

**ROBERT F. KENNEDY, “STATEMENT ON THE DEATH OF REVEREND MARTIN LUTHER KING, RALLY IN INDIANAPOLIS, INDIANA” (4 APRIL 1968)**  
**and**  
**ROBERT F. KENNEDY, “REMARKS AT THE CLEVELAND CITY CLUB” (5 APRIL 1968)**

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**Abstract:** Following the assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr., Robert F. Kennedy delivered two speeches—a highly praised impromptu speech in Indianapolis and a less renowned exhortation in Cleveland—making sense of the death and condemning the tolerance and endless acts of violence in America. This essay analyzes Kennedy’s speeches as examples of prophetic rhetoric that accused the nation of sins and offered wisdom and justice as the path to redemption.

**Keywords:** Robert F. Kennedy, Martin Luther King, Jr., Indianapolis, Cleveland, 1968 presidential election, prophetic rhetoric, ultimate terms, exhortation

Robert F. Kennedy frequently ended his stump speeches during the 1968 presidential campaign by quoting George Bernard Shaw: “Some people see things as they are and say why? I dream things that never were and say, why not?” When Kennedy was assassinated in June of that year, his younger brother, Ted, immortalized this quotation by using it to conclude the eulogy of his late brother. It was a fitting tribute given Bobby’s focus on the future and his effort to, as indicated in the title of his 1967 book, “seek a newer world.” And yet Kennedy waded deeply in the present world, confronting injustice, prejudice, poverty, and violence through a journey of self- and other-awareness.

This conflict between the despair of the world and the promise of Kennedy’s dreams was stark following the assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr. on April 4, 1968. Kennedy delivered two speeches—one in Indianapolis, Indiana, on April 4 and one in Cleveland, Ohio, on April 5—that sought to comprehend King’s assassination. The Indianapolis speech, which has received more scholarly and public attention for its presumed effects, was largely impromptu and ceremonial whereas the Cleveland remarks were largely scripted and deliberative. We argue that both speeches, in conjunction, constructed a prophetic *ethos* that invested Kennedy with the authority to speak as a source of wisdom. In his prophetic voice, he used ultimate terms to exhort

the audience to adhere to natural law, comprised of reason and justice, as redemption for the nation's sin of condoning violence.

To develop our argument, we first discuss Kennedy's personal qualities that shed light on his later prophetic persona and the significance of the context surrounding his two speeches. We then analyze his rhetoric thematically around two main elements that sought to build a better future: the construction of prophetic *ethos* and the invocation of natural law through ultimate terms. Finally, we conclude the essay by discussing the legacy of Kennedy's speeches as they relate to and their applicability to contemporary society. Ultimately, Kennedy's speeches still resonate for their idealistic vision in response to continued violence.

### **Bobby Kennedy: From Prosecutor to Prophet**

At the height of Robert F. Kennedy's popularity in 1967 and 1968, cartoonist Jules Feiffer penned a memorable series called "The Bobby Twins" that featured a "Good Bobby" and a "Bad Bobby."<sup>2</sup> The message captured in short form what the national public had long observed: Kennedy's moral beliefs often conflicted with his pragmatic behavior. In this section, we frame our analysis of Kennedy's prophetic voice by sketching an image of his moral awakening on the topics of Vietnam and civil rights.

Part of Kennedy's conflicted character stemmed, no doubt, from his upbringing as a Kennedy. Born November 20, 1925, Bobby was the seventh of nine children and the third youngest of four sons. Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr. has explained how Kennedy's introspective and awkward demeanor as a child caused him to suffer at the hands of his older brothers, Joseph Jr. and John, while his parents demanded nothing less than excellence.<sup>3</sup> Among his siblings, Bobby was an overachiever, deeply loyal, and the most religious Kennedy. At the same time, he was born into relative wealth and had, essentially, a privileged and spoiled upbringing that sheltered him from the destitution that he would later encounter.

His strong familial devotion led him—at his father's request—to quit his job as a lawyer and manage John's campaigns for Senate in 1952 and for president in 1959.<sup>4</sup> During these years, Bobby earned his reputation for arrogance, ruthlessness, and determination. Kennedy's "crusade" against organized crime in the late 1950s as part of the Senate Rackets Committee (particularly as embodied by teamster boss Jimmy Hoffa whom Kennedy called "a genuinely evil man") was representative of his broader view of the world as comprising dichotomous absolutes.<sup>5</sup> Biographer Evan Thomas explains, "the young Robert Kennedy was hot-blooded and passionate, his Catholicism serious and dogmatic, and his view of the world intensely Manichaeian."<sup>6</sup> Prior to his brother's death, Kennedy demonstrated righteousness but lacked the compassion that characterized his later approach to politics.

President Kennedy's assassination in November 1963 had a lasting effect on Bobby. The evening he learned of his brother's passing, Kennedy was heard crying out, "Why, God?"<sup>7</sup> Even in his own despair, he was searching for reason. Like the long-suffering Job in the Old Testament, Kennedy maintained his faith and sought wisdom.<sup>8</sup> And, like Job, we argue that

Kennedy's experience was necessary for his construction of a prophetic voice. Biblical scholar Fred Blumenthal has argued that the Book of Job demonstrates Job's "road to prophecy" in which Job could only "submit to total acceptance of the sufferings which had afflicted him" once he had received this "prophetic understanding" that prompted a wider vision of the cosmos.<sup>9</sup> In the months following John's passing, Bobby endured a similar journey. He read poetry and works by Albert Camus, and Jacqueline introduced him to Aeschylus and other Greek tragedies when she lent him Edith Hamilton's book, *The Greek Way*, over the Easter holiday in 1964. Hamilton's book comforted Kennedy as he reconciled his deep faith in God with the experience of human suffering, acknowledging the wisdom begotten by pain.<sup>10</sup>

As part of his conversion over the course of the mid-1960s, Kennedy became concerned with the plight of the poor, especially among African Americans and Native Americans, and the atrocities in Vietnam. Indeed, long before his speeches in Indianapolis and Cleveland, Kennedy longed for a newer America—a newer world—full of positive economic, political, and social developments. He challenged himself and his audiences to use reasoning that was "unstained by violent prejudices or myths," to rethink ideas, and to arrive at new answers to societal problems.<sup>11</sup> Kennedy cultivated his sensitivity to poverty and injustice through his first-hand experience in the early- and mid-1960s. He walked among the poor of the Mississippi Delta, visited the starving at Native American reservations of the Western states and upstate New York, toured the *barriadas* of South America, observed apartheid in South Africa, and marched through the grape fields of California. His conscience was especially shaken by the racially charged Watts riots in 1965.<sup>12</sup>

A key to understanding Kennedy's biography, then, is that his decisions in the 1960s seemed driven not by the winds of politics or public opinion but by his inner voice—what some might call a conscience. Joseph Kraft labeled this the distinctive quality that set Kennedy apart as a leader.<sup>13</sup> And while this single-minded pursuit of principle helps explain why many followers flanked Bobby in the final two years of his life, it also explains why he had created many enemies and alienated many people in his journey.<sup>14</sup> We agree with James Reston's characterization of Kennedy in his *New York Times* eulogy: Kennedy relied on his "worst qualities" at the start of his career in politics "but in the end he failed while using his best qualities."<sup>15</sup> Kennedy demonstrated these "best qualities" in the 1968 campaign leading up to his speeches in response to King's death.

