

35 QUOTATIONS



John F. Kennedy

(1917-1963)

John Kennedy rose to the White House at the outset of the 1960s as the most charismatic American politician after Franklin Roosevelt. He inspired people—that was his greatest service. A wounded hero of World War II, the most articulate and witty politician of his era, handsome and charming enough to be a leading man in Hollywood, Jack Kennedy glowed. He proved himself a talented writer in his *Profiles in Courage* (1956) and his press conferences were intellectual entertainment. His freedom speech at the Berlin Wall thrilled everyone on this side of it. He backed down the Soviet Union over missiles discovered in Cuba. By then he personified the collective will of the western democracies. On the social front the Kennedys became the American equivalent of British royals, but much better looking—more than that, they revived the romantic myth of Camelot. Then the shock from Dallas stopped the world. It was one of those events that leave you saying ever afterward, I remember what I was doing when I first heard the news. For many people, the funeral of President Kennedy was the saddest civic experience of their lives. Followed by the assassinations of Martin Luther King, Jr. and Robert Kennedy, the death of John Kennedy contributed to the death of idealism in America and to the onset of cynical Postmodernism.

ORDER OF TOPICS: realistic idealism, a new generation, being President, politics, America, foreign policy, freedom, Communism, character, courage, art, Hemingway, Jefferson, women, equality, unrealistic myths, advice, death:

REALISTIC IDEALISM

I'm an idealist without illusions.

A NEW GENERATION

Let the word go forth from this time and place, to friend and foe alike, that the torch has been passed to a new generation of Americans--born in this century, tempered by war, disciplined by a hard and bitter peace.

We stand today on the edge of a new frontier—the frontier of the 1960s—a frontier of unknown opportunities and perils—a frontier of unfulfilled hopes and threats.

BEING PRESIDENT

When we got into office, the thing that surprised me most was to find that things were really just as bad as we'd been saying they were.

The pay is good and I can walk to work.

POLITICS

Politics is like football; when you see daylight, go through the hole.

AMERICA

The United States has to move very fast to even stand still.

America has tossed its cap over the wall of space.

I am sorry to say that there is too much point to the wisecrack that life is extinct on other planets because their scientists were more advanced than ours.

It is an unfortunate fact that we can secure peace only by preparing for war.

FOREIGN POLICY

The basic problems facing the world today are not susceptible to a military solution.

Let us never negotiate out of fear. But let us never fear to negotiate.

Now we have a problem in making our power credible, and Vietnam is the place.

We cannot expect that all nations will adopt like systems, for conformity is the jailer of freedom and the enemy of growth.

Let every nation know, whether it wishes us well or ill, that we shall pay any price, bear any burden, meet any hardship, support any friend, oppose any foe to assure the survival and the success of liberty.

Victory has a thousand fathers, but defeat is an orphan.

FREEDOM

All free men, wherever they may live, are citizens of Berlin. And therefore, as a free man, I take pride in the words, "*Ich bin ein Berliner!*"

Those who make peaceful revolution impossible will make violent revolution inevitable.

COMMUNISM

Communism has never come to power in a country that was not disrupted by war or corruption, or both.

CHARACTER

A young man who does not have what it takes to perform military service is not likely to have what it takes to make a living.

COURAGE

This is a book [his *Profiles in Courage*, 1956] about that most admirable of human virtues—courage. “Grace under pressure,” Ernest Hemingway defined it.

ART

If art is to nourish the roots of our culture, society must set the artist free to follow his vision wherever it takes him.

When power leads man toward arrogance, poetry reminds him of his limitations. When power narrows the area of man's concern, poetry reminds him of the richness and diversity of existence. When power corrupts, poetry cleanses.

ERNEST HEMINGWAY

Few Americans have had a greater impact on the emotions and attitudes of the American people than Ernest Hemingway.... He almost singlehandedly transformed the literature and the ways of thought of men and women in every country in the world. [Response to news of Hemingway's death in 1961. The papers of Hemingway are located in the Hemingway Room of the John F. Kennedy Library.]

THOMAS JEFFERSON

I think this is the most extraordinary collection of talent, of human knowledge, that has ever been gathered at the White House--with the possible exception of when Thomas Jefferson dined alone.

WOMEN

I'm always rather nervous about how you talk about women who are active in politics, whether they want to be talked about as women or as politicians.

EQUALITY

There is always inequality in life. Some men are killed in a war and some men are wounded and some may never leave the country. Life is unfair.

UNREALISTIC MYTHS

The great enemy of the truth is very often not the lie, deliberate, contrived and dishonest, but the myth, persistent, persuasive and unrealistic.

Too often...we enjoy the comfort of opinion without the discomfort of thought. [Political Correctness]

A child miseducated is a child lost.

ADVICE

Those who dare to fail miserably can achieve greatly.

Forgive your enemies, but never forget their names.

Do not pray for easy lives. Pray to be stronger men.

And so my fellow Americans, ask *not* what your country can do for you; ask what *you* can do for your country. [Neoclassical antithesis]

DEATH

If anyone is crazy enough to want to kill a president of the United States, he can do it. All he must be prepared to do is give his life for the president's.

