

The Dark Side of Camelot

Written by Seymour Hersh

Highlights

JFK's Roots

John F. Kennedy's maternal grandfather, and the man for whom JFK was named, John F. "Honey Fitz" Fitzgerald was a two term mayor of Boston. His mayoral administration involved significant nepotism, patronage and graft. Fitzgerald was booted out of the U.S. House of Representatives for vote fraud (he had won that election by just over 1% of the votes cast). A major organizer for his corrupt campaign was his son-in-law; the ambitious Joseph P. Kennedy, Jack's father.

Joe Kennedy outlived three sons, Joe, Jack, and Bobby, and a daughter Kathleen (he had five other children). When he died in 1969, Joe Kennedy was one of the richest men in the U.S. with a net worth estimated at half a billion dollars. He made his fortune in the stock market, movies, and through various illicit means including bootlegging during Prohibition and partnering with organized crime. Joe had lofty political aspirations. He made significant contributions to Franklin Delano Roosevelt's presidential election campaigns, but FDR, who didn't trust Joe, declined to offer him a cabinet position. Joe successfully lobbied President Roosevelt for the ambassadorship to England. The leverage he used was FDR's son James, whose friendship he solidified by supplying James with women. Joe was openly adulterous; at times flaunting it in front of his wife and their guests.

As ambassador, Joe Kennedy was reviled in England for his defeatism and regarded as a coward when, during Luftwaffe bombings in 1940, he left London to spend his nights at a country estate. While ambassador he engaged in profiteering; commandeering valued transatlantic cargo space for the continued importation of British Scotch and gin to his importing company. He was anti-Semitic and willingly ignorant of European history. He sought, without State Department approval, a personal meeting with Hitler with the intent of keeping the U.S. out of the war. Over the objection of the State Department and FDR, he met with a high-level Nazi official seeking to reach an agreement to pay the Nazis up to \$1 billion for peace. Ambassador Kennedy once briefed a group of American journalists about a plot of dissident German generals to overthrow Hitler; even giving them the names of the dissidents jeopardizing their plotting and lives. He may have feared Communism more than Nazism.

Joe Kennedy used his contacts in the press to position himself for a presidential nomination in 1940. FDR isolated him from the American public by keeping him in London. Unfortunately for FDR, Kennedy had access to secret FDR-Churchill communications including those indicating FDR's willingness to assist England in war against Hitler. This was powerful blackmail material against FDR as the American

people wanted to remain out of the war. When Kennedy returned to the U.S. in October 1940, 10 days before the presidential election, he was expected to endorse Republican Wilkie. After a private dinner with FDR, Kennedy agreed to endorse FDR in a radio speech. It is not known why but it was probably because both men had the goods on the other (FDR having access to Kennedy's tax returns and IRS problems and, through his friend J. Edgar Hoover, FBI information on Kennedy). Kennedy's speech included the lie that no secret commitments had been made and that FDR was not trying to involve the country in war.

Three days after FDR won re-election, Kennedy self-destructed. He claimed Hitler had won the war and that democracy was finished in England and perhaps in the U.S.. His public support collapsed and his dreams of high public office ended. He resigned as ambassador to England a few months later and he never served in public office again. He refocused his considerable energies on his two oldest sons, Joe and Jack. When Joe Jr., a naval aviator, died in 1944, the emphasis shifted almost entirely to Jack. Joe purposely moved to the background to protect his sons from any damage his tainted reputation may cause them. Still, Joe remained a commanding and demanding force in the lives of his sons. A private phone was installed in the White House through which Joe and his son, President John F. Kennedy, would frequently communicate—at least until Joe's stroke in December 1961 left him unable to speak. Since these conversations were always held in private and the two principals are dead--having apparently left no record of the subject matter of their talks--no one knows how strongly Joe Kennedy influenced or directed Jack's presidency, especially during that first year. It would be surprising if the influence were not substantial, given Joe's ambitiousness, desire for power, long time political aspirations, and his money, connections, and energy being critical to JFK's election and given Jack's loyalty and devotion to his father.

General

John Kennedy seemed to have it all; looks, charm, intelligence, a sense of humor, power, and the Kennedy fortune. He was a man's man and a woman's man. He was also impatient, self-absorbed, zealously loyal to his family, a womanizer, an adulterer, physically unhealthy, dishonest, and extremely reckless. John Kennedy was a notorious penny-pincher who never carried cash and thus was never able to pay his share of a restaurant or bar bill.

