8-1970

John F. Kennedy’s Road to the White House

George T. Sink
Western Michigan University

Follow this and additional works at: https://scholarworks.wmich.edu/masters_theses
Part of the History Commons

Recommended Citation
https://scholarworks.wmich.edu/masters_theses/2995
JOHN F. KENNEDY'S
ROAD TO THE WHITE HOUSE

by

George T. Sink

A Thesis
Submitted to the
Faculty of the School of Graduate Studies in partial fulfillment of the
Degree of Master of Arts

Western Michigan University
Kalamazoo, Michigan
August, 1970
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

In writing this thesis, I have benefited from the encouragement, advice, and constructive criticism of Mr. Gilbert W. Morell. My thanks go to him, as to many others at Western Michigan University, who have given much needed help. A special note of appreciation must also be extended to my mother for her encouragement and willingness to aid me in my efforts.

George T. Sink
MASTER'S THESIS

SINK, George T.
JOHN F. KENNEDY'S ROAD TO THE WHITE HOUSE.

Western Michigan University, M.A., 1970
History, modern

University Microfilms, Inc., Ann Arbor, Michigan
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>CHAPTER</th>
<th>PAGE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I. THE FAMILY AMBITION</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>II. THE PAROCHIAL LEGISLATOR</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>III. THE PRAGMATIC POLITICIAN</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BIBLIOGRAPHY</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CHAPTER I

THE FAMILY AMBITION

The American myth has it that every mother looks upon her newborn manchild as a future president. The belief that any American boy can ascend to the presidency was made an article of faith by Abraham Lincoln. Between myth and reality there is always considerable discrepancy. The road to the White House taken by the thirty-fifth President of the United States, John Fitzgerald Kennedy, affords an excellent opportunity to examine this discrepancy. Although accident and chance did play some role in the political advancement of this wealthy, intelligent, and attractive man from Massachusetts, his ultimate attainment can best be understood as an expression of the intensity and zeal which characterized his Irish antecedents. The driving ambition which most observers discerned in John F. Kennedy was also marked in his grandfather, the son of an Irish immigrant, and in his father, the compiler of the Kennedy fortune. It has been appropriately noted that the Kennedy ambition was "a family ambition that grew out of the racial and religious prejudice existing in Boston two generations ago."  

---

1 Joe McCarthy, "Jack Kennedy, Heir to Power," Look, XXIII (October 27, 1959), 89.
In 1862 Patrick Joseph Kennedy, John's grandfather, was born in Boston of Irish immigrant parents. Patrick's father was driven from Ireland by the devastating potato famine of the 1840's. He had settled in Boston where "The Irish were the lowest of the low," raised four children and died, leaving his offspring to survive as best they could. This was a legacy common to the Irish of that day.

Patrick Kennedy refused to accept his inherited situation as final. He strove for self-improvement despite the fact that "His deep, instinctive urge to get ahead was practically his only resource." He worked and saved his money to build a saloon. Once established in the saloon business, he made influential friends and entered politics, amassing political power in the manner traditionally associated with urban machine politics. Many years later his son remarked, "One of my earliest recollections is listening to a couple of my father's friends in East Boston tell how they voted 128 times on election day." Patrick was election commissioner at the time.

---


4Quoted in McCarthy, p. 91.
John's grandfather ruthlessly pursued his desire to advance his financial, political, and social status. Since life to the Kennedys "was a joint venture between one generation and the next," Patrick's son, Joseph P. Kennedy, inherited not only the benefits of his father's success, but also the knowledge that they were to be used as a means through which his father's ambition would be fulfilled. This ambition, conceived in a personal revolution sparked by the feeling of inequity extant in persecuted minority groups, was intensified by the distressing failure of Patrick's son to establish himself in the social hierarchy of Boston. Thus it was necessary that the torch be passed to yet another generation of Kennedys.

The valiant efforts of Joseph Patrick Kennedy, however, cannot be dismissed this easily, for it was from the smoldering ruins of his father's shattered dreams that John Fitzgerald Kennedy derived his inspiration and motivation. To understand what made John run, it is necessary to envision the extent to which Joseph Kennedy had dedicated his life to attaining "acceptability". More than that, we must comprehend the extremes to which this fanatic, embittered competitor would go to amend or eradicate any evidence of failure in his efforts.

Joseph Patrick Kennedy was a ruthless and zealous competitor.

---

Whalen, p. 31.
From childhood on he sought to outdo his peers in anything he undertook. As a boy he energetically joined in the pursuit of the dollar "not out of necessity, but out of a desire to excel in competition with his peers."\(^6\) At Harvard, where he displayed more athletic drive than scholarship, he was remembered as a "whole-souled competitor and a poor loser."\(^7\) The method by which he "won" his baseball letter is a case in point. As a second-stringer, he was not scheduled to play in the Yale game which meant that he would not receive his letter. But a little economic pressure was put on the team's captain, a sworn enemy of Joe, and the ambitious substitute earned his letter with a last-inning token appearance in the big game.

However, such tactics did not gain the desired goal. Although Joe was a member of several Harvard social clubs, his Irish background excluded him from the top-ranked clubs. His sense of outrage at this overt discrimination only redoubled his dedication to gain "acceptability", and following his graduation in 1912, he didn't waste a moment.

Joseph Kennedy quickly compiled a fortune by coldly exploiting situations in a variety of enterprises which ranged from banking to the movie industry. He enlarged his accumulating fortune through

\(^{6}\text{Ibid.}, \ p. \ 30.\)
\(^{7}\text{Ibid.}, \ p. \ 33.\)
stock market operations that were marked by the typical Kennedy manner. 8

Kennedy's financial success assured his family of a more than comfortable future, but it could not buy him acceptability in the elite social world of Boston. The Brahmins of established wealth measured a man by his family background as well as by his financial status. To them Joseph P. Kennedy remained a social outcast, the money-grubbing son of an Irish ward politician.

Embittered but undaunted, Kennedy set out in pursuit of a high political position from which he could command the prestige he craved. He was quick to spot Franklin Roosevelt as a good presidential prospect, later bragging that he "was the first man with more than $12 in the bank who openly supported him." 9 In Roosevelt Kennedy saw a winner, a rising star that he could ride to his desired goals.

As a reward for his support, Kennedy was made chairman of the newly formed Securities and Exchange Commission. Many who

8 In repayment of a political debt, he agreed to stabilize the market price of Yellow Cab Company stock that was being forced down by "bearish" operations. Joe went to New York and in seven weeks had placed a seemingly solid floor under Yellow Cab. Several months later the stock fell, and there are those who suspected Kennedy of pulling out the props and selling the stock short. *Ibid.*, pp. 72-73.

saw the appointment as a case of a wolf guarding the sheep misunderstood their man. Now financially secure, he could afford to be a dedicated public servant. Craving respectability, he wanted to impress people, not "take" them. He became "not only a good policeman, but also a polite one."\(^\text{10}\)

His services in the Roosevelt administration, which also included heading the Maritime Commission and an ambassadorship to Britain, however impressive, left the elder Kennedy somewhat unhappy because he was never considered entirely "proper". He never was saluted with an honorary degree from Harvard nor accepted as a social equal in the best circles. He was fanatically determined that his children would not suffer these frustrations. In this respect, the Kennedy family became an extension of the father's life, another chance to succeed. He planned his family's future with the meticulous care of a man who recognized that he had one more chance to achieve his life's goal.

There were three components in the father's plan for his children's future: First, to remove any concern about financial matters; Second, to instill a competitive attitude within the whole family, thus giving each child a relentless drive to succeed; Finally, to encourage each child to view his undertaking with a

detached attitude, enabling each one to use the most appropriate means to satisfy his competitive drive.

Joseph Kennedy felt that the wealth he placed at the disposal of his offspring removed a barrier that had impeded his own career. Knowing only too well how the pursuit of wealth had soiled his own reputation, he refused to allow his children to discuss or even think about money. He later proclaimed, "I have never discussed money with my wife and family and I never will."\(^\text{11}\) In 1957, when an article in Fortune indicated the Kennedy fortune was in excess of a quarter of a billion dollars, Rose Kennedy was reputedly astonished that her husband enjoyed such wealth. Why hadn't she been told? Joe intended that his money be used as the cornerstone of his family's success and not as a stumbling block in their path. By such an approach, Joseph Kennedy sought, with some success, to remove the shackling stigma of "money-grubber" from his children.

