John F. Kennedy

The Man and His Meaning

The grief and shock caused by last week's horrible event are deeply and thoroughly distributed throughout the land, but neither more nor less than other Americans, those who labor in the intellectual realm have their own special grounds for bereavement.

For, despite comforting illusions and some evidence to the contrary, the formally trained and well-honed mind has always encountered suspicion and distrust in this country; and it was against this suspicion and distrust that John F. Kennedy made a singular contribution. He did this by recognizing and honoring intellect as a spring of national well-being, to a degree previously unknown in modern American history, by appealing to the nation's campuses and laboratories to lend their best minds to government, and by never relenting in his conviction that education and intellectual growth and freedom are indispensable to the nation's welfare and safety.

The result was that during his short administration he saturated Washington with the most dazzling assemblage of brains that it had known since the early days of the Republic. To an unprecedented extent, he brought the academies and the literati and the scientists into the nation's capital as workers, guests, and companions. And, though unquestionably aided to a great extent by that grand motivator, Sputnik, he went a long way toward convincing the country that the classroom is a prodigiously important place in the grand scheme of things. He took the Pentagon away from the admirals and generals and turned it over to a remarkable crew of intellectuals; he brought music and art into the White House; he embarrassed and cajoled the television industry toward a more responsible conception of its role as a medium for information and education; he brought life into the moribund U.S. Office of Education; he began the politically difficult task of erasing the disgraceful stain on the name of J. Robert Oppenheimer (he was to present the annual Fermi award to Oppenheimer next week); and, at a time when political considerations made it expedient to restrain budgetary growth, he was always responsive to proposals to put more money into education and research—in fact, he often prodded his subordinates to seek new and imaginative means for enhancing and utilizing the nation's intellectual resources. In sum, he made government not only an acceptable place but a highly desirable place for many of the best people this country has ever produced, to a point where it was often said, and with justification, that this administration had the best civil service leadership in the world. Although the latter portion of the Eisenhower administration had its healing effects on the wounds left by McCarthy, it was only under Kennedy that the wounds disappeared and that the academic and scientific communities came to feel that Washington not only needed their efforts but wanted and deserved them.

That the late President did not succeed in obtaining a legislative record to match most of his aspirations is a sad truth, for while he clearly saw that in many ways the nation was not realizing its potential—that it was wasting human as well as phyical resources—neither Congress nor, for that matter, a majority of the American people, came to share his conviction. Most of his major domestic proposals—in education as in many other fields—languished from one session of Congress to the next, and it was only by winning bits and scraps, by public exhortation and an occasional end run around Congress, that he was able to impress his convictions upon the American landscape. A grim fact is that, for all the genius and wisdom that he brought to government, his hopes, his perceptions, his style, his determination, and his optimism are his legacy. At the time of his death he had sounded many calls, but, sadly, few had listened, which tells us a great deal about our late President and about ourselves.

The Johnson Administration

Although it is difficult to conceive of it during this time of national mourning, the grief will pass, and then the realities of the world will be crowding back into our consciousness. South Vietnam, the Soviet Union, Berlin, the bomb, civil rights, unemployment, education, urban blight, the elderly, automation, the coming presidential election, and a thousand other problems and issues have not gone away; we have just been unable to think of them. They are still there, and they raise the question, What can be expected of the Johnson Administration. The incredible events of the last week should deter anyone from seeking to anticipate the future, but a few things are readily apparent. Lyndon B. Johnson, partly through the foresight of the late President, comes well equipped in many respects for his new responsibilities. Unlike Harry Truman, who did not even know of the atom bomb project until his sudden succession to the White House, Johnson was taken into the administration's most inner councils. It is not likely that he will encounter any major surprises or require very much of an orientation period before he can assert his leadership.

As for his leadership qualities, he demonstrated that on the legislative scene they are of the highest order. Johnson had been in the Senate for only 4 years when he became majority leader, and he then went on to fill that post in a fashion that has won him general acclaim as the most effective majority leader in the nation's history. He clearly was able to get the Senate to perform in a manner beyond the ability of his successor, Mike Mansfield (D–Mont.), and that is also probably beyond anyone now serving in that chamber. Whether this ability to lead a legislative body portends a similar ability to lead the executive branch and the nation can only be a matter of guesswork. In any case, Johnson is an extremely experienced politician; he is shrewd, highly intelligent, very tough and determined, and, perhaps most important of all, endowed with an instinctive knowledge of how power works and what can be done to make men behave in a given fashion. Just where

his heart will direct these abilities is something on which there is infinite speculation, with the Northern liberals finding him too conservative and the Southern conservatives finding him too liberal. However, his utterances on civil rights would be difficult to distinguish from Kennedy's; as majority leader he did win passage for the first civil rights bill since the Civil War; and there is a good deal of evidence to indicate that beneath his highly political exterior there is a basic emotional identity with the New Frontier's commitment to an enlargement of the federal role in American life. And it is just possible that, with his well-trained sense of political reality, Johnson will seek less from Congress and end up getting more.