JFK adored his father and maternal grandfather, his brother Bobby was his closest friend, but he had little time or use for his mother nor for women as peers in general. He often called women he knew "kid" because he couldn't remember their names; even the names of his lovers. Hersh speculates that JFK's craving for women and compulsive need to shower (as often as five times a day) may have been linked to a lack of mothering.

He not only considered women as less than equals, he often referred to the poor, the blacks, and the Jews, as "poor bastards". He showed almost no empathy and, like the majority of people of his time, accepted inequalities based on race, gender, and religious belief.

Though he won a Pulitzer Prize for his autobiography *Profiles in Courage*, it is likely the book was largely ghostwritten and it is the case that his dad's money kept it on the bestseller list and Joe's connections won it the Pulitzer.

JFK had an undistinguished legislative output in the Senate, but his looks and personal appeal and Joe Kennedy's planning, connections, and money were behind marketing efforts that made him a national celebrity.

During JFK's presidency, his desire and demand for loyalty resulted in his capable staff serving him poorly as they preferred to please him rather than enlighten him.

What the public saw in JFK was an attractive, glamorous, hardworking President devoted to country, wife and family. Four former secret service men who were assigned the Kennedy presidential detail were interviewed for *The Dark Side of Camelot*. They reported they saw a president obsessed with sex, willing to take enormous risks to gratify that obsession, a president who came late many times to the Oval Office and who was not readily available for hours during the day.

Health

Jack Kennedy had a severe case of Addison's disease; an often fatal disease that weakens the immune system. He was given last rites on four occasions but recovered each time. He was often sick as an infant. He nearly died from scarlet fever at age 2, at 4 he missed two thirds of his nursery school days due to illness, at 13 he almost died due to appendicitis, and in college he suffered a back injury playing football that led him to wear a back brace much of the rest of his life. He was born with one leg slightly longer than the other so he had back problems even before the football injury.

JFK had been treated since his early twenties for a series of often painful venereal diseases. He was repeatedly reinfected and presumably infecting his wife and many other sex partners.

Basically, pain was a constant in JFK's life. To deal with it, he enlisted the services of Dr. Max Jacobson. Dr. Jacobson was known to the secret service agents as "Dr. Feelgood". He often treated the president with "painkillers" (apparently a combination of cortisone and amphetamines), and provided drugs and hypodermic needles for self-administration. There were periods during his presidency when JFK would get an injection every six hours. He received treatments shortly before one of the televised debates with Nixon, during Presidential travels to Europe, moments before a summit meeting with Soviet premier Nikita Khrushchev, and during the tense moments of the October 1962 missile crisis. Dr. Jacobson's license to practice medicine was revoked in 1975 for misuse of amphetamines.

Sex

President Kennedy once told a friend, "You know, I get a migraine headache if I don't get a strange piece of ass every day." Apparently he didn't have many headaches. His affairs were legion. He even slept with one of his long time lovers in the Georgetown home he shared with his wife and two children the night before his inauguration. He and this

woman began their affair when she was a 19 year old Radcliffe College student and he was a 42 year old Senator running for president. Their four year affair lasted through the election and into his presidency during which time she was a member of the White House staff.

JFK, at 24, had a torrid affair with a married journalist, Inga Marie Arvadi. The former Danish beauty queen had earlier socialized with Hitler. FBI surveillance, wire-tapping, and searches found no evidence of illegal doings; just lovers at play.

Kennedy's affair with Marilyn Monroe, an open secret in Hollywood, began before the 1960 election and continued after he went to the White House.

Alicia Darr, who was to become an expensive call girl, had an affair with JFK in the spring of 1960 and tried to extort money from the Kennedys, though there is no record of money ever having been paid.

JFK told one of his lovers during the 1960 presidential primary that he would divorce his wife if he didn't win the election.

A Georgetown housewife, obsessed with exposing the womanizing JFK, became a public nuisance to the 1960 Kennedy presidential campaign but the general public did not care to hear or believe her evidence.

President Kennedy did not have affairs in the White House when his wife was also staying there, but she spent most of her time with their children at a family retreat in Virginia. When returning to the White House earlier than expected, she would typically call ahead, presumably to enable the coast to be cleared before her arrival. It seems "plausible deniability" was important to the first lady as well as her husband.

