

### Thesis American Studies

#### Cover page for examination assignment

<b>Examination period</b> <i>(please indicate)</i>	Summer <u>  X  </u>	Winter <u>      </u>
<b>Teacher: Jørn Brøndal</b>		

<b>Title of assignment:</b>	
Theodore C. Sorensen's Role in Robert F. Kennedy's Transformation, 1952-1968: Shaping the Kennedy Legacy Throughout Robert Kennedy's Political Career	
<b>Min./Max. number of characters:</b> 60-80 standard pages, excluding cover page, table of contents, abstract, notes, and bibliography and appendices  (1 norm page = 2400 characters incl. blank spaces)	<b>Number of characters in assignment<sup>1</sup>:</b> <b>159.779</b>
Please notice that in case your assignment does not meet the minimum/maximum requirements stipulated in the curriculum your assignment will be dismissed and you will have used up one examination attempt.	
<i>(Please mark)</i> _____	<b>Yes, my assignment may in anonymized form be published on BlackBoard for future students in this course</b>

<b>Solemn declaration</b>
I hereby declare that I have drawn up the assignment single-handed and independently. All quotes are marked as such and duly referenced. The full assignment or parts thereof have not been handed in as full or partial fulfilment of examination requirements in any other courses. Read more here: <a href="http://www.sdu.dk/en/Information_til/Studerende_ved_SDU/Eksamen.aspx">http://www.sdu.dk/en/Information_til/Studerende_ved_SDU/Eksamen.aspx</a>
<b>Handed in by</b> (indicate [ <i>Examination number/Birthdate and name</i> ]): <b>XXXXXX-XXXX11/92 Maxime Spithorst</b>

<sup>1</sup> Characters are counted from the first character in the introduction until and including the last character in the conclusion. Footnotes are included. Charts are counted with their characters. The following is excluded from the total count: abstract, table of contents, bibliography, list of references, appendix. For more information, see the examination regulations of the course in the curriculum.

University of Southern Denmark

Theodore C. Sorensen's Role in Robert F. Kennedy's Transformation, 1952-1968:  
Shaping the Kennedy Legacy Throughout Robert Kennedy's Political Career

Maxime Spithorst

MA Thesis in American Studies

Jørn Brøndal

June 2, 2020

## Table of Contents

<u>Abstract</u>	<u>2</u>
<u>Introduction</u>	<u>3</u>
<u>Literature Review</u>	<u>9</u>
<u>Upbringing</u>	<u>13</u>
<u>Political Careers</u>	<u>24</u>
<u>1968 Presidential Campaign</u>	<u>47</u>
<u>Other Influences</u>	<u>67</u>
<u>Legacy</u>	<u>71</u>
<u>Conclusion</u>	<u>79</u>
<u>Works Cited</u>	<u>82</u>

## Abstract

This thesis focuses on the role that Theodore C. Sorensen played in the political transformation of Robert F. Kennedy. There are many resources that explore the role of Sorensen as speechwriter and adviser for John F. Kennedy, but his assistance to Robert Kennedy is largely glossed over. The two men continued their political affiliation after the assassination of John Kennedy, despite both experiencing a great sense of grief. Various aspects of the lives and political contributions of both Kennedy and Sorensen will be analyzed to understand how this connection survived tragedy and how it strengthened Sorensen's influence on Robert Kennedy's political transformation. Outside sources that contributed to Sorensen's increased political influence will be evaluated on their impact. By exploring the upbringing of both men to determine their political influences and political foundations, Sorensen's contributions, Kennedy's transformation, and finally, outside influences on their working relationship, this paper aims to show that Sorensen played a larger role in Kennedy's transformation and the short-lived success of his presidential campaign than previously acknowledged. By appreciating Sorensen's service to Robert Kennedy, we only begin to recognize his lifelong devotion to the Kennedy legacy.

## Introduction

This thesis focuses on the role that Theodore C. Sorensen played in the political transformation of Robert F. Kennedy. There are many resources that explore the role of Sorensen as speechwriter and adviser for John F. Kennedy, but his assistance to Robert Kennedy is largely glossed over. While Sorensen's service to Robert Kennedy is not as well-documented as his service to John Kennedy, it has to receive further attention to fully understand and appreciate Sorensen's devotion to the Kennedy legacy and U.S. politics as a whole. The two men continued their political affiliation after the assassination of John Kennedy, despite both experiencing a great sense of grief. Various aspects of the lives and political contributions of both Kennedy and Sorensen will be analyzed to understand how this connection survived tragedy and how it strengthened Sorensen's influence on Robert Kennedy's political transformation. Outside sources that contributed to Sorensen's increased political influence will be evaluated on their impact. By exploring the upbringing of both men to determine their political influences and political foundations, Sorensen's contributions, Kennedy's transformation, and finally, outside influences on their working relationship, this paper aims to show that Sorensen played a larger role in Kennedy's transformation and the short-lived success of his presidential campaign than previously acknowledged. By appreciating Sorensen's service to Robert Kennedy, we only begin to recognize his lifelong devotion to the Kennedy legacy.

First, this paper will address the upbringing of both Sorensen and Kennedy. Understanding the background and political foundations that shaped the political views of both men is crucial to understanding how Sorensen effectively served not only John Kennedy, but Robert Kennedy as well. While Sorensen and Kennedy came from different backgrounds, they shared an increasing amount of values throughout their political careers. By coming in contact with people like Sorensen and politics such as his, as well as by being

impacted by the role that men like Sorensen played during the Kennedy administration, Robert Kennedy began a public transformation that would become his strength as well as his weakness during his own presidential campaign. This transformation would shape American politics in the mid- to late-1960s. It would also influence the lasting Kennedy legacy and the memory of Robert Kennedy himself. There is plenty of debate on the memory of Kennedy, questioning whether it is fair to attribute such a positive memory to a man who would often be described as cold, uncompromising and unforgiving. At the same time, there is a continuing discussion on whether those who used these terms to describe Kennedy were simply too critical of a man doing his job. Previous works have outlined that Robert Kennedy was always a “man of powerfully conflicting characteristics” (Schumacher 152). Following this thought, the shift in public opinion about Robert Kennedy may well be based on the changing trajectory of Kennedy’s career after his brother’s death and the efforts made by his closest confidants. This paper works to support a nuanced perspective of Robert Kennedy while highlighting the positive notions presented by Sorensen, in an effort to emphasize the creation of the Kennedy legacy. After the death of President Kennedy, Sorensen continued his devotion to the Kennedy name by playing a large role in the development of the younger Kennedy’s following political career, delivering each time Kennedy needed the support.

After establishing the conditions under which both men were brought up, the trajectory of their political careers is analyzed to expand on the similarities and differences that were presented during the evaluation of both upbringings. This segment will include significant events that contribute to the understanding of Sorensen’s loyalty and Kennedy’s transformation. This assessment starts with Kennedy’s seemingly eager participation in the Army-McCarthy hearings and Sorensen’s dedication in his work for Senator John Kennedy, followed by the shared history in the Kennedy White House as well as Sorensen’s contributions to Robert Kennedy’s individual political efforts after John’s assassination.

Highlighting the family connection between the Kennedys and Joe McCarthy, the shift away from McCarthy, serving on the Racketeering Committee and prosecuting Teamsters, it can be said that Robert began a transformation before he well and truly connected with Sorensen. However, this paper argues that this beginning shift in his political approach may not have meant that much and simply opened the door to a more drastic transformation during and after his John Kennedy's presidency. Attention will be paid to major events that connected these men and expanded their political relationship. From there, Sorensen's contributions through speechwriting for both John Kennedy and Robert Kennedy will be assessed, highlighting how Sorensen incorporated or negated his own political views through the words that others would speak.

Ted Sorensen had his own set of political beliefs which he carefully veiled under the Kennedy administration. As the main, familiar voice of President John Kennedy, Sorensen allowed himself only a sliver of public advocacy on his personal beliefs. He would not publicly interfere with the platform of the John F. Kennedy administration, his narrative becoming the vessel in which the President's policies would be released to the public. As part of John Kennedy's team, Sorensen had committed to protecting the Kennedy name at any cost. However, it was not only the Kennedy name he protected. He would be sending the message of a (future) president into the nation, and "the necessity of 'uniting important policymaking and speechwriting functions in one trusted adviser—[...] a Sorensen'" in this case, is essential to transferring public policy effectively to the American population (A. Schlesinger, "Commentary on *The 'Invisible' Speechwriter*" 156). In this respect, Sorensen adopted the role of what was deemed the "invisible" speechwriter. He would be known for being the speechwriter, but he would not spout his personal politics publicly. Instead, he would follow Kennedy's policies and his personality in order to present a unified front with the president, which often made it look like Sorensen was simply John Kennedy's "alter ego"

(A. Schlesinger, "Commentary on *The 'Invisible' Speechwriter* 156). Regardless of how much Sorensen maintained that protective role over President Kennedy after his assassination, the relationship with Robert Kennedy allowed some space between Sorensen's politics and that of the younger Kennedy brother. Perhaps this was because both Sorensen and Robert Kennedy no longer fulfilled the same roles, or perhaps it occurred because of the increase in physical distance. Sorensen's writing was not the main vessel of Robert Kennedy's politics as it had been for John. Instead, Sorensen provided wisdom, experience, contrasting opinions and nuanced tactics that Robert Kennedy had earlier been accused to lack. The difference between Sorensen's relationship with either of the presidential candidates explains how his role could be so different during each presidential campaign. This paper therefore aims to explore how the two different roles that Sorensen played for John and Robert Kennedy allowed for a transformation within RFK and gave him the opportunity to become part of the memory of a changing America.

