



Written by [R. Cort Kirkwood](#) on November 7, 2023

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JFK's Rule Was No Camelot

Had President John F. Kennedy not been assassinated, he might well have gone the way of all flesh in old age, remembered at best as a mediocre president most notable for the Cuban Missile Crisis and his failure of nerve during the U.S.-backed invasion of anti-Communist Cubans at the Bay of Pigs. Beyond that, most of what we know about him is that he and his fetching wife, Jackie, brought dignity and white-tie-and-tails class to the White House. Such was JFK's bewildering charm and good looks, and the *High Hopes* for his New Frontier, as Frank Sinatra's campaign theme song went, that the time was called "Camelot," where "July and August cannot be too hot," "there's a legal limit to the snow," "winter is forbidden till December," and "summer lingers through September."

But the late trailblazing conservative writer M. Stanton Evans probably expressed better than anyone what really happened when the Kennedy Circus erected its tent. He analogized with Chubby Checkers' West African shuffle: "I say *The Twist* was originated in Washington by the Kennedy administration — a lot of frantic motion with no visible progress."

That dismal record explains why most of what we see and hear about JFK appears in nostalgic family photos and films: Kennedy Christmases, touch football at the Hyannisport "compound," or now dead John-John peeping out from under POTUS 35's Oval Office desk. And of course, every November 22, we are treated to an assassination retrospective and endless loop of the Zapruder Film, which recorded the moment his head exploded in Dealey Plaza in Dallas, Texas.

A better understanding of JFK might be found by looking at the legacy he left behind, not least his undermining Catholic moral teaching in the public square, which directly led to his family's promoting abortion on demand.

Dirty Man, Dirty Politics

Despite the romantic image partly fashioned by Hollywood celebrities such as Sinatra and his Rat Pack, JFK was neither an honest nor a particularly capable man.

His famous "bestselling" book, for instance, 1956's *Profiles in Courage*, was a put-up job. Mostly written by speechwriter Ted Sorenson, the book sold two million copies. Then again, whiskey smuggler Joe Kennedy, JFK's father, bought thousands of copies to ensure it was a bestseller, Seymour Hersh reported in *The Dark Side of Camelot*. Bookworms are probably chowing down on them in the basement of the "compound" manse even today. As well, Father Kennedy asked friend Arthur Krock of *The New*



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Carefully curated: Most of what the public knows about John F. Kennedy comes from nostalgic photos, such as this one of John-John (now dead) peering out from under his father's desk in the Oval Office.



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York Times, a former member of the Pulitzer Prize board, to lobby the panel on JFK's behalf, Craig Fehrman wrote for *Politico*. The pressure worked. Kennedy won the prize for biography in 1957.

"John F. Kennedy is the only man in history that I know who won a Pulitzer Prize for a book that was ghostwritten for him," columnist Drew Pearson told ABC's Mike Wallace on his interview program. Kennedy and Sorenson agreed to keep the latter's authorship a secret, lest it ruin JFK's forthcoming campaign for president. Papa Kennedy threatened to sue the network, which retracted Pearson's claim.

JFK was famous for his extramarital shenanigans, of course, including using prostitutes and skinny-dipping in the White House pool with his brothers and two secretaries called Fiddle and Faddle. He told British Prime Minister Harold MacMillan that if he didn't have sex for three days, he got a headache. That unslakable thirst for sex nearly derailed his campaign. A female supporter, Florence Kater, snapped a photo of Kennedy, face hidden with a handkerchief, as he left the apartment of an aide at 3:00 a.m. Kennedy accosted her and her husband on the street and warned her not to go public, and an aide even visited the woman seven times to persuade her likewise.

In 1959, she wrote to some four dozen top officials across Washington, D.C., about the encounter and included the photo. Both landed on the desk of FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover. She even showed up at a campaign event with an enlargement on a placard, which also drew news coverage. She was denounced as a heckler. It was fake news!

Kater later confessed to reporter Bob Clark of the *Washington Star* that she offered to drop the matter in exchange for Kennedy's buying her an expensive impressionist painting. She also told Clark that she had recordings of JFK's adulterous sexcapades. When Clark phoned editor Charles Seib with the story, "he was put on hold while Seib checked with his superiors," Hersh reported.

"A few moments later, Seib returned to the telephone and ordered [Clark] 'to drop the story,'" Hersh said. "He wouldn't even let me go back to listen to the tapes." The story would "have blown Kennedy out of the water," Clark rightly concluded. "There never would have been a President Kennedy."

Kennedy bedded so many women — again, many of them prostitutes even when he was president — he suffered myriad venereal diseases and with chronic sexually transmitted, non-gonorrheal urethritis, even at the time of his murder. His autopsy showed signs of chlamydia.