According to a Secret Service agent who was on the Kennedy presidential detail: "When she (Jackie) was there, it was no fun. He just had headaches. You really saw him droop because he wasn't getting laid. He was like a rooster getting hit with a water hose."

Secret service agents were frustrated by the many "unknown" women who were brought to the President for one-night stands. The women were not searched before meeting the President. The agents feared that one of these women would blackmail or even kill JFK. This was not the only way the agents felt derelict in their duty, they also allowed crimes to go unreported. When travelling, oftentimes local officials would bring call girls and hookers (often more than one at a time) to the President. The agents, rather than arresting the President or his aides, friends and supporters for procuring prostitutes, would say nothing. There were many budding Hollywood starlets brought to the White House for their "services" with it made clear that sex with the President could help a career but news of the affair would end it. JFK's skinny-dipping lunchtime pool parties at the White House with two young female staff aides (Fiddle and Faddle) sometimes included his brothers Bobby and Teddy.

Judith Campbell (now known as Judith Exner) was a gorgeous California socialite, 25 years old when she was introduced to JFK by Frank Sinatra in early 1960. One month later they become lovers. A month after that, JFK asked Campbell to carry a satchel

containing at least \$250,000 ("for the [presidential primary] campaign") to Mafia kingpin Sam Giancana; who was also recently introduced to Campbell by Sinatra. She became a conduit between Kennedy and Giancana during the primaries and remained so during the general election and the Kennedy administration. She carried money and documents on the "elimination" of Castro from JFK to Giancana and arranged meetings between the two. Throughout her years with JFK, Campbell was under intense FBI surveillance due to her association with Giancana. The surveillance revealed to the FBI her relationship with JFK. Hoover chose not to make this information public at least in part because revealing it would indicate the extent of his illegal bugging and would damage his and the FBI's reputations.

By the fall of 1962, Campbell was out of JFK's life. The FBI surveillance and JFK's waning passion for her (he'd brought another woman to their bed much to Campbell's dismay) left her heartbroken. Exner (Campbell) claims to have gotten pregnant from JFK during their last sexual encounter. According to Exner, JFK told her not to keep the baby and to seek help from Giancana, who had also become her lover, in terminating the pregnancy.

In 1963, German born Ellen Rometsch became one of the White House pool party girls. Rometsch was 27, beautiful, and a prostitute when she met JFK. As a youth and young adult she was a member of the Communist Party. Other call girls from Communist countries, Maria Novtny (a Czech) and Suzy Chang (a Chinese) serviced JFK (their relationship preceded his election). These latter two women were also involved with a British prime minister of war, getting answers to questions about British nuclear policy being fed them by a Soviet naval attaché. When that dalliance became known, prime minister Harold Macmillan resigned and his government was shortly voted out of office. Some reporters knew about the link between these call girls and JFK but their story was suppressed by publishing mogul Bill Hearst. The FBI learned of the Rometsch-Kennedy connection and began to investigate her as a possible spy. The Kennedys had her deported to Germany and paid her to keep her mouth shut.

In September 1963, while frolicking poolside with one of his sexual partners, JFK tore a groin muscle. He had to wear a stiff shoulder-to-groin brace that locked his body in a rigid upright position. It was far more constraining than his usual back brace, which he continued to wear. The two braces made it impossible for JFK to bend in reflex when he was struck in the neck by a bullet fired by Lee Harvey Oswald. The president remained erect for the fatal shot from Oswald.

Elections

The first election JFK won was his grandfather Honey Fitz's congressional seat. Critical to the win was Joe's money. It didn't hurt when a second Joseph Russo was placed on the ballot. The first Joseph Russo was a leading contender for the House seat but the two Russo names split his vote total. JFK's election to the U.S. Senate was again largely the result of Joe's money and connections. Bobby Kennedy was his brother's official campaign manager.

During the Democratic primaries for the 1960 presidential election, JFK's most important victory came in West Virginia. Large sums of Kennedy money--at least \$2 million (\$11

million in today's dollars) and possibly twice that--bought votes. The paymasters included JFK's brothers, Bobby and Ted Kennedy. The primary was effectively stolen from Hubert Humphrey.

