a January 24, 1963 Washington Post article: “United States officials vigorously denied yesterday, as they had last week, that plans to remove 30 Jupiter missiles from Italy and 15 from Turkey have any connection with the correspondence between President Kennedy and Soviet Premier Nikita S. Khrushchev during the Cuban crisis last October.”⁵¹ While there were many complaints regarding Kennedy’s handling of the Cuban missile crisis, the President and his administration spun the event positively. Downplaying the concessions made, JFK used the Cuban missile crisis to prove to America and the world that he was a strong, rational, decisive, capable leader. It helped the President gain the confidence that he had been lacking, and changed the course of his administration.

With this new-found confidence and revitalized image, President Kennedy took the USSR to the bargaining table after years of the Soviets dragging their feet on the subject of arms negotiations. In June of 1963, Britain, the US and the USSR agreed upon the Nuclear Test Ban Treaty, which prohibited all nuclear tests in the atmosphere, outer space, on land, and underwater.⁵² While the treaty did not ban testing underground, nor subject the signing countries to on-site inspections, it was a huge step forward in ending nuclear proliferation and also served to ease tensions between the two superpowers. The

⁵⁰ Khrushchev made a second request during the Cuban missile crisis that the United States remove strategic NATO missiles from Turkey. However, Kennedy refused to acquiesce to the request publicly. The removal of those missiles came in January of 1963. Brugioni. Eyeball to Eyeball, 466-467.

⁵¹ This however was not true. The removal of the missiles from Turkey was part of the deal struck between Kennedy and Khrushchev. The Kennedy administration kept it silent in order to protect the image of the President. Murrey Marder, “U.S. to Take Missile Out of Turkey,” The Washington Post, January 24, 1963. A1.

⁵² Grantham, Recent America, 221-222.

treaty was soon signed by over a hundred more nations, resulting in one of Kennedy's greatest diplomatic achievements.⁵³

Domestic

Due to the closeness of the election, Kennedy believed that he did not have the mandate to push for several of his progressive domestic legislation. Thus, during his first year in office, Kennedy had a difficult time passing legislation. One such piece of legislation was the President's national education proposal. Designed to help children from low-income families, children with physical handicaps and to prevent discrimination, the proposal asked for \$2.3 billion to be used over a three-year period for school construction and teachers' salaries. It also requested \$3.3 billion to aid higher education over a five-year period.⁵⁴ The proposal made it through the Senate, but was voted down in the House.

However, on a more positive note, 1961 heralded one of the greatest achievements of the Kennedy administration: the creation of the Peace Corps. As authors Fraser and Murray state in their book, "The project exemplified everything vigorous, dynamic and creative about the new administration and spoke to all that was good about the United States."⁵⁵ The Peace Corps sent young Americans to live and volunteer in developing countries. These volunteers served as goodwill ambassadors who shed a good light on the United States and democracy. It was a way for young Americans to do something selfless that would benefit others. Fraser and Murray state on the Peace Corps, "Although in practical terms the appreciable benefits of the scheme

⁵³ Ibid, 222.

⁵⁴ Ibid, 235.

⁵⁵ Fraser and Murray, America and the World Since 1945, 105.

were limited, the real success of the Peace Corps lay in the reflected glory that it projected on to the Kennedy administration and the confident, idealistic patriotism for which it provided an outlet.”⁵⁶ It was through the Peace Corps that Kennedy could use his younger age to relate to America’s youth and inspire them to serve. The Peace Corps also helped Kennedy project optimism and hope for the future of America and foreign relations. All of this served to shed a positive light on Kennedy.

Unlike the President’s position on service, his stance on civil rights wavered greatly at the beginning of his administration. During the 1960 campaign, Kennedy had promised to help the civil rights cause.⁵⁷ However, with the close election results, Kennedy did not jump to enact any civil rights legislation once in office, as he did not want to alienate any Americans or key politicians whose votes he may need. Most Kennedy historians describe his views towards the Civil Rights movement as “apathetic” and that he did not act on the issue until he had to. Kennedy biographer Arthur Schlesinger, Jr. wrote,

He had at this point, (1961) I think, a terrible ambivalence about civil rights. While he did not doubt the depth of injustice or the need for remedy, he had read the arithmetic of the new Congress and concluded that there was no possible chance of passing a civil rights bill. Moreover, he had a wide range of Presidential responsibilities; and a fight for civil rights would alienate Southern support he needed for other purposes.⁵⁸

Thus, throughout Kennedy’s first and most of his second years in office, he sidetracked civil rights legislation. What forced the President to deal with the issue was a series of events beginning in the fall of 1962. These included the de-segregation of the University

⁵⁶ Ibid, 105.

⁵⁷ John F. Kennedy’s Acceptance of Presidential Nomination at the Democratic National Convention, July 15, 1960 Cited in Sorenson, Let the Word Go Forth, 96.

⁵⁸ Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., A Thousand Days, (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1965), 849.

of Mississippi, the march led by Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. in Birmingham, Alabama, the de-segregation of the University of Alabama, and the civil rights march on Washington.⁵⁹

In reaction to these events, the President sent a Civil Rights bill to Congress on June 19, 1963. The bill, as detailed by Grantham, "...proposed a limited ban on discrimination in public spaces, requested power to enable the Justice Department to sue for school desegregation when an aggrieved citizen asked its help, and called for a vital provision authorizing the government to withhold funds for federal assistance programs in cases of discrimination."⁶⁰ However, it would take much work from Lyndon Johnson, following Kennedy's assassination, to pass the Civil Rights Bill.

Overall, Kennedy's administration was fairly average; his days in the White House were marked by both setbacks and great accomplishments. However, JFK's political record does little to explain why, during his 1000 days in office, he continually had 60-70% approval ratings.⁶¹ Thus, one also has to look beyond the substance to Kennedy's style and image as the answer to his enduring approval. Even at the lowest points of his administration, Kennedy was able to maintain high approval through image; he presented himself in a certain manner in order to evoke specific styles and sentiments that would resonate positively with the American people. He was able to proliferate

⁵⁹ Patrick B. Miller, Therese Frey Steffen, and Elisabeth Schafer-Wunsche. The Civil Rights Movement Revisited, (Hamburg: Lit Verlag Munster. 2001). 201. Terry Anderson, The Sixties, (New York: Longman, 1999), 33-36.

⁶⁰ Grantham, Recent America, 241.

⁶¹ Dr. George H. Gallup, The Gallup Poll: Public Opinion 1935-1991, Volume III. (New York: Random House, 1992). pg 1707-1850. Kennedy's approval ratings dropped into the 50% range in his last few months in office. This was mostly the result of Southern unrest regarding Kennedy's sudden strong stand for Civil Rights.

these images thanks to the rise of television and through his relationships with members of the mass media.

The Kennedy Style

Kennedy knew how important image was to his career. As a politician, he used image to convey his style and personality. For example, Kennedy created images of himself as an intellectual, a playful family man, a glamorous movie star, a charismatic wit, and a strong leader. Many times these images were used to heighten the interest of the American people in the President. By creating specific images of himself, President Kennedy could sell those images to the American public through the media. This allowed Americans to feel that they knew who Kennedy was and that they had a personal connection to him. Although these images did not directly correspond to any particular policy, they helped to sustain Kennedy's popularity when his political actions did not. As the image historians Waterman, Wright and St. Clair stated, "...the Kennedy years were more style than substance..."⁶²

Kennedy & the Media

The images Kennedy presented of himself were important during the 1960 presidential campaign and during his tenure in the White House, but their effectiveness was reliant upon the mass media. Most important was the heightening of Kennedy's image through television broadcasts. People, who normally would never have had the chance to see JFK in action, were able to see him look them in the eye and promise them

⁶² Richard W. Waterman, Robert Wright and Gilbert St. Clair, *The Image-Is-Everything Presidency: Dilemmas in American Leadership*, (Westview Press, Boulder, 1999), 41.

a better future. They could see the smirk he got before he told a joke. Television allowed the images of Kennedy to become more personal.⁶³ JFK understood this. He was insightful in recognizing the importance of presentation with the televised media. Kennedy became the first President to hold televised press conferences. Through the press conferences he was able to convey to America that he was indeed a strong, informed, capable leader. These occasions also helped Kennedy get his message directly to the public, which, in turn, allowed the public to feel like the President was keeping them informed. It was also during these events that Kennedy was able to showcase his infamous charisma and wit, charming not only the viewers at home, but also the reporters who were in the room.⁶⁴ It was his attitude towards the press that helped him establish a special relationship with them.

Kennedy, who was a reporter earlier on in his life, knew what it took to develop a close relationship with the press.⁶⁵ As President, he welcomed members of the media into the White House. He understood that by giving the press a few more privileges, he could benefit greatly. He allowed cameras to follow him into the Oval Office where they snapped shots of Kennedy, for example, during serious moments such as the Cuban missile crisis, and less serious moments, such as taking a break from his work, playing with his children.⁶⁶ In allowing photographers to capture these scenes, John Kennedy benefited in two ways. First, he was able to set up an image of himself that he wanted the American public to see. In the instance showing the President playing with his children,

⁶³ John Hellmann, The Kennedy Obsession, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997), 132.

⁶⁴ Louis W. Liebovich, The Press and the Modern Presidency: Myths and Mindsets from Kennedy to Election 2000, (Westport: Praeger, 2001), 26.

⁶⁵ Robert Dallek, An Unfinished Life, (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 2003), 113.

⁶⁶ Tom Shales, "Camelot Recaptured: TV Pays Homage to the First Television President," The Washington Post, November 13, 1983.

the populace saw charming and sweet photos of the President as someone who despite the rigors of the office still had time to be a family man. Second, by letting cameras photograph these scenes, it allowed the nation to feel closer to Kennedy. These were intimate moments that the public was invited to be a part of. It led to a sense of personal attachment to the new President, whereas in the past, presidents had seemed out of reach.

Once a close relationship with the members of the media was established, Kennedy did not hesitate to take liberties with them. He understood that he had great power to heavily influence many of the things that were being written about him. This he accomplished through several means. Kennedy was notorious for making personal phone calls to reporters and journalists if he read an article or story that criticized, praised him, or painted him in a certain light. As Bernhard M. Auer, publisher of *TIME* magazine wrote, "In Washington, the President got his copy [of *TIME*] early, and sometimes within an hour was on the phone to our White House correspondent with comments- wry, appreciative or angry- on what had been written about him."⁶⁷ There are even stories from journalists whom Kennedy was very close to about times when they published a highly critical article on the President, they were snubbed by him for months. Once, JFK canceled his subscription to the New York Herald Tribune because of its supposedly 'biased' coverage of his presidency.⁶⁸ Such was the environment for reporters in JFK's White House. Thus it is in this sense that Kennedy nudged and encouraged reporters to write good rather than critical stories about him. These were blatant attempts to control his image and what stories or facts were presented to the public.