There will be a brief discussion of John Kennedy's book, *Profiles in Courage*, and the affidavit in which Sorensen claimed his distance from authorship. This discussion will reiterate the willingness with which Sorensen sacrificed any public power in favor of supporting and strengthening the Kennedy name. Not only did Sorensen officially reign in the reach of his own voice here, but he earned the respect of the Kennedy brother that had been deemed the colder, uncompromising and unforgiving one. Perhaps this is the moment where Sorensen took his first steps to breaking down the wall that Robert Kennedy had built so high around himself. It is through the transformational years of Robert Kennedy that this paper reviews Sorensen's contributions during the Kennedy trajectory, concluding with the aftermath of the 1968 Presidential Primary campaign of said Kennedy. Finally, a closer look will be taken at the various memoirs written by Sorensen himself in efforts of structuring his history with the Kennedy family and building the Kennedy legacy that had been created upon



the assassination of the first brother. In his writings, Sorensen favored a positive retelling of Kennedy history, which was in line with the shock of both assassinations and the public outcry of horror. Sorensen's writing contributed not only to memorialization of the brothers, but its "sympathetic [portrayal] set a template for subsequent works" that was only "solidified when [...] Robert Kennedy was assassinated while pursuing his own presidential bid" (Palermo article 97). Based on these moments and decisions in Sorensen's life, it can be said that Sorensen left his mark on the development of U.S. politics, while his contributions were far greater than the memory of his name would suggest. Richard Nixon once said: "You need a mind like Sorensen's around you that's clicking and clicking all the time," for he had "a rare gift: the knack of finding phrases that penetrated the American psyche" (Weiner). Sorensen proved this by contributing to some of the most memorable speeches in the second half of the 1900s. He influenced and perhaps emphasized the role of the Kennedys by minimizing his own exposure beyond his role as speechwriter and adviser. Yet Sorensen's role in politics provided a way for his personal politics to reach the American public and to be remembered as part of the Kennedy legacy. And just perhaps, the names of speechwriters should be remembered as more than an extension of the senators and presidents they served.

Theodore Sorensen devoted his life to supporting the Kennedy brothers and building as well as protecting their legacy. His efforts have irrefutably linked his name with those of John F. Kennedy, Robert F. Kennedy, and even Edward M. Kennedy. Despite his lasting influence on the development of U.S. politics especially in the early second half of the twentieth century, Sorensen is not a household name like that of the Kennedy family. This paper assesses Sorensen's influence on the Kennedy legacy through the lens of the political, and therefore public, transformation that Robert Kennedy experienced from the 1950s to his assassination in 1968. The argument is that while Sorensen's name may not be as prominently featured in history books and biographies as the Kennedy name, his

contributions in service to both brothers, especially after the assassination of John Kennedy, was just as significant in the development of U.S. politics as the contributions of the Kennedys themselves. By playing a key role in transforming Robert Kennedy from anti-Communist crusader to liberal civil rights hero, Sorensen solidified the entire Kennedy legacy, and his service to Robert Kennedy needs to be remembered as a separate chapter to truly appreciate its value.

## Literature Review

There is plenty of evidence available about the significant contributions that Ted Sorensen made to John Kennedy's political career, but there is not a definite history of the Kennedy-Sorensen relationship. After Kennedy's assassination, Sorensen continued his contributions to the Kennedy administration by adding to the memory of the slain president and his platform. Sorensen wrote various articles and books on issues that explored and resonated with John Kennedy's platform, expanding on the Cuban Missile Crisis and civil rights, for example. An area of Sorensen's continued contributions that remains largely undiscussed is that of his work with Robert Kennedy, from their time together in the White House and the younger Kennedy's campaign for U.S. Senate, to the presidential campaign during which he, too, was assassinated. Despite that fact that Sorensen wrote various books that recorded and solidified the Kennedy legacy, his writing on Robert Kennedy is far less extensive than that on John Kennedy. Though it can be said that Sorensen did not do so because Robert Kennedy continued his brother's legacy, this is simply not a strong enough argument. Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., who also dedicated much of his time after working for John Kennedy to writing memoirs about this same time frame did write a full biography on Robert Kennedy and his experiences with the younger brother specifically, but he understandably did not focus on the relationship between Robert Kennedy and Ted Sorensen.

Sorensen and Schlesinger both began their documentation of the Kennedy administration before the president was assassinated and continued quite rapidly afterwards, publishing books in 1963 (Sorensen) and 1965 (Sorensen and Schlesinger). Due to the nature of the president's death, their roles in the administration, and the public outcry over John Kennedy's passing, both writers maintained quite a positive position on their version of events. However, when the nation became more critical of the government and more critical of the Kennedy name in the 1980s and 1990s, other books provided perspectives to match the

public demeanor of those changing times. One particular biography of Robert Kennedy written by C. David Heymann, *RFK: A Candid Biography of Robert F. Kennedy*, presents the two-sided personality of Robert Kennedy in a 524-page reflection. Focusing not only on Robert Kennedy's role in the McCarthy hearings, his changing perspective on civil rights and his rumored affairs, Heymann explores one of the much darker sides to the Kennedy name. Here, he explores the relationship between Jackie Kennedy and Robert Kennedy after John's death, for example. He bases his findings on the words of others, which are anything but certain – as are the words of Sorensen and Schlesinger. There is such a bipolarity to the recalling of Robert Kennedy's political career, that it seems impossible to truly determine whether he was as good or as bad as people said.

This complexity is also reflected in a cartoon series created by Jules Feiffer titled “the Bobby twins.” In the cartoons, Feiffer creates the visual of Robert Kennedy's apparent two-sided decision-making and poses the question which one of these two is the true reflection of Kennedy's personality. Of course, it reflects a very two-dimensional representation of the complexity of any individual. These cartoons leave the work of any other officials out of discussion, ignoring how Kennedy could have been persuaded to say or do things by those around him. For example, it has been said that Robert Kennedy grew increasingly opposed to Joe McCarthy's conduct, but would voice these opinions behind closed doors instead of during hearings until he resigned and joined the opposition. Opinions of Robert Kennedy during his brother's presidency seemed to adhere to the good guy vs. bad guy tradition that had already stuck. Despite the administration consisting of many people, decisions were often attributed to Kennedy if they seemed to be a positive decision with a negative afterthought. Of course, this was a consequence of Kennedy being named Attorney General and the history of Joe Kennedy interfering or meddling with his sons' political careers. There was a general

mistrust in Robert Kennedy that appeared to exist even among some of John Kennedy's high-ranking advisers, which made them less than willing to work with the Attorney General.

Only recently, a focus was placed on Sorensen's contributions not only to John Kennedy and his political ambitions, but also to Robert taking over many of these responsibilities (as they were drilled into the family by their father, Joe) after the president's untimely death. In 2019, Michelle Ulyatt published her book, *Theodore Sorensen and the Kennedys: A Life of Public Service*, in which she expands on the common understanding that Sorensen was generally focused on his work for John F. Kennedy during and after his death. Ulyatt reviews and documents the history of the relationship between Theodore Sorensen and the Kennedy family, highlighting many of Ted Sorensen's contributions to the political successes of all three of the Kennedy brothers during their time in politics. Though she does not elaborate as thoroughly on Sorensen's public service after the John Kennedy's assassination, Ulyatt emphasizes that he did play a bigger role in the entire family's political aspirations than was previously noted. Articles from the *New York Times* in 1967 and 1968 reflect this sentiment, as does the survival of the Kennedy legacy today. This can be partly contributed to Sorensen's writings. However, Ulyatt fails to go into depth about Sorensen's influence on the transformation of Robert Kennedy before and during his presidential campaign. While Sorensen did not fulfill the role of main speechwriter for the younger Kennedy, he contributed dutifully during Kennedy's 1964 campaign for a Senate seat for New York. He was subsequently hired as main strategist for the 1968 presidential campaign. In this role, Sorensen fulfilled contributing speechwriting duties, but also served a greater purpose in deciding over the direction of the campaign. Ulyatt narrows the scope in which Sorensen contributed to civil rights activism, pacifism and liberalism under John Kennedy especially, but glosses over the specifics of his contributions in support of RFK. Another omission in Ulyatt's research would be the contributions of Sorensen's writings to the memory of Robert

Kennedy. Both John Kennedy and Robert Kennedy are known figures all over the globe, but Ulyatt neglects to address precisely how the shaping of the Kennedy brothers during their influential years as done by the sympathetic writings of Sorensen and Arthur Schlesinger, Jr. especially after their untimely deaths, turned a decade of political contributions into a lasting legacy of liberalism and civil rights. By neglecting to acknowledge the extent of Sorensen's influence on Robert Kennedy's transformation, Ulyatt limits the extent of Sorensen's influence on American politics in the first years after John F. Kennedy's assassination. That restriction, then, limits the legacy of Ted Sorensen as a contributor to American political development over the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and ensures that Sorensen's writings only served as the vessel in which Kennedy words reached their target audience.

## Upbringing

Born in Lincoln, Nebraska, on May 8th, 1928, Theodore “Ted” Chaikin Sorensen grew up in an environment that was quite different from that of the men he would serve later in life. Sorensen was a product of his politically active family and well-informed from a young age due to the many news magazines present in their home. Despite the Republican leanings of his family, Sorensen found himself within the Democratic framework from early on. With a fierce commitment to racial justice, Sorensen began his political involvement through protest during his university years. Robert Schlesinger writes that “when the dean of the University of Nebraska opposed integrating the dorms, Sorensen and his friends wrote letters of protest” (108). These letters were likely a product of the early literary foundation that his mother had laid, upon which Sorensen built his knack for writing. While his family was involved in politics and certainly exercised a level of influence, Sorensen still hailed from humble beginnings as a student in Nebraska public schools and member of the Unitarian Church. He did not come from seemingly unlimited wealth and private school privileges like the Kennedy brothers. In his memoir, *Counselor*, Sorensen recounts that:

“[In those days,] Nebraskans spoke plainly, dressed plainly, and opposed elites and sophisticates of any kind. They were mostly middle class with middle-of-the-road views, isolationists increasingly interested in stable overseas markets for Nebraska crops, churchgoers who supported traditional church-state separation (except for school prayer), community-minded pragmatists and businessmen who were skeptical of the far right as well as the far left, and opposed to big spending by politicians. They did not like politicians of either party who showed too little concern about truly big issues but hypocritically expressed too much concern over trivial issues (27).”