With the matter of financial security resolved, the elder Kennedy gave his attention to developing the talents and capacities of his children. His approach to this task has been ably described by Richard Whalen:

Kennedy dispassionately appraised the strengths and weaknesses of each of his children as though he were sizing up an

\(^{11}\) Quoted in Eleanor Harris, "The Senator Is in a Hurry," McCall's, LXXXIV (August, 1957), 119.
all-important investment. Having gauged a child's potential he relentlessly encouraged its fulfillment, keeping up a pressure for improved performance that stopped just short of each child's point of rebellion.\textsuperscript{12}

The primary Kennedy method for improving performance was competition. Competition became an earmark of the Kennedy family. Even the girls were subject to the regimen. As Eunice Kennedy would later recall:

Even when we were six and seven years old, Daddy always entered us in public swimming races, in the different age categories so we didn't have to swim against each other. And he did the same thing with us in sailing races. And if we won, he got terribly enthusiastic. Daddy was always very, very competitive.\textsuperscript{13}

As a result, the Kennedy children were always on the go, and John's amazed wife was later to report that "They never relax even when they're relaxing."\textsuperscript{14}

The insistent emphasis on competition derived in large part from the father's conviction that life itself was a serious and deadly competition in which only those with appetite and initiative could win. He repeatedly underscored the idea that winning was an end in itself, and that any means were justified in the pursuit of victory.

\textsuperscript{12}Whalen, p. 167.

\textsuperscript{13}Quoted in Ralph G. Martin and Ed Plaut, \textit{Front Runner, Dark Horse} (Garden City: Doubleday and Company, Inc., 1960), p. 121.

\textsuperscript{14}Quoted in Harris, p. 125.
John, as did all the Kennedy children, took this lesson to heart.

He named his first sailboat *Victura* which, according to the future President, was Latin meaning something about winning.

Joseph P. Kennedy's final contribution to his brood was to develop in them a strong sense of objectivity and detachment which enabled his children to adopt the shortest and most expedient path in the pursuit of their goals. This ability to reduce abstract qualities such as loyalty and sentiment to mundane elements, to be valued only in proportion to the degree to which they advanced personal ambition, was encouraged in all family discussions. As family head and discussion leader, Joseph Kennedy demanded the use of his trusted tools, "a passion for facts (and) a complete lack of sentiment," as the Kennedys explored issues rationally and objectively, probing for reasonable and workable solutions. The Ambassador followed his children's reasoning closely as a check against impassioned, partisan, or superficial solutions. "'Every single kid', a close friend of the family told a reporter, 'was raised to think, First, what shall I do about the problem? Second, what will Dad say about my solution of it?'"16 That the latter factor was the weightier of the two considerations is conveyed by

---

15 Whalen, p. 71.

16 Quoted in Burns, p. 37.
Bobby's recollection that his father's "personality was so strong, his ideas so definite, his views and outlook so determined, that he dominated our home and our lives."\textsuperscript{17} Thus, the final element in the Kennedy formula for success, detached perception, became a characteristic of the Kennedy offspring.

John Fitzgerald Kennedy's youth reveals how successfully Joseph Kennedy had done his work. John was a highly competitive youngster with a marked ability for rational assessment. Over-shadowed by his older brother, Joseph P. Kennedy, Jr., in competitive events, John turned his attention more to writing. It was here that his father's trait of detached perception was evident.

John Kennedy's stark rationalism was to become to many his most curious trait. John's youth, devoid of financial concern, kept him empirically ignorant of the forces in society which frustrate and arouse the less fortunate. He learned of these problems by briefing "himself on them the way a lawyer briefs himself on the problems of a new client."\textsuperscript{18} This detached approach was apparent in two political studies he made while at Harvard.

John's study of Bertrand H. Snell, a relatively insignificant,

\textsuperscript{17}"Life with Father," \textit{Newsweek}, November 1, 1965, p. 24, quoting \textit{The Fruitful Bough} (privately printed).

vehemently anti-New Deal New York politician, illuminates John's developing detachment. He studied Snell while his father was writing *I'm For Roosevelt*. Aside from that, his work is significant for the aloofness with which young Kennedy probed his chosen political specimen, oblivious to emotional involvement or political prejudice.

The ability to analyze the impersonal forces at work in the political world is further evidenced in the future President's senior thesis, which later was to become a best-selling book, *Why England Slept*. Here he gave far more weight to the circumstances surrounding the capitulation at Munich than to the strength of the personalities involved. He tended to excuse Baldwin and Chamberlain for their roles in Munich because England was neither mentally prepared nor physically ready to fight. Although in this respect John shared the opinions of his father, who was then serving as Ambassador to Great Britain, his views were reached with a minimum of parental influence and only after an objective study of all available facts.

While John's views coincided with his father's, Joe encouraged his children to take an aloof, objective attitude concerning viewpoints, adopting only those which led to success. "British policy," wrote John from Jerusalem in 1939, "sounded just and fair but that what was needed was not a just and fair solution "but
a solution that would work'. "19 John would always be interested in what could be done about a problem and would not judge results by comparing them with some standard of absolute justice. "He saw the courage of 'unyielding devotion to absolute principle' as the moral fulfillment of the individual rather than as necessarily the best way of running a government."20

While John's rational perception met with little obstruction and much success in its development, his competitive drive developed under much less favorable circumstances. Although his spirit remained undaunted, John seemed destined to be overshadowed by his brother, Joseph Patrick Kennedy, Jr., who was two years older, thirty-five pounds heavier, and two inches taller. He possessed more athletic ability than John, and, in their competition, Joe consistently prevailed. While racing on bicycles around the block in opposite directions, they crashed into each other. John suffered a twenty-eight stitch gash while Joe emerged unscathed.

The elder Kennedy's prolonged absences prompted Joe, Jr.'s, rise as an authority figure and example to the younger children.

19Quoted in Burns, p. 52.

He would not hesitate to encourage or bully, as the situation dictated, to ensure that the younger children stayed in line. He set the pace in the family's activities, and the children looked to him for approval. The only friction point in the Kennedy *esprit de corps* was evidenced when John would unsuccessfully attempt to rebel against the authority of Joe, Jr. At home, John admitted his only problem was "his big brother: 'He had a pugnacious personality. Later on it smoothed out but it was a problem in my boyhood."  

Even away at school he could not escape Joe, Jr.'s unmatchable performances. At Choate, an exclusive Eastern prep school, Joe, Jr., won the Harvard trophy as the football player who best combined scholarship and sportsmanship while John had to content himself with the role of cheerleader. John's initial choice of college was Princeton rather than Harvard because, among other reasons, Joe, Jr., wouldn't precede him there. After an attack of jaundice forced him to withdraw from school, he decided to go to Harvard rather than return to Princeton. Upon entering Harvard, he tried to follow his brother's steps on the gridiron. A classmate, Torbert Macdonald, recalls:

> Joe was six-two and weighed 185 or so . . . . He was a natural athlete, a good football player, varsity. Jack was six feet, weighed 150, only average ability . . . . He didn't make the first team but stayed on the squad as freshman and earned

21 Quoted in Burns, p. 44.
his numerals. It was a matter of determination . . . Once he makes up his mind to do something, he does it, and nothing is going to stand in his way. 22

While competition bred a determined attitude in the Kennedy children, it also served to underline John's developing sense of caution, a realization that there were certain things which he could not do or change. This tended to narrow his vision of the possible although it left his determination to succeed undaunted.

This indestructible determination to succeed is an indication of the extent to which Joseph P. Kennedy had succeeded in forming his children's attitudes. His work, inspired by his frustrating quest for social acceptability, was done well. All of his children, even John if necessary, could be called upon to give spirited and determined chase to the propriety that had eluded the ambassador and his father, the ward politician, before him.

But, who at this juncture would have thought that John Fitzgerald Kennedy would be the one to carry the family colors into the national political arena? Joseph, Jr., was the more likely standard-bearer, his avowed goal being the presidency of the United States. But what if the oldest son should falter or fate remove him from the scene? A disaster of such a personal nature would be overcome by the inertia of the impersonal family ambition. Dedicated to a mission which was not to be thwarted by twists of fate,

22Quoted in Martin and Plaut, p. 125.
the Kennedys would unite behind a new leader. Such an eventuality was so remote at this stage that it is no wonder that John's life reflected so little of the ambition which was to later characterize his actions. John did not anticipate that he would be the vehicle through which his family's ambition would be served. But Joseph's second son was aware, as were all the Kennedy children, that should the responsibility of family representation be passed on to him, he could not refuse it. His competitive spirit insured his acceptance and his detached pursuit of an objective enhanced the chances of his success. If his time came, John Fitzgerald Kennedy would be ready.
CHAPTER II.
THE PAROCHIAL LEGISLATOR

The period from 1945 to 1952, between his retirement from the Navy and his election to the Senate, was one of gradually evolving political ambition for John Fitzgerald Kennedy. His entrance into politics through election to the House of Representatives in 1946 was more a result of family pressure than of his own inclinations. His own ambition was whetted only after he realized that he possessed very little power and influence as a member of the House. He responded by conducting a four-year campaign for higher office which culminated in his election to the Senate in 1952.