⁶⁷ Bernhard M. Auer "A Letter from the PUBLISHER," *TIME*, November 29, 1963. 1.

⁶⁸ Howard Kurtz, Spin Cycle: How the White House and the Media Manipulate the News, (New York: Touchstone, 1998), xvi.

Post-Assassination

On November 22, 1963 President Kennedy was shot and killed while riding in a limo in Dallas, Texas. Immediately the media, especially television, responded and people relied on it to give them up to date information. According to a National Opinion Research Center Poll taken in the days following the assassination, “about half of the people [47 percent] received word of the assassination by means of radio or television.”⁶⁹ Moreover, “on any one of the four days [following the assassination], a minimum of 95 percent of the public spent some time attending the radio or television, and on Saturday, Sunday, and Monday, approximately a quarter of the people devoted thirteen or more hours to this activity.”⁷⁰ For the first time ever, Americans were able to see live, vivid pictures of the assassination and watch the funeral and the burial of the President. In this sense, television once again served to personalize the relationship between the President and the public. People who in the past would have never gotten to see the funeral proceedings were able to watch them live. It was as if the whole country could come together and mourn.

Through the media, the American public was bombarded with nostalgic images of their slain President. Due to the circumstances, at the time it was uncouth to criticize or question Kennedy’s legacy. Thus, positive views of JFK’s tenure in the White House were repeatedly presented to the populace, leaving them with images of their young, charismatic, glamorous, witty, intelligent president who was taken away from them and his once ideal family mourning his loss. As an editorial in LIFE magazine from December 6, 1963 pointed out,

⁶⁹ Jacob J. Feldman and Paul B. Sheatsley. “The Assassination of President Kennedy: A Primary Report on Public Relations and Behavior,” *Public Opinion Quarterly* Vol. 28, No. 2 (Summer, 1964). 190.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 191.

Even now the myths are forming in the American mind. And from the chaotic jumble of grotesque violence, pathos, stupidity, grandeur, pageant and tragedy, what we select to remember could have as great an influence on our political future as did the martyrdom of Lincoln. What then are the right things to remember? What ingredients will make the truest myth?⁷¹

Indeed the myths were forming, and certainly the Kennedy family was trying to guide the public to remember the “right things” about Kennedy’s presidency. But this was a hard task to accomplish, as the public was almost constantly informed by Kennedy loyalists how great a president he was.⁷² Perhaps the greatest influence on the post-mortem image of JFK came from an interview of Jackie Kennedy shortly after her husband’s death. In relating her story to Theodore White, a good friend and reporter for LIFE magazine, Mrs. Kennedy stated,

At night, before we’d go to sleep, Jack liked to play some records and the song he loved most came at the very end of this record. The lines he loved to hear were: *Don’t let it be forgot, that once there was a spot, for one brief shining moment that was known as Camelot.* There’ll be great Presidents again – and the Johnsons are wonderful, they’ve been wonderful to me- but there’ll never be another Camelot again.⁷³

The lines in the record quoted by Jacqueline Kennedy were from the musical *Camelot*, which relayed the story of King Arthur and the Knights of the Round Table. Camelot, the setting of the story, is a place of truth, hope and equality. Thus, in making this bold comparison, Jackie Kennedy laid the foundation for what would become the myth of her husband’s presidency: the Kennedy image.

⁷¹ “The 72 Hours and What They Can Teach US,” LIFE, December 6, 1963, 31-32.

⁷² These loyalists included members of the Kennedy family as well as those who personally knew Kennedy or worked with him. In the years following Kennedy’s assassination, they made it their job to manage, control and protect the glorified image of JFK that they had helped to establish. They did this through invoking his image as well as writing books. It should also be noted that these loyalists believed that the Kennedy image should only be invoked by themselves and the Democratic Party.

⁷³ It should be noted that good friend of the late President Kennedy and Mrs. Kennedy edited greatly the former First Lady’s words, making her phrases seem more eloquent and repeating the Camelot reference throughout the article in order to perpetuate the image. It was in this sense that not only Kennedy’s wife, but his friend helped to create the Camelot image. Theodore H. White, “For President Kennedy: An Epilogue,” LIFE, December 6, 1963, 159.

In the aftermath of JFK's assassination, the Kennedy image seemed to have established itself. It came to encompass, in an idealized form, the substance and style of Kennedy's administration, as well as the sentiments associated with it. The substance of the image became an idealistic representation of the late President's policies; mistakes and character flaws were downplayed and considered part of Kennedy's youthful gaffes which had led to growth. The style of the President, including strength, glamour, wit and charisma was absorbed into the image as well. The Kennedy image also took in all of the idealized feelings associated with JFK's administration including hope, trust, peace, prosperity, strength, and activism. Thus, as the Kennedy image was stored away in the collective memory of Americans, that one image represented all aspects of Kennedy's idealized presidency: style, substance and sentiment.

During Lyndon Johnson's administration, following Kennedy's assassination, a collective 'time of troubles' began to plague the United States. The Vietnam War, the assassinations of Robert Kennedy and Martin Luther King, Jr., the Nixon Watergate scandal, gas shortages, the Iranian hostage situation and economic stagflation all unfolded within sixteen years of JFK's death. With the country and Americans taking blow after blow, nostalgia for the times of the Kennedy administration grew.⁷⁴ Due to the fact that Kennedy was assassinated after 1000 days in office, his record was left open for interpretation. People could speculate as to what Kennedy would have done differently had he lived to see a second term. Some of these people believed that had JFK lived, the world would have been profoundly different- the United States would not

⁷⁴ James T. Madore, "Kennedy Kitsch/ 40 Years After Dallas, JFK Still Sells," Newsday. November 21, 2003. A6.

have gotten involved in Vietnam, lost its prestige in the world, etc.⁷⁵ Thus, for some, the problems that arose in the 1960s and 70s furthered their belief in the idealistic Kennedy image.

For others, however, the cynicism and lack of trust brought about by the events of the 1960s and 1970s made them question the glorified Kennedy image. This group of revisionist historians used old as well as newly released documents (such as the Pentagon Papers and certain Kennedy White House tapes) and new interviews to get the real story behind the image.⁷⁶ What was revealed was the extent to which Kennedy had increased US involvement in Vietnam, ok'd a plan to overthrow Diem, made greater concessions than he said during the Cuban Missile Crisis, given the go on several CIA plots to assassinate Fidel Castro, and had been ambivalent about civil rights.⁷⁷ These revelations continued into Kennedy's personal life. Stories of Kennedy's medical problems such as Addison's disease and venereal disease became known, as well as stories of his numerous affairs ranging from White House secretaries and Marilyn Monroe to more reckless rendezvous with Judith Campbell Exner (who was connected with the mafia) and Ellen Rometsch (an East-German once thought to be a spy).⁷⁸

The revelations that were made by the revisionist historians shed light on the idealistic Kennedy image. They proved that there was, in fact, little substance to back it up. Without this substance, the Kennedy image became weak. It merely relied on style

⁷⁵ "What Might Have Been," TIME, June 28, 1993, Vol. 141, Iss. 26. 44.

⁷⁶ Brown, JFK: History of an Image, 50-69.

⁷⁷ George C. Herring, The Pentagon Papers: Abridged Edition, (New York: McGraw-Hill, Inc., 1993), 43. Seymour M. Hersh, The Dark Side of Camelot, (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1997).

⁷⁸ United Press International, "A New Book Links President Kennedy to Marilyn Monroe," The New York Times, December 14, 1973, 38. George Lardner, Jr., "Woman Who Claimed Affair with JFK Asserts She Was His Conduit to Mafia," The Washington Post, February 23, 1988. Seymour M. Hersh, The Dark Side of Camelot, (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1997).

and sentiment. These two aspects of the image, however, could not be tied down to any specific policy or politics. As a result, the Kennedy image became malleable. Whereas in the past, the image was used and controlled by an elite group of Kennedy insiders, it could now be used by any politician to suit any circumstance. This malleability was best highlighted by Ronald Reagan, who saw the opportunity and the advantage in appropriating the Kennedy image as a propaganda tool in order to help change the tone of America, pass policy and win voters.

Chapter 2: Reagan & Kennedy

One of the phrases of Kennedy's that Reagan used the most during his years in office was, "A rising tide lifts all boats."⁷⁹ This saying seemed especially appropriate given that America needed some lifting when Reagan came into office. Since Kennedy's assassination, America had experienced what seemed like a never-ending downward spiral. Just within the previous administration, that of President Jimmy Carter, America seemed to have been dealt some especially hard blows. The country appeared weak, both militarily and financially. The dollar had lost power, investments were down, and inflation was on the rise, as were unemployment and interest rates. There were energy crises as well as foreign crises.⁸⁰ In 1979, the US-backed Shah in Iran was overthrown by an anti-American Islamic-revolutionary, Ayatollah Khomeini. These problems in Iran were heightened when a militant mob took over the US embassy and held hostage more than sixty Americans.⁸¹ Shortly thereafter, the Soviet Union sent its army into Afghanistan to ensure the stability of its pro-communist government.⁸² It was no wonder that the American people were suffering from what President Carter called a "crisis of confidence."⁸³ As 1979 passed and 1980 began, America's situation did not improve.

Ronald Reagan saw the malaise from which the United States was suffering. For his part, Reagan knew that he had to rebuild America's economic and military strength. In doing so, he could excite hope and confidence in the American people. Moreover, he

⁷⁹ Kennedy, John F. "A New Social Order," June 24, 1963, The Paulskirche, Frankfurt, Germany. <http://www.geocities.com/~newgeneration/paulsk.htm>.

⁸⁰ Grantham, *Recent America*, 387-389.

⁸¹ *Ibid*, 390.

⁸² *Ibid*.

⁸³ "Jimmy Carter: Energy and the National Goals- A 'Crisis of Confidence.'" July 5, 1979. <http://www.americanrhetoric.com/speeches/jimycartercrisisofconfidence.htm>.

knew that he could help this process along by tapping into the sentiments associated with the Kennedy image. The last time that people had felt confident in the government and hopeful about the future was during JFK's administration.⁸⁴ Thus it was no surprise that Reagan chose to use the Kennedy image to help turn around the nation's attitude.