Sorensen puts forth a sympathetic portrayal of the simplicity of Nebraskans and his hailing from this kind of background. By doing so, Sorensen positions himself in a way that shapes

his political convictions and, thus, his political contributions. He follows this up with the naming of some political leaders like William Jennings Bryan and Malcolm X, for example, who contributed to the historically political narrative of the United States based on their individual political convictions. Setting the scene for his audience, Sorensen pays tribute to the political landscape in his home state during his youth while honoring his political leanings and resulting accomplishments on the national platform. Sorensen was the child of “second-generation American parents as the nation teetered on the brink of the Great Depression” which would shape his political views immensely (Ulyatt 1). His parents, Christian Sorensen and Annis Chaikin Sorensen, were politically active progressives in an already progressive part of the United States and they formed young Ted’s lasting political interests by their own contributions.

Credited by Sorensen as the parent who set him up with the largest set of public service skills, Sorensen’s father was a strong proponent of Senator George W. Norris and became a regular campaigner for the Senator in 1918. He would continue to fulfill these duties throughout the rest of the thirty years of that Senator Norris served. Christian worked his way up among the people of Nebraska and even served as state Attorney General to the progressive Senator from 1929 until 1933. This dedication to one candidate must have served as an example to Sorensen, who would serve the Kennedy family and their legacy until his own death in 2010. Not only did Christian Sorensen serve as an example of faithfulness, he was a pillar in the progressive movement of Nebraska. During his campaign for state Attorney General, Christian ran on a reform platform which had “the backing of the Women’s Christian Temperance Union and the Anti-Saloon League, having promised to take a firm stance against bootlegging, vice and organized crime” while his concerns “centered around strengthening moral values, cleaning up local politics, resolving problems that impacted on the state’s prosperity and establishing a fairer society,” all under the



“commitment to equality of all under the law” (Ulyatt 7-8). Additionally, Christian Sorensen was staunchly anti-crime, yet equally opposed to the death penalty as form of punishment. This viewpoint was rooted within his faith, but just as much within the belief that the death of a person by means of the death penalty was equal to a death by the hands of a murderer. Ted Sorensen followed his father’s “commitment to progressive ideas around regulation and the role of the law” as they were influenced by their European heritage and it was Christian’s work on the humanitarian priorities which he shared with Norris that made their way into the liberal progressive movement that Ted Sorensen grew to support early in life (Ulyatt 8).

When Christian met Theodore Roosevelt Jr. by chance, three-year-old Ted received a letter from the son of the former President. Noticing the excitement amongst his family members, Christian wrote, “[Ted] knew that something unusual had happened which some way or other involved him” (Sorensen, *Counselor* 25). Roosevelt Jr. made mention of their identical first names, noting they had both been named after the President. Annis, a pacifist who opposed Roosevelt’s military endeavors, would refuse this claim. Instead, she would insist that Ted had been named “for the Greek words meaning ‘gift from God’” (Sorensen, *Counselor* 25). Her assertions were so strong that this became be the reasoning Sorensen’s biographers adopted. The early base of political experiences and ideological debate provided Sorensen with a particular philosophy that inspired much of his contributions as public servant under both prominent Kennedy brothers.

Not only Ted’s father was involved in the political sphere, but, as briefly mentioned, his mother was also quite active in the political realm. Annis Chaikin Sorensen, inspired by her own upbringing, walked the frontlines of Nebraskan women’s suffrage and would be a strong advocate of decreasing inequality based on categories such as race, religion and sex. Christian and Annis both held these beliefs as a direct result of their familiarity with different aspects of the inequality that existed in the United States during the early 1900s. Christian

had roots in Europe as a second-generation Danish American, and he honored the progressive ideas that sprung from this region. This meant that he, too, supported women's suffrage, but also fought to remove corruption from the government in order to level the playing field. Annis supported ideas that were very similar to her husband's but reached these similar sentiments from a different background. Her parents also immigrated to the United States for a better future but had fled anti-Jewish violence back in Russia. When they made their way into the United States, Annis' family found "limits placed on their ability to integrate fully" and "scapegoating of their people over the nation's economic problems" (Ulyatt 9-10). In other words, Sorensen's mother grew up "in a poor home in a poor neighborhood" to such an extent that she "had only two dresses as a girl" (Sorensen, *Counselor* 33). Once Annis reached the age of seventeen, her family did not have the funds to send her through university and women were highly unlikely to receive scholarships. To fund any further education, Annis worked as a maid. Being an immigrant woman from a poor background drove Annis to seek both religious and a certain level of gender equality (for example, women's suffrage) under U.S. law.

Annis would stand strong during the long struggle for women's suffrage, with Nebraska being one of the final states to adopt legislation that granted women the right to vote. While women's suffrage was one of Annis' priorities, she had completed a master's degree in 1911 and was a gifted writer. As an outlet for some of her strengths, Annis founded a writing club for women in 1921, providing further exposure for women's literature. It was not without reason that Ted Sorensen would be supportive of equal representation in the political process for men and women. Annis' feminism would be reflected even through the birth of her children, as each would be gifted with her maiden name, Chaikin, in addition to their father's name, Sorensen. It would also ensure that the children would face frequent misspellings of their last names, to which Ted was no exception. He wrote: "the *New York*

*Times* has misspelled my name more than a hundred times in headlines and articles over the past fifty years” (Sorensen, *Counselor* 26). The frequency of this error reflects the relative unfamiliarity with which the public regarded Sorensen, despite his powerful political contributions. In a way, this was how Annis went through life. Despite her activism and efforts in favor of women’s suffrage, Annis’ name is largely reserved for Sorensen’s accounts of his youth, except for an award and student fund in her name at the University of Nebraska. Through activism, Annis exposed Ted to experiences which led him to support a greater equality based on race and sex. Ted Sorensen would use his political influence to work on equality throughout his life. Then, through her fervent love for writing and storytelling, Annis had sparked the affinity for writing in each of her young children. Her affinity for writing, of course, would prove instrumental for Ted in his role as John Kennedy’s speechwriter. According to Ulyatt, Annis “encouraged Theodore to explore his own capabilities with the written word, supporting him as he grasped opportunities to develop his skills through high school and his university career during the 1930s and 1940s (10). The early support would serve Ted especially well throughout his life as he became one of the great political writers of the past century. An unfortunate shift occurred in Annis’ mental health during the 1940s and she was subjected to depressive episodes that varied in length. It was the extent of these episodes that brought another dimension to Sorensen’s outlook on life. In *Counselor*, he states he developed a “less rose-colored view of the world” (44).

Due to his mother’s mental health struggles, Sorensen and his siblings refrained from inviting friends over to the house. The children kept their problems to themselves, learning at a young age how to put the issues into perspective and move on. If there were issues that caused enough of a disturbance, the family used humor to “submerge [their] despair” (Sorensen, *Counselor* 45). As an outlet, Sorensen spent his time focusing on his education and extracurricular activities. He joined the Lincoln High writers’ club and would end up as

its president. Additionally, he would be “editor of the literary magazine, the *Scribe*” and “credited the debate club as a major contributor to the ‘clarity, quality and color’ of his writing” (Goduti 1). Choosing his studies based on his passions, Ted Sorensen followed in his father’s footsteps. Entering law school, Sorensen would look up to Nebraska Senator George Norris, the same man that his father had so strongly supported for many years. Supposedly, Sorensen “idolized Norris” and modeled his personal politics as much after that of the Senator as the values he had inherited from his parents (Ulyatt 11). During his time in law school, Sorensen continued to feed his interest in writing. However, Sorensen held some unrealistic expectations of the speed at “which progress could be achieved” in politics based on the successes that Norris had booked in Nebraska (Ulyatt 11). Sorensen quickly “decided his best opportunity to get a job in that field was to leave Nebraska and pursue a job in DC,” but experienced that it took time and effort to build a network that allowed the climb toward improved civil rights and foreign policy (Goduti 1). During his time in the Senate and White House, Sorensen witnessed how opposing views dictated the pace of progress and how much work Norris had actually put into implementing change.

Ted Sorensen came to Washington, D.C. with a belief system that was very much shaped by his political heritage. Despite Sorensen’s idolization of George Norris, it was his parents that had had a huge impact on the young man and his ideals of humanitarianism, egalitarianism and pacifism. These ideals would become the pillars on which Sorensen rested throughout his political career and which continued to be heavily featured in his later writing as well. With the Kennedy brothers, Sorensen found the means to achieve his ideals. As Michael Brenes notes in *A Companion to John F. Kennedy* edited by Marc Selverstone that “Sorensen was a determined member of what his Kennedy colleague Arthur Schlesinger Jr. called the ‘vital center’ of postwar American liberalism: a noncommunist who believed government had a responsibility in rectifying social and economic inequality.” The Kennedy

brothers had an agenda that aligned with Sorensen's, but as they realized it needed some adjustments over time to appeal to the masses. In order to achieve this, they would need to be able to build a well-oiled working relationship.

In order to best serve the Kennedys, Sorensen would first need to be a match for John Kennedy's personality. Sorensen had a personality that was not exactly like that of any of the Kennedy brothers, but his personal development within politics allowed for him to find much more of a personal overlap with Robert Kennedy during the 1968 campaign. Where John F. Kennedy was a good-looking, charming and commanding presence, Robert Kennedy was of average charm with a quiet presence – a description that also fit Sorensen (R. Schlesinger 107). In this sense, the opposing personalities of John Kennedy and Ted Sorensen balanced each other out, much like Robert and John balanced each other out. Not offered the same kind of educational background as the Kennedy brothers, Sorensen worked his way up by means of his intellect, his craft and his persistence. When Robert Kennedy first joined his brother in politics, he was “an exacting taskmaster with an almost fanatical drive,” which can be likened to the descriptions of Sorensen's conduct in politics. When it was time for Sorensen to serve Robert Kennedy, there were significant changes in both personalities which created an unbreakable bond, and an ironed out working relationship. The transformation of both men was caused by the assassination of John Kennedy and will be further analyzed during the discussion of that event.