At the democratic convention, JFK came in with enough delegates for a first ballot nomination. He made a surprise choice of Lyndon Johnson as a running mate. No one, including JFK, had wanted Johnson on the ticket. LBJ was a close friend of J. Edgar Hoover, who had provided him with much information about JFK's personal life. JFK admitted in private that he chose Johnson because, "those bastards are trying to frame me."

Prior to the 1960 election, the CIA had unassailable evidence of a Nixon bribe; a copy of a check for \$100,000 that had been deposited in Nixon's checking account in a California bank. This was given by a former business partner of Albert Göring (brother of Field Marshall Hermann Göring). The men in the upper echelons of the CIA disliked the dishonorable Nixon—who had publicly and vehemently disavowed ever accepting any bribes—and strongly favored JFK in the election.

In the 1960 presidential election, Joe Kennedy made a deal with Sam Giancana. This former Al Capone hit man was the most influential gangster in the powerful organized crime syndicate in Chicago. The deal was for Giancana to get out the JFK vote among the rank and file in the mob controlled unions and siphon campaign funds from the corrupt Teamster's union fund. What Giancana would get in return is unknown. JFK's stolen win in Illinois was crucial to his narrow general election victory of less than one tenth of one percent of the popular vote.

In 1960, Hoover was five years short of the mandatory retirement age for government workers (70). Through illegal wiretaps, he knew the election corruption went far beyond Illinois. Allegations of fraud were filed in eleven states. The day after the election, JFK announced he would reappoint Hoover as FBI director. Another JFK appointment was his brother Bobby as Attorney General. This choice was forced on Jack by his dad. With his brother the Attorney General, the investigation into election fraud was stopped in its tracks. Nothing was done after the Justice Department forwarded a report to the Attorney General that the Illinois election was stolen.

During the election, JFK railed against the "missile gap", a supposed shortcoming of U.S. nuclear missile capability compared to that of the Soviet Union. Through briefings with high ranking officials Kennedy knew no such gap existed, but it became an issue to the electorate worried about nearby Cuba. JFK was more vocal in bashing Cuba than his opponent, Vice President Richard Nixon. Both of them knew of Eisenhower's top secret plans to assassinate Cuban leader Fidel Castro and to invade Cuba though Nixon, as VP, couldn't bash Cuba too much or it would jeopardize that plan. Eisenhower and Nixon had hoped that the Castro overthrow would occur prior to the 1960 election. Under the direction of the Eisenhower administration, the CIA involved the Mafia in plotting the assassination of Fidel Castro as early as August 1960. The CIA contact, Johnny Rosselli (believed to be personally responsible for 13 Mafia murders), was a top man directly responsible to Sam Giancana. Giancana was supposed to arrange the Castro hit in October 1960 for Eisenhower and Nixon while he was also working to steal the election for Kennedy. Giancana made no attempt to kill Castro before the election.

Castro was preparing for an invasion based on JFK's tough talk, his awareness of invasion plans, and the expected Republican response to JFK's accusations that they were soft on Cuba. Nixon believed JFK's manipulation of the Cuba issue beat him in the election. He saw Kennedy men as "the most ruthless group of political operatives." In his memoirs, Nixon wrote: From this point on I had the wisdom and wariness of someone who had been burned by the power of the Kennedys and their money and by the license they were given by the media. I vowed that I would never again enter an election at a disadvantage by being vulnerable to them – or anyone – on the level of political tactics.

The lesson he learned appears to have led Nixon to the presidency, a re-election, and the disgrace of a forced resignation.

The Kennedys planned to have Jack as president for two terms followed by Bobby as president for two terms. To move Bobby closer to the presidency for the 1968 election, the Kennedys planned to dump Vice President Lyndon Johnson from the 1964 ticket. In 1963, they supplied documents about Johnson and some of his illegal financial dealings to Republicans.

Assassinations

Just prior to assuming office, JFK asked CIA director Richard Bissell to create a formal capacity for political assassination. He picked up where the Eisenhower administration left off; in plotting the assassination of three foreign leaders: Fidel Castro of Cuba, Patrice Lumumba of the Congo, and Rafael Trujillo of the Dominican Republic. Well-versed in "plausible deniability", there are no papers tying JFK to the use of the word "assassination", but the evidence for his directives is overwhelming. In mid-January 1961, Lumumba was murdered. In May 1961, Trujillo was murdered by assassins using CIA supplied weapons and ammunition.

