

JOHN F. KENNEDY, "'THE PRESIDENT AND THE PRESS,' BUREAU OF ADVERTISING, AMERICAN
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Abstract: In "The President and the Press," John F. Kennedy crafted a presidential crisis speech that attempted to explain and justify the failed Bay of Pigs invasion. In the process, Kennedy shifted at least some of the blame for the fiasco to the nation's press. Calling upon journalists to exercise more self-restraint and presenting support for the president as a moral responsibility in times of crisis, Kennedy encouraged the press to voluntarily censor itself in the context of a Cold War melodrama pitting good against evil

Keywords: John F. Kennedy, Cold War, Bay of Pigs, free speech, presidential crisis rhetoric

John F. Kennedy (JFK) enjoyed a unique relationship with the press during his presidency. Based on his own experience as a reporter, he both understood the mechanics of news reporting and respected the potential influence of the press on public opinion.¹ As James T. Graham explains, Kennedy took office in 1961 "driven by the belief that newspapers and magazines were the most influential channels to shape public opinion."² Besides his savviness with the print media, Kennedy also holds the distinction of being "the first president to effectively use the new medium of television to speak directly to the American people."³ He also was the first to conduct "live televised press conferences without delay or editing."⁴ According to one estimate, Kennedy held one press conference on average every sixteen days during his presidency.⁵

In this essay, we analyze Kennedy's speech, "The President and the Press," which he delivered before the American Newspaper Publishers Association (ANPA) on April 27, 1961. Confronted with allegations that he deliberately misled the press and the people about the Bay of Pigs invasion, Kennedy crafted a presidential "crisis" speech that attempted to explain and justify the invasion, blamed the press for its failure, and pressured the news media to voluntarily censor itself on national security issues. We argue that Kennedy's speech was widely considered a failure because few bought into his "crisis" narrative and because the press refused to accept his attempt to scapegoat and censor them. Our analysis lends insight into how presidents may attempt to rhetorically exacerbate crisis situations in order to manage press coverage and cultivate public consent.

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The essay proceeds in four sections beginning with a brief biography of John F. Kennedy. The second section contextualizes "The President and the Press" by providing some historical background on the Cold War era, including the controversy surrounding the Bay of Pigs invasion. The third section analyzes the text of the speech itself, illuminating how Kennedy employed presidential crisis rhetoric and Cold War arguments to shift blame for the Bay of Pigs debacle to the press, and to pressure the press into exercising more self-restraint. The final section of this essay considers the legacy and lessons of Kennedy's speech in light of later instances of presidential crisis rhetoric and governmental attempts to limit free speech.

John Fitzgerald Kennedy and the Cold War

John Fitzgerald Kennedy was born to Rose and Joseph ("Joe") Kennedy on May 29, 1917, in Brookline, Massachusetts. The Kennedys were a wealthy and influential Irish-Catholic family. Rose was the daughter of John Francis "Honey Fitz" Fitzgerald, a popular Democratic mayor of Boston. Joe made his fortune as a stock market and commodity investor. He later served as a U.S. Ambassador to the United Kingdom. John, the second of their nine children, attended exclusive private schools in Massachusetts, New York, and Connecticut.⁶ After graduating from Harvard in 1940, Kennedy served honorably as a World War II naval officer from 1941 to 1945. Among his military decorations, Kennedy earned the Purple Heart and the Navy and Marine Corps Medal for leading his crew to safety when their patrol torpedo boat was rammed by a Japanese destroyer.⁷ The year following his discharge from the Navy marked JFK's entry into politics.

In 1946, Kennedy became a Democratic congressman from Massachusetts, and six years later, he won a seat in the U.S. Senate. Shortly after his senate victory, Kennedy married Jacqueline Bouvier, also from an affluent and influential family. Together they had two children, Caroline and John, Jr.⁸ Continuing his political climb, Kennedy earned national attention in 1956 when he was nominated for Vice President. Even though he lost that nomination, it was only four years later when Kennedy became the Democratic nominee for president. Perhaps that election is best remembered for Kennedy's presidential debates with Republican opponent Richard M. Nixon—the first televised presidential debates in U.S. history.⁹ Kennedy ended up defeating Nixon in one of the closest presidential elections of the twentieth century to become the youngest person, as well as the first Roman Catholic, ever elected to the U.S. presidency.¹⁰

The challenges presented by the Cold War and international politics informed many of President Kennedy's executive initiatives. By 1961, the Soviet Union was ahead in the space race, having launched a satellite and orbited a man around Earth. Motivated by Russia's successes, Kennedy expanded the U.S. space program and vowed to land a man on the moon by the end of the decade.¹¹ In what he considered a first step in ending the Cold War and the atomic arms race, Kennedy signed the Limited Nuclear Test Ban treaty on October 7, 1963. Also signed by the United Kingdom and the Soviet Union, the treaty greatly restricted nuclear testing and committed its signatories to work toward complete disarmament.¹² Perhaps Kennedy's most trying moment as president came in October 1962, after U.S. intelligence discovered that the Soviet Union was building missile sites in Cuba. The American people would breathe a sigh of relief after Kennedy ordered blockades to prevent more arms from reaching Cuba, Kennedy

initiated negotiations with Soviet leader Nikita Khrushchev, and Russia dismantled its weapons and left Cuba. The Cuban Missile Crisis, as it became known, was the closest the United States ever came to nuclear war.¹³ But even before the Cuban Missile Crisis, Kennedy faced another foreign policy crisis—the failure of an operation known as the Bay of Pigs. Understanding the events surrounding the Bay of Pigs, however, necessitates a deeper understanding of the U.S. Cold War with the USSR.