Reagan not only used the Kennedy image to evoke optimism and hope, he also used it to garner support for his legislation. As President, he took the country in a very conservative direction. In order to pass much of his legislation, such as his tax cut and his defense spending, Reagan invoked the image of Kennedy and his administration's policies in order to win over moderates and conservative Democrats. This need for moderate and Democratic support also led to Reagan's repeated invocations of the Kennedy image during the 1984 election. This chapter will detail how Reagan used the Kennedy image as a propaganda tool in order to pass tax and defense legislation as well as to win re-election. Through these invocations, it can be seen how Reagan was using the sentiments associated with the Kennedy image to set the tone for his presidency and how he used the image to relay his point to both politicians and Americans alike.

Tax Cut

When Reagan took over the Presidency in 1981, the country was in a severe economic crisis. High unemployment rates paired with great inflation had caused many Americans to lose faith in the economy. During the 1980 campaign, inflation had reached 20 percent, interest rates were climbing, and unemployment hovered around 8

⁸⁴ Richard Boeth. "JFK: Visions and Revisions," Newsweek. November 19, 1973, 76, 90, 92.

percent.⁸⁵ While campaigning, Ronald Reagan promised to use new ideas and policies to improve the economy and get it working again. One such idea was to implement one of the largest tax cuts in history. Reagan's plan, the Economic Recovery Tax Act, which he immediately began to pursue once in office, called for a 30 percent cut in both personal and corporate income taxes over a three-year period.⁸⁶ This idea was based on the supply-side economics of Arthur Laffer, a professor at the University of California. Laffer believed that by giving businesses tax reductions, producers would increase the supply of goods, jobs, savings and investment, all of which Reagan hoped would lead to increased revenue and would help pull the country out of its economic slump.⁸⁷

The Economic Recovery Tax Act required promotion by Reagan for two main reasons. First, it was the first big legislation that his administration would attempt to pass. This could set the tone for the rest of his term in office; passage of the act would start the Reagan administration out on the right foot. Second, Reagan received great opposition from Democrats in Congress who charged that the tax cut would only help the wealthy and/or that it would cause inflation rates to rise even more than they had.⁸⁸ The latter was especially damaging considering the state of the economy. Reagan had to campaign to prove that the tax reduction would benefit all Americans and that it would not harm the economy, but rather, help it. As one reporter pointed out, "The GOP nominee has frequently quoted [John F. Kennedy], comparing his own tax-reduction proposals to those supported by JFK in 1962. Reagan's frequent citation of Democratic

⁸⁵ Grantham, Recent America, 393.

⁸⁶ *Ibid*, 404.

⁸⁷ *Ibid*, 405.

⁸⁸ "Tax Cuts: 1961, 1981," Boston Globe, March 6, 1981, 1.

idols FDR and JFK is part of his strategy to appeal to blue-collar Democrats.’⁸⁹ Thus the President went out to promote his tax plan in hopes that he could sway the opinions of skeptics, who were, for the most part, working class Americans and Democrats. For this reason, Reagan played up comparisons between his tax cut and that of John F. Kennedy, one of the greatest Democratic presidents of the century. Kennedy’s tax cut, the last major tax cut, was similar to the one Reagan was proposing. However, there were some significant differences. Kennedy’s tax cut proposal granted reductions on personal income taxes ranging from 6-26% and a 5% reduction for corporate income taxes spread out over three years; the total tax reduction came to about \$10.2 billion.⁹⁰ Another difference was that Kennedy’s tax cut was based on Keynesian economics, which stated that lowering taxes would increase the demand for goods, and thus stimulate production.⁹¹ This was in contrast to Reagan’s tax cut, which was based on the supply-side economics of Laffer.⁹² When Kennedy proposed his tax cut, inflation rates were under 3%, whereas when Reagan proposed his, inflation rates were hovering around 8%.⁹³ This last point was especially important. Following Kennedy’s tax cuts, many aspects of the economy did turn around, however inflation went up.⁹⁴ Reagan repeatedly ignored this fact when appropriating the Kennedy image. In this sense one can see how the President was using the Kennedy image as propaganda; he was only using the parts of Kennedy’s tax cut that helped his cause. In doing so, Reagan could easily tap into the positive memories and admiration that people had for Kennedy’s presidency, remind

⁸⁹ Martin F. Nolan, “Reagan, Quoting JFK, Raps Carter on Defense.” *Boston Globe*. August 21, 1980. 1.

⁹⁰ Giglio, *The Presidency of John F. Kennedy*, 138.

⁹¹ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Keynesian_economics, “Keynesian Economics.” April 21, 2005.

⁹² http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Laffer_curve, “Laffer Curve.” April 20, 2005.

⁹³ <http://www.neatideas.com/info/inflation.htm>, “Inflation Rate Data,” 1999.

⁹⁴ Ibid.

them of the progress Kennedy's tax cut allowed, and then link himself with that progress and those positive emotions.

In attempts to garner faith in and support for his tax policy, Reagan first claimed that he had used John F. Kennedy's tax cut program as a partial model for his own.⁹⁵ Statements such as these made it harder for Democrats to completely disapprove of his tax plan. After all, it seemed uncouth for Democrats to slander the policies of a Democratic icon. These statements must have also heightened the public's assessment of Reagan's tax cut. If they could remember Kennedy's and the progress it led to, then perhaps they might think that a tax plan based on Kennedy's could not be all bad. Reagan hammered this home in speech after speech, using Kennedy's exact words in order to help his point resonate with the American public. This can be seen in a speech he gave at the Illinois Forum Reception on September 2, 1981:

There is that question in people's minds, 'Can you cut taxes and fight inflation by doing so?' Well, I believe very much that you can. Let me just read you something. 'Our true choice is not between tax reduction on the one hand and avoidance of large Federal deficits on the other. An economy stifled by restrictive tax rates will never produce enough revenue to balance the budget, just as it will never produce enough jobs or enough profits.' John F. Kennedy said that back in 1962, when he was asking for a tax decrease, a cut in tax rates across the board. And he was proven right, because that- the last tax cut, literally, that we've had- actually produced more revenue for government, because the economy was stimulated and more people were working and there was more industry and productivity in America.⁹⁶

Building from those comparisons, Reagan also foreshadowed the economic future of America. He claimed that because several aspects of the economy improved after

⁹⁵ "Tax Cuts," *Boston Globe*, March 6, 1981, 1.

⁹⁶ Ronald Reagan. "Remarks at the Illinois Forum Reception in Chicago, Illinois." September 2, 1981. Public Papers of Ronald Reagan. Ronald Reagan Presidential Library. www.reagan.utexas.edu/resource/speeches/1981/90281a.html, 21 April 2005.

Kennedy's tax cut that the same was sure to happen after his. An example of this can be seen in a November 13, 1981 speech where, in response to the doubts voiced by Congressional Democrats on his tax cut, Reagan remarked:

Perhaps we should just refer them to the history of those years just prior to the Kennedy tax cut, when employment in America was increasing by 1.19 percent a year, and how in the years immediately following, the rate of increase in employment was almost doubled. The real gross national product, the rate of growth, went from a little over 3 ½ percent before the tax cut to over 5 percent after the tax cut. The savings, the growth rate of personal savings, jumped from 2 1/3 percent to 8 percent of the American people's earnings. Now, this is not the only evidence of recent history of what can happen when more money rather than less is left in the hands of the people.⁹⁷

After saying much the same in a speech given on November 30, 1981, Reagan added, "If our tax policies result in an increase of only 2 percentage points in the level of savings that will mean \$40 billion more in the money available for investment and mortgages."⁹⁸ Through such examples, it is clear how Reagan was using the results of the Kennedy tax cut in order to prove that his tax cut would have the same positive results if not better results in order to quell unrest over his proposal.

Amazingly, during this whole period, there was little opposition from the Democratic Party in regards to Reagan's invocations. Naturally there were critics of his tax policy, yet there were few who directly challenged Reagan's appropriation of the Kennedy image for his own use as political propaganda. In one interview, Senator Edward Kennedy rebuffed Reagan's use of the Kennedy image in order to pass his tax

⁹⁷ Ronald Reagan, "Remarks at a 'Salute to a Stronger America' Republican Fundraising Dinner in Houston Texas." November 13, 1981. Public Papers of Ronald Reagan. Ronald Reagan Presidential Library. www.reagan.utexas.edu/resource/speeches/1981/111381e.htm.

⁹⁸ Ronald Reagan, "Remarks at an Ohio State Republican Fundraising Reception in Cincinnati." November 30, 1981. Public Papers of Ronald Reagan. Ronald Reagan Presidential Library. www.reagan.utexas.edu/resource/speeches/1981/113081a.htm.

legislation, saying, "It is one thing to have a tax cut while maintaining inflation at less than 3.6 percent for three years. It is another matter entirely to impose one with double-digit inflation."⁹⁹ This criticism, however, was extremely mild. Most Democrats, including Senator Kennedy, seemed to be more concerned with altering the tax legislation to make sure that it would benefit middle income families instead of burden them.¹⁰⁰

In late 1981 Congress passed the Economic Recovery Tax Act which, "provided for a 24 percent across the board tax cut spread over thirty-three months, a drop in maximum rates from 70 percent to 50 percent, a reduction in the capital gains tax, and an array of tax incentives."¹⁰¹ Despite some continuing economic problems throughout 1982, in 1983, the economy reached a stable state.¹⁰² Reagan and his supporters attributed the upturn in the economy to their new fiscal ideas, especially the broad tax cut. As 1984 rolled around, Reagan used this success during his re-election campaign. However, instead of simply speaking about how he worked to pass the tax cut and how the tax cut benefited Americans, Reagan continued to drop the John F. Kennedy name. In speech after speech, the President remarked, "For the first time since the administration of John Kennedy, we cut tax rates significantly for every working American."¹⁰³

⁹⁹ Garry Wills. "Kennedy, the Opposition?" Boston Globe, February 25, 1981, 1.

¹⁰⁰ "Senator Kennedy Says Reagan's Budget Cuts Are 'Unfair Sacrifice,'" The New York Times, March 1, 1981, 24. Steven Rattner. "Reagan Tax Cut Plan Favors the Well-to-Do. Some Economists Find," The New York Times, March 15, 1981, 1.

¹⁰¹ Grantham, Recent America, 405.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, 407.