Over a three year period, dozens of plans to assassinate Castro were developed by the Eisenhower and Kennedy administrations, the CIA, and the Mafia under Sam Giancana. None of those plans was successfully executed. On November 22, 1963, as Oswald was shooting JFK in Dallas, an undercover CIA agent was meeting with a former follower of Castro and delivering to him an assassination device for use against Castro.

There was at least one more successful assassination by unknown killers. Mafia kingpin Sam Giancana was brutally murdered in his home the night before he was to meet with a lawyer for the Church Committee, the Congressional committee established in 1975 to investigate CIA assassination plots.

Cuba

JFK also continued the Eisenhower plan to invade Cuba. Though the plan was to assassinate Castro just prior to the invasion, the invasion proceeded with Castro still in control. It was a disaster. On April 17, 1961, three months after Kennedy took office, Castro's army routed the 1,400 Cuban exiles that landed at the Bay of Pigs. The Cuban exiles were recruited, trained, and armed by the CIA. On the eve of the invasion, JFK personally cancelled a scheduled second airstrike intended to destroy the Cuban airforce. The first bombing, carried out two days earlier by 8 unmarked WWII B-26's, failed to

complete their mission. Kennedy thought a second attempt would more likely implicate the U.S.. His cancellation of that mission had inevitable deadly consequences when the landing proceeded into the teeth of superior air power.

Four U.S. pilots in Nicaragua secretly training Cubans ignored the President's orders not to do the second air strike and took off with two bombers on their own to fight Castro. They did heavy damage before being shot down. JFK had denied any U.S. involvement inside Cuba so he hoped the pilots were dead--hence avoiding the type of embarrassment Eisenhower endured when downed U-2 pilot Francis Gary Powers was displayed in Moscow after Eisenhower denied any such missions were in effect. The Kennedy administration initially refused to pay the families of those pilots military pensions because of the possible political fallout of how they died. The families eventually got part of the pensions.

In public, JFK took responsibility for the Bay of Pigs fiasco. His popularity soared to an 83% approval rating. In private, he blamed the CIA and the military brass for the debacle and drew the circle of decision-makers ever tighter around himself and Bobby. Though inexperienced in foreign policy, the Kennedys began back channel communications with Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev and spent the next 18 months negotiating foreign policy secretly. Bobby Kennedy, just 35 years old, within the first six months of JFK's presidency had become the president's legal advisor, political advisor, protector, best friend, and most influential foreign affairs advisor.

Kennedy was devastated by the humiliating failure in Cuba and sought revenge on Castro. He paused in dealing with Cuba to turn his attention elsewhere. Less than two months after the Bay of Pigs, JFK approved a series of clandestine actions to escalate the war in Vietnam.

The Kennedys continued to lean heavily on the CIA to murder Fidel Castro and overthrow his government. CIA leadership bristled at the pressure; feeling the Kennedys were carrying out a family vendetta against Castro since the Bay of Pigs (for which the Kennedys blamed the CIA). The Mafia was again enlisted and again unsuccessful. Attorney General Bobby Kennedy was publicly out to destroy the Mafia while privately using them for information about and dirty work in Cuba. Ultimately more than \$100 million was spent by the Kennedy administration trying to assassinate Castro and overthrow his regime. In anticipation of a successful CIA and Mafia initiated revolt in Cuba (scheduled for October 1962; just before the midterm elections), the Pentagon had been ordered to begin prepositioning troops and matériel for a massive invasion of Cuba. Hundreds of thousands of American soldiers and sailors took part in military exercises in the Caribbean. This activity was observed by Cuban and Soviet intelligence. Khrushchev responded by moving Soviet missiles and launchers into Cuba triggering the missile crisis of October 1962.

The Soviets were already capable of launching missiles from submarines against any coastal U.S. city, a few more in Cuba wouldn't make much difference to U.S. security (the United States had ten times the number of warheads and missile launchers as the Soviets). Despite his awareness of these facts, President Kennedy brought the world to the brink of nuclear war. He had already mobilized a vast army of men and matériel in preparation for an invasion of Cuba. He refused to believe U.S. intelligence reports that

the Soviets were placing missiles in Cuba preferring to believe the lies he was receiving from Khrushchev through their secret back channel communications. On October 16, 1962, Kennedy was given irrefutable U-2 photographic evidence of a Soviet ballistic site in Cuba. The President, angered by the Khrushchev lies, eschewed diplomacy and played a terrifying game of nuclear chicken.