The Truman Doctrine

At its most basic level, the Cold War was a struggle between democracy and capitalism in the West versus communism in the East. The United States, a country committed to democracy—and the Soviet Union, a country committed to communism—represented the two major players in this struggle.¹⁴ Many trace the genesis of the Cold War to the end of World War II, when the U.S. dropped atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki in 1945. Although they had been allies during the war, the atomic bomb heightened distrust between the United States and the Soviet Union and led to an escalating nuclear arms race.¹⁵ Shortly after World War II ended, President Harry S Truman articulated what became known as the Truman Doctrine, pledging the United States to the "containment" of communism. The goal was to stop the spread of communism into neighboring free nations. More often than not, this commitment meant sending financial and military assistance to nations like Greece and Turkey, which were threatened by communist insurgencies. As Truman explained the doctrine, America's mission was to "assist free peoples to work out their own destinies in their own way."¹⁶ Over the next three decades, the United States would become embroiled in fights against communism around the globe, including conflicts in Korea, Cuba, Vietnam, Grenada, and Afghanistan. Some scholars point to the economic collapse of the Soviet Union in the 1980s as the end of the Cold War.¹⁷ As historian Martin Walker has argued, the West ultimately prevailed "because its economy proved able to supply guns as well as butter, aircraft-carriers *and* private cars, rockets as well as foreign holidays for an ever-increasing proportion of taxpayers."¹⁸

The Bay of Pigs

The Bay of Pigs invasion marked the height of the Cold War, and most scholars agree that it was Kennedy's biggest political blunder.¹⁹ In 1959, the U.S. Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) began planning an invasion of Cuba after Fidel Castro overthrew the American-backed dictator, Fulgencio Batista. The following year, the CIA, operating under the secret authorization of President Dwight D. Eisenhower, began training anti-Castro Cuban exiles for an invasion of the island nation.²⁰ Shortly after Kennedy took office in 1961, the CIA informed the new president of their plan to unleash their trained forces at the Bay of Pigs, located on the south shore of Cuba. The goal, according to historian Howard Zinn, was to "stimulate a general rising against Castro."²¹ Kennedy authorized the invasion, and it took place from April 14 to April 19, 1961. Yet, the plan did not go as the CIA or Kennedy had hoped.²²

In fact, anything that could have gone wrong with the plan did. Within just hours of the invasion, Castro's planes "sank two freighters carrying ten days of reserve ammunition and much of the expedition force's communications equipment."²³ Castro had arrested "virtually all the potential rebels in his country" ahead of the invasion, and the local uprising that was supposed to rise up in support of the invasion never materialized.²⁴ Additionally, outdated maps failed to show that Castro's favorite vacation spot was nearby and being developed as a resort; thus, when alerted to the invasion, the Cuban leader was able to quickly move in "thousands of troops to encircle the little exile force."²⁵ In the end, 114 people were killed and another 1,179 were taken captive.²⁶ Kennedy was forced to do damage control, as he was widely criticized for the "fiasco" and for misleading the American public in the days leading up to the invasion.

For many Americans and press professionals, the most troubling aspect of the Bay of Pigs situation was that the president had lied to them regarding America's policy toward Cuba. At a press conference on April 12, 1961, Kennedy had announced that "there will not be, under any conditions, an intervention in Cuba by the United States Armed Forces."²⁷ Kennedy's White House counselor, Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., had warned Kennedy of the potential backlash in a memorandum: "When lies must be told, they should be told by subordinate officials."²⁸ Given the context of the early 1960s, Graham makes the important point that "journalists like most Americans, still trusted government."²⁹ "The President and the Press" provided Kennedy with an opportunity to repair the breach of trust with the press and the public. However, as we argue in our analysis, Kennedy miscalculated the rhetorical situation and delivered a presidential crisis speech in which he blamed the press for the Bay of Pigs debacle and advocated for journalistic self-restraint.

Kennedy faulted the press for leaking information about the Bay of Pigs operation just days before its execution. The first report to uncover the president's plans was slated for publication in the *New Republic* magazine. Kennedy instructed Schlesinger to have the story killed, and Schlesinger succeeded in his mission.³⁰ But a reporter for the *New York Times*, Tad Szulc, also had uncovered the story, and the *Times* ran the story after eliminating references to the CIA and the word "imminent." The *Times'* publisher also downplayed Szulc's story by eliminating a four-column banner headline and running it instead as a more routine single column story on the front page.³¹ Nevertheless, the damage was done. Kennedy reportedly complained in private that "Castro doesn't need agents over here. All he has to do is read our papers. It's all laid out for him."³² As a result, of course, the invaders no longer had the element of surprise, but Kennedy went ahead with the plan anyway. Amidst these lingering feelings of mutual distrust between the president and the press, Kennedy took to the podium.

The President and the Press

President Kennedy arrived in New York City on April 27, 1961, to deliver his remarks to the annual dinner of the Bureau of Advertising of the American Newspaper Publishers Association.³³ The event marked the close of New York's annual Press Week, which included meetings of the Associated Press and United Press International.³⁴ A *New York Times* reporter, Russell Porter, described the scene outside the hotel, as "more than 2,000 anti-Castro Cubans

and anti-Communist Hungarians. . . . sang, chanted, waved banners and held aloft signs urging the President to continue his opposition to communism."³⁵ Inside the hotel, the Associated Press reported that President Kennedy was "attired in white tie and tails,"³⁶ and he "received a standing ovation from 1700 diners when he arrived at the grand ballroom of the hotel."³⁷ There was some speculation about the content of Kennedy's speech since a draft was not released to the press prior to delivery.³⁸ In advance of the speech, the *Los Angeles Times* noted that "Mr. Kennedy, known to feel that the failure of the Cuba invasion attempt was due in part to the flood of advance news reports on the operation, is expected to appeal to publishers for restraint in dealing with national security affairs."³⁹ Kennedy had already addressed the topic of press restraint one week earlier in an address before the American Society of Newspaper Editors (ASNE).⁴⁰

Kennedy's ASNE speech on April 20, 1961, offers an important contrast to "The President and the Press." In the ASNE speech, Thomas W. Benson argues that Kennedy was contrite, depicting himself as "a president in trouble after the failed invasion of Cuba" and "learning from his mistakes."⁴¹ After that speech, Benson continues, "most of the mainstream press appeared to rally to Kennedy's support" because it reinforced themes of humility and responsibility on the President's part.⁴² Studying the contrast between the ASNE and the subsequent ANPA speech is important because it highlights two different ways in which Kennedy responded to the same exigency. Rhetorical scholar Amos Kiewe has argued that "a given exigency can be a helpful guide in studying what issues crisis rhetoric addressed, how it was constructed, with what anticipation, and fulfilling what functions."⁴³ By the time he spoke to the ANPA on April 27, the pressing exigency of the Bay of Pigs invasion had passed, Kennedy had already spoken persuasively about his mistakes during the ASNE speech, and the press was largely on his side. Yet his April 27 speech stirred up controversy about the Bay of Pigs mission again by implicating the press in the mission's failure.