### **Kennedy's Campaign: A Prelude to Indianapolis and Cleveland**

Despite Kennedy's outspoken concerns about race relations and the war in Vietnam, Kennedy denied any overture that he would challenge his party's incumbent president as the 1968 election drew nearer. The struggle between the "Good Bobby" who opposed the war and the "Bad Bobby" who supported the president responsible for perpetuating it produced great stress for Kennedy and became the fodder for Feiffer's second episode of "The Bobby Twins."<sup>16</sup> As the war continued, Kennedy resolved to enter the presidential race on March 5, 1968, and at

the prodding of his wife Ethel, journalist Jack Newfield, and others (and to the dismay of Ted and advisors such as Schlesinger), Kennedy finally announced his decision to run for president on March 16, 1968.<sup>17</sup> In this section, we discuss his brief campaign and the context surrounding his speeches in Indianapolis and Cleveland.

Upon declaring his candidacy, Kennedy began campaigning to recapture America's moral vision in the wake of the violence at home and abroad. Following Johnson's exit on March 31, many believed the election, or at least Kennedy's campaign and his speeches, shifted focus from foreign issues to domestic ones such as poverty, illiteracy, and jobs.<sup>18</sup> Nevertheless, Johnson's withdrawal hurt Kennedy's effort because "it made the campaign a campaign, rather than an emotional crusade."<sup>19</sup> Kennedy had to figure out his sense of purpose in the campaign now that Johnson's Vietnam War policy was no longer a driving force.

Kennedy "did find his voice," according to Thomas, in the weeks leading up to the Indiana primary in part by settling "on a theme of unity and reconciliation."<sup>20</sup> Beginning a busy day of appearances at noon on Thursday, April 4, he carried that rhetoric with him to the Hoosier state where Ray E. Boomhower explains he faced "an antagonist local press and two tough opponents" in McCarthy and Indiana Governor Roger Branigin.<sup>21</sup> First speaking at the University of Notre Dame, Kennedy discussed in detail his plans to address national poverty and hunger, proclaiming the importance of student involvement in political processes.<sup>22</sup>

Next, Kennedy spoke at Ball State University in Muncie, Indiana. There, he argued the hard-truths about the poor and minority citizens bearing the burden in Vietnam while admitting his own responsibility for the country's involvement. To an audience full of college students, he spoke out against any toleration of violence and lawlessness at home and emphasized the search for common understanding to end the national polarization between races. After the speech, Kennedy fielded questions and was asked by one student about whether his "faith in white America" was "justified."<sup>23</sup> Kennedy, unaware that a white man had shot King in Memphis as he was delivering his speech in Muncie, responded with words that would soon echo an ironic familiarity: "I think that there are white people who say that they are concerned about black people and that the black people are inferior and therefore they don't want to treat them as equally. I think that is a small minority of the white people, and I think the vast majority of American people want to do the decent and the right thing here within our country."<sup>24</sup>

As Kennedy boarded his plane to Indianapolis for a rally and the opening of his campaign headquarters, he was briefed about King's injury. On the flight, Kennedy was visibly shaken and recalled his statement in Muncie, remarking "to think that I just finished saying that white America wants to do the right thing, and even while I was talking this happened . . . all this divisiveness, all this hate. We have to do something about the divisions and the hate."<sup>25</sup> When the plane landed, Kennedy learned that King had died and he became determined to speak to the crowd awaiting him at the Broadway Christian Center Outdoor Basketball Court at the corner of 17th and Broadway. Members of Kennedy's staff, the Mayor of Indianapolis, Richard Lugar, and the Chief of Police feared Kennedy's safety and warned against making an appearance in a poor, predominantly black part of town.<sup>26</sup> In a resilient response to the cautions, Kennedy implied a

sense of obligation to deliver his prophetic message: “There’s no way I won’t give that speech. I’ve got to make that speech. It’s the most important thing I can do.”<sup>27</sup> His speechwriter then worked with him to prepare remarks even though Kennedy did not use them.<sup>28</sup> Meanwhile, local militants aware of King’s death assembled more than 200 people to attend Kennedy’s speech.<sup>29</sup>

When Kennedy arrived, he pushed his way through the typically boisterous Kennedy crowd and stepped atop a flatbed truck that served as a makeshift stage. In the crowd of more than one thousand people, almost eighty-percent were young and black.<sup>30</sup> Many of them had not heard the news; roaring for Kennedy, they expected a routine campaign speech. They were soon shocked to hear the news of King’s tragic death. Filled with great emotion and an eagerness to keep the peace, Kennedy’s words echoed his prior pleas for nonviolence and reason.

Later that evening at his downtown hotel, Kennedy met with black community leaders to listen to their complaints and ideas about race issues in Indiana.<sup>31</sup> Kennedy also canceled all scheduled events for April 5 except his speech to the City Club at the Hotel Sheraton. Earlier in the week, the City Club sold more than 1,400 tickets for the speech now just hours away.<sup>32</sup> His original address, part of a lunchtime campaign speech to the members and guests of the City Club Forum along with Democratic Party leaders, was now inappropriate to the new context surrounding King’s death.<sup>33</sup> Kennedy, with the help of his staff, stayed up well into the early hours of April 5 writing a new speech.

Although we do not know why this was the only engagement Kennedy maintained that day, the City Club speech comprises Kennedy’s prepared response to the violence surrounding King’s assassination. He delivered the 10-minute speech to a sellout luncheon crowd of more than 2,200 largely white executives, members and guests of the City Club. The speech also aired on local television channels 3 and 5, interrupting memorial service coverage of King’s death.<sup>34</sup> In the next section, we analyze how both speeches used a prophetic voice to call forth a vision of the future, with the Cleveland address serving as a counterpart to his prior evening’s oration.

### **Kennedy’s Prophetic Voice in Indianapolis and Cleveland**

Our analysis draws upon the concept of prophetic rhetoric to investigate Kennedy’s rhetorical response to King’s death. We are not the first scholars to recognize the religious symbolism of Kennedy’s speeches. In particular, John M. Murphy analyzed Kennedy’s Cleveland address through the genre of the American jeremiad. Murphy’s religious framework makes sense given Kennedy’s strong faith as a child and his journey following his brother’s death. We disagree, however, that Kennedy delivered a jeremiad—a ceremonial “sermon” seeking “rededication to the principles of American culture”<sup>35</sup>—arguing instead that it envisioned a new world tied to natural (rather than national) law. We also disagree with Murphy’s claim that Kennedy’s speech in Indianapolis was significant *only* insofar as it “opened a key question and introduced important themes” for Kennedy’s Cleveland speech.<sup>36</sup> Murphy’s conclusions make sense from the jeremiad perspective but, as rhetorical scholar James Darsey has noted, the jeremiad is “the genre of priests and preachers, not prophets.”<sup>37</sup> Rhetorical scholar

Mike Milford elaborates that priests and prophets “mirror each other in means and motives but seek significantly different outcomes” insofar as priests “function to uphold a given orientation” through governance while prophets “come from outside the governing structure and work to revise the community’s orientation.”<sup>38</sup>

In the Hebraic tradition, particularly the Hebrew Bible, God sent prophets to accuse individuals and nations of sin and to communicate God’s judgment.<sup>39</sup> In addition to messengers, theologian Abraham J. Heschel has emphasized that the prophets were also counselors and people who felt things fiercely. Heschel explained that the “the secret of the prophet’s style” is that “his life and soul are at stake in what he says and in what is going to happen to what he says.”<sup>40</sup> The rhetorical style of prophets was equally fierce. Striving to disquiet the minds of their fellow humans, Hebraic prophets used jarring, emotionally laden rhetoric full of grandeur. Darsey notes that prophets relied on “the logic of sacred principle, that is, immutable law, beyond the reach of humankind and uncompromisable.”<sup>41</sup> In prophecy, God’s law is given and needs no explication; the focus is on what happens when sinners violate it. There was also no sin too small for prophets; violence, wrath, and injustice were all catastrophic.<sup>42</sup>

