



Written by [Steve Byas](#) on May 29, 2017

Kennedy Was No Conservative

On the occasion of the 100th birthday of former President John F. Kennedy on May 29, it is important to look at the other events in his life besides his tragic assassination in Dallas on November 22, 1963. That sudden and violent end to his life obscures many other aspects of the man, particularly his political career, that are important for us to know.



Most discussions about Kennedy center around questions such as was his assassination a conspiracy, and if so, who all was involved? Others might also be aware of his numerous affairs over the years. The affair that is particularly noteworthy in connection with his birthday involved the huge celebration at Madison Square Garden

as he turned 4⁵ — memorable because Marilyn Monroe sang a sexy rendition of “Happy Birthday, Mr. President.”

Kennedy’s popularity surged after his public assassination, so much so that even many political conservatives have tried to wrest his legacy away from political liberals. Conservatives who claim Kennedy as one of their own generally point to his advocacy of tax cuts to spur the economy, usually taken as another piece of evidence for the efficacy of “supply-side economics” later implemented in the Reagan administration. Others note that he was a strong anti-Communist, citing his “standing up to Krushchev” during the Cuban Missile Crisis, his lament in 1949 over the loss of China to communism, and his famous comments in support of keeping Berlin out of the Soviet orbit.

Perhaps his strongest remarks against communism were those he made as a second-term member of the U.S. House of Representatives in January of 1949, when he declared,

Our policy in China has reaped the whirlwind. The continued insistence that aid would not be forthcoming unless a coalition government with the Communists was formed, was a crippling blow to the Nationalist government. So concerned were our diplomats and the their advisers, the Lattimores, and the Fairbanks, with the imperfections of the diplomatic system in China after 20 years of war, and the tales of corruption in high places, that they lost sight of our tremendous stake in a non-Communist China.

Kennedy concluded his pointed castigation of the disastrous American policy in China with an excellent summary of what had happened: “What our young men have saved, our diplomats and our President have frittered away.”

That president who did the frittering was fellow Democrat Harry Truman, and when Kennedy sought the Democratic Party nomination for president in 1960, Truman was not among his supporters.



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Finally, others cite the monetary contributions that Kennedy made as a young college student to the America First Committee, the organization that had around 800,000 members hoping to keep the United States out of World War II.

Despite these arguments for a “conservative” Kennedy, other facts paint a different picture of the man — one more attuned to the left side of the political spectrum. First, it should be stressed that a person can be an “anti-Communist” and still be a liberal, even a socialist. After all, Leon Trotsky was anti-Stalinist, but he was still a Red. Adolf Hitler was a National Socialist, yet he was an ardent anti-Communist.

The differences between socialists such as the Fabians of England and the Leninists of Russia was not so much the goals, but the methods. And even as a young man, Jack Kennedy showed a definite inclination toward democratic socialism. While he eventually graduated *cum laude* from Harvard with a political science degree with a specialty in “international relations,” his original goal was to attend the London School of Economics and study under the Fabian Socialist icon Harold Laski. Laski was a proponent of Marxism and a planned economy, and was so far to the Left that he was eventually disavowed by the socialist Labour Party. The man that Kennedy wanted to study under was known as Britain’s most influential spokesman for socialism.

Kennedy served as a lieutenant in World War II, commanding the Patrol Torpedo boat PT-109 which was ripped into two parts by a Japanese ship. He heroically swam three miles to an island, carrying one of his sailors. His war service was of great help to him when he successfully ran for Congress in 1946.

Then in 1952 Kennedy won a seat in the U.S. Senate, defeating Henry Cabot Lodge. Fortunately for JFK, Wisconsin’s U.S. Senator Joe McCarthy declined to travel to Massachusetts to campaign for fellow Republican Lodge, out of deference for Kennedy’s father, Joe Kennedy. Joe was a great supporter of McCarthy. In fact, McCarthy was such a strong friend of the Kennedy family that many speculated he would marry Kennedy’s sister Eunice. Kennedy’s brother Robert was an aide on McCarthy’s famous subcommittee that investigated Communist infiltration into the U.S. government.

When McCarthy was later condemned by the Senate in December of 1954, John Kennedy was ill in the hospital and did not vote. He never gave any public comment as to how he would have voted concerning the man who probably had done the most other than his father to put him in the Senate.

By 1956, Kennedy was ready to seek higher office. At that year’s Democratic National Convention, presidential nominee Adlai Stevenson opted to let the delegates pick his running-mate. Kennedy offered himself as a candidate, but lost out to Senator Estes Kefauver.

In the 1960 presidential campaign, Kennedy brilliantly exploited the question of his religion, Roman Catholicism, and although no Catholic had ever been elected president, due to anti-Catholic prejudice, he was able to assure voters that his religion was actually a plus, arguing that it would actually make him more likely to keep his oath of office. In the televised debates with Republican Richard Nixon, Kennedy’s chances were boosted by his superior physical appearance. Nixon had received a leg injury and was in visible pain, and he was also perspiring freely under the bright lights. In contrast, Kennedy received professional make-up assistance and was well-rested. People who watched the debates on TV thought Kennedy had won, but tellingly, those who simply listened via radio considered Nixon the winner.

As president, Kennedy’s overall record reveals that he certainly should not be considered a conservative hero.