A year earlier, JFK approved operational status for U.S. nuclear missiles stationed in Turkey, just across the Black Sea from Russia. This deployment in the Soviet Union's backyard coupled with the continued U.S. threat to Cuba prompted Khrushchev to gamble on deploying missiles in Cuba. On October 22, 1962, JFK told the American people about the Soviet missiles in Cuba. A U.S. naval blockade was established to keep Soviet ships from reaching Cuba. When the Soviet vessels reached the blockade, they stopped then returned to the Soviet Union. The public record is that JFK won the missile crisis by negotiating through strength. The resolution of the crisis was actually the result of a secret arrangement made by the U.S. to give Khrushchev what he wanted; a promise that the U.S. would not invade Cuba and the removal of U.S. missiles from Turkey. JFK was a hero to the uninformed American people. Nine days after the missile crisis ended, the Democrats had a successful midterm election (Ted Kennedy won his first term in the Senate.) The missile crisis did not deter the Kennedys in their quest to rid themselves of Castro and his regime. Anti-Castro exile groups continued to be provided with funds, arms, and intelligence by the CIA.

Vietnam

JFK's enduring legacy as president was the war in Vietnam. JFK had personal responsibility for the November 2, 1963, overthrow and murder of his friend Ngo Dinh Diem, the president of South Vietnam. Diem's fall is considered to be the turning point in converting a Vietnamese war into an American one with the eventual loss of 58,000 American lives and many more thousands of Vietnamese lives. In 1963, Diem had begun secret talks with North Vietnam to reach a peaceful settlement to establish a neutral regime in the South and to get the 16,500 Americans out. Kennedy did not want to lose South Vietnam to communism (his administration had inherited the inevitable loss of Laos to communism), and that was the expected result of an agreement between North and South Vietnam. However, there was strong support for communism among the South Vietnamese (the Viet Cong), who despised Diem's influential brother Nhu. To avoid the South settling with the North, JFK had the CIA help South Vietnamese General Minh plot a coup against Diem knowing the Vietnamese president and his brother would be murdered in the coup. JFK had planned to get the U.S. out of Vietnam, but not until after his re-election in November 1964. An earlier settlement between North and South, brokered in part by the French, would jeopardize his re-election as he would have appeared to lose another country to communism. Apparently JFK's policy was not to save South Vietnam from communism, but to delay that conversion until after his re-election. His public proclamations of the need to stem the tide of communism lest more countries fall like dominoes drove America's foreign policy in Vietnam even after JFK's death.

Other Foreign Affairs

In June of 1961, at a summit in Vienna between the leaders of the United States and Soviet Union, Khrushchev bullied and threatened Kennedy over the status of Berlin. Many

of the most capable and intelligent people in East Germany were leaving that country and communist rule through Berlin for the freedom of the West. To stop the exodus, it appeared Khrushchev might take over all of Berlin by force. The following month Kennedy announced a series of military escalations; tripling draft calls, increasing defense spending, authorizing reservists callups and extending tours of duty, canceling leaves, placing elements of the Strategic Air Command on heightened alert, and increasing military hardware and munitions shipments to Europe. The U.S. population rallied around him. On August 13, 1961, Khrushchev had the city of Berlin split in two with the erection of the Berlin Wall. The Kennedy administration did nothing to stop its construction. The way Kennedy saw it, "Better a wall than a war."

In October 1961, Dr. Cheddi Jagan, the recently elected Prime Minister of the tiny Latin American country of British Guiana visited the White House seeking American foreign aid. As he was a socialist, he didn't get any money. Further, Kennedy ordered the CIA to unseat Prime Minister Jagan. Within months, CIA men in Guianan triggered race and labor riots which resulted in the burning of the capital. The CIA also financed new radio stations and phony newspaper stories to heighten unrest. Jagan clung to power for nearly three more years before being unseated by a strong anticommunist.

JFK sought to enlist the Soviet Union's help in destroying China's ability to create nuclear weapons. How this could be carried off was still under investigation by the Kennedy administration at JFK's death.