Consequently, prophetic rhetoric sought to illuminate the cosmic impact of sin through rhetoric. According to Claus Westermann, the genre of prophetic rhetoric included two main points: an accusation through a list of transgressions followed by an announcement of judgment, most commonly death or dispossession of kingdom.<sup>43</sup> Despite the doom and gloom associated with prophets, they did offer hope for a better future. Indeed, Heschel has explained that the prophet “begins with a *message of doom*; he concludes with a *message of hope*.”<sup>44</sup> In the Hebrew Bible, the prophesied futures did not have a “revolutionary character” but were reform-oriented, designed to change the existing kingdom.<sup>45</sup> F. W. Dillistone has explained the temporal orientation of prophetic rhetoric: “The symbolic act is related to the past, performed in the present and metaphorically joined to the future which will transcend and fulfil it.”<sup>46</sup> This impulse means that prophetic rhetoric was particularly suited for times of crisis, when the path forward was uncertain or undecided.<sup>47</sup>

Whereas the prophets of old were in commune with God, contemporary U.S. rhetors still speak in the prophetic tradition without this direct appeal to or communication with God. Rhetorical scholar Anna M. Young has observed that “In modern times . . . audiences are far too wary of anyone claiming to be God’s trumpet. However, prophets must prove that their message is a higher form of truth because they have to be beyond reproach, trustworthy, and credible to a much greater degree than the average person.”<sup>48</sup> Although modern prophets draw upon a higher authority to outline a road to redemption, that road is about the future rather than the past. In fact, Darsey has observed that American prophetic rhetoric displays “an almost limitless confidence in the future” fueled by the prophet’s faith.<sup>49</sup> Additionally, the rhetoric in this tradition uses strong emotional appeals even though it is often delivered in a matter-of-fact and measured tone rather than in hysterics. Kennedy’s speeches in Indianapolis and Cleveland were, we contend, evocative of this prophetic voice. We demonstrate this connection through two main sections, each dedicated to a particular quality emphasized by Kennedy’s role as prophet: the authority or

*ethos* he crafted and the importance of a higher power—in this case, natural law—to the accusation, judgment, and redemption in both speeches.

*Kennedy's Prophetic Ethos*<sup>50</sup>

One significant rhetorical quality of Kennedy's speeches is his crafting of a prophetic *ethos*. By prophetic *ethos*, we mean how the speaker rhetorically reflects the personal experience of divine will, in which the prophet is a living emblem of a higher power.<sup>51</sup> Margaret D. Zulick has explained that this Hebraic version of *ethos* differs from the Greek insofar as "the Hebrew capacity for reflection is marked by mastery of ethos in a mythic and personal vein" rather than "the logical demonstration of credibility posited in the Aristotelian tradition."<sup>52</sup>

Kennedy rhetorically constructed this prophetic *ethos* in Indianapolis. Recall that the Indianapolis speech was largely impromptu and ceremonial, designed to console the crowd. To this end, Kennedy began the speech by breaking the news about King's death and reinforcing King's message in life. But it was also a portent of prophetic warning for the nation as Kennedy quickly shifted the discussion from King to "what kind of a nation we are and what direction we want to move in" (Indianapolis, 3).<sup>53</sup> Kennedy recognized that the darker impulses of his audience members might tend toward sin as they are "filled with hatred and distrust" (5). He cautioned them against this response:

For those of you who are black and are tempted to fill with—be filled with—hatred and distrust at the injustice of such an act, against all white people, I would only say that I can also feel in my own heart the same kind of feeling. I had a member of my family killed, but he was killed by a white man. But we have to make an effort in the United States, we have to make an effort to understand, to get beyond or go beyond these rather difficult times. My favorite poem—my favorite poet—was Aeschylus, and he once wrote: "Even in our sleep, pain which cannot forget, falls drop by drop upon the heart, until, in our own despair, against our will, comes wisdom through the awful grace of God." (5-6)

We have quoted Kennedy at length because this is the decisive ethotic moment in the speech, just prior to his rendering of prophetic judgment for the audience. Moreover, Karl W. Anatol and John R. Bittner reported that, to this point, there were "continued rumblings of unrest" that threatened to turn violent but, by the time Kennedy finished the quotation from Aeschylus, "the crowd had quieted and the rumblings had stopped."<sup>54</sup>

Most rhetorical scholars have separated Kennedy's personal revelation from the Aeschylus quotation. They interpret the former passage through a Greek understanding of *pathos* as a strategy to connect and foster identification with one's audience on the path to persuasion.<sup>55</sup> The Aeschylus quotation, on the other hand, "may have well have been wasted" on the crowd according to Anatol and Bittner while Roger Cook asserted that it demonstrated how "Kennedy seeks to elevate the concerns of his audience with a similarly exalted content."<sup>56</sup> For these scholars, the entire passage represented Kennedy's strategy to secure an emotional reaction from the audience.

Rather than divorce paragraphs 5 and 6 as separate strategies of *pathos*, we contend that the progression of the passage developed Kennedy's prophetic *ethos*. Kennedy began by

discussing how, similar to members of the audience, he once felt “hatred and distrust of the injustice of such an act” when “a member of [his] family” was killed (5). However, he quickly negated this feeling through the word “but,” claiming that “we have to make an effort in the United States” (5). The feelings of hatred and distrust are sinful and do not provide understanding. Kennedy then used Aeschylus to explain how the audience might turn away from sin: “wisdom through the awful grace of God” (6). Kennedy earned such wisdom “against [his] will” in his “own despair” following the death of his brother (6). Put another way, Kennedy experienced a conversion following his brother’s death turning him away from sinful feelings of anger and toward understanding and compassion. Now, he was assuming the role of a prophet to share God’s wisdom with the audience.

This excerpt provided two additional clues about his *ethos* as especially prophetic. First, Kennedy’s references to “heart” echo Hebraic prophecy. Timothy Polk has argued that the metaphor of “heart” was fundamental to the self-concept of the prophets because prophetic rhetoric had a performative nature.<sup>57</sup> The word “heart” only appeared twice in Kennedy’s Indianapolis speech but both instances reflected prophetic expressions—once when discussing his own feeling and once in the quotation from Aeschylus. Both uses of “heart” are self-referential and synecdochally represent his being. A second clue is Kennedy’s use of personal experience as symbolic rather than demonstrative. In contrast to the Greek tradition of *ethos* as a mode of proof, Kennedy’s confession exemplified how prophets used autobiographical rhetoric as “a medium for a message” to emphasize what the prophet “represents, signifies, and points to.”<sup>58</sup> Kennedy shared his own feelings to witness how suffering brings wisdom through God’s grace. In fact, just as the prophets effaced themselves through most of their rhetoric,<sup>59</sup> Kennedy too removed himself later in the passage by quoting Aeschylus rather than sharing his own experience of pain and rebirth. The reference to his family member, thus, laid the groundwork for the message of wisdom that he communicated in the remainder of the speech.

By framing his personal journey as a symbolic and motivational force, Kennedy may have mitigated concerns about his own position as a privileged white person. His life was, no doubt, at stake in the ongoing threat of hate and violence (patently evident in his assassination two months later) but his experience was substantially different from the struggles faced by members of his audience in Indianapolis. Some could view it as demeaning that Kennedy purported to speak wisdom and empathize with the audience at a moment of racial division when he had not personally endured the physical or mental violence of racism.<sup>60</sup> This concern is valid from the perspective of the audience but the logic of the speech helps reduce the focus on Kennedy’s *experience* because it emphasized instead his *authenticity* as a prophet. “For the community confronted by the prophet,” Darsey explains, recognizing the prophet’s authenticity is paramount to the message.<sup>61</sup> Kennedy’s construction of his prophetic *ethos* was, in part, about establishing such authenticity based on personal revelation.