Despite having received a description of exacting taskmaster, Robert Kennedy was not as politically inclined as John Kennedy and Sorensen were during their youth. Being the third son of Joseph P. Kennedy, a “strong-willed father” who had created a life plan for his eldest two sons, Bobby was left largely outside of his father's big plans and served rather as an irritation until the time came to assume a supporting role in the political aspirations Joe held for the two oldest living sons (Palermo 2). Bobby Kennedy was born on November 20,

1925. According to both Bobby and his mother, he had to fight to survive as the seventh, thinner and smaller child in the family (Heymann 19). This led Bobby to work extra hard for his standing within the family, often trying to keep up with his older brothers. Heymann writes that “as aggressive and determined as young Bobby was, close acquaintances also discerned in him a pronounced kindness and sweetness” (19-20). In fact, Rose Kennedy would worry that “Bobby would ‘be a sissy’ because he was surrounded by sisters” (Tye 32). These two opposing sets of attributes seem to reflect the debate that continued to revolve around his personality during and after the rest of his life.

Bobby was not nearly as interested in politics as Ted Sorensen was during his youth. Despite his family’s ties to people more powerful than George W. Norris, notably President Franklin D. Roosevelt, Bobby left any political interest to his two older brothers. As the oldest son, Joe Kennedy Jr. had been appointed the role of Joe Sr.’s favorite child. This role entailed more than simply being the apple of the eye, as Joe Sr. had set out to fulfill his own dreams through Joe Jr. It had been Joe Kennedy Sr. who first hoped to claim the highest title of U.S. president. He decided that “future generations of school children [were to] remember three names together: Washington, Lincoln and Kennedy” (Tye 30). When it became clear that Joe Sr. would never become president, he elected Joe Kennedy Jr. for the role. When World War II erupted, Joe Sr. was clear about his opposition to American involvement. For Joe “personal realities always trumped policy abstractions” and having his sons deployed overseas with a high risk of death was an unsettling thought (Tye 30). Bobby would later reflect a similar affliction. Larry Tye writes that “Bobby understood Joe’s bottom-line message: that family came before anything, and that in a crunch, it was only your siblings and parents you could count on. Bobby felt more deeply and cared more passionately than his brothers and sisters did about matters worldly and personal” (Tye 43). This is reflected in his dedication to John later in life, after the golden boy, Joe Kennedy Jr., dies a tragic death

during World War II. When Joe Jr. passed, Joe Sr. passed his hopes to his second-oldest son, John. While Bobby was largely ignored before Joe Jr.'s death, he now had to fill the big shoes that John had filled in service of Joe Jr. Joseph Palermo notes that "the death of [Joe Kennedy Jr.], who was the focus of their father's grand political ambitions, changed everything for both John and Robert. John quickly grasped that he had little choice but to accept his new fate as the object of his father's soaring aspirations. Eighteen-year-old Robert also understood that his new position in the family hierarchy obliged him to assist John's public career in whatever ways he could" (*A Companion to John F. Kennedy* 98). It can also be seen in the way that Robert Kennedy seems to fervently work to protect underprivileged Americans during his time as Attorney General, as a Senator and during the 1968 campaign. Growing older, Bobby noticed the way that his father favored Joe Jr. and John. He was very aware of the different behavior that Joe Sr. displayed towards his older brothers, which had made Bobby insecure about his own abilities. Like his siblings, "[Bobby] lived in fear as well as awe of his dad" as Joe Sr. ruled the family with near-military precision (Tye 36). Out of his insecurity, Bobby found a determination that drove him to work harder than his peers. During his teenage years, Bobby wrote his father a letter, asking that he would send the same type of letters regarding current political events that he had sent to the two older brothers (Tye 33). Both his determination and lack in confidence were noticed during his time in the public eye.

For the Kennedy children, life with Rose Kennedy may not have been much easier than life with Joe Sr. Various sources recall Rose as being extremely frugal, cutting many corners to save as much money as possible (Palermo; Heymann). One of the most significant examples of this behavior would be the appearance of the family home in Hyannis Port. The front of the house, which others would see, was immaculate. The sides and back of the house would be in various stages of disarray, simply because it did not matter if the world could not

see their fortune. Steadily rooted within this frugality would be Rose's behavior towards her children. Her children would remember Rose as "firm" and perhaps a bit harsher than she may have needed to be (Tye 32). While Rose was firm with her other children, it seems like she had a soft spot for Bobby. Bobby would volunteer "to sit next to [Rose] on the plane when the family was traveling and nobody else offered, and he regularly told her how beautiful she looked (32). Referring to him as "my own pet," she mirrored the affection that she only received from Bobby (32). In displaying his affection for his mother, Bobby Kennedy showed that he was not only the competitive younger son who had to fight for attention. Rather, Kennedy displayed a care that he would revisit during his time as presidential hopeful.

While not as much is known about Sorensen's personality and internal family relations growing up aside from his own recollections, it becomes clear that Sorensen grew up with parents that were a bit softer than Joe and Rose Kennedy. While the Kennedys taught their children the benefits of tough love, Sorensen seemed to have been gently guided into a political career that was generally thrust upon Bobby as he became the second son through the death of his oldest brother. Sorensen had a steady base during his youth until the mental health problems of his mother grew increasingly debilitating for the family, while Kennedy went through different schools and had to work hard for his father's approval while seemingly receiving a greater amount of affection from his mother than his siblings. The two men grew up quite differently yet ended up with a near-identical set of values. Bobby recalled that which he remembered "most vividly about growing up was going to a lot of different schools, always having to make new friends, and that I was very awkward. I dropped things and fell down all the time. I had to go to the hospital a few times for stitches in my head and my leg. And I was pretty quiet most of the time. And I didn't mind being alone" (Tye 35). In turn, Larry Tye notes that "all of that eventually would make him sensitive to children in



general, and particularly to the misfits. At the time, it was even more hurtful than he led on” (35). This sentiment explains how Robert Kennedy became involved with César Chávez and how he explored the poverty-stricken areas of the United States. It also explains how he grew to feel a duty to politically protect those who were underrepresented. Here, the foundation for Robert Kennedy’s presidential campaign was already visible.

## Political Careers

Combining his sense of determination with prioritization of his family, as well as realizing the expectations that his father had delegated to him, “Robert became John’s statewide campaign manager for the 1952 Senate race at the age of twenty-six” (Palermo, *A Companion to John F. Kennedy* 99). Having learned to drop everything to support the oldest Kennedy son, Robert Kennedy resigned from his brief stint as correspondent with *The Boston Post* and his work at the Justice Department. Refusing to acknowledge the possibility of losing, Robert expanded his skillset to get his brother the Senate seat. Palermo notes that “it was during this campaign that Robert established himself as an exacting taskmaster with an almost fanatical drive to win the seat for his brother” (*A Companion to John F. Kennedy* 99). Before Robert Kennedy successfully won John the seat as Senator for New York, he completed his education by finishing his law degree from the University of Virginia. During his time there, Kennedy was disgruntled about the fact that the African American Nobel Peace Prize-winning diplomat Ralph Bunche could not speak to a racially integrated crowd on campus. Successfully opposing the decision, Kennedy “played a key role” in arranging that Bunche would speak to a racially integrated audience, even if this were only an exception as the campus remained segregated during this time (Palermo, *A Companion to John F. Kennedy* 99). Using his education against the provider of said education, Kennedy dug up the 1950 Supreme Court case *McLaurin v. Oklahoma State Regents*. In addition to his use of the 14<sup>th</sup> Amendment, Kennedy effectively argued that the university did not have legal grounds for requiring a segregated audience during Dr. Bunche’s speech (Williamson). Just like he would do during his brother’s Senate race, Robert Kennedy refused to take no for an answer.

After securing John the Senate seat, Kennedy “took his first job on Capitol Hill, working under the notorious demagogue Senator Joseph McCarthy of Wisconsin. Robert was named one of the counsels for the powerful Permanent Investigations Subcommittee of the

Government Operations Committee, known for its cult of personality around McCarthy” (Palermo, *A Companion to John F. Kennedy* 99). Robert Kennedy came from a family that was “steadfastly anticommunist” (Tye 40). While John Kennedy declared to Sorensen that he rejected the ways of the Army-McCarthy hearings, Robert initially joined Senator Joe McCarthy and was quite involved in the hearings. McCarthy was a family friend, after all, and Bobby followed in Joe Sr.’s footsteps in valuing family connections over anything else. Additionally, the mindset to protect the American way of life with the luxuries that capitalism brought was incredibly appealing to the wealthy Kennedy family. As the threat of communism increased, the persecution of supposed “communists” was seen as a good cause, which Robert Kennedy was happy to join. When he realized the flaws of McCarthy’s particular persecutions, Robert Kennedy resigned.

While Robert Kennedy completed his duties during the Army-McCarthy hearings, Ted Sorensen ensured that he would not have to support a similar sentiment during the first of his many influential years. After two brief meetings in January 1953, Sorensen felt satisfied when John Kennedy’s explained that he personally disagreed with McCarthy’s tactics and joined his staff as “number two legislative assistant” (Sorensen, *Counselor* 121). It came as a surprise to many that Sorensen was chosen as aide. Sorensen was, according to William Lee Miller:

“not a Harvard man or an Easterner or a Catholic or an Irishman or a hereditary Democrat, or a political middler or culturally sophisticated or rich or an aristocrat or an urbanite or an intellectual dilettante or widely traveled or weak on the civil-liberties side or primarily interested in *Why England Slept* type of foreign affairs or a master of the Ivy League casual style or anything at all of a playboy” (qtd. in R. Schlesinger 107).

It was not very typical for John F. Kennedy to hire anyone that would not be hired by his father, who without fail seemed to hire exclusively Irish Catholics. However, Sorensen came highly recommended by Bob Wallace, legislative assistant to Senator Paul H. Douglas of Illinois and staff director of the Joint Senate House Committee on Railroad Retirement. John Kennedy had admired Senator Douglas, which is why Wallace's recommendation carried weight. Sorensen met with Kennedy twice and the men connected. When Sorensen was hired despite missing a recommendation from Joe Sr., it caused some weariness of his loyalty and skill within the Kennedy family. Robert shared this weariness, which Sorensen returned based on the younger brother's connections to McCarthy during that time. In spite of the differences between the Kennedy family and himself, Sorensen set out to become a master of John F. Kennedy's public voice.