When John F. Kennedy returned to civilian life in 1945, he carried with him the impact of the war. No man encounters war and emerges unaffected, and John Kennedy was no exception. World War II put John's will to succeed to the acid test, exposed him to life's inequities, stimulated his interest in foreign affairs, and opened the door to politics.

When the war broke out, Joe, Jr., enlisted. John, who was in aimless pursuit of some future career, sought to follow Joe's example only to be rejected by the Army because of an old football injury to his back. After five months of exercising to strengthen his back, he was accepted by the Navy which immediately assigned
him to desk duty. John was quickly bored by his office assignment and had his father use his influence to procure a P. T. boat assignment for him.

The apex of his war-time career provided a demanding and successful test of his determination and physical courage when a Japanese destroyer sank his boat in hostile waters. Removed from the influence of his family, engaged in a no-holds-barred competition with total strangers, John showed that what had originally been an other-directed urge to win had become an integral part of his make-up. It also provided him with an asset of incalculable value in his post-war political campaigns, for not even his staunchest political critics would deny his heroism in the rescue of the P. T. 109's crew.

The war brought home to John the unreasonableness and inequity in life when it claimed two members of his family, Joe, Jr., and his brother-in-law, the Marquis of Huntington. These events re-enforced John's notion that there were many precarious and unalterable currents running through life which one could do little or nothing about, therefore, man's attention should be directed toward workable answers to problems that lend themselves to solution.

John returned from the war sharing the win-the-peace idealism.
common among most war veterans.1 While realizing that peace must be obtained, he understood that there were many barriers to such an undertaking. Kennedy's apprehension and pessimism about the possibilities of an enduring peace in the post-war world were set forth in an unpublished effort to organize his thoughts on the Second World War and the prevention of future wars. He felt that if armaments could not be controlled, the prospect of peace would be dubious.

Science will always overtake caution with new terrors against which defence cannot be anticipated . . . . Into the orthodox picture of classical warfare comes the V bomb, which raises the spectre of destruction almost beyond the power of the human mind to grasp . . . . It is not exaggeration to expect that these missiles will be developed to a point where theoretically any spot on the globe can send to any community in the world, with pinpoint accuracy, a silent but frightful message of death and destruction. . . . Detection of their source may be difficult. One does not have to be a Jules Verne to visualize the death of the human race, a victim of science and moral degeneracy.2

Concern with making the world a more peaceful place to live became a genuine interest of this future president who, as Theodore Sorensen notes "devoted more time in the White House to deterring and preventing (war) than to all other subjects combined."3

---

1Selig Harrison, "Kennedy As President," The New Republic, CXXXII (June 27, 1960), 11.
2Ibid.
One of the choices that most returning servicemen had to make was that of a career, and John tried on several for size before choosing politics. He tried Stanford's business school but soon grew disenchanted. Another career, journalism, was cut short by the realization that instead of doing things, he was writing about people who did things. This was not the Kennedy fashion. The world of politics, opened to him by his brother's death, seemed a reasonable choice for a young man of wealth, energy, and ambition; although Kennedy frankly admitted, "if (Joe) had lived, I'd have kept on being a writer."  

John had never felt that he was the Kennedy best qualified to satisfy his father's ambition, but Joe's death and his father's driving ambition left no escape from this responsibility. The elder Kennedy was insistent on the point:

"I got Jack into politics; I was the one. I told him Joe was dead, and it was therefore his responsibility to run for Congress. He didn't want to. He felt he didn't have the ability and he still feels that way. But I told him he had to."  

Later, as a Senator, Kennedy indicated the importance of family aspirations in the choice of a political career. "If I died, my brother Bob would want to be a Senator, and if anything happened to him, my brother Teddy would run for us."  

---

4 Quoted in Harris, p. 123.
5 Ibid.
6 Ibid., p. 125.
Now that politics was to become his career, John had to find an office to fill. Two offices were being considered. Either he would attempt to fill the recently vacated eleventh congressional seat or run for lieutenant governor of Massachusetts. The advantages of a national stage rather than a local one seemed to decide the matter. Joe, Sr., and his cronies were awake to the fact that political futures were generally built in Washington, not in Massachusetts. Frank Morrissey, chief among the elder Kennedy's advisors, recalls advising Joe in this manner:

I strongly urged the ambassador to persuade Jack to run for Congress. I felt that it was a much better spot for advancement in national politics. The ambassador gave the matter considerable thought and finally agreed. Jack accepted the ambassador's advice.  

All political barometers seemed to re-enforce Morrissey's advice. The House seemed accessible, and whatever interest John possessed in politics was in national affairs. Armed with the demeanor of a journalist and a relative ignorance of the issues, John started his campaign.

As a campaigner, John learned quickly. He began by emphasizing his war exploits, but as soon as the polls indicated that the voters were more interested in social welfare legislation, John quickly abandoned the P. T. 109.

---

John's relative ignorance of the concerns of his constituents was only a minor flaw in the circus of Boston politics, where a politician's personality was his most valuable asset. His biggest job "was to convince the 37 different nationalities in some of Boston's grimiest slums that he was not just the wealthy son of Joe Kennedy . . ., but rather an attractive individual in his own right." He got off to a bad start. Overly conscious of his dead brother, he publicly offered excuses for himself. "If Joe were alive, I wouldn't be in this. I'm only trying to fill his shoes." But such self-effacement quickly melted in the heat of battle, and the transformation it wrought in the campaigner was both startling and successful. Joe, Sr., watched one of his son's later hand-shaking expeditions and marveled at John's newly-found ability to bring a smile to the face of a hostile constituent. "I never thought Jack had it in him," said an astounded Joe Kennedy.

John's political charm was not that of the classical, flamboyant, back-slapping Irish politician, for he was neither prone to dynamic, emotional speeches or histrionic behavior. Instead, he developed what was to become his prime political asset, an

---

8"Promise Kept," *Time*, July 1, 1946, p. 23.

9Quoted in McCarthy, *The Remarkable Kennedys*, p. 120.

intangible warmth which enabled voters to identify him with whatever causes they felt were right. Even the hard-boiled Irish politicians who gathered at Kennedy headquarters for favors succumbed to this Kennedy charm. As one of the Kennedy biographers has noted: "He never promised them anything, but they all had the impression that something would be coming to them, because that was what they wanted to believe."

John's developing political magnetism was supplemented by relentless effort, unlimited wealth, and a well-known name. His organization's extensive advertising campaign was aided by the fact that the adventures of Ambassador Kennedy's son always made good newspaper copy. The whole family helped conduct an unusual number of house parties, and John's personal efforts were unusually extensive. The resulting victory was impressive.

When triumph came, Kennedy found himself with three invaluable assets: freedom from political debt to any outside group, a safe district, and a base for political expansion.

John's election came almost entirely through the efforts of his own organization, and consequently was not burdened by political debt to any outside groups. Kennedy was fully aware of his unique

---


Reproduced with permission of the copyright owner. Further reproduction prohibited without permission.
position. He would later recall: "I cam in sort of sideways. It was never drilled into me that I was responsible to some political boss in the Eleventh District. . . . I never had the feeling I needed Truman."\(^{12}\)

The desire to remain unencumbered by political obligations and to pursue his own course was characteristic of the Kennedy approach. Even during the campaign his only promise to the electorate other than to support social welfare legislation, was to "vote them the way I see them."\(^{13}\)

John was grateful for his safe district. The fact that his voting record in the House reflected the will of his constituents indicates that he wanted to keep it. A safe district freed him from the burden of conducting a full-scale campaign every two years. The time and effort he was spared enabled him to develop plans and launch a campaign for higher office.

Finally, John had established a small and effective power base on which to build a state-wide organization. The structure of the Democratic party in Massachusetts and the voting habits of the electorate aided his efforts. The loosely organized Democratic state party enabled any Democrat with sufficient popularity to build an

\(^{12}\)Quoted in Burns, p. 100.

\(^{13}\)Quoted in Harrison, p. 12.
influential organization of his own, supporting this organization with votes not only from Democrats, but also from approximately one-third of the state's notoriously independent voters. John set out not only to establish an effective political organization, but also to capture the support of his state's nonpartisan voters. The success of these efforts became apparent in his eye-opening victory over Henry Cabot Lodge in the 1952 Senate race.

Although Kennedy possessed the qualifications for becoming a serious and constructive legislator, his mental attitude did not incline him in this direction. He accepted his new job in the spirit of a student who attends college at his parents' behest. While recognizing an obligation to those who placed him there, he was also conscious of the fact that he was performing his task because it was expected of him, not because it was his desire. This bred an indifferent attitude, one that was reflected in his dress. On occasion John would make an appearance on the House floor with his shirt-tail hanging out or in his rumpled seersucker coat. In this light, the older and more staid Congressmen could hardly take him seriously.