What is certain is that the style of official Washington is going to undergo some major transformations. Johnson has never indicated that he is at home with the sort of glittering minds that were so assiduously sought out by Kennedy. Johnson is a product—and a proud one—of the Southwest, and Kennedy was a product—and an equally proud one—of New England, and the distance between these two points is more than a matter of mileage. Kennedy, prior to acting, was very much the meditator, the brainpicker, the cautious weigher of alternatives, and the student of history. Johnson, as in the case of any President, cannot disregard these qualities, but those who know him well offer the view that he is the confident man of action, quite sure of what he wants and confident about how to get it. This style worked well in the small arena of the Senate, where quid pro quo could be worked out with algebraic precision to arrive at the possible, but it remains to be seen whether it can be transferred effectively to the national arena. In any case, during the next few months we can probably expect to see much of Kennedy's academic brain trust slowly disappearing from Washington, to be replaced by less formally learned, but possibly more politically astute, men brought in by Johnson.—D. S. GREENBERG

Policy and Legacy

No fair evaluation of President Kennedy's achievements and influence can be made immediately. Not only does the shock of the assassination and the custom of *de mortuis nil nisi bonum* prevent it, but in the time scheme of a Presidency it is still too early to assess truly the effects of the legislation and policies initiated by the late President. A balance sheet on Kennedy as a leader and innovator, therefore, must await future events and the long thoughts of the memoirists and historians.

On the subject of federal policy on science and education, however, it is possible to say that Kennedy evinced a more systematic understanding and active concern than any of his predecessors in office. If what was achieved in this realm fell short of what he asked, it is necessary to remember the context of national and international politics in which he worked.

His election by a narrow margin gave him what some regarded as a qualified mandate, and in the new Congress his party had reduced majorities. When Lyndon Johnson moved from the majority leadership of the Senate to the vice-presidency, the administration lost a peerless leader in the Senate, and the death of Speaker of the House Sam Rayburn early in the administration resulted in a corresponding loss in the House. The President's Catholicism added special complications to his role as an advocate of education and welfare legislation.

A President must deal with primary issues, and Kennedy was confronted at the outset with a recession and high unemployment. Then he faced a series of international crises mounting to the confrontation of the United States and the Soviet Union over the placement of missiles in Cuba. This year the civil rights crisis laid at the door of the White House perhaps the most serious issue in domestic affairs since the 1930's.

Kennedy, therefore, was granted neither time nor tranquility in which to come fully to grips with the underlying but profoundly important effects of science and technological change on American security and the national life.

Perhaps the most publicized and most significant changes wrought by the Kennedy administration were in the defense establishment, which accounts for about half of the roughly $100 billion federal budget and also for about half of federal expenditures for research and development, which are nudging $15 billion a year.

Through the President's surrogate, Defense Secretary Robert S. McNamara, civilian control over the military has been reaffirmed and—not without conflict and questions—a managerial revolution has been carried out at the Pentagon. The McNamara reforms were aimed at conventional targets of waste, inefficiency, and duplication, but the radical element was a change in the methods of selecting weapons. The conditions of modern warfare and the tremendous increase in the complexity and cost of modern weapon systems led McNamara to conclude that it was necessary to make choices earlier, through systematic analyses of needs and technical capabilities and through projections of costs, rather than to carry through the full development of prototypes of major weapon systems designed to serve similar purposes. "Cost-effectiveness" analysis has played a key part in the cancellation of projects such as the nuclear-powered aircraft and the Skybolt missile and in the restrictions placed on the growth of research on military uses of space. There have been strong objections that this sort of high-level planning affects strategy and tactics, which are traditionally the responsibility of the military. There is little question, however, that the use of cost-effectiveness analysis to influence scientific decisions is spreading to other agencies.

President Kennedy from the time of his inaugural address emphasized that in international affairs the United States would welcome negotiation but would negotiate from strength. The obverse of his bolstering of the defense establishment was the initiative he took in diplomacy. For example, establishment of an Arms Control and Disarmament Agency made good a Kennedy campaign pledge. It also required a good measure of resoluteness on the part of the President, for while the major task of the agency was to do research on the technical, scientific, and economic, as well as military and political, aspects of arms control, hard-line opponents of the idea described it as a "surrender agency." It is perhaps significant that before the assassination last week the House voted to double the agency's fiscal 1964 appropriation to $10 million.

The partial nuclear test ban concluded this summer must certainly be accounted the chief monument of Kennedy diplomacy. His assurances that national interests would be safeguarded were the key to acceptance of the treaty, and those assurances could be made because of the work by scientists, strategists, and diplomats which was accelerated after Kennedy became President.