When Sorensen entered the arena as Kennedy's aide, he came with few connections as he had only been out of law school since June 1951. This did not prove to impede his work. Theodore White described Sorensen as "self-sufficient, taut, purposeful" and "a man of brilliant intellectual gifts," leading him to be "jealously devoted to the President and rather indifferent to personal relations." Without the interference of personal interests, Sorensen proved incredibly skillful at improving his professional network. His continuous efforts managed to pack his card file with nearly 30,000 political contacts. Though Sorensen's skillset was effective for his professional network, it did not prohibit him from turning other off from his "pessimist" personality (T. Reeves 27). His demeanor would convey that he was "rather indifferent to personal relations" (R. Schlesinger 109). While John Kennedy was a man that many seemed to get along with, Sorensen was less fortunate. Whatever his connection with others, he would find a kinship with John Kennedy that could be rivaled by few.

Sorensen had been made to believe that John Kennedy opposed the means that Joe McCarthy used to get results in the Army-McCarthy hearings. In 1954 a censure process started in the Senate, but John Kennedy failed to publicly take a stance on the matter due to invasive surgery on his back and the recovery process afterwards. As criticisms over McCarthy's conduct grew in number, Robert Kennedy was clever enough to move along. In fact, "Kennedy had had the good fortune of being recruited to work for Senator John McClellan of Arkansas, the ranking Democrat" who "gave Robert Kennedy the job of chief counsel and staff director of the committee that McCarthy had so abused," meaning he would stand in opposition with his previous employer (Palermo, *A Companion to John F. Kennedy* 100). This brought a wave of responses, of which there were plenty of reactions that questioned and distrusted Kennedy's motives in moving against a family friend. It resulted in a black mark on Kennedy's record, which would be brought up during his own political advances, receiving plenty of attention during the presidential campaign. Robert Kennedy would comment that he did not feel that McCarthy was on the right track and that he had tried in vain to bring this to the Senator's attention. Kennedy said his decision to leave simply had to do with his waning support based on McCarthy's growing recklessness in prosecuting alleged communists. With this change of heart, Kennedy began to align himself more with his brother just as he began to connect more to the political beliefs that Sorensen had grown to support. Robert Kennedy saw that the Army-McCarthy hearings unfairly targeted the lesser-privileged and set out to stop this issue. However, John Kennedy had not publicly mentioned opposition against McCarthy, so when he failed to record a vote on the matter the public was left wondering and speculating about the ties that either Kennedy brother maintained with Joe McCarthy. As one of the two top aides to John Kennedy, Ulyatt states that he "could, and should, have made greater efforts to reach Senator Kennedy and establish a proper course of

action in regard to the vote” (53). It was, after all, Sorensen who should have reached out to the recovering senator to clarify his political stance to the masses.

In 1957, Robert Kennedy became the chief counsel for the Senate Select Committee on Improper Activities in the Labor and Management Field, widely known as the “Rackets Committee,” he left his time chasing Communists behind and zeroed in on the rumored “corrupt labor unionists” alongside John, who already served on the committee (Palermo, *A Companion to John F. Kennedy* 100). If his tough persecutory style under McCarthy had not already been solidified, his hardliner approach to prosecuting labor unionists would now cement the public persona that the Robert Kennedy from the 1950s had been. While Robert Kennedy continued the trajectory expected of his public persona, so did Ted Sorensen. In 1956, John Bailey of Connecticut released the Bailey Memorandum, which was a study done by Sorensen. The memorandum explained how only a prohibitionist Democratic candidate would have beat the Republican candidate in 1928. It emphasized the fact that Catholicism was not and would not be, a detrimental religious feature of any (vice-)presidential candidate. Ulyatt notes that “here, as in the case of *Profiles in Courage*, Sorensen was willing to conceal his own influence in order to do what was best for his candidate” (63). Sorensen later admitted that he had manipulated his selection of resources to present only those that allowed a positive argument in favor of his candidate, John F. Kennedy. The timing of the memorandum’s release was also done with an eye specifically on the upcoming convention. There is a collection of criticisms surrounding the “piecemeal” treatment that historians have given the Kennedy-Sorensen relationship. It is widely known that Sorensen played a major role, in so far that he very well may have written the novel for which John Kennedy received a Pulitzer Prize. However, “when the current literature on Sorensen and Kennedy is scrutinized, one walks away with the overall impression that Sorensen was the idealist, Kennedy the pragmatist. Sorensen pushed Kennedy to take political risks, while Kennedy

tempered Sorensen's ambitiousness for sweeping change. More scholarly avenues exist beyond this binary treatment of a relationship that is even more nuanced and historically meaningful than previously understood" (Selverstone, *A Companion to John F. Kennedy*). Sorensen shows that despite minimizing his public presence, he increasingly influenced public opinion on his candidate. This evidence, therefore, supports the argument that while publicly serving only as aide, speechwriter, or strategist, Sorensen's influence reached far beyond any of these individual roles.

Unlike Kennedy, Sorensen objected to World War II rooted within his pacifist upbringing. He embodied an aversion to warfare, which proved to be a difficult point in his employment with President Kennedy. However, Sorensen was one of the main men in Kennedy's team and spent eight years close to his side before entering the Presidency. Like he did in the Bailey Memorandum and in the *Profiles in Courage* controversy, Sorensen put the needs of his candidate over his own political views. He was a very strong second fiddle to the man he would dedicate his life to, which also contributed to the fact that he was allowed to grow so close to both John and Robert Kennedy both. During the Democratic National Convention of 1956, both men joined forces in effort of getting Senator Kennedy to become the vice-presidential candidate in the presidential election of that year. As hard Robert Kennedy argued on the floor of the convention, it was not enough. John was not selected to run as vice-president during that year's election cycle. However, it improved the standing of John Kennedy to some extent and opened the way to a possible run for the presidency in 1960. After the defeat, John Kennedy assigned Ted Sorensen the role of chief speechwriter when he sensed there was a lasting dedication from the young legislative assistant. For the next four years, "they traveled across the country [...], making appearances and meeting with party leaders. On those trips the two men came to know each other well. Sorensen became a better writer and Kennedy a better speaker" (Goduti 2). Sorensen himself would write that

“day after day after day after day, [Kennedy’s] up there on the platform speaking, and I’m sitting in the audience listening, and I find out what works and what doesn’t, what fits his style” (qtd. in Weiner). Additionally, Sorensen crafted “excellent speeches” and placed “thoughtful articles carrying Kennedy’s byline in leading periodicals” (Rorabaugh 4).

Utilizing the four years to increase public recognition and popularity of the Kennedy name, Sorensen became finetuned to John Kennedy’s political needs just as Robert Kennedy had grown to do after Joe Jr.’s death.

Robert Kennedy spent time working on his own career during John Kennedy’s Senate years and was not too keen on becoming the main man to deliver his brother the ticket for the vice presidency during the 1956 convention. However, he knew that due to Joe Jr.’s death this was his role in his father’s masterplan, leaving him no other choice but to fight his hardest. Palermo acknowledges that “for thirty-year-old Robert, his experience managing John’s 1952 Senate campaign and his efforts at the 1956 convention sharpened his knowledge of what needed to be done if his brother ran for president” (*A Companion to John F. Kennedy* 100). He even spent time working with the Stevenson campaign to gain more knowledge, learning especially what not to do once John’s day finally came. The experiences that Robert had gained led him to become more vigilant in the process, focusing solely on his one goal: bringing his brother to the presidency. By the time Robert reached the ripe age of thirty-three, his brother would make his move – and so would he.

At a meeting in Palm Beach during April of 1959, Robert planned for John’s entrance into the Democratic primaries, and he pulled together a staff and doled out responsibilities” (Palermo, *A Companion to John F. Kennedy* 101). During this time, Robert Kennedy would honor the earlier claims of ruthlessness, stopping at nothing to make his brother president. He had learned from his experiences at the 1956 convention and got the best team together for the job. When John F. Kennedy announced his run for Presidency, Robert Kennedy was



appointed as his campaign manager and Stephen E. Smith, husband to their sister Jean Kennedy, would lead campaign headquarters as well as keep his eye on campaign finances. Theodore Sorensen was appointed as the third key player in the campaign and he would be the only one this high on the list that did not come with familial ties to the Kennedy family. The decisions that Sorensen made in order to protect the Kennedy name prior to this point had paid off: he had officially made it into John F. Kennedy's inner circle. Together with Robert Kennedy and Steven Smith, Sorensen would do whatever he could to ensure a win. Robert Kennedy was prepared to do the grunt work. "Whenever you see Bobby Kennedy in public with his brother," columnist Murray Kempton wrote, "he looks as though he showed up for a rumble" (qtd. in Hilty 149). When John Kennedy became the Democratic nominee, Robert had a crew of videographers follow John around during his campaign trail. The footage revealed a more personal side of the next president and allowed the campaign to provide the media with short films that were edited to target a specific audience (Palermo, *A Companion to John F. Kennedy* 101). By providing a more personal look, Kennedy became more relatable, which in turn would lead voters to be more sympathetic to his platform. During election night, it became clear that Robert Kennedy had ran another successful campaign.

There is an almost unanimous perspective on how Robert Kennedy managed to become the Attorney General during his brother's presidency after winning the election. In virtually every biographical account, each author notes that "Bobby was named attorney general at [Joe Kennedy Sr.'s] insistence" (Reeves, *A Question of Character* 225). Though this had not been entirely out of the realm of possibilities, especially after Robert's contributions to his brother's Senate campaign and his efforts to make his brother vice-presidential candidate during the 1956 convention, there was a negative response from both the media and the public. None other than Robert Kennedy himself had publicly painted this

outcome as highly unlikely, referring to it as “nepotism,” a word that would be repeated by more than a few. This is not where the political game ended for the Kennedy family, led by the family patriarch, whose name was surprisingly absent in Ted Sorensen’s written recollection of the forming of John Kennedy’s Cabinet. Instead, Sorensen addresses how the freshly appointed Attorney General “played a major role” in his brother’s process of choosing other Cabinet members (Palermo, *In His Own Right* 102; Sorensen, *Kennedy* 255).