Although Kennedy's performance in the House was hardly worthy of national attention, he did display an undeviating devotion

\footnote{Burns, p. 119.}
to the needs of his constituents, thus making a secure political base even safer. On the negative side, this parochialism was reflected in his opposition to legislation that didn't directly benefit the Eleventh District. Thus he consistently voted against appropriations for Western projects or federal aid to any endeavor that did not directly benefit his constituents. The limited horizon of his interests evoked some comment. "All the gentleman has talked about since he has been here is New England," remarked a fellow Representative. Unmiffed, Kennedy retorted, "Does the gentleman object to that?"15

On the positive side, he fought for the bread and butter issues that were the traditional concerns of his Boston constituents. Such issues as housing, wages, working conditions, and aid to veterans and the aged were virtually the only ones on which he had any well-defined notions. These issues were staunchly advocated, and those who opposed them were courageously denounced. When the politically potent American Legion continually frustrated his bids to pass low-cost housing bills, Kennedy struck out against it. "The leadership of the American Legion has not had a constructive thought for the benefit of the country since 1918." he proclaimed on the House floor to the amazement of his fellow legislators.16 But


16Quoted in Burns, p. 85.
whatever misgivings Kennedy might have had about his attack on
the Legion leadership were removed by the flood of mail he received
sanctioning his action.

Occasions did arise which revealed Kennedy's interest in issues
whose scope was national character. One such instance was the con-
sideration of the Hartley Bill, a bill which was consciously designed
to redress the pro-labor bias of the New Deal's Wagner Act. It was
an emotion-laden issue which aroused fear and alarm in both its
proponents and opponents.

John had eaten too many meals at his father's table to be swayed
by these considerations. He saw no reason to base legislation in
this field on old and deeply rooted anti-labor prejudices which, for
decades, had contributed nothing positive to the development of a
fair and constructive labor policy in the United States. Opposing
the bill in committee, he filed a revealingly moderate one-man
report:

I reaffirm my basic faith in the system of private enter-
prise under which this Nation has flourished and successfully
carried the burden of two great wars. But if this system is
to work in our complex economic society, there must be a
recognition by management and labor that the welfare of each
is dependent ultimately upon the welfare of the other.

If repressive and vindictive labor legislation is enacted
at the behest of management, a tide of left-wing reaction will
develop which may well destroy our existing business system.

17 Joseph F. Dinneen, The Kennedy Family (Boston and Toronto:
At the same time, if labor continues to insist on special privilege and unfair advantage in its relation with management, I have grave doubts as to the future of the trade-union movement.  

This moderation was overwhelmed by the conservative temper of the Eightieth Congress as it overrode the President's veto of the Taft-Hartley Act which Kennedy voted to sustain.

This opposition to the Taft-Hartley Bill, however, did not put the young Massachusetts legislator in the camp of those who talked about "slave labor" and campaigned for its repeal in 1948. Kennedy's "resistance to, and his rejection of, pre-ordained decisions, his refusal to choose among alternatives formulated elsewhere than in his own mind," was evident in his lack of enthusiasm for its repeal. In the first place, he viewed repeal as impossible to attain. But more important to John was the fact that a reasonable and workable solution could be arrived at through modification.

Although John's early views in the field of foreign affairs were touched by the prejudices of his Irish Catholic constituency and the anti-Roosevelt bias of his father, his search for workable solutions would ultimately become clearly evident in this realm. Early policy formulation was typified by his reaction to the success


of the Communists in China which did not lose him any votes in Boston. His House speech on January 25, 1949 foreshadowed the sentiments of Wisconsin's Joseph McCarthy. He said.

Mr. Speaker, over this weekend we have learned the extent of the disaster that has befallen China and the United States. The responsibility for the failure of our foreign policy in the Far East rests squarely with the White House and the Department of State.

The continued insistence that aid would not be forthcoming unless a coalition government with the Communists was formed, was a crippling blow to the National Government.

Our policy . . . of vacillation, uncertainty, and confusion reaped the whirlwind. 20

In a similar vein he would lament that a "sick Roosevelt, with the advice of General Marshall . . . gave the Kurile Islands as well as control of various Chinese ports . . . to the Soviet Union." 21 But such remarks only obscure Kennedy's slowly developing competence in the field of foreign affairs.

John Kennedy's interest in foreign affairs goes back at least to his senior year at Harvard. It was an interest re-enforced by his father's appointment as ambassador to Britain and his family's subsequent experiences in the war. Thus it is understandable that he felt a developing need for constructive and responsible opinions in this area. His mind was slowly being engaged and stimulated. His aroused curiosity led to an ego-involvement, which, given the


21 Quoted in Harrison, p. 12.
Kennedy pride, would result in the development of a frame of reference that was peculiarly his own. As his vision expanded, his confidence in his perspective would grow, resulting in a proportional diminishing of other influences in his formulation of foreign policy.

The most significant event in this development was his world tour of 1951. Consciously designed to reduce his ignorance of issues and areas with which the United States was increasingly involved, Kennedy probed and inquired intelligently wherever he stopped. He was inclined to seek out and pump dry the experienced newspaper correspondents in foreign capitals rather than engage in the social activities that American diplomats usually provided for visiting Congressmen. Seymour Topping, an A. P. reporter in Saigon, was pleasantly surprised by the young Congressman's curiosity, later exclaiming, "He really wanted to know."²²

What he learned was reflected in his voting record. Returning to Washington impressed with the enormous difficulties and potentials of underdeveloped nations, he support Point Four aid to the Middle East. His increased awareness not only gained the respect of his colleagues but re-enforced his sense of pride in work which encouraged a continuation of deliberate, studied, and independent decisions on his part.

²²Ibid.
Approval from one's colleagues and the enlargement of one's understanding of the complexity of foreign affairs were both satisfying to the maturing legislator, but neither seemed related to the hard realities of political life. John saw politics as a power struggle in which survivors were wise politicians, not enlightened legislators. He was keenly aware that facing issues too squarely often exposed one to the long knives of the opposition. Therefore, it was a consciousness of power, or more to the point, the lack of power which dominated Kennedy's years in the House of Representatives.

The ambitious youth quickly became frustrated by the remoteness of a House seat from the wellsprings of governmental power. He desired greater influence, and his position as one representative among four-hundred and thirty-five did not afford him this opportunity. Because he felt that "we were just worms over in the House," and that "nobody pays much attention to us nationally," he was never to seriously consider establishing himself in the House of Representatives in any capacity.23

Kennedy's extra-legislative activities were indications of his welling discontent with his position as a Representative. He joined the House "Tuesday to Thursday" club, attending those three days

23Quoted in Burns, p. 100.
and conducting a relentless campaign in Massachusetts on the remainder. Campaigning received the greatest emphasis as Kennedy drove himself and his aides relentlessly, wasting little time on food or sleep. The remarkable feature of Kennedy's performance, which began as early as 1947, was that by 1951 "He still did not know what office he was seeking." Clearly, it reflected his consuming desire for a larger stage.

John's personal choice was complicated by the unannounced intentions of Massachusetts Governor Paul Dever; if Dever challenged the seemingly unbeatable Senator Henry Cabot Lodge, Kennedy would be faced with the choice of running for the Massachusetts Governorship or challenging Dever in a Democratic primary for the Senate. Eventually Dever made matters easier for Kennedy by declining to risk a clash with the formidable Lodge.

John Fitzgerald Kennedy immediately announced his candidacy for United States Senator from Massachusetts.

This was a coldly calculated decision in which the elder Kennedy played an important role. For eighteen months a pair of Kennedy advance men had been touring Massachusetts preparing detailed reports on the strength of Lodge, Dever, and Kennedy. Only when these reports indicated that John had a chance of

24 Burns, p. 105.
defeating Lodge was the ambassador's approval given, and the challenge made. The likelihood of success was always an important consideration in a Kennedy decision.

Joseph Kennedy's concern with the chances of his son in the Senate race was but part of a larger scheme in his mind's eye. As reported by a family intimate, the ambassador saw the defeat of Lodge as a preface to the White House. In unmistakable tones he informed his son, "I will work out the plans to elect you President. It will not be any more difficult for you to be elected President than it will be to win the Lodge fight."²⁵ The dream of a Kennedy in the White House, which had seemed so real before the untimely death of his talented first son, was now being renewed in the elder Kennedy's heart. Joseph was determined that nothing would impair the chances of his second son.