Increased scientific cooperation between the United States and the Soviet Union and progress in the United Nations space committee toward the extension of international law to space are certainly in part attributable to the Kennedy approach.

The cold war, nonetheless, and the resulting cosmic competition with the Soviet Union, have remained a well of persuasion for Kennedy proposals, just as they were for Truman and Eisenhower.

In behalf of science and education legislation the cold war argument was often employed. A clear example of where it worked is in oceanographic research. Ten years ago the annual federal budget for oceanography was $10 million. By 1961 it had risen to $62 million, and in President Kennedy's first budget the following year it soared to $103 million. Another spurt took it to $123 million in fiscal 1963. It is in oceanography, also, that this administration had made a real effort to bring greater order and long-range purpose to the efforts of the phalanx of agencies which share the budget in oceanography.

The Lead in Space

It was competition with the Soviet Union which also provided the President early in his administration with the carrot and stick to enable him to ask Congress to endorse, as a national goal, sending a man to the moon and back in this decade. In a Special Message on Urgent National Needs, sent Congress on 25 May 1961, the President said it was time for the United States to take a leading role in space. He cited the head start their bigger boosters gave the Soviets, but asked Congress to commit itself to go to the moon in the 1960's. He asked for, and got, an immediate transfusion of $549 million, and the fiscal 1962 budget went to $1.8 billion from the $964 million of 1961.

The 1963 space budget topped $3 billion, and the National Space and Aeronautics Administration asked for $5.7 billion for the current fiscal year. But Congress balked at the pace. An economy drive was having its effect, but also dawning in Congress was a realization of the effects of heavy allocations of exhaustible technical and manpower resources to the moon-landing program.

The delayed reaction in the scientific community and Congress might have been avoided if people had listened more attentively to all that the President said in that same speech in May of 1961.

"I believe we should go to the moon," he said. "But I think that every citizen of this country as well as the Members of Congress should consider the matter carefully in making their judgment, to which we have given attention over many weeks and months, because it is a heavy burden, and there is no sense in agreeing or desiring that the United States take an affirmative position in outer space, unless we are prepared to do the work and bear the burdens to make it successful. If we are not we should decide today and this year.

"This decision demands a major national commitment of scientific and technical manpower, material and facilities, and the possibility of their diversion from other important activities where they are thinly spread. It means a degree of dedication, organization, and discipline which have not always characterized our research and development efforts. It means we cannot afford undue work stoppages, inflated costs of material and talent, wasteful interagency rivalries, or a high turnover of key personnel."

This vein of realism, of balanced and critical assessment, runs through Kennedy's speeches and public papers. Reading back through them, one gains the strong impression that he sought to educate Congress and the public by keeping the facts before them. One theme sounded almost as a refrain is that the effects of science and technology on our security and on the quality of our national life impose a growing responsibility on the federal government for education in the broadest sense.

A typical statement of the Kennedy view came in the traditionally low-keyed language of the Economic Report of the President last January.

"History will value the American commitment to universal education as one of our greatest contributions to civilization. Impressive evidence is also accumulating that education is one of the deepest roots of economic growth. Through its direct effects on the quality and adaptability of the working population and through its indirect effects on the advance of science and knowledge, education is the ultimate source of much of our increased productivity.

"Our educational frontier can and must still be widened: through improvements in the quality of education now available, through opening new opportunities so that all can acquire education proportionate to their abilities, and through expanding the capacity of an educational system that increasingly feels the pinch of demands it is not equipped to meet.

"In our society, the major responsibility for meeting educational needs must rest with the State and local governments, private institutions, and individual families. But today, when education is essential to the discharge of Federal responsibilities for national security and economic growth, additional Federal support and assistance are required. The dollar contribution the Federal Government would make is small in relation to the $30 billion our Nation now spends on education; but it is vital if we are to grasp the opportunities that lie before us."

His championing of education legislation had, up to the time of his death, brought mixed results. Early in the administration a bill to provide general aid for public schools was blocked in Congress by a combination of those who opposed federal aid and others who favored aid to private schools as well. This year, proposals to raise very substantially the number of graduate fellowships to increase the production of scientific and technical manpower hit a stone wall in Congress.

The single clear success so far was the enactment this year of a bill to aid in the construction of teaching facilities for physicians and other health professions.

It is ironical that just at the time of the President's death, White House machinery was going into action to salvage two important bills—college aid and vocational education—both of which had run aground on the shoals of the church-state issue and Senate-House dissension.

These bills and the rationale behind them now become part of John F. Kennedy's political testament.

The late President was an intellectual with, as one British observer put it, a respect for facts. Last year in his education message to Congress he used the following quotation from another President who was an intellectual and a believer in education in a democracy —a quotation which the events of the last week have given greater point and poignancy. " 'If a nation,' wrote Thomas Jefferson in 1816, 'expects to be ignorant *and* free, in a state of civilization, it expects what never was and never will be.' "—JOHN WALSH