The Cleveland address offered a similar but less decided construction of Kennedy’s prophetic *ethos*. Kennedy’s self-references in this speech were entirely through inclusive pronouns (“we,” “us,” “our”) except for the first paragraph. This exception is telling for how it



framed his subsequent message. In this opening paragraph, Kennedy stated that “I speak to you under different circumstances than I had intended to just twenty-four hours ago” because “this is a time of shame and a time of sorrow. It is not a day for politics.” (Cleveland, 1).<sup>62</sup> If it was not a day for politics, why then was Kennedy, a political candidate for president of the United States, speaking? Kennedy subtly established himself as a prophet when he informed the audience that he wanted to discuss a weighty topic, which he initially called “the mindless menace of violence” (1). The “mindless” adjective suitably juxtaposed the wisdom fundamental to Kennedy’s authority as a prophet. Kennedy later labeled this mindless menace a “sickness from our souls” (6), indicating that he was addressing a moral condition appropriate to a prophet more than a politician.

We admit that Kennedy’s Cleveland address implied a choice rather than obligation to speak, which may contradict the typical prophetic utterance, but Kennedy furthered his prophetic *ethos* by indicating that he was speaking in a moment of crisis affecting his entire audience. This is evident when he underscored his purposeful selection of this time and place: “I have saved this one opportunity—my only event of today—to speak briefly to you” (1). He also identified the scope of his message for the entire people when noting how violence “again stains our land and every one of our lives” (1). These features helped Kennedy construct the *ethos* required to transcend the specific circumstance of King’s death and render judgment on the entire nation.

In sum, we have shown how Kennedy framed his message in both Indianapolis and Cleveland with self-references designed to position him as a font of prophetic wisdom. We have illustrated above how our focus on Kennedy’s self-references as a function of *ethos* offers insight beyond prior scholars who have viewed those appeals from the perspective of *pathos*. This *ethos* prepared the audience for Kennedy’s words of wisdom in renouncing the sin of violence, a message we analyze in the next section.

#### *Invoking Natural Law through God and Devil Terms*

To condemn violence, Kennedy relied on appeals to natural law. Kathleen M. Jamieson has argued that the principle of natural law is “an absolute standard binding on all men from which there is no appeal.”<sup>63</sup> This kind of appeal often relies on what Richard M. Weaver coined God and Devil terms, ultimate terms perceived as carrying the greatest blessings and greatest evils in a culture.<sup>64</sup> In this section, we unpack how Kennedy’s prophetic rhetoric in both speeches called for adherence to natural law—reason and justice—as an optimistic redemption for sins of violence and hatred.

As noted earlier, prophets draw upon a higher authority in their rhetorical appeals, what Darsey has characterized as “speak[ing] on behalf of an absolute truth.”<sup>65</sup> In Kennedy’s speeches, natural law served as this higher authority or absolute truth. Natural law assumes two basic features as an ultimate appeal: it is an absolute standard and it is binding on all.<sup>66</sup> However, as times change, natural law can be “accessorized to suit the social or intellectual fashion of the day.”<sup>67</sup> Jamieson has further observed that, as rhetorical situations develop, “natural law facilitates the rhetorical moves demanded by these situations.”<sup>68</sup> This makes sense in light of Weaver’s observation that audience members typically relate ultimate terms to their own beliefs,

experiences, and values.<sup>69</sup> In the United States, for example, Weaver recognized “American” or “progress” as God terms of his era.<sup>70</sup> Consequently, despite natural law’s absolutism, invocations of natural law inevitably draw meaning from the rhetorical situation in which they appear.

The importance of context is evident in Kennedy’s rhetoric. Kennedy had always condemned violence, for example, labeling it the “negation of reason and the antithesis of humanity” in a 1966 speech at Berkeley.<sup>71</sup> However, in that same speech, he recognized violence as a rational—although not justifiable—response to the situation faced by the black community in the United States at that time: “Some have turned to violence. And the question many Negroes surely ask themselves—the question many of you surely ask yourselves—is, why not? Why not turn to violence?”<sup>72</sup> Following King’s death, however, Kennedy used ultimate terms to advocate an uncompromising stance that violence of any degree (absolute standard) and by any person (binding on all) could no longer be understood, let alone accepted. For Kennedy, King’s death demanded that Americans, having sinned, conform to the principles and purpose of natural law or suffer the consequences prophesied in his rhetoric.

The scope of Kennedy’s message helps direct our interpretation of Kennedy’s ultimate terms as they fuel the prophetic meaning of his speeches. Kennedy’s accusation of sin and his judgment were not directed at the single assassin who killed King or at individuals who committed sin; instead, they represented what the prophetic tradition has labeled an announcement of judgment against the nation. As we will explore below, Kennedy accused society at large of performing, honoring, and tolerating sins. He demanded adherence not to any individual or institutional actions but to the absolute and binding standard of natural law. And, in accordance, he offered judgment that would affect the whole society.

Kennedy’s Devil terms form the foundation for his accusation and judgment. In Indianapolis and Cleveland, “violence” and its linguistic cousins signified sin. “Violence” appeared a staggering 14 times in his two speeches. In Indianapolis, Kennedy claimed that “what we need in the United States is not violence or lawlessness” (7). In Cleveland, he cautioned, “we seemingly tolerate a rising level of violence that ignores our common humanity and our claims to civilization alike” (5). From Kennedy’s viewpoint, “violence” was not only unwarranted and unwanted but also dehumanizing: “whenever any American’s life is taken . . . in an attack of violence or in response to violence . . . then the whole nation is degraded” (Cleveland, 4). Kennedy denounced “violence” of any kind by any person as a sin.

We also note that Kennedy employed traditional rhetorical strategies of the prophet by developing “violence” through concrete, emotional language. For instance, he emphasized the fear the audience should feel about the violence that “stains our land and every one of our lives” (Cleveland, 1). He further developed this menace by listing how all are at risk; the “victims” of violence “are black and white, rich and poor, young and old, famous and unknown” and “no one—no matter where he lives or what he does—can be certain whom next will suffer from some senseless act of bloodshed” (Cleveland, 2). In these opening paragraphs of the Cleveland address, Kennedy connected the threat of violence—a threat fresh in the minds of audience members following King’s assassination and the reports of rioting across the country—to the

entire community. He also encouraged cognitive dissonance by casting things American citizens typically celebrate—freedom of speech and the press, achievements in television and film, freedom to bear arms, pride, and personal material success—as the very sins that precluded a real sense of community and purpose (Cleveland, 5, 6). These appeals invited his white audience to identify with the fear of victimage and encouraged them to recognize the scope and severity of violence in the nation. Despite their relative shelter and privilege, they too were at risk of sinning and being sinned against.

The linguistic cousins of “violence” appeared in equal frequency and denunciation. In Cleveland, Kennedy used expressions like “senseless acts” and the “voice of madness” to describe the unceasing acts of “violence” in America and used words like “deadly,” “destructive,” “poisons,” and “breaking” to describe the effects of “violence” by American institutions (2, 3, 7). In Indianapolis, Kennedy also spoke about the sins, such as “bitterness,” “hatred,” and “revenge” associated with “violence” (3, 4, 5, 7). Here, Kennedy did not directly accuse individuals of acting with “violence” but he did equate violence with sin when Americans become “tempted to fill with hatred and distrust” (5). Most importantly, he condemned those who would seek to produce “greater polarization” or perpetrate an act of recourse, encouraging them instead to “make an effort” to adhere to natural law (4).