In keeping with the Kennedy tradition, the 1952 campaign for the Senate seat held by Lodge was the most methodical, most scientific, the most thoroughly detailed, the most intricate, the most disciplined, and smoothly working state-wide campaign in Massachusetts history - and possibly anywhere else.²⁶

It was also, and typically, a family affair.

All of the Kennedys enjoyed significant roles in the campaign.

²⁶Martin and Plaut, p. 164.
The elder Kennedy, whose unpopular image precluded a public role, made important moves and decisions behind the scenes. The voting public, conversely, was overwhelmed by the lavish outpouring of charm and verve from the rest of the clan.

Although the candidate's father studiously avoided a public role, his contributions to his son's success were nonetheless significant. First there was the important and delicate problem of Senator Joseph McCarthy, the Wisconsin Republican and anti-Communist demagogue who had a wide following in Catholic Massachusetts. Joseph Kennedy immediately recognized the benefit an endorsement by a man of Joseph McCarthy's stature would bring to John's opponent. Joe immediately made indirect contact with McCarthy in an effort to dissuade his old friend from aiding Lodge. He even managed to make a contribution to McCarthy's campaign although he later stated "it was only a couple of thousand dollars, and I didn't give it to him to keep him out of Massachusetts." When Gardner ("Pat") Jackson, John's link with the liberal community, attempted to have John endorse a paper entitled *Communism and McCarthy: Both Wrong*, Joe nearly struck him, finally forcing him to hastily leave the room under the barrage of his vitriolic rage. "I never had a working over like that in my life," Jackson later

---

recalled. But this watchdog was as artful on offense as on defense. *The Boston Post*, thus far pro-Lodge in its editorial endorsement, coincidentally switched its editorial sentiment from Lodge to Kennedy at the same time as a five hundred thousand dollar loan was being transacted between John Fox, the newspaper publisher, and the candidate's father.

While the father worked his magic behind the scenes, the activities of the other Kennedys were geared to win the public's eye. The "public Kennedys" accepted their roles with the same zealous gusto which they had previously displayed in John's House campaigns. The tempo was evidenced by the hard-driving Robert Kennedy's activities as campaign manager and his wife's speech-making on the eve of the morning she was to make her husband a father.

The highlight of the campaign, however, were the teas. John's mother and sisters arranged a series of teas which were attended by hordes of flattered women who seemingly made, as an observant family biographer points out, "allegiance with the Democratic candidate a sort of chic social distinction." After each guest was introduced to the Kennedys, John would briefly tell them that he

---

28 Quoted in Martin and Plaut, p. 175.

hoped to win the election. Before the performance had ended, his audience of would-be social climbers would be transformed into legions of inspired political workers and Kennedy devotees.

The teas cleverly enunciated John's only real advantage over his opponent, his ability to relate to his listeners. To the great mass of voters John was the risen Irishman, the symbol of what they had dreamed they could be. This identification enabled Kennedy's campaign to generate a warmth and personal appeal which The New York Times noted was absent in Senator Lodge's efforts. In a battle of personalities it was a difference that would be fatal to the incumbent.

That the issues failed to influence this Senate race is apparent in the mutual efforts of the candidates to muffle them. Lodge assumed he would win an easy victory, and Kennedy trusted in his personal appeal. These legislators possessed strikingly similar voting records, a fact which gave their infrequent debates such an affable and agreeable tone that those followers of Massachusetts politics who took delight in the more orthodox mud-slinging campaigns were disappointed.

When John did launch an attack on Lodge, he did so by appealing to liberals and conservatives. He would claim that his voting

---

record on foreign affairs compared more favorably with conservative Taft's than did Lodge's, while to liberals his campaign slogan "Kennedy will do More for Massachusetts," proclaimed his devotion to bread-and-butter liberalism. He acquired the unique distinction of being the only state office holder to match the endorsement standards of the Massachusetts branch of Americans for Democratic Action while simultaneously gathering votes through the editorial support of the conservative Boston Herald. As his eminent biographer, James MacGregor Burns, observes, "Kennedy had taken what seemed to be a major strength of Lodge - his ambiguous record - and at the very least had managed to neutralize it."  

Neutralize it he did, for The New York Times was to report that "in the betting parlors fringing Beacon Hill today the smart money is still about 6 to 5 against his (Lodge) beating the Irish Kennedys a week from next Tuesday." Long, hard campaigning plus the warmth of the tea parties yielded a 70,000 vote victory for John F. Kennedy while Massachusetts voters were simultaneously giving Eisenhower a 208,800 vote margin over Stevenson and Dever was also defeated by a Republican, Christian Herter, by a close margin.

John's political position as he entered the Senate was most

---

31 McCarthy, The Remarkable Kennedys, p. 11.

32 Burns, p. 119.

33 Phillips, p. 51.
favorable. Having defeated Lodge, there was little likelihood that he would fail of re-election in 1958. Furthermore, his obligations to political groups outside of his own organization were negligible. If he could avoid offending significant groups of voters during his Senate term, he could insure his re-election while solidifying his already strong political position.
CHAPTER III
THE PRAGMATIC POLITICIAN

In Kennedy's eight years in the Senate, his drive for the presidency was evidenced both in his political aggressiveness and his legislative fence-straddling. Politically, the increasing scope of his ambition compelled Kennedy to expand the purview of his interests to national affairs. As his political interests broadened to meet the demands of his ambition, Kennedy was increasingly confronted with legislative matters that his experience had not prepared him to deal with. Thus Kennedy's legislative approach became generally defensive, marked by his attempt to offer constructive solutions that would not alienate any significant group of potential political supporters.

The Senator's first two years were largely devoted to Massachusetts. He was elected to do more for Massachusetts, and his prodigious efforts to fulfill this promise were apparent in the landslide of Massachusetts legislation he provoked. His accomplishments solidly established him with his constituents and enabled him to take the risk of expanding his political base.

On May 18, 1953, the freshman Senator from Massachusetts gave his first formal Senate speech. Dryly listing New England's
problems, he kept returning to the theme that New England's problems were the nation's problems. As he saw it, both New England and the nation would be served by removing such roadblocks to progress as depressed areas and undeveloped resources, both human and natural. He proposed federal legislation to alleviate these problems and advocated the formation of a bi-partisan bloc of New England Senators to fight for legislation beneficial to their region. Kennedy followed through with his last proposal, playing a leading role in the organization of an effective machine for the production of New England legislation. In the process he had successfully broadened his political base. Now New England as well as Massachusetts looked to Kennedy for effective leadership.

The strength of this base was put to the test when Kennedy voted sharply against the interests of his Massachusetts constituents in 1954. The decision to support the St. Lawrence Seaway Bill was "in many ways a turning point for the thirty-six year old Senator."¹ This project had been opposed on six different occasions over a period of twenty years by every Massachusetts Senator and Representative. Kennedy's aide, Timothy J. Reardon, was to recall that he "had never seen his boss so torn over a decision."²

¹ Sorensen, p. 59.
² Burns, p. 127.
Kennedy decided not only to endorse the proposed Seaway, but to take the Senate floor and publicize his stand. "I am unable to accept such a narrow view of my function as United States Senator," proclaimed the Senator. He continued his explication by admitting that his vote would bring no immediate benefit to the port of Boston but that Canada would go ahead with or without American co-operation. Kennedy's stand on the Seaway was compounded of his view that it represented the most reasonable solution and of his desire to free himself from the stigma of being a regional legislator. If this deviation was objectionable to the voters of Massachusetts, the lopsided majorities they handed him in 1958 and 1960 indicated that his state was more than willing to forgive and forget.

John's habit of dealing rationally with problems had a long history. It began with his father's table talks which emphasized reasonable and workable solutions and was reflected in his work as a student. As a Congressman his approach to the Hartley Bill, and his changing views on foreign aid belonged to the same tradition. In this light, what explanation is to be offered for Kennedy's break with his constituents on the Seaway issue? Clearly it reflected a shift in the Kennedy aspirations rather than the Kennedy approach. As long as his aspirations were regional, the interests

---

3Quoted in Sorensen, p. 59.
of Massachusetts and New England enjoyed high priority. Now his focus became increasingly national, and his constituency broadened. John realized that to broaden himself, he had to establish himself as a man who legislates in the national interest.

This new and national orientation in the Kennedy outlook had been hinted at in his early Senate speeches, but it had been obscured by his emphasis on the benefits that would accrue to New England from the solution of problems that were basically national. Kennedy now realized that he had to be clearer in his approach, leaving no doubt as to his dedication to the nation's welfare. The Seaway Bill presented this chance, and Kennedy cautiously appraised the situation. He was torn between the effect a vote of endorsement would have on his support from New England, and the obvious necessity of shedding his identity as a regional legislator. Was this the moment? Was the cost too great? The ripeness of this opportunity was irresistible, and Kennedy took the Senate floor, underscoring the significance of his vote for anyone who may have missed it. This emphatic endorsement announced the dawn of a new stage in his political career.