The president might have viewed his ANPA speech as an opportunity to build upon his ASNE speech, fostering still more trust and goodwill between the president and the press. The situation called for an after dinner or ceremonial address—a black tie dinner held in a grand ballroom of a hotel.⁴⁴ Kennedy instead delivered an accusatory speech, shifting blame for the failed invasion onto the press and calling for the press to censor itself in the face of national security threats. Kennedy's speech to the ANPA, we contend, exploited the tragedy by portraying it as a crisis and demanding more control over the nation's free press. Kennedy's rhetorical miscalculation led to one of his most notable rhetorical failures because his rhetoric of crisis backfired.

Kennedy's speech exhibited several key qualities of presidential crisis rhetoric.⁴⁵ As Theodore O. Windt explains, "situations do not create crises. Rather, the President's perception of the situation and the rhetoric he uses to describe it mark an event as a crisis."⁴⁶ To study these types of presidential utterances, Windt identified three qualities of presidential crisis rhetoric. First, the president delivers a statement of fact: "presidential speeches about international crises" often "constitute a New Situation—a crisis for the United States."⁴⁷ Second, the president constructs a "melodrama" out of the facts by pitting good versus evil. As Windt explains, "Melodrama replaces politics as each President delves into the sinister motives of the enemy

even as he accentuates the pure motives of the United States."⁴⁸ The result is a "devil-angel interpretation" of the facts as the president sees them.⁴⁹ Finally, the president announces his policy for dealing with the crisis and uses ethical appeals to ask the American people for their support: "he calls for the public to realize that the enactment of his policy and support for it are moral acts."⁵⁰ We argue that Kennedy followed this recipe for presidential crisis rhetoric in an attempt to pressure the press into acceding to his judgment in national security matters. But the strategy backfired and only damaged the president's relationship with the press.

Since Windt's original discussion of presidential crisis rhetoric, rhetorical scholars have written a lot about this complex type of oratory.⁵¹ Most notably, Bonnie Dow argues for a broader understanding of crisis rhetoric, explaining how some "crisis" exigencies trigger policy speeches, while others result in more ceremonial or "epideictic" rhetorical responses. Although Windt's framework conceived of crisis rhetoric as *crisis-creating*, Dow argues that not all crises are rhetorical constructions; she also demonstrates how epideictic strategies may be especially fitting in situations where the audience perceives that a crisis *already* exists. As Dow explains, "in order for [a] community to feel comforted, restored, and unified after a disruptive experience, they must be given guidelines for interpreting the experience."⁵² Epideictic strategies of praise and blame may prove especially useful. Windt also recognized the important role of epideictic rhetoric in crisis speeches: "Deliberative rhetoric gives way first to melodrama and then to epideictic."⁵³ We recognize that presidential crisis rhetoric is a much broader and more complex form of public discourse than Windt initially imagined. And we realize that there is no definitive description of crisis rhetoric as a genre. Yet, we find Windt's framework particularly useful in detailing how Kennedy's rhetoric aimed to provoke and amplify a crisis in order to exercise more control over the press and to silence debate.

In "The President and the Press," Kennedy utilized rhetorical patterns characteristic of Cold War rhetoric to frame the melodrama of his speech. A defining characteristic of Cold War rhetoric—and of all war rhetoric, really—is its use of god and devil terms. Rhetorical critic John F. Cragan explains that in Cold War rhetoric, "evil was characterized as communistic slavery and the good was democratic freedom."⁵⁴ Along those same lines, Robert L. Ivie explains that war rhetoric routinely depicts the enemy as "a savage" or "an aggressor, driven by irrational desires for conquest, who is seeking to subjugate others by force of arms."⁵⁵ The savagery metaphor also contrasts the "image of the enemy" with the "image of the United States as a representative of civilization who is rational, tolerant of diversity, and pacific."⁵⁶ The impact of Cold War rhetoric on American behavior has been significant, because it has justified armed conflict and increased military spending by dividing the world into representations of good and evil.⁵⁷ As we illustrate in our analysis, Kennedy relied on the dualisms central to Cold War rhetoric to construct a melodrama of good versus evil that he hoped might pressure press professionals to censor themselves. The following analysis examines how John F. Kennedy's speech, "The President and the Press," followed a script of "crisis" and "good versus evil" to legitimate his call for more press restraint.

A Statement of Facts

Windt explained that presidential crisis rhetoric often begins with a statement of "New Facts." The president's narration of facts establishes his mastery and control of a "New Situation," which boosts his ethos and lends authority to his rhetorical effort to "mark an event as a crisis."⁵⁸ Kennedy presented his audience with a "New Situation" by evoking "the events of recent weeks"—the continuing perils of the Cold War, and the wartime responsibilities of a free press. That responsibility meant not leaking government national security secrets to the public (16).⁵⁹ While Kennedy's audience was certainly aware of the Bay of Pigs debacle, the president's rhetoric selected particular facts to mark the crisis in a way that absolved Kennedy of responsibility and shifted blame for the fiasco onto the press.

Kennedy declared the "New Facts" of the situation by explaining what his speech would *not* be about. He announced first that his purpose was "not to deliver the usual assault on the so-called one-party press. . . . Nor is it my purpose tonight to discuss or defend the televising of Presidential press conferences. . . . Nor, finally, are these remarks intended to examine the proper degree of privacy which the press should allow to any President and his family" (10-11). Instead, Kennedy stated that his speech was about "our common responsibilities in the face of a common danger" (16). Kennedy then elevated the significance of the crisis:

The events of recent weeks may have helped to illuminate that challenge for some; but the dimensions of its threat have loomed large on the horizon for many years. Whatever our hopes may be for the future—for reducing this threat or living with it—there is no escaping either the gravity or the totality of its challenge to our survival and to our security. (16)

Kennedy's audiences understood that the "events of recent weeks" referred to the Bay of Pigs invasion. Those events also included Kennedy's misstatements to the press regarding the incident and the role the press allegedly played in compromising the mission. His audiences also understood that the "threat," "danger," and "challenge" Kennedy mentioned were the Cold War and all its attendant associations: the Soviet threat, the nuclear arms race, and the communist take-over of Cuba. Thus, Kennedy combined selective "New Facts" about the Bay of Pigs debacle with an on-going Cold War narrative about the communist threat.