Redemption took its shape for Kennedy through God terms. Reason was one obvious road to redemption in Kennedy’s rhetoric. In Indianapolis, Kennedy did not offer a full theory of reason and wisdom but he incorporated “wisdom” and an ability to “understand” in clusters with other words like “compassion” and “love” to signify the intellectual endeavor required to quell violence (4, 5, 6, 7). To describe the actual route to redemption, Kennedy used a strain of verbs related to thought and reason in his more prepared Cleveland speech. These included “admit,” “learn,” “find,” “remember,” and “recognize” (Cleveland, 9, 10, 11, 13). Kennedy argued that traditional solutions would not work; “we cannot banish [violence] with a program, nor with a resolution” (Cleveland, 12). Rather, he urged the whole nation—in the words of Tennyson—“to strive, to seek, to find, and not to yield” and he called for leadership that would “recognize the terrible truths of our existence” (Cleveland, 15, 10). This was not an appeal for political or even pastoral leadership, but for prophetic leadership designed to promote *intellectual* efforts that society ought to *rationaly* pursue. In other words, the making of minds would allow redemption for the nation rather than the battle of bodies.

Justice emerged as the other form of redemption. The term “justice” appeared three times in Indianapolis. First, “justice” served alongside “love” as two standards toward which King dedicated his life (2). If King committed himself to it, Kennedy inserted it as an essential quality for others to bestow in their lives. Second, “justice” functioned as a feeling necessary “toward those who still suffer within our country” (7), including not only the black community in the United States but the countless others with whom Kennedy had communed. If the United States wanted to redeem itself, it needed to especially extend its support to those continuing to suffer within. And third, “justice” behaved as a universally desired principle for “all human beings that abide in our land” (8). In Cleveland, Kennedy similarly argued that adhering to “true justice”

would forge a new moral ground that would allow others “the chance to live out their lives in purpose and happiness, winning what satisfaction and fulfillment that they can” (10, 13).

Significantly, Kennedy justified this call for redemption not on expediency, cost, or net benefits but on self-evident reality. “We know what we must do,” Kennedy proclaimed, “and that is to achieve true justice among all our fellow citizens” (Cleveland, 10). Darsey has explained that prophetic efforts “to create grand mythologies have an element of foreignness and extravagance” for the audience.<sup>73</sup> Kennedy’s claim that citizens can find peace and justice if only they make a personal commitment to achieving wisdom may seem naïve and unwarranted were citizens and scholars to approach it from the perspective of politician or priest. In either role, audience members would have expected Kennedy to warrant both how his solution is feasible and how it might solve the problem of violence.<sup>74</sup> However, Kennedy’s use of natural law (coupled with his *ethos* and authenticity as a prophet) avoided such a burden because it rendered the beliefs as true in an absolute sense and the examples peppered throughout the speeches had already demonstrated the consequences of inaction.<sup>75</sup> From the logic of Kennedy’s speech, it did not matter if Kennedy’s offering of salvation begat personal sacrifice, pain, and even martyrdom; such was the path of the prophets and such was the way to wisdom and justice for all human beings.

The framework of prophecy also helps explain why Kennedy grounded his solution in natural law rather than either joining the New Left chorus clamoring to “change the system” or calling for a return to national values. Earlier we noted that prophets rarely called for radical change. Rather, they spoke the language of the people but did so in ways that sought to “reshape human beings” in line with their vision of the world beyond themselves.<sup>76</sup> Like other prophets before him, Kennedy used the values of the existing system (values that inescapably influenced the imagination of those living in the United States at the time) to envision what was possible through wisdom. At the same time, Kennedy defied nationalistic history or sentiment entirely. God terms such as reason, justice, and community happen to be traditional American values but Kennedy framed them as universally binding and neglected to connect his call for redemption to the nation. Apart from two references to President Lincoln (one explicit and one veiled), neither of Kennedy’s speeches indicated the nation of which he spoke. Moreover, rather than citing Lincoln explicitly, Kennedy concluded his Cleveland speech with words from Tennyson’s *Ulysses* that spoke to a completely different context and country (Cleveland, 15). In this regard, Kennedy’s appeal to the Greeks before a predominantly black audience in Indianapolis or his invocations of Lincoln and Tennyson to predominantly white business leaders in Cleveland were not about veneration of the past but using the past as a catalyst for radical, personal conversion. He implied that natural law was timeless, universal, and superseded national law.

This section has explored how Kennedy appealed to natural law in accusing the whole nation of sins and proclaiming violence as the perpetual course for American society unless citizens found redemption. He presented reason and justice as the opposite of the mindless violence perpetuated by American society. In Indianapolis, Kennedy called for “compassion and love” but supplemented them with precursors of “wisdom” and “understanding” (4, 7). In

Cleveland, Kennedy did not mention nonviolence at all; instead, he called for reason and justice because of their higher importance in that moment. Although Kennedy cast doubt in his final judgment that violence would be fully abolished in the United States, he remained optimistic about improvements to American society if the people heeded his warning and enacted change. In the end, though, Kennedy was a failed but not a false prophet; to our own society's chagrin, the "mindless menace of violence" still "goes on and on and on" (Cleveland, 1, 2).

### **Remembering Kennedy: An April Night Not (Un)Like the Rest in America**

King's assassination, and Kennedy's two months later, represented the unmistakable culture of conflict, hatred, and violence that epitomized the 1960s (along with the assassinations of JFK, Malcolm X, and others). Kennedy's speeches in Indianapolis and Cleveland honored King's life by expressing his efforts for nonviolence and wisdom. Today, they still resonate. In 2016, Kennedy's grandson, Kick, explained that Kennedy's call "for a kind of national transcendence of racial, ethnic and generational mistrust" were "directed at the times he lived" but "also seem to hit us where we live today."<sup>77</sup> The Indianapolis speech has received much praise and recognition over the years while the Cleveland speech has been largely ignored by scholars. Nevertheless, measured together, Kennedy's rhetoric prophesied the inescapable failure of Americans to practice reason, not violence. In this final section, we explore the immediate reaction to both speeches as well as their continued legacy in tackling such violence.

The Indianapolis speech is particularly remarkable for its ostensible effects. In the hours and days after King was slain, it is estimated that 110 cities contained riots, resulting in injuries to more than 25,000 people and the death of at least 39.<sup>78</sup> But Indianapolis saw no such reaction. Kennedy's speech softened even the most violent-ready activists. After he spoke, one militant present for the speech commented, "We went there for trouble, after he spoke we couldn't get nowhere, I don't know why, I don't understand."<sup>79</sup> Another said, "Man there was going to be trouble. They kill Martin Luther and we was ready to move."<sup>80</sup> Their efforts failed, at least in part, because of Kennedy's tenacity. To quote author Daniel Miller on Kennedy's speech, "It worked . . . Anguish had not become anger; confusion had not become chaos."<sup>81</sup>

Kennedy's Indianapolis speech not only saved the city from burning, but it gave hope to the black community. John Lewis, a key Indianapolis campaign organizer and current U.S. Representative, said, "if it hadn't been for him, I don't know what would have happened. He had the ability, he had the capacity, perhaps more than any other white politician in America, to sort of vent the feelings and at the same the hopes and the dreams and aspirations of African-Americans."<sup>82</sup> Indeed, most of the nation and especially black communities leaned heavily on Kennedy's rhetoric over the next two months. This is likely why David Halberstam considers Kennedy's Indianapolis address "perhaps the best speech of the campaign, perhaps the best speech of his life,"<sup>83</sup> a sentiment shared by Kennedy's campaign speechwriter, strategist, and press aide.<sup>84</sup>