¹⁰³ Ronald Reagan, "Radio Address to the Nation on Administration Policies." August 19, 1984. Public Papers of Ronald Reagan. Ronald Reagan Presidential Library. www.reagan.utexas.edu/resource/speeches/1984/81884a.htm.

In 1985, after Reagan's re-election, it became clear just how well his JFK comparisons had worked. That year, the Reagan administration pushed again for tax reform. After Reagan gave a nationally televised address in which he laid out his plan for an overhaul of the tax code, many Democrats aligned with him. As one newspaper article pointed out, "The Democrats, trying to regain some initiative on tax reform, last night characterized President Ronald Reagan as a convert to Democratic dogma who is 'bucking his party's tradition as protector of big business and the wealthy.'"¹⁰⁴ The article even quoted Democratic Party official, Dan Rostenkowski, as commenting that Reagan's televised address evoked memories of John F. Kennedy, as well as other Democratic Presidential greats.¹⁰⁵ What this shows, to some extent, is what a convincing job Reagan did at comparing his tax reforms to those of the Kennedy administration. The Democratic Party finally realized that it was better to align themselves with the Kennedy legacy (as portrayed by Reagan), rather than abandon the record of one of their greatest presidents.

Defending Defense & Fighting the Cold War

Since the beginning of the Cold War in the 1940s, the United States had found itself in a constant struggle for military superiority over the Soviet Union. To fall behind could mean the domination of the free world. Ronald Reagan had always been a staunch supporter of military spending in order to build a strong defense. He also believed in stopping the Soviets in their attempts to spread communism. As his political career developed, the majority of Reagan's sentiments towards the Soviet Union remained the

¹⁰⁴ Eileen McNamara, "Democrats Praise Reagan's Tax Plan," Boston Globe, May 29, 1985, 7.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

same. Robert Dallek, a presidential historian wrote, “The organizing principle of Ronald Reagan’s defense and foreign policies was anti-Sovietism- the need to confront and overcome the Soviet Communist danger in every part of the globe.”¹⁰⁶

These sentiments were clear in the 1980 presidential campaign. Reagan charged President Jimmy Carter with being too soft on communism, and chastised him for allowing the Soviets to gain on the military superiority of the United States.¹⁰⁷ Whereas Carter had, according to Reagan, let down America’s guard, Reagan proposed a vast defense expansion and “peace through strength.”¹⁰⁸ During the campaign, he used the words of John F. Kennedy, a Democrat and a strong Cold Warrior, in order to gain further acceptance for his views as well as point out how much the Democratic Party had eased on defense. Perhaps one of the best examples of this can be seen in a speech given at the American Legion in Boston. Reagan spoke to the audience,

How is American military superiority dangerous? Whatever happened to the words of John F. Kennedy: ‘There can only be one defense policy for the United States, and that is summed up in the word first. I do not mean first, but. I do not mean first, when. I mean first period.’ President Kennedy went on to say, ‘Only then can we stop the next war before it starts. Only then can we prevent war by preparing for it.’¹⁰⁹

Here, Reagan’s juxtaposition of Carter’s comment next to Kennedy’s statement served to show how far the Carter administration had strayed from the traditions of the Democratic Party and how weak on defense they had become. If Kennedy, one of the greatest Democratic presidents, believed in a strong national defense, then Carter’s opinions seemed rogue and not in the best interests of the country’s security. This in turn made it

¹⁰⁶ Grantham, Recent America, 408.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid.

¹⁰⁸ Martin F. Nolan, “Reagan, Quoting JFK, Raps Carter on Defense,” Boston Globe, August 21, 1980, 1.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid.

seem like Reagan was on the right track. He promised to restore America's strength and power. By invoking the Kennedy image, Reagan thus also associated himself with the strength linked to JFK and his administration in regards to national defense.

While in office, Reagan continued to invoke the Kennedy image in regards to defense spending. One example of this can be seen in a private letter to Bill Breisky, the editor of the *Cape Cod Times*, from April 26, 1982. Breisky, along with several other Northeastern editors, had been invited to the White House for a special briefing. Upon his return home, Mr. Breisky published an article in which he questioned the "record defense spending" of the administration and asked questions such as, "What would happen... if you told Mr. Brezhnev that, as a peace gesture, we were going to cut, say, \$20 billion from our fiscal '83 defense budget?"¹¹⁰ In response to the questions, Reagan wrote,

What you call "record" defense spending was reduced so much that we created a window of vulnerability vis-à-vis the Soviet Union. Maybe our budget is "record" compared to those of the previous administrations but only in such a comparison. We are spending on defense an amount equal to 6 percent of the GNP, JFK spent 9 percent. I only picked the single year- 1961 as an illustration but it was typical of the peacetime military spending.¹¹¹

In his letter, Reagan used the Kennedy image in order to lessen his critic's claims of larger than needed defense spending. In fact, Reagan would use this sort of comparison in order to gain support for a greater defense budget. After all, as President Kennedy once said, "There is no discount on defense."¹¹²

¹¹⁰ Kiron K. Skinner, et. all, eds., *Ronald Reagan: A Life in Letters*, (New York: Free Press, 2003), 593.

¹¹¹ Ibid, 594.

¹¹² Ronald Reagan, "Radio Address to the Nation on Armed Forces Day and Defense Spending." May 18, 1985. Public Papers of Ronald Reagan. Ronald Reagan Presidential Library. www.reagan.utexas.edu/resource/speeches/1985/51885a.htm.

As the years passed, Reagan continued to invoke the Kennedy image in order to persuade the public and Congress to continue high defense spending. He believed that this was important because the Soviets were pumping loads of money into military spending. In Reagan's opinion, in order to keep the playing field even and thus hope to bring the USSR to the table to negotiate arms limitations, the United States could not slack off on defense.¹¹³ Rather, more money needed to be dedicated to strengthening the military and towards developing new defensive technology.

One area of the world where Reagan took extra interest in fighting the Cold War was in Central America. Reagan believed that communist states in the hemisphere would be a direct threat to the United States and democracy. For the President, the greatest threat was occurring in El Salvador. There, a leftist uprising was threatening the government. Reagan believed that the leftist radicals were being supported by the Nicaraguan left-wing rebels, the Sandinistas.¹¹⁴ He also believed that the Sandinistas were supported by both Cuba and the Soviet Union, and that they were responsible for the overthrow of Anastasio Somoza, the dictator of Nicaragua, in 1979.¹¹⁵

When Reagan came into office, he had a plan to send aid (military and monetary) to both El Salvador and Nicaragua. In El Salvador, he wanted to assure that the America-friendly government was not overthrown. Therefore, from 1981-1983, the Reagan administration sent military advisers, money and military machinery.¹¹⁶ In 1983, the situation in Central America was not improving and the American people were growing restless. In response, the President created a bipartisan commission on Central America,

¹¹³ Grantham, Recent America. 409.

¹¹⁴ Ibid, 410.

¹¹⁵ Ibid.

¹¹⁶ Ibid. 411.

headed by Henry Kissinger, to investigate how and if the United States should proceed with the situation. The report, which was presented in January of 1984, “acknowledged the vital need for long-term social and economic reforms in the region and proposed \$8.5 billion in aid over the following three years.”¹¹⁷ It also recommended that the United States needed a “significantly larger program of military assistance” for fighting communists in Central America, and thus preventing the Soviet Union from gaining influence in the hemisphere.¹¹⁸ Accordingly, the Reagan administration came up with a plan to send \$312 million, in addition to the \$64.8 million already being sent, to the El Salvadorian army.¹¹⁹ Most criticism to the increase in military aid came in two forms. First, many believed, with the United States already operating in deficit, that there was no reason for such a significant increase in funding. Second, politicians and the public alike were worried that the situation would turn into another Vietnam.¹²⁰

In response to these worries, Reagan took to the airwaves to earn support for increased aid towards El Salvador. It was especially important for Reagan to gain approval on the issue, as 1984 was an election year. With the need for support and the need for approval, President Reagan turned again to the Kennedy image and reminded Americans of Kennedy’s policies toward helping out Latin American countries during his presidency. Kennedy had begun the Alliance for Progress to stop the spread of communism in the developing nations of Latin America. Reagan compared his plans to

¹¹⁷ Ibid.

¹¹⁸ Ibid.

¹¹⁹ Associated Press, “Reagan Seeks \$312M More in Military Aid for El Salvador.” Boston Globe, February 3, 1984, 1.

¹²⁰ In a Gallup poll taken in May of 1984, 72% of the people surveyed who were aware of the situation in Central America felt that it was similar to the situation in Vietnam (where Americans would get dragged in). “Gallup Survey Shows Criticism of Policy in Central America,” Boston Globe, Jun 10, 1984, 1.

send aid to El Salvador with that particular piece of Kennedy legislation. In a radio address on April 14, 1984, he said,

We cannot turn our backs on this crisis at our doorstep. Nearly 23 years ago, President Kennedy warned against the threat of Communist penetration in our hemisphere. He said, 'I want it clearly understood that this government will not hesitate in meeting its primary obligations which are to the security of our nation.' We can do no less today. I have, therefore, after consultation with the Congress, decided to use one of my legal authorities to provide money to help the Government of El Salvador defend itself.¹²¹

In several other speeches, Reagan would use this same Kennedy quote, adding to it that "...the House and Senate supported [Kennedy] overwhelmingly."¹²² What Reagan failed to mention was how the Alliance for Progress quickly failed.¹²³ He was spinning Kennedy's legislation in order to garner both political and public support for helping to aid El Salvador.

1984 Election

The 1984 election provides particular insight into the history of Kennedy's image. During this presidential campaign, the Kennedy image was invoked more than it ever had been before. Both the Republican candidate, President Reagan, and the Democratic candidates, Gary Hart and Walter Mondale, invoked the Kennedy image. Gary Hart even made attempts to promote himself as the heir to the Kennedy legacy. However, none of the Democratic candidates' appropriations compared to those made by Reagan.

¹²¹ Ronald Reagan, "Radio Address to the Nation on Central America." April 14, 1984. Public Papers of Ronald Reagan. Ronald Reagan Presidential Library. www.reagan.utexas.edu/resource/speeches/1984/41484a.htm.

¹²² Ronald Reagan, "Address to the Nation on United States Policy in Central America." May 9, 1984. Public Papers of Ronald Reagan. Ronald Reagan Presidential Library. www.reagan.utexas.edu/resource/speeches/1984/50984h.htm.

¹²³ Giglio. *The Presidency*. 233-236.