Kennedy included the responsibilities of the press and the press's relationship to the presidency as key components of this "New Situation." When stating the facts simply, he declared, "I have selected as the title of my remarks tonight 'The President and the Press.' Some may suggest that this would be more naturally worded 'The President versus the Press.' But those are not my sentiments tonight" (8). Kennedy suggested he merely wished to discuss the relationship and shared responsibilities of the president and the press rather than forge an adversarial relationship between them. To allay any suspicions to the contrary, Kennedy announced that he did not wish to censor or abridge freedom of the press: "no official of my Administration, whether his rank is high or low, civilian or military, should interpret my words here tonight as an excuse to censor the news, to stifle dissent, to cover up our mistakes or to withhold from the press and the public the facts they deserve to know" (19). Following this seemingly direct statement, however, Kennedy essentially asked the press to censor itself: "But

I do ask every publisher, every editor, and every newsman in the nation to re-examine his own standards." Kennedy also pleaded with the press "to recognize the nature of our country's peril" (20). Kennedy's opening remarks thus appeared to position himself on the side of his journalistic audience, but those assurances rang hollow as he proceeded to cast suspicion on the motives and even the loyalties of the press in the rest of the speech.

It was not until more than half-way through his address that Kennedy identified his major concern: the role of the press in undermining the administration's Cold War policies. He offered the following assertion regarding the premature leaks about the Bay of Pigs operation: "For the facts of the matter are that this nation's foes have openly boasted of acquiring through our newspapers information they would otherwise hire agents to acquire through theft, bribery or espionage" (26). Because some newspapers chose to report on the administration's "covert plans" for an invasion of Cuba, they in effect provided aid to the enemy. Kennedy made the condemnation of the press clearest when he stated that,

details of this nation's covert preparations to counter the enemy's covert operations have been available to every newspaper reader, friend and foe alike; that the size, the strength, the location and the nature of our forces and weapons, and our plans and strategy for their use, have all been pinpointed in the press and other news media to a degree sufficient to satisfy any foreign power. (26)

With this statement, Kennedy seemed to suggest that had the press not leaked "this nation's covert preparations," perhaps the Bay of Pigs invasion would have succeeded. Essentially, these were not the words of a president accepting responsibility for his role in a crisis, as Kennedy had done in his earlier ASNE speech. Instead, these were the words of a president attempting to shift blame to another agent: the press.

Taken together, Kennedy's statement of facts served to define the situation as a crisis, to absolve Kennedy from blame, and to instead shift blame for the Bay of Pigs debacle to the press. Given the make-up of his audience, however, this proved a rhetorical blunder, and that blunder was only exacerbated by Kennedy's melodramatic Cold War narrative.

A Cold War Melodrama

A second key feature of Kennedy's address is the proliferation of a Cold War melodrama pitting good versus evil. Windt explained that, "the purpose of this line of argument is to introduce a devil-angel interpretation into the narration of facts."⁶⁰ Kennedy's speech was animated by an exaggerated dualistic rhetoric that narrated an ongoing and perilous battle between communism and democracy. Kennedy's melodramatic framing divided the world into two opposing camps and raised the stakes for those in his audience. In the process, he suggested that journalistic restraint was necessary if the free world was to prevail in the fight against communism.

Kennedy's melodramatic rhetoric exploited the persistent fear of communism as an insidious and omnipotent threat. He proclaimed, "For we are opposed around the world by a monolithic and ruthless conspiracy that relies primarily on covert means for expanding its sphere of influence—on infiltration instead of invasion, on subversion instead of elections, on intimidation instead of free choice, on guerrillas by night instead of armies by day" (23). Here we see Kennedy pitting the communistic evils of "infiltration," "subversion," and "intimidation" by "guerrillas by night" against the democratic ideal of "free choice" (23). The dualistic juxtaposition of good versus evil ran through Kennedy's address and amplified communism as a constant threat to democracy.

Kennedy raised questions about the role of the press in the battle between good versus evil. He would eventually invite his audience to prove their commitment to anticommunism by practicing journalistic restraint. Early in his speech, Kennedy identified a Cold War "devil": the father of communist thought himself, Karl Marx. Ironically, the story that Kennedy relayed about Marx subtly blamed the press for creating this devil in the first place:

You may remember that in 1851 [the] *New York Herald Tribune*, under the sponsorship and publishing of Horace Greeley, employed as its London correspondent an obscure journalist by the name of Karl Marx. We are told that foreign correspondent Marx, stone broke, and with a family ill and undernourished, constantly appealed to Greeley and Managing Editor Charles Dana for an increase in his munificent salary of \$5 per installment, a salary which he and Engels ungratefully labeled as the "lousiest petty bourgeois cheating." But when all his financial appeals were refused, Marx looked around for other means of livelihood and fame, eventually terminating his relationship with *The Tribune* and devoting his talents full time to the cause that would bequeath to the world the seeds of Leninism, Stalinism, revolution and the cold war. (4-6)

The "cause" that informed the evils of "Leninism, Stalinism, revolution, and the cold war" was, of course, Marxism, and Kennedy implicated the co-author of *The Communist Manifesto*, Friedrich Engels, as well.⁶¹ The moral of the story, however, was most telling: "If only this capitalistic New York newspaper had treated him more kindly; if only Marx had remained a foreign correspondent, history might have been different" (7). The journalists and editors laughed and applauded at this ironic story of how a capitalist newspaper somehow inspired Marx and Engels to found the communist movement. And they also reacted favorably as Kennedy delivered the final take-away from his narrative: "I hope all publishers will bear this lesson in mind the next time they receive a poverty-stricken appeal [for] a small increase in the expense account from an obscure newspaper man" (7). Although intended as a humorous anecdote, Kennedy's implication that the press might somehow have aided the spread of communism was hard to miss.