Kennedy's Indianapolis speech is well documented in films, newspaper and scholarly articles, and biographies, suggestive of how it transcends time. Most books about Kennedy reprint the speech nearly or entirely in full and several films restage or present the speech. Communication scholars recently rated it the seventeenth best American speech of the twentieth century.<sup>85</sup> In 1994, after Nelson Mandela was elected President of South Africa, President Bill Clinton used Kennedy's Indianapolis speech as an example of America's history of racial successes while pleading for Americans to exercise the same compassion and wisdom in the face of intolerance and violence that Kennedy had beckoned a quarter of a century earlier.<sup>86</sup> Author Joe Klein framed the prologue to his book around Kennedy's Indianapolis speech, contending that the personal "moments of spontaneity and courage" in politics have been almost completely lost since Kennedy's presidential campaign.<sup>87</sup>

For the city of Indianapolis, Kennedy's speech marks the spot "for communion with the unanswered questions of the civil rights movement and the welfare state in America."<sup>88</sup> In May, 1994, at the center of the empty spaces within Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Park, the city dedicated the memorial "A Landmark for Peace" to King and Kennedy.<sup>89</sup> The memorial features bronze busts of Kennedy and King reaching toward one another and reprints in full the text of Kennedy's speech at the site. In recognizing the legacy of this speech, Circuit Judge David Dreyer remarked in 2009 that "this is a place where a dream actually happened, where violence was quelled, where a nonviolence philosophy actually was realized."<sup>90</sup>

Kennedy's Cleveland speech has been given significantly less attention even though it received a standing ovation at the time and Jeff Greenfield later called it "the best-written speech of the campaign."<sup>91</sup> Cleveland's local newspaper, the *Plain Dealer*, labeled the speech "timeless" and devoted extensive coverage to it and Kennedy's broader visit,<sup>92</sup> but the national press gave it substantially less notice. In a single column, the *New York Times* simply labeled it as a somber delivery of a nonpolitical speech aimed at condemning the "tolerance of rise in level in violence" following King's assassination.<sup>93</sup> The most high profile recognition of Kennedy's Cleveland speech was in the 2006 movie *Bobby*; in the final scene, most of the speech is somberly spoken over the raw and recreated footage of his violent assassination in California.<sup>94</sup> Whereas most biographies, films, and narratives spend substantial time with the Indianapolis speech, most mention the Cleveland speech in passing or omit it completely.<sup>95</sup>

The disparity between memorializing the two speeches is perhaps because the Indianapolis speech epitomizes the Bobby Kennedy people wish to remember—the person who bridged the gap between black and white America, who had poise and compassion in moments of crisis, and who called forth our better selves even, or perhaps especially, when he had limited time to prepare. These features provide the backbone to what biographer Ronald Steel has called "the Bobby Myth."<sup>96</sup> As time has passed, authors have increasingly advanced this idea that Kennedy *symbolized* more than he actually *was*.<sup>97</sup> Like the early prophets were later canonized as saints in their martyrdom,<sup>98</sup> so too has Kennedy become a saint remembered for having made the ultimate sacrifice for his ideals.

However, this narrative about Kennedy and Kennedy's own emphasis on natural law may obscure the real power dynamics underlying his participation in the controversy. We noted earlier that Kennedy's appeal to wisdom disregarded traditional political concerns by emphasizing the universal and binding character of natural law. Such a perspective romanticizes the struggle and suggests that a change in thought would suffice in cultivating justice, peace, and equality. We admit that this may provide only a temporary salve and, at worst, could perpetuate frustration from the black community. Civil laws had been and were at the time of Kennedy's speeches oppressive toward the black community. As Martin Luther King cautioned in his 1963 Letter from a Birmingham Jail, such laws are often "not rooted in eternal and natural law."<sup>99</sup> In ignoring this reality, Kennedy's speeches did not provide a blueprint for productive change and risked alienation of the black audience to which he appealed in Indianapolis. After all, King argued that "it is wrong to urge an individual to cease his efforts to gain his basic constitutional rights because the quest may precipitate violence."<sup>100</sup> Despite Kennedy's framing of his call as universal, it failed to grapple with the institutional elements that perpetuated violence. As citizens and scholars reflect on Kennedy's legacy, it is worth considering how it served to reinforce as well as challenge power dynamics.

In this regard, recognizing the prophetic nature of Kennedy's rhetoric also means that contemporary citizens are implicated in Kennedy's failure to create a newer world. Almost 50 years later, Kennedy's rhetoric in response to King's assassination lives on as the United States continues to experience senseless acts of bloodshed, greater political polarization, and racial inequality. For instance, following the 2012 shootings at the Washington Navy Yard, President Barack Obama reinforced the same appeal from Kennedy's rhetoric, saying,

What Robert Kennedy understood, what Dr. King understood, what all our great leaders have always understood, is that wisdom does not come from tragedy alone or from some sense of resignation in the fallibility of man. Wisdom comes through the recognition that tragedies such as this are not inevitable and that we possess the ability to act and to change and to spare others the pain that drops upon our hearts.<sup>101</sup>

That appeals to natural law and prophetic warnings about racially motivated violence continue in the present day may suggest a certain failure of imagination in the intervening years to fully grapple with the social and political challenges of inequality that produce violence. Even still, regardless of one's personal politics, it is difficult to read Kennedy's speeches today and not agree with Obama's characterization of the lesson they continue to teach the American people; Kennedy's rhetoric stands as a model of reason toward which many will strive but few, if any, will achieve. In the final analysis, Heschel's statement about the prophets summarizes the legacy of Kennedy's rhetoric: "Above all, the prophets remind us of the moral state of a people: Few are guilty, but all are responsible."<sup>102</sup>

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### Notes

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<sup>1</sup> Robert F. Kennedy, *To Seek a Newer World* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Co., 1967).

<sup>2</sup> The first "episode" ran in 1967: Jules Feiffer, "These Are the Bobby Twins," *The Village Voice*, February 2, 1967, 4.

<sup>3</sup> Arthur M. Schlesinger Jr., *Robert Kennedy and His Times* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2002), 17-18.

<sup>4</sup> Ronald Steel, *In Love with Night: The American Romance with Robert Kennedy* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2000), 25.

<sup>5</sup> Robert F. Kennedy, *The Enemy Within: The McClellan Committee's Crusade Against Jimmy Hoffa and Corrupt Labor Unions* (New York: Harper, 1960); Robert F. Kennedy, quoted in Schlesinger, *Robert Kennedy and His Times*, 149. Kennedy used the label "crusade" in the subtitle of his 1960 book, *The Enemy Within*.

<sup>6</sup> Joseph A. Palermo, *In His Own Right: The Political Odyssey of Senator Robert F. Kennedy* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001), 2.

<sup>7</sup> Schlesinger, *Robert Kennedy and His Times*, 611.

<sup>8</sup> Kennedy's friend, Sam Adams, observed this parallel between Kennedy's journey and Job's. Sam Adams, quoted in Lester David and Irene David, *Bobby Kennedy: The Making of a Folk Hero* (New York: Dodd, Mead & Co., 1986), 223.

<sup>9</sup> Fred Blumenthal, "The Book of Job: A Prelude to Prophecy," *Jewish Bible Quarterly* 27 (1999): 224, 223. For a discussion of the debate about Job's status as prophet, see R. Laird



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Harris, "The Book of Job and its Doctrine of God," *Grace Theological Journal* 13.3 (1972): 9-10.