Reagan used the Kennedy image in support of his continued defense spending and his tax cut. These were two areas of his first administration where Reagan knew his Democratic opponents were sure to attack him. Invoking the Kennedy image in both of these situations lessened the blow of those attacks. After all, Democratic candidates couldn't be so against the tax cut and defense spending if one of their presidential heroes stood for them during his presidency. Thus Reagan knew that by comparing his politics and policies to those of Kennedy, he stood a chance of winning over key Democratic votes. One newspaper article pointed this out: "Reagan's aides have been saying for some time that he must attract 25 percent of the registered Democrats in order to win the election... As part of this strategy, Reagan has quoted extensively from Democrats including Franklin D. Roosevelt, Harry S. Truman, and Kennedy."¹²⁴

Reagan took his invocations one step further when he claimed that it was he, not the Democratic candidates, who was operating in the tradition of Democratic presidential greats such as FDR, Truman and especially Kennedy. In speech after speech Reagan claimed that the Democratic Party had abandoned the tradition set forth by these three presidents, and that was why he had switched Parties. He told countless voters:

To all those Democrats who have been loyal to the party of FDR, Harry Truman, and JFK, but who believe that its current leaders have changed that party, that they no longer stand firmly for America's responsibilities in the world, that they no longer protect the working people of this country, we say to them, 'Join us. Come walk with us down the new path of hope and opportunity.' I can speak to that because I did that already. I was a Democrat, and I changed when I found I could no longer follow the course of the leadership of that part.¹²⁵

¹²⁴ Benjamin Taylor, "Reagan urges Massachusetts Democrats to Join GOP on 'Path of Hope,'" Boston Globe, November 2, 1984, 1.

¹²⁵ Ronald Reagan, "Remarks at a Reagan-Bush Rally in Endicott, New York." September 12, 1984. Public Papers of Ronald Reagan. Ronald Reagan Presidential Library. www.reagan.utexas.edu/resource/speeches/1984/91284f.htm.

It was invocations such as these that especially frustrated the Democratic Party.

However, as the campaign progressed, evidence arose that Reagan had not always praised JFK and that he indeed had abandoned the Democratic Party, but this was before Kennedy was elected.

This evidence came in the form of a letter written in 1960 from Reagan to Vice President Richard Nixon, the Republican presidential candidate. Reagan, a well-known Democrat, chose to support Nixon in that election, giving over two hundred speeches to rally support for the Vice President.¹²⁶ He also became the chairman of the group “Democrats for Nixon.”¹²⁷ While this may not have seemed a surprising decision, as Reagan had campaigned for another Republican, Eisenhower, in 1956, he had also campaigned against Nixon in the past. The real reason behind Reagan’s failure to support Kennedy can be found in the letter to Richard Nixon on July 15, 1960, dating just after Kennedy’s acceptance speech at the Democratic National Convention.¹²⁸ The letter displayed Reagan’s distrust of Kennedy’s character and policies. In the beginning of the letter, Reagan comments on Kennedy’s DNC acceptance speech, stating that, “beneath the generalities [of Kennedy’s speech] I heard a frightening call to arms. Unfortunately he is a powerful speaker with an appeal to the emotions. He leaves little doubt that his idea of the ‘challenging new world’ is one in which the federal government will grow bigger and do more and of course spend more.”¹²⁹ Reagan went on to comment, “One last thought- shouldn’t someone tag Mr. Kennedy’s bold new imaginative program with

¹²⁶ “Reagan: A Life Full of Legacies.” San Francisco Chronicle, June 6, 2004. <http://www.sfgate.com/cgi-bin/article.cgi?f=/c/a/2004/06/06/MNGDQ71OTC1.DTL>.

¹²⁷ Ronald Reagan, “Debate Between the President and Former Vice President Walter F. Modale in Louisville, Kentucky.” October 7, 1984. Public Papers of Ronald Reagan. Ronald Reagan Presidential Library. www.reagan.utexas.edu/resource/speeches/1984/100784a.htm.

¹²⁸ Skinner, *Reagan: A Life in Letters*, 704-705.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*

its proper age? Under the tousled boyish haircut it is still old Karl Marx- fist launched a century ago. There is nothing new in the idea of a government being Big Brother to us all. Hitler called his ‘State Socialism’ and way before him it was ‘benevolent monarchy.’”¹³⁰

Here, in this letter, we see Reagan attacking Kennedy’s plans for the future of America. He equates JFK’s vision of a bigger government with that of communism and dictatorships. While this letter was private, its strong language was echoed in a public article Reagan published in *Human Events* on July 21, 1961. The article, entitled “Encroaching Government Controls,” made the argument that there were politicians in America who were becoming too soft on communism.¹³¹ Instead of focusing on protecting the United States from the grasp of the Soviets, they were welcoming communistic thinking in the country. Throughout the piece, Reagan made claims such as: “Federal aid is the foot in the door to Federal control,” “We now have a permanent structure of government beyond the reach of Congress and actually capable of dictating policy. This power, under whatever name you choose, is the very essence of totalitarianism,” and “We have received this progressive tax direct from Karl Marx who designed it as the prime essential of a socialist state.” The overriding idea of these statements, which sum up the tone of the entire piece, was that the liberal politicians were sacrificing the safety of the United States by neglecting defense and introducing “communistic” policies and ideas into the American government. While Reagan never directly mentions President Kennedy in the article, it was well understood that Reagan

¹³⁰ Ibid.

¹³¹ Ronald Reagan. “Encroaching Government Controls,” Human Events, July 21, 1961, pg.

considered the President part of “those of liberal persuasion”¹³² who were harming America.

Looking at both the 1960 letter and the 1961 article we can see just how greatly Reagan’s public opinion of Kennedy changed. His sentiments for Kennedy in 1960 and 1961 were clearly the opposite of those he was proclaiming in 1984. When the 1960 letter surfaced in the 1984 election, immediately both Walter Mondale and Gary Hart immediately made public statements condemning Reagan for his hypocrisy. Hart stated at a rally in Boston on October 23, “I am outraged by Ronald Regan invoking the name of John Kennedy when he doesn’t deserve to do that.”¹³³ However Reagan drew even sharper criticism from Senator Edward Kennedy who repeatedly stated that Reagan “has no right to quote John F. Kennedy.”¹³⁴ Despite the warnings and requests to stop invoking the legacy of JFK, Reagan continued to do so.

What this episode sheds light on is the malleability of Kennedy’s image and how politicians used it to reach different Americans. In 1961, Regan had used JFK’s image in a negative light in order to appeal to conservative America. However, as a conservative Republican President in 1984, Reagan was using the image to appeal to moderates and conservative Democrats. The 1984 election highlighted just how malleable the Kennedy image had become over the years. The Kennedy image was not solely for the use of the Democratic Party alone. In 1984 it was very apparent that they could no longer stake a sole claim to it, but rather that the image had transcended politics and political parties. In 1960 and 1961 when Reagan spoke against John F. Kennedy, he was doing so against a

¹³² Ibid.

¹³³ Thomas Oliphant, “Reagan Hit for 1960 Letter on Kennedy,” The Boston Globe, October 24, 1984. 21.

¹³⁴ Paul R. Carrier, “Reagan Should Be Quoting Nixon and Not JFK, Ted Kennedy Says,” Providence Journal. November 3, 1984. A4.

set of present and real policies and ideas. However, after Kennedy's death, those policies and ideologies became part of an image. In the modern world, politicians could take any part of the Kennedy image (style, substance or sentiment) and apply to any fitting situation.

Ronald Reagan's appropriation of the Kennedy image is fundamental to our understanding of the evolution of the image. Never before had a Republican president been so daring as to attempt to, in a way, steal one of the most coveted images of the Democratic Party. However, as stated above, Reagan was able to do so because the Kennedy image had become weak as a result of the revisionist historians. The President therefore chose to use the image as a propaganda tool, appropriating it in order to bring confidence back to the American people and to gain support for his legislation. But perhaps most important, is how we can see Reagan blurring the lines between image and reality. By choosing to discuss only the aspects of Kennedy's policies that benefited his cause, Reagan was deliberately manipulating the Kennedy image and therefore the perceptions of the American people. This trend would continue in President Clinton's administration.

Chapter 3: Clinton's '1000 days'

On July 24, 1963, a seventeen-year-old William Jefferson Clinton stood in the White House Rose Garden. He was there as part of an American Legion Boys' Nation visit to the nation's capitol during which they would have the opportunity to meet President John F. Kennedy. In the Rose Garden, Kennedy spoke to the young men about civil rights and service. The trip left Clinton inspired and sure that politics was the path he wanted to pursue.¹³⁵ Nearly thirty years later, he found himself in the White House holding the most powerful position in the United States.

When Clinton began campaigning for the presidency in 1992, the country had become what one author, Deborah Tannen, called a "culture of critique."¹³⁶ Americans had become cynical, critical, pessimistic and untrusting. While the past thirty years had brought many good things to America, they had also been very troublesome. Those years contained events such as the Vietnam War, Watergate, and the Iran-Contra scandal which shook the confidence and pride of the United States, changing the attitudes of a great many Americans. Many of those problems had been attributed to the Cold War as the United States had built up its defense and attempted to spread its ideologies around the globe. However, closer to the 1992 campaign, the Cold War, which had been a part of American mentality for decades, had finally come to a close. Americans were uncertain about what a post-Cold War United States would be. What Clinton offered, both during his campaign and while in office, was renewal and rebirth. With the death of the Cold War, Americans could begin anew. They could shed their uncertainty, mistrust,

¹³⁵ Shawn J. Parry-Giles and Trevor Parry-Giles, *Constructing Clinton*, (New York: Peter Lang, 2002), 37.

¹³⁶ William Neikirk, "Clinton Attacks 'Culture of Critique,'" *Chicago Tribune*, May 26, 1994, 23.

pessimism and cynicism and replace it with hope, trust, charity and optimism. Clinton recognized that the last time Americans had truly felt these things was during the Kennedy administration.¹³⁷ Thus, he chose to use the sentiments associated with the Kennedy image as motivation to bring the country back to the 1960s state of optimism. This can be seen in a news conference on May 14, 1993 where Clinton remarked,

...when President Kennedy occupied [the presidency,] nearly three-quarters of the American people believed that their leaders would tell them the truth and that their institutions worked and that their problems could be solved. So there was a lot more elbow room there. You know, a year or two years could go by, people could be working on something with maybe only slightly measurable progress, but the country felt it was moving forward. That is what we have to restore today, a sense that it can be done.¹³⁸

Here, Clinton spoke about his desire to restore trust and optimism in the people of the United States. Indeed President Clinton seemed to grow frustrated with the cynicism and pessimism of Americans. He continued to make statements in which he claimed that President Kennedy would be disappointed in the attitude of Americans were he alive today.¹³⁹

Throughout Clinton's presidency he often made attempts to link himself with his idol, President Kennedy. A good example can be seen in Clinton's speech at the opening of the Kennedy Library Museum in October of 1993. In this one speech, the President made all of the following comparisons: Kennedy's appeal for religious tolerance to the

¹³⁷ Carol D. Leoning, "A Day of Tears. Tributes for JFK," The Washington Post, November 23, 2003, C1.