In addition to implicating the press in his Cold War melodrama, Kennedy deployed the language of secrecy and deception in describing the nature of the communist threat. Kennedy never directly identified the Soviet Union or Cuba as enemies of the United States. Instead, he

spoke of "secret societies" and "closed societ[ies]," where "secret oaths," "secret proceedings," "arbitrary restrictions," and the "concealment of pertinent facts" were the order of the day (18). The free world was in a new kind of undeclared "war" with these forces of secrecy and deception, and at stake in that war was America's democratic way of American life. As Kennedy explained,

Today no war has been declared—and however fierce the struggle may be, it may never be declared in the traditional fashion. Our way of life is under attack. Those who make themselves our enemy are advancing around the globe. The survival of our friends is in danger. And yet no war has been declared, no borders have been crossed by marching troops, no missiles have been fired. (21)

This melodramatic framing—a framing common to crisis rhetoric—helped insulate Kennedy's speech against various counterarguments. Kennedy's narrative of an undeclared war with a secretive and deceptive communist enemy cast a wide net of suspicion that defied refutation or counterevidence.

Kennedy's melodramatic Cold War narrative was, of course, quite common in his day. By emphasizing the secrecy and deception of the communist threat, however, he described a situation of particular relevance to his attempt to shift blame for the Bay of Pigs onto the American press. Promoting fears that America's free press might unwillingly aid the enemy, he positioned himself to call on the press to censor itself in the interest of national security. And he portrayed that self-censorship not merely as a practical necessity but as a moral responsibility.

Moral Responsibility

With his definition of the "New Situation" and his Cold War melodrama in place, Kennedy finally asked his audience of professional journalists for their support, portraying press restraint in wartime as a moral and patriotic duty. Although he claimed to trust newspaper editors and publishers to use good judgment about what to print during perilous times, Kennedy's crisis rhetoric placed significant pressure on his audience of journalistic professionals to defer to *his* will. Windt reminds us that presidential crisis rhetoric often functions to close down debate. He explained, "In such speeches the policy is not proposed but declared. The president does not ask for debate but for support. And the rhetoric accompanying these situations is one of declaration, not one of discussion."⁶² At first glance, Kennedy's address appears to express a genuine respect for freedom of the press. Yet viewed through the lens of presidential crisis rhetoric, it functioned to constrain the press from further criticism of Kennedy's Cold War policies.

In calling for journalistic restraint in light of the Cold War crisis, Kennedy saddled his audience with a grave responsibility: never report anything that might undermine the nation's security. Kennedy appealed to the moral sensibilities of the journalistic community by referring to their "heavy responsibilities" (3), their "own standards" (20), and the need for "self-discipline" (20). Presenting his audience with the appearance of choice in the matter, he implied that he trusted them to make the right choices. When faced with a decision about whether to publish a

story in wartime, Kennedy declared, "That question is for you alone to answer. No public official can answer it for you. No governmental plan should impose its restraint against your will" (28). At the same time, however, Kennedy implied that during a wartime crisis they ought to err on the side of patriotic restraint. As Windt reminds us, crisis rhetoric invariably implies that those who stand "steadfast" with the president in that hour of crisis have "character and courage," while "those who oppose him lack these virtues."⁶³ Kennedy's reflections on the role of journalists in perilous times rendered press restraint a moral responsibility.

Kennedy framed journalistic "self-restraint" as a time-honored tradition among patriotic press professionals. Distancing himself from the sort of censorship practiced by President Woodrow Wilson and the Committee on Public Information during World War I,⁶⁴ Kennedy announced, "I have no intention of establishing a new Office of War Information to govern the flow of news. I am not suggesting any new forms of censorship or new types of security classifications. I have no easy answer to the dilemma that I have posed, and would not seek to impose it if I had one" (30). Kennedy further assured his audience that he did not wish to "stifle controversy," (36) "debate," (37) or "criticism" (37). Instead, he "welcome[d] it" (36). This part of Kennedy's speech drew the most applause from his audience.⁶⁵ But Kennedy's reflections on the moral responsibilities of journalists in wartime nevertheless *functioned* to encourage self-censorship. "In time of war," he reminded his audience, "the government and the press have customarily joined in an effort, based largely on self-discipline, to prevent unauthorized disclosures to the enemy" (20). And when the press failed to live up to that responsibility, he noted, the courts sometimes had felt the need to intervene: "In times of 'clear and present danger,' the courts have held that even the privileged rights of the First Amendment must yield to the public's need for national security" (20). Against the backdrop of Kennedy's Cold War melodrama, this call for "self-discipline" and Kennedy's mention of a "clear and present danger" sent a clear message: If the press refused to police itself, the government might be justified in censoring the news.

Toward the end of his speech, Kennedy linked the responsibilities of the press to the wartime duties of citizenship, effectively denying his audience any special powers or privileges as members of the press: "these are times that . . . call out to every citizen to weigh his rights and comforts against his obligations to the common good. I cannot now believe that those citizens who serve in the newspaper business would consider themselves exempt from that appeal" (29). Referring to his audience as "citizens who serve in the newspaper business," Kennedy stripped his audience of special status and admonished those who would fail to uphold the duties of good citizenship. Good citizenship, of course, required all to sacrifice their individual rights to the common good, especially to protect the nation's security.

In summarizing his stance on the moral responsibilities of journalists, Kennedy stated: "I am asking the members of the newspaper profession and the industry in this country to reexamine their own responsibilities—to consider the degree and the nature of the present danger—and to heed the duty of self-restraint which that danger imposes upon us all" (30). In the wake of the Bay of Pigs disaster, Kennedy's call for journalists to "reexamine their own responsibilities" implied a past failure, specifically their release of information about the planned invasion. Calling on journalists to "heed the duty of self-restraint," Kennedy effectively

admonished the press for failing to fulfill their duty during a national security crisis. Remarking on the power of presidential crisis rhetoric, Smith wrote, "The importance of redefining an individual crisis as an episode in a melodrama . . . is that it makes [supporting] the policy a test of national character."⁶⁶ Viewed through this lens, Kennedy's call for journalistic restraint was a clear indictment of the press for failing to meet that test and call for self-restraint and new limits on the freedom of press.