During this time, “Sorensen had an effective, but not close relationship with Robert Kennedy” as Robert felt Sorensen performed his duties in response to John Kennedy’s demands (Ulyatt 79). He did harbor some skepticism regarding Sorensen’s signing of the 1957 affidavit, while Sorensen on the other hand did not feel the need to interfere with the tasks that Bobby performed. However, this perception of a neutral working relationship can be overstated, as both Sorensen and Robert Kennedy alike were two of the men closest to John Kennedy. Both had a hand in policymaking, where Sorensen was initially mostly focused on domestic policy and Robert Kennedy, as Attorney General and brother, would be referred to as John’s “co-president” (Heymann). Over time, especially after the Cuban Missile Crisis [double-check this], Sorensen would become more involved in other aspects of policymaking as well. Therefore, the two must have had more than just a neutral relationship as they were often found working on the same projects, meaning they must have had frequent contact and relatively fruitful communication. Two particular areas where Sorensen and Robert Kennedy would later find each other would be civil rights and opposition to the Vietnam War, which conveniently were the two main issues on which Robert Kennedy would run for the presidency himself.

It was during the Senate years that Sorensen offered personal perspectives in effort to sway the President, without bringing these concerns to a public forum. Sorensen and Kennedy did not share the same background on civil rights issues, a concern where Sorensen

seemed to align better on with Robert Kennedy during his individual political career. This could be due to the fact that John Kennedy had lived a similarly sheltered youth as Robert Kennedy, but he had not experienced the pain of losing a brother by means of a public assassination. Ulyatt reflects the idea that as a result, John Kennedy was more into the political game than the moral quest that existed within some politicians:

“Unlike Theodore Sorensen, [JFK’s] position on civil rights issues does not appear to have been motivated by a moral stance or a commitment to justice, rather he seemed to be simply voting along party lines early in his career on domestic matters that held little interest to him. His lack of any definite moral conviction about the plight of blacks became clear once he reached the Senate, as his position shifted on an issue-by-issue basis” (Ulyatt 67).

In the end, it was Sorensen who carried many of the talking points of Kennedy’s public platform and kept his own beliefs closer to his chest. Described as a “territorial writer,” Sorensen believed that “while consultation might be widespread, a single man must wield the pen” (R. Schlesinger 120). He became the frequency through which speeches were fed to the President, using a heavy hand in editing, rephrasing and removing sections of earlier drafts written by other speechwriters.

During the discussions in ExComm on the Cuban Missile Crisis in October of 1962, Robert Kennedy would recall “supporting McNamara’s position in favor of a blockade” rather than calling for a military attack (qtd. in Hillstrom 166). He paints himself in quite a positive light, which would serve him well as argument against his generally hawkish image. Kennedy would repeat this favorable recollection in *Thirteen Days*, which would be carefully edited by Sorensen before its publishing and after Kennedy’s death. However, Sheldon M. Stern punches holes in the way that Robert Kennedy described these events and the hawkish advice that he actually offered as had been recorded and kept on tape. In *the Cuban Missile*

*Crisis in American Memory: Myths versus Reality*, Stern “tears into Theodore Sorensen [...] and Arthur Schlesinger for giving Robert Kennedy far more credit as a ‘dove on the ExComm than he deserved’” (Palermo, *A Companion to John F. Kennedy* 111). Of course, memory can be deceiving, but the fact that three different men recall the situation so differently from the tape recordings shows that they might have had ulterior motives. In this case it does not truly matter whether these be political or personal. It was clear that Sorensen felt a sense of duty and care to Robert Kennedy in protecting his memory and crafting his legacy, perhaps even more so after his death.

Throughout his presidency, John Kennedy continued to struggle with various health concerns. No matter how worrying the issues at hand were, his health problems were never divulged to the public. Robert Kennedy served as John’s protector not only in his role as Attorney General, but also as younger brother, and the Kennedy family member who was closely involved in every aspect of John’s political career. Despite being highly unwilling to speak out about his brother’s health concerns, Robert realized that he needed to make a statement to settle the American public. In other words, his “private apprehensions didn’t stop him from telling reporters from the journal of the American Medical Association, *Today’s Health*, that the president was in ‘superb physical condition.’ As it was with FDR, the sensitive nature of the public’s perception of the chief executive’s health was part of the political reality of the period” (Palermo, *A Companion to John F. Kennedy* 103). Ted Sorensen approached the issue in a very similar manner, refusing to elaborate on the president’s health concerns and engaging as little as possible in any public inquiries on the president’s health struggles even after his death. It was not until the release of previously classified documents that Sorensen would confess about his knowledge of certain health scares during John Kennedy’s presidency.

On November 22, 1963, the Kennedy presidency came to a screeching halt when Kennedy was assassinated. After John F. Kennedy's assassination, both Robert Kennedy and Ted Sorensen were asked to stay on board of Lyndon B. Johnson's administration. Sorensen quickly determined that he did not feel fit for the role, continuing to serve the politics of John Kennedy, rather than the politics of the former vice president. The new president had a different voice, which certainly did not match the speechwriting Sorensen had done for John Kennedy. He was relegated to provide only snippets in Lyndon Johnson's speeches, and had to justify his writing to the men who were attuned to Johnson's voice instead. Though he had handed in his resignation the day after John Kennedy's assassination, Sorensen agreed to stay during the transitional period after President Johnson's inauguration. He officially resigned in February 1964. Robert Kennedy stayed as Attorney General until September 1964, when he resigned to run for US Senate.

To expand on Sorensen's role for John Kennedy, we can look at other speechwriters who have explained the way that they would fulfill their duties as speechwriters. This information expands on how the speechwriter responds to the individual who will vocalize the speech. In an article that refers the connection between Sorensen and John Kennedy as comparison to his own past employment, Michael Richardson, a former speechwriter for Jack Layton, the former leader of the New Democratic Party of Canada, notes that he would hear the voice of Layton "inside his head" and acknowledges the fading of his individual voice while being joined with Layton's voice, which he would emanate in his writing (4). Richardson felt this occurrence to be "intimate, in the way only a voice that has taken up residence inside your skull can be intimate" (4). While he never admitted this exact experience, Sorensen has expressed that he spent eleven years "working, traveling, and talking [with JFK], as close friends and collaborators who communicated constantly" and he would sit in the back of the room during nearly "every speech [JFK] delivered" during "the

intensive four years of pre-1960 convention travel (158). Sorensen's description of his role sounds much like how Richardson describes the presence of Layton's voice inside his head. He would ingest John Kennedy's outward mannerisms, his manner of speaking, the words he would favor and those he would not. After some time, Sorensen was likely able to hear—or at the very least, imagine—Kennedy's voice speaking the words he wrote as he was writing them. The closeness of Sorensen and Kennedy became public knowledge. It was not without reason that Sorensen would be referred to as Kennedy's "alter ego" and "intellectual blood bank," for example. However, the argument can be made that Sorensen did not simply voice John Kennedy's thoughts. Instead, they collected the expertise and wisdom of others and repackaged these ideas as theirs (or rather, John Kennedy's) ideas. In that sense, then, "Sorensen was not the originator but the transporter of ideas who translated those ideas into the politically plausible, in language full of sound logic and occasional eloquence" (Leamer 825-6). While there are two different arguments on the contributions of Kennedy and Sorensen, it remains that Sorensen was very aware of the demands of John Kennedy and grew increasingly successful in adapting to those standards.

Perhaps this is where Sorensen's relationship with John Kennedy differed from his relationship with Robert Kennedy. Where Sorensen appeared to fill the holes in John Kennedy's intellect, insight and eloquence as a sort of extension of John's mind (and vice versa, if we are to believe Sorensen), he would maintain a different connection to RFK. Sorensen's connection to the younger brother became especially evident and, yet, was permanently changed when John Kennedy was assassinated. When RFK lost his brother, he went through years of grief and mourning. He started to wear his hair like his brother and, later, when he announced the death of Martin Luther King Jr. to a crowd in Indianapolis, he would do so in his brother's long black coat. RFK had internalized some of his brother's traits as a way to cope with his grief. Sorensen fulfilled the role of John Kennedy's closest

speechwriter and was one of three that determined who would interact with President Kennedy (Windt 94). Sorensen would have been one of the people closest to the slain President, which he reflected upon later as he wrote that “it was the most deeply traumatic experience” of his life (Sorensen, *Counselor* 439). Sorensen was the person who would be most familiar with the way John carried himself, how and when he voiced his opinion and what mannerism were distinctly his. Where the two had worked with one another before, this event solidified their bond through the experience of a great loss. From here on, Sorensen would be able to connect with RFK on an even more personal level. This also reflects the Richardson’s claim that the speechwriter transcends his individuality, embracing transindividuality instead (Richardson 12). The speechwriter faces the individual he is working with and adapts his role accordingly. Sorensen was an example of the speechwriters that did so effectively—to an extent.

It was during the early days after President Kennedy’s death that “the image of a grieving Robert Kennedy was seared into the nation’s collective memory of the event” (Palermo, *A Companion to John F. Kennedy* 96). The collective memory of Robert Kennedy was perpetuated not only by images, but by his decision to continue his brother’s work. He collected the best people from his brother’s administration around him in an effort to build an even stronger platform than that of his brother. The grief of a brother surely outmatched the grief of Sorensen, but having been so connected to John Kennedy, it still made an immeasurable impact. It provided the soil for a lifelong bond, even as this bond would later also be cut short. Sorensen recognized that Robert Kennedy had the potential to reach an audience beyond the one that his brother had reached before. William Vanden Heuvel notes that:

“RFK appealed to a broad cross section of America. African Americans identified with his grief. They had come to see in him someone who understood their cries of

injustice and who was determined to rectify those problems. Being Irish American, he had a very real appeal to other Irish Americans and Catholics. The working-class people of the state of New York had a strong affinity for him. To the young, he was glamorous and a wonderful new personality on the scene with whom they could identify. He was, after all, only thirty-nine years old when he ran for the Senate” (Vanden Heuvel 87).