Indeed, Kennedy's sex addiction might have killed him, Hersh reported. On November 22, Kennedy was wearing a groin-to-shoulder brace because he ripped a groin muscle during poolside shenanigans with one of his many sex partners:

It was far more constraining than his usual back brace, which he also continued to wear. The two braces were meant to keep him as comfortable as possible during the strenuous days of campaigning, including that day in Dallas.

Those braces also made it impossible for the president to bend in reflex when he was struck in the neck by the bullet fired by Lee Harvey Oswald. Oswald's first successful shot was not necessarily fatal, but the president remained erect — and an excellent target for the second, fatal blow to the head. Kennedy's groin brace, which is now the possession of the National Archives in Washington, was not mentioned in the public autopsy report. Nor was the injury that led to his need for it.



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Those are just a few of the tales that rather dull the shine of the Camelot king's crown.



Beautiful people: Such was the high-society charm and surpassing good looks of JFK and wife Jackie that Americans were bamboozled into thinking they lived in a new country called “Camelot.” (AP Images)

Hersh, the former *New York Times* man who exposed the My Lai massacre that greatly harmed America's war effort in Vietnam, also explained Kennedy's remarkable victory over Hubert Humphrey in anti-Catholic West Virginia's 1960 presidential primary. JFK bought the vote. Little brother Ted was the bag man, and traveled hither and thither across the Mountain State with \$5,000 cash payments for party committeemen. Total spent to corral votes: \$275,000. Locals told the Kennedys to pay off sheriffs, too, the real power in many counties, and one top Democrat collected \$40,000 for his effort.

As for the general election, Hersh reported, Kennedy robbed Richard Nixon of Illinois with the help of Mayor Richard Daley's Democratic machine and Chicago Outfit chieftain Sam Giancana. Daley and Giancana organized a vote fraud and buying scheme that was so successful that even JFK thought his margin of victory in Chicago was suspect.

Recruited to help by Sinatra, as daughter Tina told Hersh and then *60 Minutes* three years later, Giancana lined up the labor unions to back JFK. And he bragged about it. “Listen, honey,” he told his moll Judith Exner — who also rumbled the bedsheets with Kennedy — “if it wasn't for me your boyfriend wouldn't even be in the White House.”

“Giancana was not exaggerating,” Hersh reported, citing G. Robert Blakey, a former special prosecutor for the Justice Department and chief counsel to the U.S. House Assassinations Committee in the 1970s. FBI wiretaps, he told Hersh, proved “beyond doubt, in my judgment, that enough votes were stolen — let me repeat that — stolen in Chicago to give Kennedy a sufficient margin that he carried the state of Illinois.” Giancana also controlled vote fraud in congressional elections, and “money generated by the mob was put into the 1960 election,” Blakey told Hersh. Mobbed-up Sinatra muddled the money to Joe Kennedy. “Can you say mob money made the difference?” Blakey asked. “My judgment is yes.”

Space does not permit a lengthy assessment of the Kennedy administration. It suffices to say, again, it failed to achieve anything significant. Most notable, however, was Kennedy's reprehensible decision to abandon the Cuban patriots who invaded their homeland on April 17, 1961 to overthrow communist dictator Fidel Castro.



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As Mario Lazo reported for *Reader's Digest* in 1964, Kennedy adamantly refused to provide air cover for the Bay of Pigs liberators. When Admiral Arleigh Burke, chief of Naval Operations, requested permission for a destroyer to barrage Castro's forces, Kennedy asked what would happen if the communist tyrant's forces fired back and hit the destroyer. "Then we'll knock the hell out of them!" Burke replied.

That would mean the United States was publicly involved in the invasion, Kennedy said. "We are involved, sir," Burke replied. "We trained and armed these Cubans. We helped land them on the beaches. God-d**mit, Mr. President, we can't let those boys be slaughtered there!"

That is exactly what happened.

The Kennedys and Abortion

Kennedy succeeded as president and Democratic politician on one count. When he promised to be an indifferent, if not bad, Catholic to assure Protestant voters he wouldn't take orders from the pope, he didn't just create a near-obligation for Catholics to ignore their faith when voting or running for office. He also set the stage for the "personally opposed, but..." argument that "pro-choice" Catholic politicians have used ever since to justify voting to permit the murder of the unborn.

Speaking before the Protestant Greater Houston Ministerial Association on September 12, 1960, Kennedy was clear. His Catholic faith would not guide his decisions as president.

"I am not the Catholic candidate for President," he told the ministers. "I am the Democratic Party's candidate for President who happens also to be a Catholic. I do not speak for my church on public matters — and the church does not speak for me":

Whatever issue may come before me as President — on birth control, divorce, censorship, gambling or any other subject — I will make my decision in accordance with these views, in accordance with what my conscience tells me to be the national interest, and without regard to outside religious pressures or dictates. And no power or threat of punishment could cause me to decide otherwise.

