
About John F. Kennedy

John F. Kennedy (1917 – 1963) was the 35th President of the United States of America, the youngest president the U.S. ever had. His early death — Kennedy was assassinated on 22 November 1963 — turned him into an almost mythical figure. Kennedy was born into a wealthy family, which supported his political career. A research thesis on England's appeasement policy, completed during his studies abroad, was later published and found a wide readership. After attending a naval officer school at the beginning of World War II, Kennedy received various military awards for his courageous work as a speedboat captain. He won a seat as a congressman and later became a member of the Senate. After his re-election as senator, now married to journalist Jacqueline Bouvier, he was nominated as presidential candidate by the Democratic Party. The narrow victory of the Catholic Democrat over his conservative rival Richard Nixon is often attributed to Kennedy's skillful handling of the media; he won a first-ever television debate with Nixon, which helped accelerate the electoral trend toward a Democratic victory.

JFK's short tenure (1036 days) was characterized by significant national and international events. First used in the acceptance speech after his nomination as Democratic presidential candidate, the idea of a *New Frontier* became the motto of his political initiatives. An allusion to the settler generation of the United States, the politics of the *New Frontier* included comprehensive civil rights, economic, environmental, and social legislation as well as the Apollo space program that would place an American on the moon by the end of the decade (it did in 1969). In the area of foreign policy, Kennedy, a follower of the so-called *domino theory* (communism in one country leads to communism in neighboring countries), responded to the success of the Cuban revolution in 1959 with the development

program *Alliance for Progress* and supported a 1961 invasion of Cuba by Cuban exiles.

The failure of the invasion weakened Kennedy's confidence in the CIA and his generals and led to greater involvement of his brother Robert F. Kennedy and his adviser and speech writer Ted Sorensen in foreign policy decisions. The Soviet Union responded to other U.S. military maneuvers with the deployment of medium-range missiles on the Caribbean island.

Kennedy's de-escalation of the crisis triggered by this deployment is considered his greatest foreign policy success. It led to the establishment of an effective crisis management mechanism (including a *hot line*, a direct connection between the U.S. and the former Soviet Union) and was the prelude to a policy of detente between the two nuclear powers.

In Asia, Kennedy's active support of an anti-communist government in the south of Vietnam, a divided country since 1954, led to an escalation of the conflict. Kennedy's plan to withdraw most US *military advisers* active in the country by 1963 was abandoned by his successor Lyndon B. Johnson. Instead, the U.S. officially declared war in 1965. In Germany, Kennedy is remembered especially for his speech on the 15th Anniversary of the Berlin airlift. Two years after the construction of the Berlin Wall, Kennedy visited the divided city; his commitment "*Ich bin ein Berliner!*" affirmed US support of West-Berlin. His assassination during a campaign trip to Dallas, Texas is considered a central moment in contemporary history. When asked "*Where were you when JFK died?*", many older Americans still remember in detail. The brief recording of the assassination by the amateur filmmaker Abraham Zapruder, used as evidence by commissions of inquiry and not shown publicly until 1975, are now part of the National Film Archives and the National Film Registry.