Sorensen needed to ensure that the connection between John Kennedy’s supporters would not be lost while the connection with minorities would also be strengthened. He had to ensure that Robert Kennedy could appeal to both, combining his previous reputation as hardliner with that of a grief-stricken politician that is irrevocably connected to the pain of others. While Sorensen was often in close proximity of John Kennedy, he spent the largest part of his interactions with Robert Kennedy over the phone until it was time to physically join Kennedy’s 1968 campaign when Kennedy announced his candidacy. Before this, he would advise Kennedy via telephone, which he did once again before the younger brother’s short announcement on the death of MLK in Indianapolis and in preparation of the speech that Kennedy would hold the day after. The relationship between Sorensen and Robert Kennedy had developed to a point where Kennedy knew he could rely on Sorensen as adviser and companion, but also as a voice of dissent when Sorensen held differing opinions. As Sorensen was employed elsewhere, his loyalty to the Kennedy family transformed. Where he had resigned his personal politics to protect John Kennedy, he had taken to publishing op-eds when he saw fit after President Kennedy’s assassination. Of course, this was done with certain reservations, for Sorensen would never betray his loyalties. He even refused to do so in his various memoirs on the time he spent with the Kennedys. However, released from his role in the White House, Sorensen did embrace a new-found freedom of voicing certain opinions, especially as he carefully voiced opposition to the LBJ administration’s foreign



policy. Perhaps this was one of the grounds on which Kennedy felt so closely connected to Sorensen, as he slowly embraced a more pacifist and liberalist approach. This is where Sorensen's transindividuality shone brightest. He acknowledged the different needs in RFK and John Kennedy and modified his role accordingly. He was aware that RFK did not have the same speechwriting needs as Adam Walinsky had adapted his writing to suit Kennedy's tone. However, RFK needed the voice that was so closely linked to that of his assassinated brother as adviser, as a strategist, and as an unconditional friend. For many years, Sorensen had not been "only a speechwriter," instead he had become a "respected political strategist and a close, trusted advisor to the Kennedy administration on a multitude of issues" (Hillstrom 154). This shift would be the foundation for Sorensen's aide to Robert Kennedy. Despite the shift in his role, there was no doubt that Sorensen was fully able to jump in and write a speech that connected the younger brother's ambitions to the former President's legacy.

When Sorensen resigned from his position in the Johnson administration, he started his work on a book about John Kennedy. The book was released in 1965. During the writing process, Robert Kennedy decided that he would run for the Senate from New York. He would be heckled and challenged during the course of his campaign. He was accused of being a carpetbagger, of relying on his dead brother's name, and on being disingenuous. In fact, Robert Kennedy's election to office was by no means guaranteed. Some of John Kennedy's advisers and allies decided to help out, ensuring that every effort was put forth to get Robert into the office he had chosen. Sorensen freed some time in his writing schedule to campaign for the younger brother, making his way from Cape Cod to New York City. Gay Talese reported in the *New York Times* of October 27, 1964, that Sorensen spoke to a tough crowd. Though the response was nothing he could not handle, Sorensen did not manage to convince this skeptical crowd:

“[Introduced as] ‘the right hand and left earlobe’ of President Kennedy, [...] Mr. Sorensen stepped forward. [...] He began, without notes and in a soft, casual manner, to tell [a crowd of Democrats who did not favor Robert Kennedy] that Robert Kennedy was the ‘closest confidant’ of John Kennedy, and was a ‘strong and steady’ force in preventing a nuclear exchange during the Cuban crisis. He commended the former Attorney General’s role in protecting Freedom Riders, in drafting the executive order on desegregated housing, [...] he then added that if Mr. Kennedy were defeated in the Senate race, it would not only discourage the young from politics but would also ‘be regarded as a repudiation of the Kennedy name’ and all it stands for [...] Robert Kennedy, he said, should be judged on what he’s done—on civil rights, on housing, on his conduct during crises—and not on what his brother did. But, Mr. Sorensen quickly added, ‘Jack Kennedy’s principles were Bobby’s’” (Talese).

Statements such as “I voted for his brother, but I’m not voting for him” and “I didn’t get anything new out of this” closed out the article, questioning the effect of Sorensen’s efforts (Talese). It is necessary to keep in mind that Sorensen, too, had to work within the political structure present in New York, which even proved difficult for a now-seasoned professional. Despite the difficulty of convincing certain crowds, it needs to be noted that Sorensen continued to do so. His dedication to the Kennedy name, and now Robert Kennedy, never wavered.

Kennedy won the New York seat with 53.3% of the vote. Various sources note that “[Sorensen] advised Robert F. Kennedy” after he “had been elected a senator from New York in 1964” with some varied success from Sorensen’s campaign efforts (Goduti 3; Sorensen 531). Under Senator Kennedy, Sorensen aided in promoting the Senator’s public persona, while seemingly adhering to the Senator’s personal politics. He would promote Robert Kennedy’s public persona much the same, but he would bring his personal politics much

more to the foreground of the playing field. He would personally comment more publicly on issues, however he would be aware of his own connections to recent political developments. This meant that Sorensen remained cautious during this time, especially as he worked towards Robert Kennedy's election to the U.S. Senate. It was of importance that Kennedy would not be associated with the negatives of John Kennedy's administration, despite his role as Attorney General. Sorensen was tasked with putting a positive spin on the past events, which he certainly tried as he appeared on stage himself.

During his time as senator, Kennedy appeared at his committee meetings, turned up to vote, and he managed to appeal to a growing group of Americans all across the nation. In 1966, he took a trip to California and formed a bond with César Chávez. His experiences in California, the conversations he had with Mexican workers and the visuals of extreme poverty all contributed to his increasing awareness of the inequality between whites and various minority groups living in the United States. With the support of people within the John Kennedy administration, including his older brother and Sorensen, Kennedy had been introduced to the importance of civil rights. During one of his visits to lesser-privileged areas, Kennedy quietly responded to former lightweight champion and Puerto Rican prizefighter José Torres' that his reasoning for visiting barrios in Spanish Harlem to learn more about the issue at hand was that he "found out something [he] never knew. [He] found out that [his] world was not the real world" (Schmitt 227).

In January 1967, Ted Sorensen was "designated to head the advisory group by State Chairman John J. Burns" in New York, a move that "was generally regarded as strengthening the Kennedy grip on Democratic affairs (Carroll). In retrospect it was the first sign that Kennedy considered a run for presidency of the United States. "What he had been clearly affected what the public would allow him to become. The rhetoric of the campaign altered the public's perception of Kennedy, but this alteration operated within set boundaries" (Lee).

Robert Kennedy was a representation of his fallen brother, and this would be both helpful and harmful to his campaign. Also, being a lingering memory of the works of that administration and his own involvement in it made Kennedy vulnerable to a different response from the general public just as much as he was vulnerable to the responses of his political allies and opponents. If he decided to run for presidency, Robert Kennedy would need to be prepared for the framework in which he would be able to operate. He did not only have to follow his own political course, he had to honor the intersections with his brother's political course as well. Both during his campaign for U.S. Senate and his 1968 campaign, Robert would use "the continuing appeal of some of his brother's ideas to strengthen his support" even as he ran against some of the aspects of his brother's policies (Ulyatt 207). In other words, Robert Kennedy had "reinvented himself in accordance with an idealized version of John Kennedy," adapting his "tough, direct and rather dislikable figure as Attorney General" to a "more compassionate, intellectual idealist who became a hero to the dispossessed and underrepresented," and in this sense had just as much a hand in creating the Kennedy legacy as Ted Sorensen (Ulyatt 207). The difference that needs to be noted here, however, is that Robert Kennedy is intrinsically linked to his brother in multiple ways. Indeed, Sorensen was (and continues to be) linked to Kennedy in his work as a sort of "vessel" for Kennedy's words and policy opinions and he certainly embodied part of this history, but he always maintains his own individuality as a person as he did not carry the Kennedy name. He did not publicly melt into the memorialization of John Kennedy that was inescapable for Robert, especially as the younger brother opted to continue his life in politics basing his platform on John's. The differences between Sorensen and Robert Kennedy created a stronger bond between the two men, as both recognized aspects of their shared history with John Kennedy in each other. Sorensen realized how the assassination had molded Robert into someone who was, what Ulyatt called that idealized version of his brother. Robert Kennedy became

someone to carry the Kennedy legacy forward and Sorensen could provide him with wisdom as well as words on his way.

During his time in university, Sorensen was an active participant in civil rights demonstrations. However, during his time with John F. Kennedy he tended to follow the policy decisions of the Senator and later, President. This approach seemed to change during his time with Robert Kennedy. Instead of holding back his personal views in an effort to promote the ideals that John Kennedy represented, Sorensen began writing memoranda to RFK to inform him on the issues at hand, which he would infuse with his personal perspectives on the issues. This change is reflective of his increased status as strategist, but also highlights how he managed to transform RFK's politics in the public sphere. While it was unthinkable that Robert Kennedy would run for the presidency immediately after his brother's death, the public outcry left the idea floating around in Sorensen's mind. It was not long after Robert was elected as Senator from New York that Sorensen began providing him with memoranda "outlining all the contingencies [Bobby] should bear in mind for a future presidential bid" (*Counselor* 531). In *Counselor*, Sorensen admits he provided a number of these memoranda on his own accord.

Despite these memoranda, Sorensen argued "forcefully against a run" up until Kennedy's announcement (Heymann 443). Some of the memoranda he had sent included but were not limited to this point of view. Ted Sorensen, while on a summer trip in Russia had told Soviet journalists that he thought Robert Kennedy's chances of "being elected president in the following year were virtually zero" (Sorensen, *Counselor* 532). Unbeknownst to him at the time, there was an Associated Press reporter who recorded these words, which would subsequently be printed in a *New York Times* article titled "Sorensen Strongly Doubts Kennedy Would Run in '68" on August 20, 1967. In *Counselor*, Sorensen writes that he "had initially assumed that [his] career at the [law] firm would be temporary," that it would be "a

base for interesting private and public activities until 1972 or later when I hoped and expected that Robert Kennedy would run for president, win, and bring [Sorensen] back to Washington” (491). One of the main reasons that Sorensen was highly skeptical about Kennedy’s success and hoped that he would refuse to run as soon as in 1968, was his direct opposition to President Johnson. Sorensen knew that Johnson was incredibly talented at playing the political game and was a dangerous candidate, let alone incumbent. Sorensen would refer to this opinion as “political realism” in his book (532). Overall, Sorensen had prepared Kennedy as best as he could to entering the 1968 campaign, despite his personal wish that Kennedy would hold out until 1972 when his chances were better. While Robert made the decision to run in 1968 without the initial support of significant individuals like Sorensen, his brother Ted and his wife Ethel, it can be said that Sorensen still planted the seed that led to Robert considering the option.