The Legacy of "The President and the Press"

Kennedy's first term as president ended tragically on November 22, 1963, when he was assassinated in Dallas, Texas. Vice President Lyndon Johnson was sworn in as the 36th president less than two hours after Kennedy was shot and killed.⁶⁷ Despite his relatively short time in office, Kennedy is remembered as an eloquent, politically savvy, and effective public speaker. Rhetorical scholars often rank his "First Inaugural Address" and "Houston Ministerial Association Address" as two of the greatest speeches in American history.⁶⁸ It is our contention that Kennedy's speech on April 27, 1961—although it does not "rank in eloquence or perhaps in wisdom with his very greatest speeches"⁶⁹—should be considered one of his most important speeches. As an object lesson in the use of crisis rhetoric to stifle free speech and debate, it speaks volumes not only about Kennedy, but about both the power and the limits of the modern rhetorical presidency.

"The President and the Press" is generally regarded as a failed attempt to control the news media. Kennedy's own special assistant, Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., later wrote in *A Thousand Days* that the president "made his only misstep when, in a speech before the American Newspaper Publishers Association on April 27, he told the press that it should be prepared to censor itself in the interests of national security." From Schlesinger's perspective, the speech "went much too far, and he did not urge the point again."⁷⁰ More recently, rhetorical scholar Thomas W. Benson has argued that the speech is "generally regarded as a failed attempt at news management and threatened to sour the portrayal of Kennedy that had emerged just a week before [with the ASNE speech]."⁷¹ We contend that part of this failure may be attributed to Kennedy's failure to appreciate how the speech might be perceived as an attempt at scapegoating—an effort to shift blame for his greatest foreign policy blunder to the press.

Crisis rhetoric places significant pressure on its audience to succumb to the will of the president. In this case, Kennedy tried to use the ethos of the presidency to silence debate. This rhetoric of crisis may have worked to insulate the speech from counterargument, turning journalistic self-restraint into a test of moral responsibility and patriotism. As Windt wrote, however, the "crises" presidents construct rhetorically are "often more a threat to a president's political leadership or his policies" than they are to "the nation as a whole."⁷² That was indeed the case with the Bay of Pigs, and many apparently saw through Kennedy's attempt to shift blame and direct attention away from his own political missteps. As Benson observes,

Kennedy's descriptions of the difficulties of a free press in time of international conflict could easily be portrayed—and were portrayed by some as an opportunistic attempt to deflect criticism from himself and his

Administration and to blame the failure of the Bay of Pigs on the press. And yet there is plenty of evidence for those who prefer the explanation that the ASNE and ANPA speeches were simply distractions, deflections—even deceptions.⁷³

Kennedy's attempt to deflect responsibility for the Bay of Pigs stood to jeopardize his good standing with the media and the American people.

Although a few journalists sided with the president and heeded his plea for self-censorship, many agreed that Kennedy's ANPA speech "went much too far."⁷⁴ The *New York Times* reported that, "Newspaper publishers and executives reacted cautiously . . . to President Kennedy's appeal for self-regulations by the press on stories affecting national security."⁷⁵ Herbert G. Klein, editor of the *San Diego Union*, reacted to the speech by stating, "It is unfortunate . . . that the tone of his remarks . . . will encourage government officials to withhold information due the public. In the field of information policies this administration has been characterized more with a desire for political propaganda than for a free flow of non-security information. There is danger in this, too."⁷⁶ Fear is integral to an audience's acceptance of crisis rhetoric,⁷⁷ and perhaps Kennedy simply failed to convince Americans that Cuba posed a significant threat. That soon would change, of course, with the Cuban Missile Crisis on the horizon. At the time this speech was delivered, however, it was not yet so clear how Cuba fit into the president's melodramatic drama.⁷⁸

The larger legacy of Kennedy's "The President and the Press" is its relevance to ongoing debates over the First Amendment.⁷⁹ As Craig R. Smith has argued, the First Amendment is especially vulnerable during times of national crises. So while Kennedy's attempt to use crisis rhetoric to limit First Amendment rights may have failed, we must remain on guard against attempts to exploit, heighten, or prolong national security crises that threaten our civil liberties. Later presidents would be more successful in arguing for restrictions on free speech during national crises.⁸⁰ Invoking the same sort of melodramatic narratives of good versus evil, others have been more successful at shutting down debate, insulating themselves against counterargument, and shaming the voices of dissent. Indeed, Douglass Kellner has warned that dualistic discourses of good and evil invariably undermine democratic deliberation.⁸¹ Hence, we must remain on guard. As scholars and citizens, we should always cast a critical eye whenever faced with a script of presidential crisis rhetoric.

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NOTES

¹ Kennedy worked briefly as a reporter in 1945 covering the opening of the United Nations and the Potsdam Conference.

² James T. Graham, "Kennedy, Cuba, and the Press," *Journalism History* 24 (1998): 60.

³ John F. Kennedy Presidential Library and Museum, "John F. Kennedy and the Press," <http://www.jfklibrary.org/JFK/JFK-in-History/John-F-Kennedy-and-the-Press.aspx> (accessed June 3, 2013). For more on Kennedy's television savvy, see: Joseph P. Berry, Jr., *John F. Kennedy and the Media: The First Television President* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1987).

⁴ John F. Kennedy Presidential Library and Museum, "John F. Kennedy and the Press," <http://www.jfklibrary.org/JFK/JFK-in-History/John-F-Kennedy-and-the-Press.aspx> (accessed June 3, 2013).

⁵ John F. Kennedy Presidential Library and Museum, "John F. Kennedy and the Press," <http://www.jfklibrary.org/JFK/JFK-in-History/John-F-Kennedy-and-the-Press.aspx> (accessed June 3, 2013).

⁶ Michael O'Brien, *John F. Kennedy: A Biography* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2005), 27-30.

⁷ Marie Hodge, *John F. Kennedy: Voice of Hope* (New York: Sterling, 2007), 28-34.