Domestic Affairs

The Kennedy administration accomplished little in domestic legislation. For the first two years of his administration, Kennedy did not respond to calls from black leaders for passing comprehensive civil rights legislation. The Democrats held a narrow majority in Congress and many of the Democratic seats were held by Southerners who opposed such legislation. JFK needed the white Southern vote to win re-election in 1964 so his approach to civil rights was a cautious, noncommittal one. In February 1963 Kennedy submitted a watered down civil rights package to Congress, but he did little to promote its passing and it quickly expired. Anguished by the (televised) violence of Southern segregationists against those promoting civil rights, Kennedy announced on June 11, 1963 that he would send comprehensive civil rights legislation to Congress. The legislation had not yet passed when JFK was assassinated. Kennedy's efforts to cut taxes and increase funding for education died in Congress, leaving his administration with a legacy in which no significant legislation was passed. (Note: This material was drawn largely from PBS's website as Hersh had little to write about regarding legislation pushed or passed through Congress by Kennedy.)

Other Scandals

During Kennedy's presidency, there were many potential scandals that didn't erupt. One that almost did was JFK's first marriage. John Kennedy secretly wed Palm Beach socialite Durie Malcolm in early 1947 before his high-society wedding to Jacqueline Bouvier in 1953. Joe Kennedy was livid about his son's non-Catholic wedding to a twice divorced woman and he had the marriage papers removed from courthouse records. Though close family and friends knew of the wedding, no one has reported knowing of

any divorce. Evidently JFK and Malcolm, who would marry twice more, were bigamists. Rumors of his first marriage broke in 1957 and persisted into his presidency. They were finally put to bed when journalist Ben Bradlee, trying to ingratiate himself with the Kennedys, agreed to collaborate with the White House in "debunking" the Durie Malcolm marriage story once and for all. His widely published story repudiated the rumor and exposed the hate groups and gossip columnists who were continuing to spread it.

Paul Corbin, a campaign worker in the Democratic National Committee was also a whistle blower. In late 1963, he collected evidence of the skimming of campaign funds by JFK's friend and appointments secretary Kenny O'Donnell. This eventually reached the president who took no action. It might have been that at least some of the skimming was going for payoffs or to pay bribes for JFK.

Kennedy's mistress, Judith Campbell Exner, in addition to transporting papers and money from JFK to Mafia kingpin Giancana, also became a conduit for bribes paid to the President. Campbell passed along money from California businessmen to JFK for three different contract proposals.

The Kennedy-Campbell relationship became known to executives at General Dynamics Corporation, one of two defense firms competing for the right to manufacture a new combat plane. The FBI, monitoring Campbell's apartment, watched as the sons of the General Dynamics executive in charge of security broke into her apartment. A few months later the Kennedy administration made the surprising choice of awarding the huge contract for the combat plane to General Dynamics over the more highly regarded Boeing. This choice was so controversial that a Senate committee was formed to investigate why it was made. The committee was not told what the FBI knew about the Campbell break-in and it shut down its investigation after JFK was assassinated. It seems quite possible that JFK was blackmailed by a desperate corporation. Billions of American taxpayer dollars would be spent on an aircraft that became renowned as a failure.

Assassination Aftermath

Bobby Kennedy was convinced JFK's assassination was done as part of a domestic conspiracy. He believed it had a Mafia tie-in but his connections in Chicago could not find any evidence in support of this conspiracy theory. Author Seymour Hersh's research also did not find any evidence to contradict the findings of the Warren Commission; that Lee Oswald then Jack Ruby acted alone. Bobby Kennedy did not testify before the Warren Commission. He did nothing to pursue the truth behind his brother's death in 1964. The price of an investigation, making public the truth about President Kennedy and the Kennedy family was too high. By early morning the day after JFK was killed, all his papers had been moved to the most secure room of the White House complex and placed under 24 hour guard. The papers and secret recordings made by the president were screened, edited, and in some cases destroyed. The remaining papers and tapes were passed to the Kennedy presidential library for further screening.

A few days after the assassination of JFK, Jackie Kennedy related in an interview how she and her husband would lay in bed listening to a recording of the musical Camelot.

The interviewer got his angle and the labeling of the Kennedy presidency as "Camelot" was born—shortly after the presidency ended.