He promised to resign from the presidency if his conscience was conflicted. Looking back at the speech and Kennedy's legendary sexual appetite, going on about his "conscience" was droll commentary on either his honesty or his lack of self-awareness. But a question many must have asked is who or what formed and guided Kennedy's conscience.

The speech foreshadowed what would come from the same quarters three years later.

"In July 1964, several liberal theologians received invitations to the Kennedy family compound in Hyannisport, Massachusetts, for a discussion of how a Catholic politician should handle the abortion issue," Philip Lawler wrote in *The Faithful Departed: The Collapse of Boston's Catholic Culture*. Abortion would not be an issue in the 1964 Senate campaign of father of 10 Robert F. Kennedy, but the "planners had the more distant future in mind":

For two days, the theologians huddled ... [and then] reached a consensus, which they passed along to their political patrons. Abortion, they agreed, could sometimes be morally



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acceptable as a lesser of two evils. Lawmakers should certainly not encourage abortion, but a blanket prohibition might be more harmful to the common good than allowing abortion in *some* cases. And a danger to the common good would very likely arise if political leaders sought to impose their own private views on public policy....

Thus, the basic lines of “pro-choice” rhetoric were sketched out by Catholic theologians at the residence of America’s most famous Catholic family, nine years before the *Roe v. Wade* [U.S. Supreme Court] decision [that legalized abortion on demand]. The late President Kennedy had already laid the foundation for the argument that a Catholic politician must not attempt to enact his private religious views; now his brothers were prepared to take the step forward. They were ready to explain that they were personally opposed to abortion, but...

One Kennedy brother didn’t get the message, at least not right away. Eight years later, answering a letter, then-Senator Ted Kennedy explained why he opposed abortion.

“Once life has begun, no matter at what stage of growth,” Kennedy wrote, “it is my belief that termination should not be decided merely by desire”:

When history looks back to this era it should recognize this generation as one which cared about human beings enough to halt the practice of war, to provide a decent living for every family, and to fulfill its responsibility to its children from the very moment of conception.

Senator Kennedy later changed his mind to become one of Capitol Hill’s most vociferous supporters of murdering the unborn, which means either he didn’t believe what he wrote, or his life of drunkenness and debauchery had darkened his intellect. Something had to change, either his behavior or his beliefs. Changing his beliefs enabled him to rationalize his behavior.

Indeed, so dark was Ted Kennedy’s intellect that when he wrote to Pope Benedict as death from brain cancer beckoned, he offered a list of public policy positions, including opposition to the death penalty, that supposedly demonstrated his fealty to Catholic moral teaching. Yet he said nothing about abortion. “I’ve never failed to believe and respect the fundamental teachings of my faith,” Kennedy wrote. He must have been personally opposed to abortion, but...

With the notable exception of the late Eunice (Kennedy) Shriver and her husband, Sargent, the Kennedy family has been adamantly pro-abortion.

Pro-choice Catholics? JFK’s speech to the Greater Houston Ministerial Association in 1960 set the stage for the argument that a Catholic can be “personally opposed to abortion” but permit the state to legalize it. Though the outlines of that argument were fleshed out in 1964, Senator Ted Kennedy (shown here with JFK) was pro-life into the 1970s. (AP Images)



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The Real Story

The truth about JFK is sobering. He was a sex addict whose carnal shenanigans were a major national security risk — he canoodled with a suspected East German spy and a Chinese prostitute — who won a Pulitzer Prize for a book he didn't write, and who then stole a primary and national election with money and the power it can buy (and with the help of organized crime).

That helps explain at least one of the myriad assassination conspiracy theories. As attorney general, Robert F. Kennedy continued the crusade against organized crime he began as an aide on the Senate Select Committee on Improper Activities in Labor and Management, also known as the Rackets Committee. RFK had famously ridiculed Giancana during committee questioning 18 months before JFK took office.

Continuing that crusade betrayed the mob. The disloyalty called for revenge. Florida Mafia chieftain Santo Trafficante, Jr. and New Orleans mob boss Carlos Marcellos supposedly organized the hit on November 22, 1963. In 1992, Frank Ragano, an attorney for Trafficante, revealed a deathbed declaration from the gangster: "Carlos f***ed up. We shouldn't have gotten rid of Giovanni [John]. We should have killed Bobby."

Whatever one believes about the assassination, the bullet or bullets that killed Kennedy did not deprive the nation of a remarkable leader of so much promise and unrealized dreams.

Perhaps the most salient observation about JFK, apropos of Hersh's *Dark Side of Camelot*, is this: There really wasn't a bright side.



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