⁸ Sadly, two of Jacqueline and John Kennedy's children did not survive: daughter Arabella was still-born in 1956 and son Patrick died two days after birth in 1963.

⁹ Gary A. Donaldson, *The First Modern Campaign: Kennedy, Nixon, and the Election of 1960* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2007), 109-126.

¹⁰ To read more about Kennedy's presidential tenure, see: Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., *A Thousand Days: John F. Kennedy in the White House* (New York: First Mariner Books, 2002); and James M. Giglio, *The Presidency of John F. Kennedy* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1991).

¹¹ Robert Dallek, *An Unfinished Life: John F. Kennedy, 1917-1963* (New York: Little, Brown and Co., 2003), 392-394.

¹² John F. Kennedy Presidential Library and Museum, "Nuclear Test Ban Treaty," <http://www.jfklibrary.org/JFK/JFK-in-History/Nuclear-Test-Ban-Treaty.aspx> (accessed June 3, 2013).

¹³ Paul J. Byrne, *The Cuban Missile Crisis: To the Brink of War* (Minneapolis, MN: Compass Point Books, 2006), 86.

¹⁴ Martin Walker, *The Cold War: A History* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1995), 1-7.

¹⁵ John Lewis Gaddis, *The Cold War: A New History* (New York: Penguin Group, 2007), 25.

¹⁶ Harry S. Truman Library and Museum, "Address of the President to Congress, Recommending Assistance to Greece and Turkey, May 12, 1947," http://www.trumanlibrary.org/whistlestop/study_collections/doctrine/large/documents/index.php?pagenumber=4&documentdate=1947-03-12&documentid=5-9 (accessed 3 July 2015).

¹⁷ The history, politics, economics, and social ramifications of the Cold War are much more nuanced and intricate than can be captured here. For more, also read David S. Painter, *The Cold*

War: An International History (New York: Routledge, 1999); and Klaus Larres and Ann Lane, eds., *The Cold War: The Essential Readings* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 2001).

¹⁸ Martin Walker, *The Cold War: A History* (New York: Henry Holt & Company, 1995), 1.

¹⁹ For more on Kennedy's "failure" with the Bay of Pigs invasion, read Trumbull Higgins, *The Perfect Failure: Kennedy, Eisenhower, and the CIA at the Bay of Pigs* (New York: Norton & Company, 1987); and Jim Rasenberger, *The Brilliant Disaster: JFK, Castro, and America's Doomed Invasion of Cuba's Bay of Pigs* (New York: Scribner, 2011).

²⁰ Howard Zinn, *A People's History of the United States* (New York: The New Press, 2003), 320.

²¹ Zinn, *A People's History*, 320.

²² For more detailed information about the planning, execution, and aftermath of the Bay of Pigs invasion, read especially Howard Jones, *The Bay of Pigs* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008).

²³ Richard Reeves, *President Kennedy: Profile of Power* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1993), 92.

²⁴ Reeves, *President Kennedy*, 92.

²⁵ Reeves, *President Kennedy*, 92.

²⁶ Howard Jones, *The Bay of Pigs* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 122. Castro later ransomed the captives to the United States for food and medicine.

²⁷ John F. Kennedy, "The President's New Conference of April 12, 1961," Public Papers of the Presidents, <http://quod.lib.umich.edu/p/ppotpus/4730886.1961.001/316?rgn=full+text;view=image;q1=april+12> (accessed January 16, 2014).

²⁸ Reeves, *President Kennedy*, 84-85.

²⁹ Graham, "Kennedy," 60.

³⁰ Rasenberger, *The Brilliant Disaster*, 169.

³¹ Graham, "Kennedy," 61.

³² Pierre Salinger, *With Kennedy* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1966), 146.

³³ For an outstanding analysis of this speech and Kennedy's Address before the American Society of Newspaper Editors on April 20, 1961, see: Thomas W. Benson, *Writing JFK: Presidential Rhetoric and the Press in the Bay of Pigs Crisis* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2004). Focusing largely on the invention of these speeches, Benson conducted first-hand interviews with key White House staffers and uncovered important archival documents to illustrate how these two speeches "display the implicit and characteristic collaboration of Kennedy with his speechwriters and the press to create a depiction of Kennedy as a political and moral agent" (10).

³⁴ Russell Porter, "President Urges Press Limit News That Helps Reds," *New York Times*, April 28, 1961: 1.

³⁵ Porter, "President Urges Press Limit News That Helps Reds," 1.

³⁶ Associated Press, "No War Ever Posed So Great a Threat to U.S. as World Communism, Kennedy Tells," *Boston Globe*, April 28, 1961: 1.

³⁷ Associated Press, "No War," 1.

³⁸ The speech Kennedy delivered was likely authored, in large part, by Theodore "Ted" Sorensen, Kennedy's special counsel and adviser, and primary speechwriter. However, Kennedy likely had a hand in writing the speech. According to Sorensen, "the President 'almost always' served as an *outliner* who suggested guidelines which an assistant used in writing the first draft. Second, he 'almost always' acted as an *editor* and *collaborator* who tuned up thoughts, revised arguments, deleted words, sentences, and paragraphs, and inserted others. Third, he sometimes—though not very often—assumed the task of *creator* who both conceived and phrased the speech." See: James L. Golden, "John F. Kennedy and the 'Ghosts,'" *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 52 (1966): 351. Also see: Lois J. Einhorn, "The Ghosts Talk: Personal Interviews with Three Former Speechwriters," *Communication Quarterly* 36 (1988): 94-108, for an interview that includes another Kennedy speech writer, Dr. Robert Turner.

³⁹ Don Shannon, "President Will Launch Political Speaking Tour," *Los Angeles Times*, April 27, 1961: 2.

⁴⁰ John F. Kennedy, "Address to American Society of Newspaper Editors, 20 April 1961," Public Papers of the Presidents, <http://quod.lib.umich.edu/p/ppotpus/4730886.1961.001/362?page=root;rgn=full+text;size=100;view=image;q1=april+20+1961> (accessed June 3, 2013).

⁴¹ Benson, *Writing JFK*, 10.

⁴² Benson, *Writing JFK*, 36.

