

THE LEGACY OF JOHN F. KENNEDY

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If you were to ask a random person to name 5 random U.S. presidents, you most likely will hear the name John F. Kennedy on their list. He had a powerful sense of charisma and American spirit that many Americans admired about him. He has been described as “a man marked with the scars of the love of his country” and “having a wit in a man neither young nor old, but a wit full of an old man’s wisdom and of a child’s wisdom.” His legacy has only grown enormously since his tragic death in November 1963. John F. Kennedy will go down as one of the most remembered presidents, with his powerful sense of charisma and deep love of his country, and his legacy will grow even bigger as time goes by.

John F. Kennedy had a powerful sense of charisma and American spirit that many Americans admired about him. Mike Mansfield, former Majority Leader of the United States, described him as “a man marked with the scars of his love of country, a body active with the surge of a life far, far, from spent.”¹ Earl Warren, former Chief Justice of the United States, described him as “the friend of all men of good will, a believer in the dignity and equality of all human beings, a fighter for justice, and an apostle of peace.”¹ Finally, John W. McCormack, former Speaker of the House, said in his remarks “He had the warmth and the sense of humanity which made the burden of the task bearable for himself and for his associates, and which made all kinds of diverse peoples and races eager to be associated with him in his task. He had the tenacity and determination to carry each stage of his great work through to its successful conclusion.”¹ As you can see in these eulogies, which were given two days after his death, he was loved by everybody. Mike Mansfield, Earl Warren, and John W. McCormack all had lots of respect towards President Kennedy and viewed him as a great leader. These people personally

¹ “Eulogies for President Kennedy.” John F. Kennedy Presidential Library and Museum. Accessed January 15, 2021. www.jfklibrary.org/Research/Research-Aids/Ready-Reference/JFK-Fast-Facts/Eulogies.aspx.

knew President Kennedy, as their positions are close to the president. These are good perspectives to hear from, as they are first-hand coming from people who actually knew him.

Fast forward to present day. His legacy has grown enormously ever since his death, as more and more people learned who he was and examined his life more in depth. A PBS article states, “John F. Kennedy superseded reality; he made a singular, seemingly indelible impression upon the American scene.” Alan Brinkley, who writes for The Atlantic, writes “He reminds many Americans of an age when it was possible to believe that politics could speak to society’s moral yearnings and be harnessed to its highest aspirations.”² He also says, “Kennedy reminds us of a time when the nation’s capacities looked limitless, when its future seemed unbounded, when Americans believed that they could solve hard problems and accomplish bold deeds.”² Through these statements, you can see the respect lots of people have towards him. President Kennedy was different than other presidents and seemed to make a much bigger mark on America as compared to other presidents before him. A PBS article states, “Kennedy evoked a sense of security and a spirit of idealism which reassured Americans of their nation's strengths and inspired them to serve their country and the world.”³ These perspectives, however, are not as good as the ones given by Mike Mansfield, Earl Warren, and John W. McCormack as these are not first-hand perspectives. These perspectives are based off information they gathered and their opinion of the information.

Let’s take a look at his legacy at the time of his death and compare it to his legacy today. At the time of his death, he was beloved by almost every American. That number has only

² Brinkley, Alan. “The Legacy of John F. Kennedy.” The Atlantic. Atlantic Media Company, February 19, 2014. www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2013/08/the-legacy-of-john-f-kennedy/309499.

³ “JFK: The Legacy.” PBS. Public Broadcasting Service. Accessed January 15, 2021. www.pbs.org/wgbh/americanexperience/features/jfk-legacy.

grown since then, as younger generations have discovered who he is. Just ask any person to name 5 presidents off the top of their head, Kennedy most likely will be among that list.

However, his legacy at the time of his death was more first-hand as the people who spoke about him actually knew him. Most of those people are not alive anymore, so his legacy today is mostly based off of what is in the history books and not by actual people giving speeches about him.

John F. Kennedy will go down as one of the most well-known U.S. presidents of all time. He had a powerful sense of charisma and American spirit that many Americans admired about him. Earl Warren, former Chief Justice of the United States, described him as “the friend of all men of good will, a believer in the dignity and equality of all human beings, a fighter for justice, and an apostle of peace.” Alan Brinkley, who writes for The Atlantic, writes “He reminds many Americans of an age when it was possible to believe that politics could speak to society’s moral yearnings and be harnessed to its highest aspirations.” His legacy has only grown since his tragic death in November 1963. The perspectives given shortly after his death at the Capitol are much better to study, as they are first-hand perspectives given by people who actually knew President Kennedy. Regardless, President Kennedy will always be remembered.

Bibliography

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