¹³⁸ William J. Clinton, "The President's News Conference," May 14, 1993. Public Papers of the President. www.archives.gov.

¹³⁹ William J. Clinton, "Remarks to the National Urban League," August 4, 1993. Public Papers of the President. www.archives.gov.

passing of the Religious Freedom Restoration Act,¹⁴⁰ Kennedy's appeal for basic civil rights to the passing of the Motor Voter Act¹⁴¹ as well as a racially diverse administration; JFK's launching of the space program to the continuation of funding towards the space station, and the creation of the Peace Corps to the creation of the National Service Corps.¹⁴² Clinton also compared Kennedy's quest to secure health care for America's elderly to his quest to provide all Americans with quality healthcare, as well as JFK's pursuit of a Nuclear Test Ban Treaty to his administration's efforts to end the proliferation of nuclear weapons.¹⁴³

This chapter seeks to explore how and why Clinton appropriated the Kennedy image through an analysis of events from Clinton's campaign through his first year in office. These events include the 1992 presidential campaign and 1993 inauguration, the establishment of AmeriCorps and the passing of NAFTA. While the time frame and event choice may seem limited, they have been selected not for want of other examples, but rather because they provide the clearest, most frequent and most intense invocations of the Kennedy image. They allow us to gain a firm understanding of how Clinton used the image as a propaganda tool, which can then be applied to the multiple other times during his administration where he invoked the Kennedy image.

Passing the Torch: The 1992 Presidential Campaign and Clinton's Inauguration

¹⁴⁰ This act restored religious freedoms in order to create a more neutral and balanced separation of church and state. <http://www.theorator.com/bills108/hr1547.html>, "Religious Freedom Restoration Act," April 1, 2003.

¹⁴¹ Also known as the National Voter Registration Act, it "works by reducing necessary and burdensome bureaucratic obstacles to voter registration. The law requires states to provide uniform registration services through drivers' license agencies, through public assistance and disability agencies and through mail-in registration." <http://www.motorvoter.com/>, "The Right to Vote Means Nothing... Until You Register!"

¹⁴² William J. Clinton, "Remarks at the Dedication of the John F. Kennedy Presidential Library Museum in Boston, Massachusetts," October 29, 1993. Public Papers of the President. www.archives.gov.

¹⁴³ Ibid.

When Clinton began campaigning in 1992 he cleverly chose to use the Kennedy image as a propaganda tool. He realized that by comparing himself and his policy to the Kennedy image, he would be able to tap into the positive sentiments associated with it. One of the strongest themes of his campaign was similar to that of Kennedy's in 1960: after years of old school politicians with their aging mentalities, it was time for a new generation of politicians with new ideas.¹⁴⁴ Clinton, much like Kennedy, believed that he was the politician to usher in such a change. Energetic and charismatic, the young Governor from Arkansas claimed that a new millennium required new leadership. Reflections of this can be seen in a 1991 speech at the Georgetown School of Foreign Service, "What we need to elect in 1992 is not the last president of the 20th century, but the first president of the 21st century."¹⁴⁵ This quote hinted at the generational difference between Clinton and his opponent, President Bush. Clinton saw himself as the politician who would begin the transition between the World War II generation and the baby boomer generation in politics. Other members of the Democratic Party picked up on this sentiment as the campaign continued. New York Governor, Mario Cuomo, echoed Clinton's words at the Democratic National Convention. After speaking on the missteps that had occurred in the previous twelve years under Republican rule, Cuomo called Clinton, "a new voice for a new America."¹⁴⁶ Being a member of the baby boomer generation, Bill Clinton represented the voice of the generation that was beginning to compose the majority of the voting block. This was very similar to how Kennedy portrayed himself when running in 1962. JFK was also the voice of a new generation of

¹⁴⁴ Parry-Giles and Parry-Giles. Constructing Clinton, 36-38.

¹⁴⁵ Jack W. Germond, Jules Witcover, "Clinton Starts Filling in the Gap on Foreign Policy," *St. Petersburg Times*, December 13, 1991.

¹⁴⁶ Robin Toner, "Clinton Gets Liberal Nod: Cuomo, Kennedy back nomination," The [Montreal] Gazette, July 16, 1992.

voters. He wanted to reach out, inspire, and bring forth new and fresh ideas. As one biographer of Clinton noted, “He had cast himself as the Kennedy of the 1990s.”¹⁴⁷

However, all the Kennedy invocations that Clinton made since the beginning of his campaign paled in comparison to those at the 1992 Democratic National Convention. Here, the greatest visual link between John F. Kennedy and Bill Clinton was presented. Just before Clinton was set to take the stage and give his acceptance speech, a short biographical film called “The Man from Hope” was shown. As the video progressed through the monumental moments in Clinton’s boyhood, it included his meeting with President John Kennedy in 1963.¹⁴⁸ Following the scene, Bill’s mother commented, “When [Bill] came home from Boys Nation with this picture of John Kennedy and himself shaking hands, I’ve never seen such an expression on a man’s face in my life... he just had such pride... and I knew right then that government in some form would be his goal.”¹⁴⁹ This scene, first, reiterated what Clinton himself had said many times during the campaign- that John F. Kennedy inspired him to go into politics. There were many times when Clinton said that he hoped, as President, to inspire the nation and America’s youth, just as men like Kennedy had for him.¹⁵⁰ Second, the scene served to link Clinton to the image of Kennedy.

This was further emphasized at the end of “The Man From Hope” when once again an image of Clinton shaking hands with Kennedy was shown. As the scene flashed up, Clinton’s voice spoke, “I still believe in the promise of America,” to which the

¹⁴⁷ R. Emmett Tyrell, Jr., Boy Clinton: The Political Bio, (Washington D.C.: Regency Publishing, Inc., 1996).

¹⁴⁸ Parry-Giles and Parry-Giles, Constructing Clinton, 37.

¹⁴⁹ “Man From Hope” video, 1992 convention. www.clintonfoundation.org.

¹⁵⁰ John F. Harris “Legacies Echo Through Clinton’s Crisis,” The Washington Post, January 10, 1999, A16.

convention crowd grew excited.¹⁵¹ H.L. Goodall Jr. wrote, “At the convention, when this image beamed across the floor, a wellspring of passion emerged spontaneously; voices cried out, there was reverent applause, there probably wasn’t a dry eye in the house.”¹⁵² The image at the end of the film, although brief, was important and deliberate because it allowed Bill Clinton to present himself as the inheritor of the Kennedy legacy. The scene recalled the promise and hope that Kennedy symbolized, attempting to link Clinton with those sentiments. As stated by the authors of Constructing Clinton, a book on the methods Clinton used to develop his image, “We can almost sense the torch of leadership passing from President Kennedy to a young Bill Clinton as they shake hands.”¹⁵³ It is as though through the video clip, Clinton was saying that he would be this generation’s John F. Kennedy and that the American people could have the opportunity to re-live the optimistic times of Camelot again through him.

The desire to be associated with the Camelot legacy continued throughout Clinton’s campaign. This can be seen in the October 11 Presidential debate. Much like JFK, Clinton was comfortable and at ease when speaking in front of audiences and cameras. He had the same charisma, charm and eloquence with words. Thus it is no surprise that a TIME magazine reporter wrote of the debate, “As with John Kennedy (whom [Clinton] shamelessly imitated by saying “we can do better and we must”), the lasting impression of Clinton was his vigorous, confident demeanor and his often bemused attitude towards Bush.”¹⁵⁴ Thus, not only was Clinton invoking Kennedy’s

¹⁵¹ “Man From Hope” video, 1992 convention. www.clintonfoundation.org.

¹⁵² H.L. Goodall Jr., “Living in the Rock N Roll Campaign, or Mystery Media, and the American Public Imagination,” part of Bill Clinton on Stump, State, and Stage, Edited by Stephen A. Smith, (Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 1994), 387.

¹⁵³ Parry-Giles and Parry-Giles Constructing Clinton, 37.

¹⁵⁴ Michael Kramer, “It’s Clinton’s to Lose,” TIME, October 19, 1992, 28.

debating style, but he was also using Kennedy's well-known words for self-comparison. This too was deliberate. Clinton was playing off the myth that stood in the collective memory of the American public. Once again he hoped to make people see that not only was he inspired by Kennedy, but also that he would re-ignite the Kennedy torch and carry out the legacy.

Victorious in the 1992 election, President-elect Clinton used his inauguration as another occasion in which to declare himself the heir to the Kennedy legacy. In addition to all the normal pomp and circumstance that surrounded the occasion, Clinton took the time to directly make several connections with the inauguration of Kennedy. The overall tone of Clinton's inaugural speech was similar to Kennedy's. Both emphasized that their victories symbolized a new generation in politics that would bring renewal and a new beginning, as well as hope.¹⁵⁵ This tone can be seen through many of the lines in Clinton's speech; while not direct quotations of Kennedy's address, the lines were similar enough for the public to catch on. Martin Fletcher, a reporter present noted, "...many of [Clinton's] best lines were direct echoes of John Kennedy's of 1961, one of the greatest speeches ever made. Kennedy proclaimed: 'The torch has been passed to a new generation.' Mr. Clinton said: 'Today a generation raised in the shadows of the Cold war assumes new responsibilities.' Kennedy said: 'And so, my fellow Americans; ask not what your country can do for you, ask what you can do for your country.' Mr. Clinton said: 'My fellow Americans, you, too, must play your part in our renewal.'"¹⁵⁶ By attempting to tap into the collective memory of the American public, Clinton was seeking

¹⁵⁵ In 1962, Kennedy claimed his inauguration symbolized a beginning, renewal and change. Clinton's inauguration claimed that it was "spring in America," a time of rebirth and renewal.