<sup>10</sup> Schlesinger, *Robert Kennedy and His Times*, 618. The Greek view of tragedy is, of course, different from the Old Testament. Despite Kennedy's foray into ancient Greek thought, we believe his personal journey more strongly parallels the prophets. In particular, Abraham J. Heschel has explained that, in ancient Greek and Roman culture, the gods attended to lofty matters rather than trivial ones whereas, in the Hebraic tradition, "nothing that has bearing upon good and evil is small or trite in the eyes of God." Abraham J. Heschel, *The Prophets* (Peabody, MA: Prince Press, 1999), 5.

<sup>11</sup> Robert F. Kennedy, "Address by Senator Robert F. Kennedy at the University of Mississippi Law School Forum, March 18, 1966," National Archives and Records Administration, 4, <https://catalog.archives.gov/id/194031>.

<sup>12</sup> Jack Newfield, *Robert Kennedy: A Memoir* (New York: E. P. Dutton & Co., 1969), 18.

<sup>13</sup> Joseph Kraft, "Recollections of Robert Kennedy," *Washington Post*, June 7, 1963, n.p.

<sup>14</sup> Steel, *In Love with Night*, 28.

<sup>15</sup> James Reston, "Washington: The Qualities of Robert Kennedy," *New York Times*, June 7, 1968, late city ed., 38.

<sup>16</sup> Newfield, *Robert Kennedy*, 61; Peter Grose, "Kennedy Asserts Johnson Shifted U.S. Aim in Vietnam," *New York Times*, November 27, 1967, late city ed., 1; Jules Feiffer, "The Bobby Twins Episode 2: In Which the Good Bobby Goes on 'Face the Nation' and the Bad Bobby Responds," *The New Republic*, February 10, 1968, 34.

<sup>17</sup> Newfield, *Robert Kennedy*, 232.

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- <sup>18</sup> *RFK: Collected Speeches*, ed. Edwin O. Guthman and C. Richard Allen (New York: Viking, 1993), 330
- <sup>19</sup> Newfield, *Robert Kennedy*, 352.
- <sup>20</sup> Evan Thomas, *Robert Kennedy: His Life* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2000), 369.
- <sup>21</sup> Ray E. Boomhower, *Robert F. Kennedy and the 1968 Indiana Primary* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2008), 57.
- <sup>22</sup> Robert F. Kennedy, "Speech University of Notre Dame 4 April 1968," in *The Unfulfilled Promise: The Speeches and Notes from the Last Campaign of Robert F. Kennedy (16 March 1968 to 5 June 1968)*, vol. 1, "Rough Draft," ed. Michael J. Aguirre (San Diego: 1986), 177-182.
- <sup>23</sup> Robert F. Kennedy, "Ball State University Campaign Visit Men's (Irving) Gymnasium," April 4, 1968, 15, <http://libx.bsu.edu/cdm/singleitem/collection/RFKen/id/22>.
- <sup>24</sup> Kennedy, "Ball State University Campaign Visit Men's (Irving) Gymnasium," 15.
- <sup>25</sup> Robert F. Kennedy, quoted in David Halberstam, *The Unfinished Odyssey of Robert Kennedy* (New York: Random House, 1968), 85.
- <sup>26</sup> Daniel T. Miller, *A Tragic Turn: Six Leaders and the Death of Martin Luther King, Jr.*, (Bloomington: AuthorHouse, 2008), 60.
- <sup>27</sup> Robert F. Kennedy, quoted in Miller, *A Tragic Turn*, 41.
- <sup>28</sup> *A Ripple of Hope*. Dir. Donald Boggs, 2008 (Anderson, IN: Covenant Productions, 2010), DVD.
- <sup>29</sup> Karl W. Anatol and John R. Bittner, "Kennedy on King: The Rhetoric of Control," *Today's Speech* 16 (1968): 32.
- <sup>30</sup> Boomhower, *Robert F. Kennedy and the 1968 Indiana Primary*, 65. We do not know how many people attended to this day, but estimates range from no less than 1,000 and no greater

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than 3,000. Miller, *A Tragic Turn*, 46; Walter Sheridan, "Recorded interview by Roberta Greene," August 5, 1969, John F. Kennedy Library Oral History Program, 9, <http://www.jfklibrary.org/Asset-Viewer/Archives/RFKOH-WS-01.aspx>.

<sup>31</sup> Boomhower, *Robert F. Kennedy and the 1968 Indiana Primary*, 69.

<sup>32</sup> "Date with RFK Proves a Best-Seller," *The Plain Dealer*, April 2, 1968, 8.

<sup>33</sup> James M. Naughton, "RFK to Give Eulogy for King," *The Plain Dealer*, April 5, 1968, 1.

<sup>34</sup> Roy W. Adams and Karl R. Burkhardt, "TV Devotes Its Prime Time to Full Coverage of the Killing," *The Plain Dealer*, April 6, 1968, 7.

<sup>35</sup> John M. Murphy, "'A Time of Shame and Sorrow': Robert F. Kennedy and the American Jeremiad," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 76 (1990): 409, 402.

<sup>36</sup> Murphy, "'A Time of Shame and Sorrow,'" 406.

<sup>37</sup> James Darsey, *The Prophetic Tradition and Radical Rhetoric in America* (New York: New York University Press, 1997), 7.

<sup>38</sup> Mike Milford, "Kenneth Burke's Punitive Priests and the Redeeming Prophets: The NCAA, the College Sports Media, and the University of Miami Scandal," *Communication Studies* 66 (2015), 47.

<sup>39</sup> Claus Westermann, *Basic Forms of Prophetic Speech*, trans. Hugh Clayton White (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1967), 170, 171, 26-27.

<sup>40</sup> Heschel, *The Prophets*, 5-6.

<sup>41</sup> Darsey, *The Prophetic Tradition and Radical Rhetoric in America*, x.

<sup>42</sup> Heschel, *The Prophets*, 4.

<sup>43</sup> Westermann, *Basic Forms of Prophetic Speech*, 170, 171, 154-55.

<sup>44</sup> Heschel, *The Prophets*, 12. Emphasis in original.

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<sup>45</sup> Westermann, *Basic Forms of Prophetic Speech*, 99.

<sup>46</sup> F. W. Dillistone, *Christianity and Symbolism* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1955), 275.

<sup>47</sup> Anna M. Young, *Prophets, Gurus, and Pundits: Rhetorical Styles and Public Engagement* (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 2014), 56.

<sup>48</sup> Young, *Prophets, Gurus, and Pundits*, 52.

<sup>49</sup> Darsey, *The Prophetic Tradition and Radical Rhetoric in America*, 204.

<sup>50</sup> We are aware that some rhetorical scholars have criticized the use of the Greek concept *ethos* to discuss a Hebraic tradition. However, we feel that the concept best frames our considerations in relation to existing scholarship about both prophetic rhetoric and Kennedy's rhetoric. Deborah H. Holdstein, "The Ironies of Ethos," *JAC* 20 (2000): 942-948.

<sup>51</sup> Abraham J. Heschel, *The Prophets*, vol. I (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1962), 218-19.

<sup>52</sup> Margaret D. Zulick, "The Agon of Jeremiah: On the Dialogic Invention of Prophetic Ethos," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 78 (1992): 126.

<sup>53</sup> Here and elsewhere passages in "Statement on the Death of the Reverend Martin Luther King, Rally in Indianapolis, Indiana" are cited with reference to paragraph numbers in the text of the speech that accompanies this essay.

<sup>54</sup> Anatol and Bittner, "Kennedy on King," 32.