⁴³ Amos Kiewe, ed., *The Modern Presidency and Crisis Rhetoric* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1994), xxiv.

⁴⁴ Benson, *Writing JFK*, 51.

⁴⁵ Rhetorical scholar Dan F. Hahn has argued persuasively that "all non-ceremonial national presidential speeches are crisis speeches." See: "Dan F. Hahn, "The Media and the Presidency: Ten Propositions," *Communication Quarterly* 35 (1987): 261.

⁴⁶ Theodore O. Windt, Jr., "The Presidency and Speeches on International Crises: Repeating the Rhetorical Past," *Speaker and Gavel* 11 (1973): 7.

⁴⁷ Windt, "The Presidency," 9.

⁴⁸ Windt, "The Presidency," 10.

⁴⁹ Windt, "The Presidency," 10.

⁵⁰ Windt, "The Presidency," 13.

⁵¹ See especially Denise Bostdorff's in-depth study of the situation, style, and identification appeals of crisis rhetoric, and Richard A. Cherwitz and Kenneth A. Zagacki's examination of justificatory and consummatory strategies. See: Denise M. Bostdorff, *The Presidency and the Rhetoric of Foreign Crisis* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1994), vii-vii; and Richard A. Cherwitz and Kenneth S. Zagacki, "Consummatory Versus Justificatory Crisis Rhetoric," *Western Journal of Speech Communication* 50 (1986): 309.

⁵² Bonnie J. Dow, "The Function of Epideictic and Deliberative Strategies in Presidential Crisis Rhetoric," *Western Journal of Speech Communication* 53 (1989): 298.

⁵³ Windt, "The Presidency," 12.

⁵⁴ John F. Cragan and Donald C. Shields, *Applied Communication Research: A Dramatistic Approach* (Prospect Heights, IL: Waveland Press, 1981), 52.

⁵⁵ Robert L. Ivie, "Images of Savagery in American Justifications for War," *Communication Monographs* 47 (1980): 281.

⁵⁶ Ivie, "Images of Savagery," 281.

⁵⁷ Robert L. Scott, "Cold War and Rhetoric: Conceptually and Critically," in *Cold War Rhetoric: Strategy, Metaphor, and Ideology*, ed. Martin J. Medhurst, Robert L. Ivie, Philip Wander, and Robert L. Scott (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 1997), 13.

⁵⁸ Windt, "The Presidency," 7.

⁵⁹ All of the remaining passages from Kennedy's "The President and the Press" speech are cited with reference to paragraph numbers in the speech that accompanies this essay.

⁶⁰ Windt, "The Presidency," 10.

⁶¹ Karl Marx, and Friedrich Engels, *The Communist Manifesto* (New York: Pocket Books, 1964).

⁶² Windt, "The Presidency," 13.

⁶³ Windt, "The Presidency," 12.

⁶⁴ Joseph R. Hayden, *Negotiating in the Press: American Journalism and Diplomacy, 1918-1919* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2010), 73-74.

⁶⁵ "At this point, he was interrupted with applause from the audience of 1,700." Porter, "President Urges Press," 1.

⁶⁶ Craig A. Smith, "President Bush's Enthymeme of Evil: The Amalgamation of 9/11, Iraq, and Moral Values," *American Behavioral Scientist* 49 (2005): 41.

⁶⁷ Peter Knight, *The Kennedy Assassination* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2007), 2-3.

⁶⁸ See especially *American Rhetoric*, "Top 100 Speeches," <http://www.americanrhetoric.com/top100speechesall.html> (accessed June 3 2013). This site ranks "the 100 most significant American political speeches of the 20th century," according to a survey of "137 leading scholars of American public address" and compiled by rhetoric and communication professors Stephen E. Lucas and Martin J. Medhurst. Also see *The History Place*, "Great Speeches Collection," <http://www.historyplace.com/speeches/previous.htm> (accessed June 3 2013), and *The Greatest American Speeches: The Stories and Transcripts of the Words that Changed Our History* (London: Quercus Publishing, 2006).

⁶⁹ Benson, *Writing JFK*, 11.

⁷⁰ Schlesinger, Jr., *A Thousand Days*, 296.

⁷¹ Benson, *Writing JFK*, 11.

⁷² Windt, "The Presidency," 17.

⁷³ Benson, *Writing JFK*, 75.

⁷⁴ Schlesinger, *A Thousand Days*, 296.

⁷⁵ "Press is Cautious on Kennedy Plea," *New York Times*, April 28, 1961: 14.

⁷⁶ "Publishers See Pitfalls in Kennedy Secrecy Proposal," *Boston Globe*, April 28, 1961: 13.

⁷⁷ For example, see: David Altheide, *Creating Fear: News and the Construction of Crisis* (New York: Aldine de Gruyter, 2002), 175-197, and Barry Glassner, *The Culture of Fear: Why Americans are Afraid of the Wrong Things* (New York: Basic Books, 1999), 1-20.

⁷⁸ For more on "the timing of the speech" and reactions to it, see Benson, *Writing JFK*, 66.

⁷⁹ David J. Bodenhamer and James W. Ely, Jr., eds., *The Bill of Rights in Modern America: After 200 Years* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993); and Craig R. Smith, ed., *Silencing the Opposition: How the U.S. Government Suppressed Freedom of Expression During Major Crisis* (Albany, NY: State University of New York, 2011).

⁸⁰ See especially: Sharon Downey and Karen Rasmussen, "Suppression During the Vietnam Era," *Silencing the Opposition: How the U.S. Government Suppressed Freedom of Expression During Major Crisis*, ed. Craig R. Smith (Albany, NY: State University of New York, 2011), 205-249; and Craig R. Smith and R. Brandon Anderson, "9/11 and the Ensuing Restrictions on Civil Liberties," *Silencing the Opposition: How the U.S. Government Suppressed Freedom of Expression During Major Crisis*, ed. Craig R. Smith (Albany, NY: State University of New York, 2011), 271-291.

⁸¹ Douglas Kellner, "BushSpeak and the Politics of Lying: Presidential Rhetoric in the 'War on Terror,'" *Presidential Studies Quarterly* 37 (2007): 622-645.