¹⁵⁶ Martin Fletcher, "New Leader Borrows Kennedy's Lofty Themes; Inauguration of Bill Clinton," The London Times, January 21, 1993.

to associate himself with the hope, challenges and progressiveness of the Kennedy era. It should also be noted that in 1961, Robert Frost spoke at the inauguration of new president John F. Kennedy. It was the first time that a poet had been invited to speak at the event. The second time occurred in January of 1993, when Maya Angelou was asked to recite her poem "On the Pulse of Morning" for the Clinton inauguration.¹⁵⁷ This was a symbolic gesture that created a clear connection. Clinton was attempting to link himself with the cultured Kennedy White House.

With it being very apparent that Clinton was associating himself with Kennedy and that a good portion of the media was making the connections as well, a question arose: was all of this working? A Gallup poll taken on January 18-19, 1993 attempted to answer this question. The poll asked, "On the whole, do Bill Clinton and his wife remind you of John F. Kennedy and his wife Jacqueline, or not?" A total of 57% of people asked said "no."¹⁵⁸ Despite what would seem to be a fair number of people responding that they did not think Clinton and Kennedy were alike, the importance of the poll lies in the fact that it was even taken. It demonstrates how frequent and blatant Clinton's attempts to compare himself with Kennedy were and, perhaps more importantly, in doing so, just how much he had caught the attention of the media and the public.

National Service

¹⁵⁷ Benjamin Playthell, "Rhymes with a reason America is celebrating a new unity in diversity, as voiced by Bill Clinton's unofficial poet laureate, Maya Angelou," *The Guardian*, January 25, 1993.

¹⁵⁸ George Gallup, Jr., *The Gallup Poll: Public Opinion 1993*, (Wilmington: Scholarly Resources Inc., 1994), 226-227. It should be noted that the poll results also showed the split in answers between Baby Boomers and World War IIers. 54% of Baby Boomers and 62% of World War IIers answered 'no' to the question.

Throughout his campaign, Clinton had spoken about the need to form a national service corps, where young men and women could trade service in America's communities for money towards an education or job training.¹⁵⁹ In this sense the service bill was a win-win situation for America; while improving the communities, volunteers could earn opportunities to improve themselves. It was also a win-win situation for Clinton not only while campaigning, but once in office as well. He could propose legislation that was beneficial to America, while benefiting from another chance to declare himself the inheritor of the Kennedy legacy.

AmeriCorps, as the national service corps came to be known, was very similar to the Peace Corps developed under John F. Kennedy. The main difference was that the Peace Corps volunteers left America and served in other countries, being quasi-ambassadors, whereas AmeriCorps volunteers stayed at home, attempting to remedy problems in their own communities.¹⁶⁰ Still, the impetus behind the two service corps was the same: Americans needed a chance to be selfless, to serve their country, and to have hope and optimism for the future.

In February of 1993 in an address before a joint session of Congress, Clinton spoke on his administration's goals. Here, the President laid out his plan for AmeriCorps, stating that he hoped it would be able to reach out to more people than the Peace Corps: "A generation ago when President Kennedy proposed and the United States Congress embraced the Peace Corps, it defined the character of a whole generation of Americans committed to serving people around the world. In this national service

¹⁵⁹ Wayne Woodlief, "Clinton Campaign Heads into New Frontier of '90s," Boston Herald, October 18, 1992, 4.

¹⁶⁰ Ian Brodie, "Clinton Deal Gives Youth its Chance to Serve Nation," The Times(London), March 1, 1993.

program, we will provide more than twice as many slots for people before they go to college to be in national service than ever served in the Peace Corps.”¹⁶¹ This goal was again echoed in a speech at the U.S. Chamber of Commerce National Business Action rally. Clinton stated, “When President Kennedy started the Peace Corps, it shaped the imagination of a whole generation. We need a peace corps here at home to deal with our problems here at home, and it needs to be much bigger than the Peace Corps ever was.”¹⁶² Clearly Clinton had big goals in mind when it came to AmeriCorps. Thus he took to the stump, letting the public know about the service bill, all the while invoking the Kennedy image.

In a New York Times article on February 28, 1993, President Clinton outlined his plan for AmeriCorps. In discussing why he had developed the new service plan, Clinton wrote, “National service is an idea as old as America... For my generation, the reality of National Service was born 32 years ago tomorrow, when President John F. Kennedy created the Peace Corps. At its peak, the Peace Corps enrolled only 16,000 volunteers yet it changed the way a generation of Americans looked at themselves and the world.”¹⁶³ This appropriation of the Kennedy image was repeated the following day during the President’s speech at Rutgers University, marking the 32nd anniversary of the day JFK signed the Peace Corps into existence. The speech itself was important because it was the first time that Clinton publicly discussed in complete the service bill. As one reporter pointed out, “Clinton used this Peace Corps anniversary to invoke the magic of Kennedy’s memory and to recall that past generations of young Americans have used

¹⁶¹ William J. Clinton, “Address Before a Joint Session of Congress on Administration Goals,” February 17, 1993. Public Papers of the President. www.archives.gov.

¹⁶² William J. Clinton, “Remarks to the U.S. Chamber of Commerce National Business Action Rally,” February 23, 1993. Public Papers of the President. www.archives.gov.

¹⁶³ Bill Clinton, “National Service- Now.” New York Times. February 28, 1993, E15.

national service to benefit themselves and their country.”¹⁶⁴ President Clinton could have announced his new service corps plan on any other day. However, he specifically chose the anniversary of the Peace Corps to further associate himself with the inspiration and hope of the Kennedy image. As one publication said, “It’s no coincidence.”¹⁶⁵ Through invoking the Kennedy image, Clinton tapped into the collective memory of the American public, which served to stimulate positive responses. The President was trying to unleash the feelings of optimism and expectation that Americans had during Kennedy’s administration. The invocation also attracted more media attention due to the fact that it appeared that Clinton was once again trying to define himself as the inheritor of the Kennedy legacy. The blatant use of the 32nd anniversary of the Peace Corps as the day to launch AmeriCorps helped to catch the attention of journalists and reporters. Thus it was a double-victory for Clinton in that he further proved he was the inheritor to the Kennedy legacy, and in doing so, garnered extra media attention for his service bill.

Nearly five months after the Rutgers University speech, President Clinton again created another perfect Kennedy-comparison scene when the American Legion Boys Nation visited the White House. On July 24, 1993, Clinton spoke to the group of boys exactly 30 years to the day of his famous Boys’ Nation visit to the White House. The President spoke about his 1963 visit and about service, invoking the Kennedy image on both topics. Clinton used the occasion as an opportunity to again push for his national service bill, saying,

Right now there’s a little bit of political maneuvering going on in the Congress about national service. It’s sad to me because we have good

¹⁶⁴ Steve Berg, “Clinton invoked JFK and Peace Corps in call for a new national service plan,” Star Tribune, March 2, 1993, 1A.

¹⁶⁵ “National Service.” The Richmond Afro-American and the Richmond Planet, March 6, 1993, Vol. 111, Iss. 28. A4.

Republican and Democrat support for this bill. And I earnestly hope that this whole idea will be saved from becoming a political football. It is too important to America. It has nothing to do with partisan politics and everything to do with giving people a chance to serve their country and, in so doing, to help to build a belief in their country again.¹⁶⁶

Here, Clinton used an occasion where he knew media attention would be great in order to send a message to those opposed to his bill in Congress. He knew the eyes of the media would be upon him because he was re-creating the visit he had to the White House in 1963, further demonstrating that he was indeed the inheritor of the Kennedy legacy. Just as Clinton had been inspired by Kennedy, thirty years later Clinton was inspiring a whole new generation. This was sensed by everyone present, including, on a lighter note, Vice President Gore. When the President and the Vice President walked out into the Rose Garden and began shaking hands with some of the young men, Al Gore said to the group, "If there is anyone here who has in the back of his mind any notion at all of going into public service or politics, I only have one word of advice. If you can manage somehow to get a picture of you shaking hands with President Clinton here today, it might come in handy later on."¹⁶⁷

What is most important about looking at how Clinton invoked the Peace Corps in regards to his national service bill is how he was using the malleable Kennedy image as propaganda. The image became something that he could market to Americans, using the style and sentiments associated with it for his own benefit. This notion is further heightened when one considers that Clinton chose to invoke the Peace Corps when there was another service corps that was even more similar: Volunteers In Service To America

¹⁶⁶ William J. Clinton, "Remarks to the American Legion Boys Nation." July 24, 1993. Public Papers of the President. www.archives.gov.

¹⁶⁷ Jason Vest, "Bill Clinton's Handshake with History: In 1963, a Boys Nation Delegate Was Awed by the President. Now It's the Next Generation's Turn," The Washington Post, July 26, 1993, B1.

(VISTA). Created by John F. Kennedy, although passed under Lyndon Johnson in 1964, VISTA was a domestic volunteer service program that allowed Americans to exchange service for minimal pay.¹⁶⁸ In the National Service Bill that Clinton proposed, VISTA would be absorbed into AmeriCorps.¹⁶⁹ However, despite the similarities, Clinton rarely invoked VISTA in his speeches. Rather, he chose to use the more well known of Kennedy's service corps, the Peace Corps. This decision was based purely on image. VISTA was associated more with Johnson's administration and was certainly not as successful, popular or well known as the Peace Corps. Thus, Clinton was blatantly ignoring the truth because it was not as profitable; Instead of using the more similar VISTA, Clinton deliberately chose to invoke the Peace Corps because it was associated with the Kennedy image and thus more marketable. Presenting a marketable bill was especially important for Clinton at this time due to the fact that the National Service Bill was one of Clinton's first major pieces of legislation. The passing of the bill was critical in order to establish momentum for his administration. This crucial sense was heightened due to the fact that Congress would be voting whether or not to pass the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) legislation a month later.

NAFTA

The North American Free Trade Agreement, negotiated by the Bush administration before President Bush left office, was picked up by Clinton as he transitioned into the presidency. The trade agreement, which was signed by Canada,

¹⁶⁸ Kennedy attempted to pass legislation enacting VISTA, however it was tabled in Congress.

<http://www.friendsofvista.org/living/hist.html>. "Brief History of VISTA."

¹⁶⁹ Ibid.

Mexico and the United States, created one large trading block between the three countries. It was projected to have a greater number of people and higher production than the European Community.¹⁷⁰ Although there was bipartisan support for NAFTA, Clinton faced the greatest resistance from within his own Party. This came primarily as a result of strong opposition from blue-collar workers and organized labor, who were afraid that they would lose their jobs to laborers south of the border who were willing to work for lower pay. Many Democrats didn't want to anger these key voters.¹⁷¹ Thus Clinton not only had to convince members of his own Party, but also American workers that NAFTA was in the best interest of the country and all Americans. In his attempts to accomplish both of these objectives, he made several key speeches, most of which contained a reference to President Kennedy's policies in regards to international trade.

