



Mr. President

John F. Kennedy 35th President, 1961-1963

John Fitzgerald “Jack” Kennedy (sometimes called J.F.K.), was the second of nine children born on May 29, 1917 in Massachusetts. He grew up in a wealthy, Catholic, Irish American family who had a strong political background. He loved sports like swimming, sailing, tennis and playing touch football with his brothers. He went to boarding school in Connecticut and went to college at Harvard University. Kennedy joined the Navy in 1940 after graduating. During World War II, he was in charge of a patrol boat called the PT-109. The boat was attacked by a Japanese ship and even though he was hurt, he was able to rescue six of his crew members. For this, he received several medals.

After the war, he became a politician. Elected to the House of Representatives in 1946, he served there until he was elected to the Senate in 1952. In 1953, Kennedy married Jacqueline Bouvier. They had three children.

In 1954, Kennedy had back surgery and during his recovery, he wrote a book called Profiles in Courage about famous Senators. Kennedy received a Pulitzer Prize for that book in 1957.

In 1960, J.F.K. ran for president against Republican Richard Nixon. He won and became the first Catholic president of the United States as well as the youngest at only 43 years old. His Inaugural Address contained these famous words: “Ask not what your country can do for you. Ask what you can do for your country.”

Major Events While in Office

During his time as president, Kennedy worked to end racial segregation. He also proposed new ways to improve civil rights. The Peace Corps was created where American volunteers are sent to different countries to provide assistance to those in need. Kennedy also wanted to learn more about the universe through his support of space exploration. His economic programs launched the United States on its longest sustained expansion since WWII.

Some of the greatest challenges President Kennedy faced was the fight against communism. He saw the failed invasion of communist Cuba called the “Bay of Pigs” in 1961. The next year, he was in a stand-off with the leader of the Soviet Union, Nikita Khrushchev. The Soviet Union (the largest communist nation) set up nuclear missile bases in Cuba. President Kennedy found out about their plan and took action to stop it. In October 1962, he was able to resolve what we now call the Cuban Missile Crisis.

His time as president was cut short as on November 22, 1963, he was shot in Dallas, Texas while riding in a parade. The doctors could not save him. His funeral was on television and the entire nation mourned for him.



Interesting Facts:

- N.A.S.A.’s Launch Operations Center in Florida was re-named John F. Kennedy Space Center in November 1963.
- New York’s International Airport, Idlewild was renamed John F. Kennedy International Airport in 1963.
- The Kennedy half dollar coin was issued in 1964.
- He was one of only two American presidents buried at Arlington National Cemetery.
- J.F.K. was the first American president to hold a press conference on television.
- He was the fourth president to be assassinated.
- He wore special shoes because his right leg was 3/4 of an inch longer than his left.
- JFK, an avid reader, was a big fan of James Bond and read Ian Fleming’s books. He liked sitting on his rocking chair while in the White House.