John had decided to become a nationally orientated legislator. His Seaway vote served as a personal declaration of independence from Massachusetts, a signal that he felt his debt to her voters had been repaid by his two years of devoted Senate service to state
John's devotion to such interests ended when they conflicted with his, and Kennedy was on the make. In order to move up the political ladder, he needed a voting record that would substantiate the belief that he was well qualified to direct the affairs of the entire nation, and he could not compile such a record if he was bound to the interests of a limited locale. Kennedy thus abandoned the narrow view of the function of a legislator which had heretofore served him so well.

John's manipulation of loyalties was as consistent and integral a part of his political strategy as his independent and rational approach was of his legislative tactics. Political strategy had thus far truncated his role as a legislative tactician, but John's increasing ambition now required that he prove himself a skillful and high-minded legislator.

John was prepared. His father had long ago encouraged discussion of governmental affairs as a means of developing a thought process in his children through which problems could be profitably and reasonably resolved. This process was characterized by an independent and rational approach to problems and a firm understanding of the long and short range advantages which would accrue to the problem solver. In no significant way did John show any tendency to deviate from the system which had brought such success to his father.
As a legislator, John was an independent, refusing to be categorized. In 1946 he called himself a "Massachusetts Democrat," while as Senator he preferred the label "Practical Liberal." Both titles reflected the elder Kennedy's accent on accomplishment.

John felt a sympathetic rapport with Democrats because they "generally had more heart, more foresight, and more energy. They were not satisfied with things as they were and believed they could make them better." He saw government as a progressive problem-solving mechanism, and his liberalism sprang from a conviction "that history requires certain things of the United States, and that these things can be achieved only by programs of the kind which are conventionally known as liberal." John's attachment to accomplishment and to action rather than to slogans was to be the dominant feature of his political and legislative identity.

Unfortunately Kennedy's early involvement in farm problems did far more to delineate his legislative identity than to enhance his political reputation. He alienated important Democrats by

---

4Quoted in Harrison, p. 12.

5Quoted in Martin and Plaut, p. 187.

6Quoted in Sorensen, p. 71.

supporting the Eisenhower-Benson flexible price support farm program in 1954 and 1956, insisting "that the Administration program deserved at least a fair trial in the national interest . . . ."\(^8\)

Unbridled by presidential aspirations, Kennedy was undoubtedly pursuing what he then considered the best solution to the farm problem without a thorough consideration of how this would influence his career. It was this kind of a lapse that he was careful to avoid in his subsequent legislative activities and by 1958 he was repudiating his previous stands on the farm problem, claiming that he had been "led down the primrose path" by Secretary of Agriculture Ezra Benson.\(^9\)

Paradoxically, problems of health that almost took his life and temporarily removed him from the political chase in 1954 and 1955 seem to have encouraged qualities that improved his presidential prospects. The rigorous physical demands of an endless political schedule had stirred up his old back injury. By the summer of 1954, when the incessant pain had reduced his mobility, he decided to enter Manhattan's Hospital for Special Surgery, where on October 21, 1954, surgeons performed a dangerous double spinal fusion operation. His recovery was so slow that after four months

\(^8\)Quoted in Turner, p. 34.

\(^9\)Quoted in Martin and Plaut, p. 194.
another operation was ordered. He emerged from the second near lethal operation in far better shape and went to Florida for a prolonged period of rest and recovery.

Kennedy emerged from these serious operations a more ambitious and focused individual. Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., historian and Kennedy aide, felt that when Kennedy learned he was going to live, ambition took over from enjoyment, and he decided that he could be President of the United States. Now Kennedy's political identity as a national legislator would be pushed harder, and the legislative independence exhibited in his farm policy votes would be curbed and subordinated to his political ambition. This legislative independence was to cost him valuable support from the farm bloc in his 1956 bid for the vice-presidential nomination at the Democratic National Convention. The politician knew that the legislator could not alienate other significant groups without virtually eliminating himself from the presidential race in 1960.

However, 1956 found Kennedy the politician dealing with a more immediate problem, that of gaining control of the Massachusetts delegation to the Democratic National Convention. John knew that his influence at the convention would rest upon his ability to deliver delegates. In the early spring, the Kennedy prospects were

\[10\text{Schlesinger, } \textit{Kennedy or Nixon}, \text{ p. 24.}\]
none too bright. The Massachusetts delegation appeared to be
divided between the Senator and John McCormack, House Demo-
cratic leader and a potent figure both in Boston and on the floor of
the House. Further, William Burke, an outspoken McCormack
supporter, held the chair in the strategic state committee. McCor-
mack was optimistic enough to consider running as a favorite son
in the April presidential primary. Kennedy countered this move
by threatening to run against McCormack if he announced his candi-
dacy. Stymied, Kennedy and McCormack settled on a unity slate
and thus seemingly avoided an overt fight for delegates in the
primary. Burke, however, was awake to the possibility of turning
this compromise into a triumph for McCormack and began a write-
in campaign for McCormack in April's election. Perhaps McCor-
mack's informal and indirect candidacy was within the letter of the
compromise with Kennedy, but it certainly violated the spirit of
the agreement. All Kennedy could do was to launch a similar cam-
paign for Adlai Stevenson which enjoyed little success. McCormack's
resounding triumph in the primary enabled him to ask for favorite
son backing on the first ballot at the national convention, which
would give him considerable influence with the Massachusetts dele-
gation on the second ballot. Kennedy was left empty handed and
could guarantee Stevenson nothing.

Kennedy's only chance of re-asserting his influence was to
defeat Burke in his bid for re-election to the state chairmanship. This plan demanded that Kennedy move into an internal party struggle with both fists flying. He had always sought to avoid this sort of political infighting because of the level to which such fights often descended. However distasteful, Kennedy's ambition had set an inexorable course for him, and he responded by bringing pressure to bear where it was most effective. He unseated Burke. Defeat for the Senator would have been a crushing blow, but if regaining some measure of influence over the delegation meant taking a gamble in which the risk outweighed the advantage obtained, that gamble must be taken. Kennedy needed a stronger bargaining position at the National Convention, even though he was still unsure of precisely how it was going to benefit him.

As he approached the National Convention, Kennedy was uncertain of his own best interests. Although he gave some consideration to the vice-presidency, his views were marked by certain reservations. His father had warned him that Stevenson would be nominated and lose. If John were his running mate, his Catholicism would surely be blamed for the defeat, and John's career would be ruined. But John's waxing ambition overrode those fatherly warnings, and he carefully launched a campaign to impress the likely Democratic standard-bearer, Adlai Stevenson, with his qualifications for the post. Among the instruments of this campaign was a
report drawn up in the Kennedy camp which assessed the political value of the many eligible and anxious Democratic vice-presidential aspirants. This effort to favorably compare the Massachusetts legislator's qualifications with his rivals is valuable for the insight it gives into Kennedy's view of not only what type of political figure it takes to gain the vice-presidency, but also into what Kennedy thought was important in presenting himself to the public. The report saw him as:

The holder of a brilliantly heroic combat record; married to a lovely wife; from the right kind of state in terms of size, location, and political tendencies; with more experience in Congress than Humphrey, Wagner, or Clement; author of a highly praised best-seller; widely known and popular; a proven vote-getter against big odds; a moderate Stevensonian philosophy; friendly with party leaders in all sections; "right" on Taft-Hartley and acceptable on the farm issue; with a winning charm, particularly on T. V.; and independently wealthy, with close contacts with other contribution sources.\(^{11}\)

He knew what it took to be a successful figure, and his cold-blooded objectivity in assessing it was only surpassed by his ambitious devotion to attaining it. Despite his defeat by Estes Kefauver for the vice-presidential nomination, he put up a good fight and had established a name for himself with the millions who followed the battle on TV. Even defeat seemed to be a victory for Kennedy.

The post-convention Kennedy became increasingly more purposeful and defined. Kennedy emerged from the convention widely

\(^{11}\)Burns, p. 183.
known and admired despite his failure to attain a position on the national ticket. He had finally "arrived" on the national political scene. He was now unmistakably in pursuit of the presidency and both the politician and the legislator were working hand-in-glove to obtain it.

The politician was running hard. Kennedy toured the nation, cultivated influential friends, started political organizations, and accepted as many out-state speaking engagements as were politically profitable. His feverish efforts in 1958 to obtain an overwhelming victory in his re-election campaign against a political non-entity removed all doubts as to the Kennedy goal; he was shooting for the top.