Perhaps the most important of Clinton's speeches concerning NAFTA took place on October 29, 1993, at the John F. Kennedy Presidential Library Museum reopening. Present were most of the Kennedy clan, including JFK's wife, Jacqueline, and children, John Jr. and Caroline, as well as his brother, Senator Ted Kennedy and nephew, Representative Joseph Kennedy. Also present were several other key politicians.¹⁷² The setting was, of course, natural for Clinton to talk about JFK and how the late President and his family had influenced him. However, President Clinton turned the occasion into an opportunity to not only lengthily compare his administration with that of Kennedy's, but also to pressure key Democrats into supporting NAFTA. In his speech, the President began by hinting at the benefits of the trade agreement by repeating Kennedy's challenge

¹⁷⁰ Grantham, Recent America, 446.

¹⁷¹ Carol Jouzaitis, "Clinton Uses JFK Legacy to Push Case for NAFTA," Chicago Tribune, October 30, 1993, 1.

¹⁷² William J. Clinton, "Remarks at the Dedication of the John F. Kennedy Presidential Library Museum in Boston, Massachusetts," October 29, 1993. Public Papers of the President. www.archives.gov.

towards Americans in the 1960s to leave behind their security and reservations and reach out to the world:

Our generation must now decide, just as John Kennedy and his generation had to decide at the end of World War II, whether we will harness the galloping changes of our time in the best tradition of John Kennedy and the post-war generation, to the well-being of the American people, or withdraw from the world and recoil from our own problems as we did after World War I.¹⁷³

Clinton continued to speak of Kennedy's openness to world trade as well as his commitment to protecting American workers from the possible consequences of it.

Clinton then proceeded to quote Kennedy in 1962 as saying, "Economic isolation and political leadership are wholly incompatible. The United States has encouraged sweeping changes in free world economic patterns in order to strengthen the forces of freedom.

But we cannot ourselves stand still. We must adopt our own economy to the imperatives of a changing world and once more assert our leadership."¹⁷⁴

The purpose of all these invocations became blatantly clear as Clinton continued speaking, directly bringing up NAFTA, for which the President lacked considerable Congressional support. In his speech, Clinton referred to such global economic commitments as this generations 'New Frontier.'¹⁷⁵ In the President's opinion, despite domestic troubles, Americans had to be trusting, fearless and engage in the global economic sphere. Only in doing so could they fully benefit. Audaciously, Clinton claimed that if JFK were still a member of Congress, as he once was, he would have endorsed NAFTA. This was a very bold statement considering that he was speaking in

¹⁷³Ibid.

¹⁷⁴ Ibid.

¹⁷⁵ "Clinton Evokes JFK to Push Trade Deal Economic Commitments Called 'Our New Frontier,'" The New York Times, October 30, 1993, A3.

front of a good majority of the Kennedy clan, including Senator Edward Kennedy, who had not yet formed an opinion on the agreement.¹⁷⁶ One editorialist wrote on the statement, “It was not the first time Clinton had tried to wrap himself in the JFK mantle, but it was the first time he was so presumptuous as to claim he knew how Kennedy might have felt were he alive.”¹⁷⁷

The clear purpose of this speech was to use the Kennedy image as a propaganda tool in order to garner both public and political support for NAFTA. Clinton began by comparing his administration to that of Kennedy’s in order to show that just as the American public trusted in JFK, they could trust in him. Supported by quotes and examples from the Kennedy administration, Clinton asked again for the trust of the American people that he had their best interests in mind when it came to NAFTA.

On the same day of the Kennedy Library Museum dedication, Clinton also spoke to Gillette Employees in Boston. The main purpose of Clinton’s factory speech was to persuade not only the Gillette workers, but all American laborers, that he was looking out for them and there was no reason to fear the results of NAFTA. The President began his speech by recapping the points he had made at the Kennedy Library Museum dedication: “I spoke at the Kennedy Library about the challenges that President Kennedy faced over 30 years ago... he started a trade adjustment program for people who lost their jobs in trade because he knew that if we did it right, we’d always have more winners than losers, but people who lost their jobs should be retrained so they could get new and different jobs. And [NAFTA] is the kind of replay in some ways of that time, with a more

¹⁷⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷⁷ Marianne Means, “Thirty Years Later, We’re Still Trying to Define JFK,” Seattle Post, November 18, 1993.

complex and difficult set of problems.”¹⁷⁸ After discussing how NAFTA would not hurt the majority of American jobs, Clinton went on to say, “Finally, just let me say this: There will be some people who will be dislocated. There always are. If you have a trade agreement, just as President Kennedy recognized in 1962, there always are. I intend to ask the Congress to literally revolutionize the unemployment and the training system in this country.”¹⁷⁹ In both of Clinton’s statements above, he appropriated the image of Kennedy for two reasons. First, it set precedent. Clinton’s mentioning that great presidents before him, such as Kennedy, enacted similar trade agreements made NAFTA seem less daunting. Secondly, Clinton used the Kennedy image in order to tap into the feelings of faith and trust in the government to look out for American workers. The President promised that just as JFK had looked out for US laborers in the 1960s, he would do the same in the 1990s.

As the years passed, Clinton continued to invoke the Kennedy image in regards to NAFTA. Occasions such as the official decision to include Chile in the trading block seemed like perfect times for Clinton to remind Americans of his Kennedy-esque style. However, what the examples above demonstrate is how Clinton appropriated the Kennedy image as a form of propaganda in order to sell NAFTA in hopes of gaining the support of the Democratic Party and the trust of America’s laborers. He understood that the memory of John F. Kennedy resonated well with these two groups and thus exploited the Kennedy image to help his cause.

¹⁷⁸ William J. Clinton, “Remarks on NAFTA to Gillette Employees in Boston, Massachusetts,” October 29, 1993. Public Papers of the President. www.archives.gov.

¹⁷⁹ Ibid.

Clinton's appropriation of the Kennedy image proved just how malleable the image had become. The President was a member of a whole new generation in politics, that operated in a post Cold-War world. Yet despite these facts, Clinton attempted to define himself as the heir to the Kennedy legacy. Many of his policies seemed as though he was trying to carry out Kennedy's legislation in the 1990s. However, what the President was actually attempting to do was use Kennedy's policies to evoke the style and sentiment associated with his administration. Both of these things would not only help cure the "culture of critique" in America, but they would also help Clinton garner support for his controversial policies. In manipulating the Kennedy image in order to serve his purposes, President Clinton only created several other problems associated with blurring the lines between image and reality..

Conclusion

In a somewhat recent *American Heritage* poll, seventy-five prominent historians and journalists ranked John F. Kennedy the most overrated public figure in American History.¹⁸⁰ This poll demonstrated a question that many people have raised: why is it that historians consistently rank Kennedy as an average president, whereas the American public thinks of him as one of the greatest? The answer lies in the image that Kennedy established of himself in office. While his administration was filled with great accomplishments and great setbacks, it was image that kept Kennedy's popularity high. However, following his assassination, this image rose to mythical proportions due in part to the flooding of pro-Kennedy images as well as several Kennedy loyalists who felt it was their duty to protect JFK's image.¹⁸¹ Another factor contributing to deeper nostalgia for the Kennedy administration was the fact that in the years directly following his death, the country plummeted into economic, political and domestic crisis.

One result of these 'time of troubles' was that a group of revisionist historians set out to debunk the glorified Kennedy image.¹⁸² As they uncovered the truth, the Kennedy image grew weaker. Without substance to back it up, the image merely relied on style and sentiments. This allowed the image to, in a way, transcend politics and policy; it could be used by any politician for whatever means. While some may argue that the malleability question does not matter, I would extremely disagree. It provides the next chapter in the history of the Kennedy image, showing that the image did in fact evolve

¹⁸⁰ Cited in Thomas C. Reeves. *A Question of Character: a Life of John F. Kennedy*, (New York: Free Press, 1991), 11.

¹⁸¹ "The 72 Hours and What They Can Teach US," *LIFE*, December 6, 1963, 31-32.

¹⁸² Brown, *JFK: History of an Image*, 50-69.

over time. It was directly affected by its environment. Thus, in looking at how the Kennedy image became malleable, one can also learn a great deal about recent politics and society.

This can be seen through how both Reagan and Clinton appropriate the Kennedy image. While Reagan and Clinton come from opposite ends of the political spectrum and governed in completely different times, their use of the Kennedy image is similar. Both presidents chose to invoke certain policies from Kennedy's administration, not in hopes to necessarily copy them, but rather to evoke the style and sentiments associated with them. For example, Reagan used the Kennedy tax cut not because he wanted his tax cut to be an exact replica, but instead to associate his legislation with prosperity and strength. In a very simplified explanation, it was almost as if Reagan was saying, "Here is Kennedy's tax cut. It resulted in economic prosperity, stability and increased wealth. My tax cut is very similar to Kennedy's, therefore it will have the same effect."

However, in their appropriations, both Reagan and Clinton deliberately chose to ignore certain aspects of Kennedy's legislation because it did not help their cause. In this sense, we can see just how malleable the Kennedy image had become. It had changed from an image used and controlled by a select group of Kennedy loyalists, to a commodity that could be sold to the public for political profit. This in turn, raises several questions about the relationship between image and reality in politics.

In the case of Reagan and Clinton, we can see that while they believed they were doing themselves good, they were actually causing social harm. In blurring the line between reality and image in regards to the Kennedy image, they actually helped to degenerate the Presidency. This is because what they tell us, as Americans, to thus base

our political beliefs and decisions on are half-truths and images. If we can see how politicians are neglecting reality and instead presenting image, this makes us wonder where else they are doing this. These two cases lead to Americans either being misinformed or cynical and suspicious of the President.

This conclusion seems ironic given the fact that part of the reason why Reagan and Clinton were invoking the Kennedy image was to foster trust and optimism in the Presidency.¹⁸³ In the end however, perhaps it is appropriate that both Clinton and Reagan used Kennedy's image. He was certainly not the first president to blur image and reality, but he was clearly one of the best.

¹⁸³ Richard Boeth, "JFK: Visions and Revisions," Newsweek, November 19, 1973. 76, 90, 92., William Neikirk, "Clinton Attacks 'Culture of Critique,'" Chicago Tribune. May 26. 1994. 23.

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