<sup>55</sup> Murphy, "'A Time of Shame and Sorrow,'" 406; Anatol and Bittner, "Kennedy on King," 32; Roger Cook, "'To Tame the Savageness of Man': Robert Kennedy's Eulogy of Martin Luther King, Jr.," in *Great Speeches for Criticism and Analysis*, 4th ed., ed. Lloyd Rohler and Roger Cook (Greenwood, IN: The Educational Video Group, 2001), 299.

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<sup>56</sup> Anatol and Bittner, “Kennedy on King,” 32; Cook, ““To Tame the Savageness of Man,”” 299.

Murphy omits the Aeschylus quotation from his analysis.

<sup>57</sup> Timothy Polk, *The Prophetic Persona: Jeremiah and the Language of the Self* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1984), 25.

<sup>58</sup> Polk, *The Prophetic Persona*, 169.

<sup>59</sup> Zulick, “The Agon of Jeremiah,” 127.

<sup>60</sup> The authors thank an anonymous reviewer for this insight.

<sup>61</sup> Darsey, *The Prophetic Tradition and Radical Rhetoric in America*, 30.

<sup>62</sup> Here and elsewhere passages in “The Mindless Menace of Violence” are cited with reference to paragraph numbers in the text of the speech that accompanies this essay.

<sup>63</sup> Kathleen M. Jamieson, “Natural Law as Warrant,” *Philosophy & Rhetoric* 6.4 (1973): 237.

<sup>64</sup> Karen A. Foss, Sonja K. Foss, and Robert Trapp, *Contemporary Perspectives on Rhetoric* (Prospect Heights: Waveland Press, 2002), 172. We are choosing to only include God and Devil terms, not charismatic terms, in our analysis because Kennedy’s predominantly used God and Devil terms in his speeches.

<sup>65</sup> Darsey, *The Prophetic Tradition and Radical Rhetoric in America*, 23. See also, Young, *Prophets, Gurus, and Pundits*, 39-40, 52; Milford, “Kenneth Burke’s Punitive Priests and the Redeeming Prophets,” 50.

<sup>66</sup> Jamieson, “Natural Law as Warrant,” 237.

<sup>67</sup> Jamieson, “Natural Law as Warrant,” 240.

<sup>68</sup> Jamieson, “Natural Law as Warrant,” 237.

<sup>69</sup> Richard M. Weaver, *Language is Sermonic* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1970), 105-06.

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<sup>70</sup> Weaver, *Language is Sermonic*, 89, 95.

<sup>71</sup> Robert F. Kennedy, "Address by Senator Robert F. Kennedy, Berkeley Campus, University of California, October 22, 1966," National Archives and Records Administration, 4, <https://catalog.archives.gov/id/194053>.

<sup>72</sup> Robert F. Kennedy, "Address by Senator Robert F. Kennedy, Berkeley Campus," 4.

<sup>73</sup> Darsey, *The Prophetic Tradition and Radical Rhetoric in America*, 208.

<sup>74</sup> See, for example, Murphy, "'A Time of Shame and Sorrow,'" 406.

<sup>75</sup> Edwin Black, *Rhetorical Criticism: A Study in Method* (New York: Macmillan, 1965), 144.

Black notes that "prophetic utterance avoids the tortuous justifications that moral arguments usually require."

<sup>76</sup> Darsey, *The Prophetic Tradition and Radical Rhetoric in America*, 208.

<sup>77</sup> Kick Kennedy, "How My Grandfather, RFK, Stopped a Riot," *Politico*, April 4, 2016.

<sup>78</sup> *A Ripple of Hope*, Dir. Boggs; Cook, "'To Tame the Savageness of Man,'" 299-300.

<sup>79</sup> Quoted in Anatol and Bittner, "Kennedy on King," 33.

<sup>80</sup> Quoted in Boomhower, *Robert F. Kennedy and the 1968 Indiana Primary*, 68.

<sup>81</sup> Miller, *A Tragic Turn*, 62.

<sup>82</sup> John R. Lewis, "Recorded interview by Vicki Daitch," March 19, 2004, John F. Kennedy Library Oral History Program, 6, <http://www.jfklibrary.org/Asset-Viewer/Archives/JFKOH-JRL-01.aspx>.

<sup>83</sup> Halberstam, *The Unfinished Odyssey of Robert Kennedy*, 85.

<sup>84</sup> Cook, "'To Tame the Savageness of Man,'" 298.

<sup>85</sup> *Words of a Century: The Top 100 American Speeches, 1900-1999*, eds. Stephen E. Lucas and Martin J. Medhurst (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), xi.

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<sup>86</sup> William J. Clinton, "The President's Radio Address," May 14, 1994, in *Public Papers of the Presidents of the United States: William J. Clinton, 1993–2001*, vol. 2, bk. 1 (Washington, DC: GPO, 1995), 912

<sup>87</sup> Joe Klein, *Politics Lost: How American Democracy Was Trivialized By People Who Think You're Stupid* (New York: Double Day, 2006), 8.

<sup>88</sup> Andrew Levy, "The Big Nap: Indianapolis as City of the Future," *Dissent*, Fall 1994, 495.

<sup>89</sup> John M. Broder, "Clinton Calls for Unity Where RFK Once Invoked It," *Los Angeles Times*, May 15, 1994, 1.

<sup>90</sup> Judge David Dreyer, quoted in Diana Penner, "Building on a Dream," *Indianapolis Star*, March 30, 2009, 1.

<sup>91</sup> Thurston Clarke, *The Last Campaign: Robert F. Kennedy and 82 Days that Inspired America* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 2008), 110.

<sup>91</sup> James M. Naughton, "Kennedy Warns of 'Mindless Violence,'" *The Plain Dealer*, April 6, 1968, 1; Newfield, *Robert Kennedy*, 359; Clarke, *The Last Campaign*, 110.

<sup>92</sup> Naughton, "Kennedy Warns of 'Mindless Violence,'" 1.

<sup>93</sup> "Kennedy Deplores Tolerance of Rise in Level of Violence," *New York Times*, April 6, 1968, 25.

<sup>94</sup> *Bobby*, Dir. Emilio Estevez (Los Angeles: Weinstein Company, 2006), Film.

<sup>95</sup> One notable exception is Clarke, who offers substantial analysis of the speech's themes. Jack Newfield and Jules Witcover also printed the press release version of the speech in its entirety but don't offer analysis or develop the context as much as they do with the Indianapolis speech. Clarke, *The Last Campaign*, 107-10; Newfield, *Robert Kennedy*, 273-75; Jules Witcover, *85 Days: The Last Campaign of Robert Kennedy* (New York: Putnam, 1969), 142-45.

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<sup>96</sup> Ronald Steel, *In Love with Night: The American Romance with Robert Kennedy* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2000), 23.

<sup>97</sup> See, for example, David and David, *Bobby Kennedy*; Clarke, *The Last Campaign*; Larry Tye, *Bobby Kennedy: The Making of a Liberal Icon* (New York: Random House, 2016).

<sup>98</sup> Darsey, *The Prophetic Tradition and Radical Rhetoric in America*, 32.

<sup>99</sup> Martin Luther King, Jr., "Letter from Birmingham Jail," *The Christian Century*, June 12, 1963, 769, <http://www.thekingcenter.org/archive/document/letter-birmingham-jail>.

<sup>100</sup> King, "Letter from Birmingham Jail," 770.

<sup>101</sup> Barack Obama, "DCPD No. 201300651: Remarks at a Memorial Service for Victims of the Shootings at the Washington Navy Yard," September 22, 2013, in *Daily Compilation of Presidential Documents* (Washington D.C.: GPO, 2013), 4, <https://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/DCPD-201300651/pdf/DCPD-201300651.pdf>.

<sup>102</sup> Heschel, *The Prophets*, 16.