John's role as a legislator, from the convention until 1960, was basically a defensive one. He approached his job cautiously in order to avoid actions that would adversely affect his political position, as he had in his farm policy venture in the mid-50's. John's attempt to identify with the Democratic liberals was generally successful, although as the pressure increased, John's cautious approach convinced many liberal worthies that he was not "one of the boys." This hedging approach was partly due to the natural tendency of presidential aspirants to avoid specific stands, but it also reflected John's lack of interest and his lack of information on domestic issues like farm policy and civil rights. Developing some
mastery in these areas was to be hard work for Kennedy.

This was not the case, however, in his approach to foreign policy. John approached the international situation with a confidence which stemmed from years of involvement and experience. This, he felt, was not a danger area and could be aggressively turned into political capital.

Kennedy's trip to the Middle East and Asia in 1951 fostered a disenchantment with anachronistic colonialism. He publicly wondered at "our avowed willingness to assume an almost imperial responsibility for the safety of Suez." He persistently attempted to realign our Indo-China policy which he saw as an alliance with "the desperate effort of a French regime to hang onto the remnants of an empire."

In July of 1957 his feelings were given expression in a most comprehensive and outspoken arraignment of American policy toward Algeria. He criticized American policy of full support of France in the struggle against Algerian rebels. He called upon the Eisenhower administration to stop supporting France's Algerian war and to begin working for Algerian independence. Although he did not succeed in altering United States foreign policy, he did achieve what was, perhaps, his intended purpose. The Gallup poll

---

12 Quoted in Harrison, p. 11.

13 Ibid., p. 13.
was soon to show that John Fitzgerald Kennedy of Bostonian Irish origin had become "the country's favorite Democrat." 14

But the gadfly in foreign affairs was content to muddle through on explosive civil rights and civil liberties issues. This is not to deny that Kennedy did not support such items as the abolition of the loyalty oath for G. I. educational loan applicants, anti-lynching legislation, abolition of the poll tax, a strong FEPC, and similar measures but rather to show that, lacking any significant background or firm convictions in this area, he approached these issues defensively, attempting to establish a liberal identity only when such stands would not threaten his political ambitions. His behavior in such situations can be seen in the following three examples.

First, one must examine Kennedy's behavior in relation to the McCarthy censure. On December 2, 1954 the United States Senate condemned Senator Joseph McCarthy of Wisconsin for not cooperating with the Senate's censuring committee. The liberals viewed this as an expression of outrage: a motion that would destroy McCarthy, the symbol of hatred, fear, and oppression, who threatened everything liberals believed in. That this moderate condemnation was the crushing counter-force that the liberals imagined it to be was seemingly borne out by the events that followed its

14Dinneen, p. 214.
adoption. As Richard Rovere saw it, "McCarthy had not been lynched, but he was finished. He was no longer a threat to anything, no longer a serious force in American politics."\(^{15}\)

McCarthyism was no longer "right."

Kennedy, very ill at the time of the censure vote, advanced varying reasons, some contradictory, for his refusal to take a stand on the issue. At first he maintained that since McCarthy's condemnation was based on specific actions, these acts should have been witnessed to be properly judged. Therefore, if the Senate was sitting as a jury, his own hospital-enforced absence at the time of McCarthy's alleged irreverences negated his value as a juror. His statement seemed to imply that information on McCarthy's activities obtained through oral and written reports was an inadequate basis for making a judgment. No such restraint was apparent several months later when he endorsed Senator Herbert Lehman's amendment to the Formosa Resolution while still in the hospital.\(^{16}\)

Later Kennedy was to advance another reason for his failure to act in the McCarthy censure that was to undercut his original


explanation. It was personal. He felt he could hardly criticize McCarthy while his brother Bob had been a member of the McCarthy staff. 17 This clearly premises his reasoning on the ground that the real issue was McCarthy's conduct as an "exposer" of Communists in government and not the specific actions noted in the censure resolution and unwitnessed by Kennedy.

His failure to take a public stand against McCarthyism undoubtedly cost the support of some liberals who otherwise viewed him with favor. When he sought Eleanor Roosevelt's support for his vice-presidential bid in 1956, her response rested on the McCarthy issue. When Kennedy failed to clearly state his position on McCarthy because "the McCarthy condemnation was so long ago that it did not enter the current situation," 18 Mrs. Roosevelt concluded that she could not support him.

Kennedy's reticence in the McCarthy matter was to be defended in Russell Turner's article in the conservative American Mercury in 1957. Turner paid tribute to the silent Senator's political fortitude, arguing that "in his own heart he realized that McCarthy had been performing a function essential to the national welfare . . .

17 Burns, p. 152.

18 Eleanor Roosevelt, "Of Stevenson, Truman, and Kennedy, The Saturday Evening Post, CCXXX (March 8, 1958), 78.
and as such was deserving of commendation rather than condemna-
tion."\(^19\) This honest conjecture is a tribute to Kennedy's continued
fence-straddling, but his straddling does not seem to have been
successful. In 1959 he was asked, in McCarthy's home town, to
comment on Mrs. Roosevelt's statement that he was "soft" on
McCarthyism. "With some irritation he said that his civil-liberties
record was clear and 'I am not ready to accept any indictment from
you or Mrs. Roosevelt on that score.'\(^20\)

By 1959, Kennedy was more inclined to make clear his opposi-
tion to McCarthyism, but his words were still marked with the
usual restraint. In reviewing Richard Rovere's _Senator Joe
McCarthy_, he wrote:

> This cult of sincere (McCarthy) devotees is not the only
> trace of the McCarthy contagion remaining today - and Mr.
> Rovere may (though I hope not) be overly optimistic in his
> estimate of how swiftly and fully the nation has recovered its
> health. Many who were directly affected . . . will neither
> forget nor forgive. And the indirect effects . . . may well
> be with us for at least the duration of the "cold war".\(^21\)

Kennedy's failure to satisfy the liberals with a condemnation of
McCarthy is best explained, perhaps, by political scientist, James
M. Burns, in a campaign biography published in 1959. As Burns

\(^{19}\)Turner, p. 34.

\(^{20}\)Burns, p. 151.

... partly out of sheer pride or stubbornness; he does not want to give the impression of taking flight from a position that he feels a considered one. Partly out of a sense of futility; he, too, is aware now that the issue will not die. Partly out of political expediency; he has chosen to occupy a place on the liberal side of center in American politics and has left more adventurous civil-liberties frontiers to Humphrey and Stevenson, who have staked out the territory. But mainly because the old pressures within him are still operative to some extent, even though on concrete civil-liberties issues ... he has taken a strong civil-libertarian position. 22

The narrow gauge of Kennedy's liberalism at this time must be viewed not only in terms of the prejudices of his Irish Catholic constituency, but also in relation to the tenets of the nineteenth century economic liberalism he had learned at his father's table.

Our second example, civil rights for Negroes, finds Kennedy behaving much as he did in relation to McCarthyism. On "hot" political issues he could not afford to take a firm stand on either side of such divisions. The political risk was too great. This hard fact of political life did much to shape his attitude toward the Negro problem. While he would support civil rights legislation as the law of the land, he refused to take a stand on the principles involved in such legislation. This was clearly evident in his behavior at Jackson, Mississippi, during the height of the 1957 Little Rock crisis. Scheduled to speak before the Young Democrats of Jackson, he had been

22Burns, p. 152.
challenged by the Republican state chairman to state his views on segregation. Kennedy responded to an expectant audience:

I have no hesitancy in telling the Republican chairman the same thing I have said in my own city of Boston, that I accept the Supreme Court decision as the supreme law of the land. I think most of us agree on the necessity to uphold law and order.23

Avoiding a direct response, he took his stand on middle ground. Observance of the law, not segregation, was the main point. Southern conservatives could hardly take issue with him on this score. Although Kennedy's remarks in Jackson could be interpreted as a tacit endorsement of the principle of racial equality, he simply stated the obvious while implying that if the Supreme Court had ruled to establish segregation as the law of the land, Kennedy would have supported it.

Kennedy's cautious, ambiguous approach to Negro civil rights is further exemplified in his handling of the 1957 Civil Rights Bill. Kennedy had to emphasize his commitment to Negro civil rights in order to preserve a favorable image with the liberals, but without alienating Southern support that would be critical in the 1960 convention.

His first vote aligned him with the South as he voted against employing Senate Rule XIV by which the civil libertarians sought

to keep the bill from entering Mississippian James Eastland's Judiciary Committee. Kennedy favored, and was prepared to vote for, the more customary discharge petition if Eastland's dilatory tactics became intolerable. Allowing that it was a legal tactic, Kennedy was still wary of "a procedure which even the proponents would admit is abnormal and seldom used." Kennedy's characteristic moderation would have made any other reaction unusual. Had he been born a poor member of a traditionally persecuted minority group, his experiences might have aroused a sense of urgency which may have subordinated his taste for traditional procedures to a personal passion to correct what he would have felt to be a monumental injustice.