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Among the most disgraceful episodes in American history was Kennedy's betrayal of the anti-Castro freedom fighters at the Bay of Pigs. After Fidel Castro imposed communism on the island nation of Cuba, many anti-Communist Cubans living in Florida were encouraged by the Eisenhower and Kennedy administrations to invade Cuba and overthrow the Castro dictatorship. They were promised American assistance, particularly air support. *U.S. News and World Report* for September 17, 1962, wrote of what happened: "Secure in this assurance of air support, the invaders went ashore ... 1400 armed men reached the beaches ... In the battle that followed Castro's troops suffered heavy casualties ... Castro's tanks, coming up to the battle were sitting ducks for attack by air. Confidently, the little invading force waited for its air support to arrive. Its leaders had assurance of that support. It was provided in the pre-invasion planning."

But it was not to be, as *U.S. News* continued. "Hours before, on Sunday evening, a small but potent force of B-26's was sitting in readiness on an airstrip 500 miles away, waiting to take off for the Bay of Pigs. Those were planes of the invasion force with Cuban pilots. But those planes didn't take off. The reason: President Kennedy forbade their use."

A year later, Kennedy supposedly "stood up" to Soviet dictator Nikita Khrushchev during the Cuban Missile Crisis, but the reality is that the U.S. secretly agreed to withdraw American missiles from Turkey and Italy in exchange for the Soviets removing missiles from Cuba. Many have speculated that this was what Khrushchev had wanted to accomplish all along.

Many Kennedy apologists on both the Left and the Right have asserted that if only Kennedy had been re-elected in 1964, he was going to "get us out of Vietnam." But it was Kennedy who had engineered the Americanization of the Vietnam War, increasing the number of soldiers in South Vietnam from 500 to 16,000, ultimately rejecting the pleas of General Douglas MacArthur to not involve the country in a land war in Asia.

Kennedy and his coterie of advisers, who called themselves the "Wise Men," dreamed of making Vietnam the "showcase for democracy" in Asia — pouring millions of American tax dollars into the country, thinking social programs would cause other nations of the region to reject communism in favor of Big Government social welfare. In 1963, Kennedy told Walter Cronkite, "I think that would be a mistake" for America to consider pulling out of Vietnam. JFK's brother Robert publicly boasted that they were in Vietnam "to win," and the Kennedy administration would stay there until they did win.

Despite evidence to the contrary, Kennedy supporters have largely been successful in casting Lyndon Johnson and Richard Nixon as the real culprits in the Vietnam debacle. While they certainly shared responsibility for what happened in southeast Asia, this does not excuse John F. Kennedy in the entire affair.

Those who believe in the national sovereignty of the United States should recognize that Kennedy was not a champion of the right of Americans to rule themselves. No "conservative," if that word means anything at all, could have issued the notorious State Department Document 7277 in September of 1961, promoting the idea of dismantling the armed forces of the United States and turning all military powers to the United Nations.

In a document titled *Program for General and Complete Disarmament in a Peaceful World*, the Kennedy State Department called for "complete disarmament" of all nations of the world, including the United States, which could "only be achieved through the progressive strengthening of international institutions under the United Nations and by creating a United Nations Peace Force to enforce the



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peace.” The ultimate goal of the proposal was for the “disbanding of all national armed forces and the prohibition of their reestablishment in any form whatsoever other than those required to preserve internal order and for contributions to a United Nations Peace Force.”

Closely related to this glaring example of Kennedy’s disregard for American national sovereignty is his position on the “Connally Amendment,” authored by Texas Senator Tom Connally. As John Stormer wrote in *None Dare Call It Treason* (the 1992 edition), “Before ratifying the United Nations Charter in 1945, the U.S. Senate amended the agreement on the International Court of Justice Statute to bar the Court from jurisdiction over matters which were essentially domestic,” — as determined by the United States.

Yet, during his time in the White House, President Kennedy advocated repealing the Connally Amendment, which would have left individual Americans at the mercy of foreigners.

This is some conservatives’ idea of a conservative hero?

Two other issues in domestic affairs should also demonstrate that Kennedy was not a limited-government conservative.

In a demonstration of raw governmental intimidation, the Kennedy brothers (President Kennedy and his brother Robert, the attorney general), went after United States Steel in 1962 for increasing steel prices. Robert Kennedy argued that U.S. Steel had illegally colluded to fix prices and threatened to investigate their expense accounts, even ordering the FBI to “interview them all,” adding “We can’t lose on this.” Under this enormous pressure, U.S. Steel rescinded its announced price increase.

The *Wall Street Journal* said that Kennedy had used “naked power” augmented by “by threats, by agents of the state security police.” The paper was not alone in expressing concern over the precedent that had been set. Charles Reich, a law professor at Yale, stated that the Kennedy administration had violated the civil liberties of a major American business, in order to achieve its political goal.

Finally, in what Democratic consultant Patrick Reddy boasted “will go down as the Kennedy family’s greatest gift to the Democratic Party,” our present struggles concerning immigration can be traced to the Kennedy administration. Most often cited in this regard is the 1965 immigration law authored by Senator *Edward* Kennedy, which snuffed out quotas for immigrants from countries that had traditionally populated America — England, Ireland, and Germany — and added “family reunification” policies. Commentator Ann Coulter has even asserted that the primary purpose of the law, passed during the heyday of President Lyndon Johnson’s “Great Society,” was to improve the electoral fortunes of the Democratic Party by creating an ever-expanding underclass inclined to vote Democrat.

But it was *President Kennedy*, not his brother, who initially proposed this alteration of immigration policy, seeing it as a “civil rights” issue. Chappaquiddick Ted simply implemented what his brother had originally suggested.

For the sake of historical accuracy, we cannot honestly consider John F. Kennedy as any kind of a “conservative.” When he was running for president, JFK said he wanted his years as president to be seen as when the tide “came in for the United States,” not when the tide went out. The reader may decide which description more accurately reflects the presidential record of John F. Kennedy.

Photo: President John F. Kennedy



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