On the other hand Kennedy pointed to his vote on Section III of the bill as proof of his liberal sympathies. Section III, which would permit the Attorney General to use injunctive power to enforce school desegregation and other Negro civil rights, had a curious history. This obviously strong measure was initially undermined to a certain extent by careless draftsmanship. A substitute was sought, but none was advanced because compromise drafters were reluctant to introduce amendments that could not gather adequate support and the liberal Democrats would not vote for a substitute

measure until they could preserve the purity of their voting records by first going on record in favor of Section III. Subsequently an emasculating amendment was passed despite the opposition of liberals and Section III was dead.

Kennedy's vote for Section III's preservation is a matter of record; why he voted for it is a matter of conjecture. If Kennedy was determined to pass Section III, he certainly would have worked for a passable compromise. It was common knowledge that Section III was doomed for lack of votes. However Kennedy did not take an independent course as he did in the Taft-Hartley fight, but instead cast a vote for political expediency rather than for legislative progress. He had obtained "irrefutable" proof that he had tried to advance the cause of civil rights without endangering his Southern support in the least.

But when the South brought pressure to bear on the Senator during the consideration of civil liberties legislation, he usually found reasons for voting with them. Such was the case when the Senate took up the O'Mahoney Amendment, which was designed to insure jury trials, with Negro jurors, in civil rights cases. The civil rights bloc of labor, NAACP, and ADA, familiar with the temper of Southern juries, opposed the O'Mahoney Amendment. Southern senators and governors urged Kennedy to support the amendment. While Kennedy inserted two letters from Harvard law professors in
the *Congressional Record* which assured liberals that the O'Mahoney Amendment was less restrictive than they believed, he cast his vote with the Southerners, assuring them that with the amendment, it would be "a moderate bill that would be enforced by Southern courts and Southern juries."\(^{25}\)

Kennedy concluded his performance with a speech to the Senate. He pointed out that a major part of the original bill was still intact. The civil contempt powers of federal judges could still be used to aid persons denied the right to vote. Southern juries would take favorable action in criminal contempt cases because the eyes of the nation would be on them. Furthermore, without the jury trial provision Southerners would have filibustered the bill to death. Clearly Kennedy was building a legislative position that offered something to the various shades of political opinion as he approached 1960.

A final legislative hurdle faced Kennedy in 1959 as Congress sought to solve the troublesome problem of revising the Taft-Hartley Act. Since its adoption in 1947, Taft-Hartley had been a political issue of some magnitude. Labor spokesmen called for a repeal of this "slave labor" law. Business and industrial groups sought to strengthen and extend its principles. Charting a legislative course

\(^{25}\)Burns, p. 194.
between this Scylla and Charybdis was a precarious task. Senator Irving Ives, the industrial relations expert from New York, had gained overwhelming Senate approval for his revisionist bill in 1958 only to see it flounder in the face of opposition from both business and labor interests. Now, feeling the need to prove himself capable of guiding major legislative measures through Congress, Kennedy took up the challenge of preparing an acceptable labor relations bill.

Kennedy's legislation was designed to prevent improper practices on the part of labor organizations, employees, labor relations consultants, and their officers and representatives. Other suggested reforms included requiring regular elections of union officials by secret ballot and mandatory periodic reports from both labor and management concerning their financial involvement in labor activities.

Senator John L. McClellan, the prestigious chairman of the so-called Labor Rackets Committee, jeopardized the fate of this measure by proposing an amendment to Kennedy's bill guaranteeing a strong "bill of rights" for union members, obligating the federal government to insure that all union members had the right to select their representatives without intimidation. This provision was far too strong for labor leaders to accept and Kennedy, with an eye on their support in 1960, made a stand consistent with his stand on the
O'Mahoney Amendment and denounced the "bill of rights" as a "vast intrusion of federal regulation into areas reserved to state control."  

The roll call which followed found the Kennedy forces defeated by one vote, that which Vice-President Richard M. Nixon cast to break a tie. Kennedy followed up this close defeat by re-organizing support behind his proposal for a less stringent "bill of rights" proposal. This tactic won reconsideration for the amendment and Kennedy was able to win wide support, not only for his amended bill of rights, but for his bill as a whole. It finally passed the Senate by an overwhelming vote of 90 to 1.

But Kennedy's battle had not ended for he was now faced with the problem of reconciling his mild reforms with the House's Landrum-Griffin Bill which called for more federal regulation of union activity. In the meetings of the resulting conference committee Kennedy compromised to bridge the gaps in the measures and to insure that both bills wouldn't die in committee. Concessions to the House's boycotting and picketing provisions were absolutely necessary in order to preserve Kennedy's moderate internal union reform measures. Although the final bill contained these moderate measures, the fact that Kennedy did not view his

---

26 Quoted in Burns, p. 213.
efforts an unadulterated success is evidenced by his request that his name be removed from the bill that was passed as the Landrum-Griffin Act. On the whole, Kennedy was quite successful in navigating a course over dangerous seas without alienating the important labor support he would need in the coming presidential election year.

John F. Kennedy had acted with political wisdom in his legislative affairs. The lessons of Irish ward politics and the business world had reached fruition in the second son of Joseph P. Kennedy. John had utilized his experiences and inheritance to master politics on many levels, and yet he remained neither a ward politician or a ruthless businessman, but rather a shrewd combination of the elements that had made his grandfather and father successful. The shunning of the rigid political ideologies and organizations of others, the coldly analytical mind, and the driving ambition, an ambition evidenced by Kennedy's repeated moves from office to office while exhausting each position's possibilities, characterized both the candidate and his family.

Kennedy moved coolly and inexorably toward the center of power. The Senator's voting record and his decision to act as a labor legislator in 1959 exemplify his understanding of American power politics. But his political acumen was most clearly manifested on election day. As an unknown in 1946, an upstart in 1952,
and a vibrant, warm, and intelligent new face in 1960, Kennedy was richly rewarded for keeping his hand on the pulse of the power brokers. The 1960 presidential campaign was a typical Kennedy campaign in which shrewd insight and hard work resulted in victory.

As Theodore H. White observes in his classic analysis of that race:

Since national politics was only people, the Kennedys set out from 1956 on to learn who the people were - the right people. Between 1956 and 1960 no Democrat, not even Adlai Stevenson, spoke in more states, addressed more Jefferson - Jackson Day dinners, participated in more local and majority campaigns of deserving Democrats, than did John F. Kennedy. By the spring of 1960 Kennedy had not only visited every state of the union, but his intelligence files bulged with what was possibly the most complete index ever made of the power structure of any national party. 27

If power gravitates toward those who best understand and desire it, John Fitzgerald Kennedy's political advancement cannot be considered a mystery.

Political advancement had been the keynote of John F. Kennedy's House and Senate careers. His unwillingness to give all-out partisan support to Democratic party measures and his disinclination to take doctrinaire positions not only reflected an independent nature but also served his political ends. His growing though cautious concern with national issues, rather than local and regional matters, reflected and advanced his expanding political consciousness and

ambition. This driving ambition, so rashly displayed in his 1956 vice-presidential bid, clearly became the moderating force in his subsequent legislative actions. The Senator artfully avoided the pitfalls of legislating for an entire nation by avoiding polarized positions and steering an unobtrusive course. While in the Senate, Kennedy dodged the McCarthy issue, took defensive action on the 1957 civil rights bill and learned the necessity of compromise as a labor reformer in 1959. Yet ironically, in a country where the independent voters hold the balance of power, a noncommittal record can become a marked advantage for a presidential aspirant.

John F. Kennedy had advanced considerably from the Boston slums of his grandfather's childhood. He had achieved everything that past Kennedys had aspired to, everything that is, except the presidency and the social recognition that accompanies it. But by mid-1959, even as he grappled with the labor reform bill, his drive for that office was swinging into high gear. His campaign trips became frequent enough to justify the purchase of a forty passenger airplane, which he christened "Victura."

The recognition which had eluded Joseph P. Kennedy was now within the reach of his second son. A calculated combination of attitudes and resources were necessary for total success and these elements, more than merely being present in the Kennedy family, were carefully developed and directed. Certainly John Fitzgerald
Kennedy's wealth, competitive drive, and detached perception cannot be ignored when taking into account his emergence as the thirty-fifth President of the United States.
BIBLIOGRAPHY

Public Documents

U. S. Congressional Record. Vol. VC.

U. S. Congressional Record. Vol. IIC.

U. S. Congressional Record. Vol. CIIL

Books


*Articles and Periodicals*