RFK kept Adam Walinsky as his speechwriter during his Senate years as well as his presidential campaign, yet Walinsky felt the threat of Sorensen’s hiring for the presidential campaign. Sorensen writes that during this time he received a report that “the particularly brilliant and liberal Adam Walinsky, [...] thought he would be Bobby’s ‘Ted Sorensen’—and then the real one came along” (Sorensen, *Counselor* 539). Over time, Kennedy would increase the frequency with which he passed Walinsky’s efforts on to Sorensen and Schlesinger Jr. over time. They would, then, review Walinsky’s drafts for further opinions and revisions. This shows that Kennedy had a certain level of trust in his older brother’s former advisors that was not necessarily matched by some of the men he had hired himself. What complicated the relationship between Sorensen and Kennedy prior to the presidential campaign, was Sorensen’s geographical distance from Kennedy. At this time, he resided in New York while Kennedy spent most of his time in Washington, D.C. This did not seem to be much of an issue, however, as he knew Sorensen’s telephone number and he would

“[check] with them on everything he [did] to see what they [thought]” (Reeves, “The People Around Bobby” 224). Soon enough, this would change, and Sorensen would spend far more time in Washington D.C.

Sorensen’s experiences during his years as John Kennedy’s aide, speechwriter, and advisor made him an especially efficient politician. He displayed his skills during his conversations with Lyndon Johnson, for example. During the Kennedy administration, Sorensen functioned as a kind of mediator between many of the people working for John Kennedy, including Robert Kennedy. For example, on the matter of civil rights, Sorensen would maintain an agreeable tone to gather additional information from Lyndon Johnson (see the transcript of Sorensen – LBJ phone conversation, 3 June 1963 in Theodore C. Sorensen Papers, located at the JFK Library). Hereby he leaned on his progressive and liberal associations. Sorensen was one of the few men in the Kennedy administration that had built up a trusting and respectful working relationship with Johnson. He would utilize skills within this realm of power and influence again during RFK’s senate run and could have proven to be of vital importance if Kennedy had been chosen to run on the Democratic ticket in 1968. In fact, Sorensen served as Robert Kennedy’s right-hand man during the anti-Vietnam discussions and courtesy visits with President Johnson. Aside from his skills in communicating with those who were not too fond of Robert Kennedy, Sorensen also moderated the flow of communication and information to John Kennedy, which he began to do for Robert Kennedy after the older brother had been assassinated, Sorensen proved not to be above the manipulation of the flow of information, which he may have also used to promote his own political agenda under both John Kennedy and to greater extent under RFK, as well as after their deaths.

Of course, sometimes efforts would be made that did go through as Kennedy and Sorensen intended. On March 14, 1968, Ted Kennedy made an appointment for the two men

to meet with Secretary of Defense Clark Clifford to discuss anti-Vietnam views and propose forming a presidential commission, which in turn would provide a guarantee that Kennedy would not run for the Democratic ticket. The result was that “Kennedy and Sorensen went away thinking that Clifford liked the idea. But several hours later, he called Sorensen and, with Kennedy listening in, said the President had rejected the plan” (Palermo, *In His Own Right* 135). If “President Johnson signaled a clear-cut willingness to seek a wider path to peace in Vietnam,” Kennedy claimed that he would have stayed out of the race (Wicker 1). Kennedy later marked the night that he and Sorensen heard back from Clifford as the night when he officially decided he would run in the 1968 presidential campaign.



## 1968 Presidential Campaign

It took quite some time for Sorensen to get on board with Robert Kennedy entering the race for the Democratic ticket. In fact, in November of 1967, the *New York Times* reported that Sorensen had stated “nothing would be ‘more stupid and self-defeating than’ to run Kennedy against Johnson or Humphrey” in an article by Terence Smith (“Sorensen Advises Same Ticket in 1968”). He would maintain this kind of sentiment at various points during the year until Robert Kennedy contacted his closest confidants, including Sorensen, to make them aware of the fact that he would be making his announcement on March 16. It appears that Sorensen had a few reasons for his beliefs, including his lack of faith in Kennedy’s success if he was pitted against the incumbent. Besides that, Sorensen held a fear that Robert would meet the same fate as John. He also simply thought that he was not yet ready for the battle. He would not be the only one arguing against a run in 1968. Adam Walinsky, Robert’s main speechwriter at this time, who was a part of the younger idealists believed the opposite and encouraged the Senator to run. According to Lawrence O’Donnell in *Playing with Fire: The 1968 Election and the Transformation of American Politics*, Robert Kennedy would listen to all parties, but he was most inclined to hear Sorensen as he had “more or less grown up listening to Ted Sorensen” even as he told Kennedy that the “idea of challenging Johnson [...] was dead wrong” (83). No matter his methods, ultimately Sorensen’s arguments fell on deaf ears. Robert Kennedy had decided he could not be stopped in his fight against the continuation of the Vietnam War and lasting poverty within the American border.

Kennedy’s announcement came after a quick public turnaround. Where Robert Kennedy still declared that he would not well into January, all signs pointed towards the opposite by the middle of March. As a result of Kennedy’s indecision, some campaigners who had argued strongly in favor of Kennedy joining the race earlier had already committed

to Eugene McCarthy. Bringing together those that had not committed to another candidate, Kennedy's team consisted of the Old Guard that had worked with his brother, his own younger senate staff, and a few reputable stragglers. This brought another set of complications. There were various sets of egos among the three "groups" that required positions of a certain status. Sorensen was one of the egos on the team and so were others like Arthur Schlesinger Jr. and Adam Walinsky. The Kennedy campaign opted to keep titles out of the job description, which negatively affected the structure and, consequently, the effectivity of the campaign. Without a clear leader, though Sorensen had been named as campaign manager and strategist in the media, there were several captains at the helm. This led to a muddled start of the campaign with conflicting interests and misguided efforts. Whatever the platform of the campaign grew to be, Kennedy had learned a lot about the state of the U.S. and was focused on doing the right thing: defeating LBJ in an effort to stop the Vietnam War and improving civil rights. Walinsky, part of the new guard and a good example of the new politics which focused particularly on one issue, argued that Kennedy should run on an anti-Vietnam platform. Sorensen still maintained his personal view which supported pacifism over any other option, but he had become more nuanced during his time with John Kennedy. He, thus, maintained a more subdued resignation to the idea. In the Netflix documentary series *Bobby Kennedy for President*, Peter Edelman states that Kennedy "had learned from his father that you didn't do things that you weren't going to win. Getting his own brother nominated as president, using all the old tools. But the new politics said, 'you do the cause, whether you win or not.' And the cause, in his mind, [was] the pursuit of justice." Kennedy felt that there was no other option but to run. The varying opinions among those involved with Kennedy's campaign provided fertile ground for discussion. Accounts of Kennedy's final discussions before announcing his candidacy reflect this drive. Sorensen did not deny his true feelings entirely, especially in private. On the morning of the

announcement, Sorensen reportedly noted that Kennedy was “looking for someone who [agreed] with him” as he answered someone requesting Kennedy’s whereabouts (O’Donnell 183). The finetuning of Kennedy’s platform during the short-lived campaign reflected the many distinctive opinions among the men leading the effort. Though the campaign struggled to pick up steam from the very beginning, “Bobby was never accepted as someone whose career would play out in the Senate. He was always seen as a possible, probable president. The issues he chose to embrace had national and international implications. His determination to have the war on poverty be successful reflected his personal passion against inequality, blocked opportunity, discrimination and injustice” (Vanden Heuvel 88). It was Kennedy’s platform that drew the attention of the people, but the confused nature of the campaign very well may have lost the support of some.

As much as the issues that Kennedy discussed resonated with the American minorities, he also depended heavily on something that he could not avoid: his brother’s assassination. Kennedy became the visualization of John Kennedy’s “what ifs” simply by being a visible surviving relative that had always been biologically, visually and politically connected to the president. Richard Bradley, author of *American Political Mythology from Kennedy to Nixon*, “the case of Bobby Kennedy” was invigorated by the imagining of what would have happened “if JFK had lived.” If it had not been enough that Robert Kennedy had adopted some of his brother’s traits after his assassination, he had “all the symbolic baggage of the dead leader transferred to [him]” and so, publicly, he became a reincarnation of the politics of his brother (91). What strengthened this imagery once again, was the location of Robert Kennedy’s announcement, as well as his journey towards it. As Kennedy makes his way out of his home in Hyannis Port, he gets in a car with two men: Ted Sorensen and Ted Kennedy. Senator Edward M. Kennedy of Massachusetts, Robert’s younger brother, has his own political career, but appears to fulfill the expected role of younger Kennedy brother.

Starting with John Kennedy supporting Joe, to Robert supporting John, and now Ted supporting Robert, the older brother receives unconditional support from the younger, while the younger brother receives a promise of a boost in status once the eldest wins the political game set up by their father. Sorensen's role here is dependent on this earlier construction. While Ted Kennedy fills the slot of the younger brother, John Kennedy and RFK became two of the same, with Robert Kennedy being referred to as John's "co-president" (Heymann). Sorensen witnessed this relationship closely. As he was more familiar with the mannerism, voice and public persona of John Kennedy than anyone, he became another integral part of the shared embodiment of John Kennedy after his passing. Therefore, it may be said that Sorensen embodied another part of John Kennedy, and thus connected to Robert Kennedy in a new way as his sorrow made him an extension of his own brother's memory.

When Robert Kennedy left the house to announce his candidacy in the same spot where his brother announced his, he was joined in his white convertible by his brother, Edward Kennedy, and Ted Sorensen (Reeves 25). Others such as Arthur Schlesinger and Adam Walinsky, Robert Kennedy's speechwriter, piled into other cars. With Edward at the wheel and Sorensen in the back, Kennedy made some final adjustments to his statement. The fact that Sorensen was the one to join Kennedy in this moment, instead of Schlesinger or Walinsky, displays the important role that Sorensen played in RFK's political life. Sorensen had been John's right-hand man and now served, in a reduced speechwriting capacity, as right-hand man for Robert. In the same respect it displays how Sorensen had gained a freedom to speak about his own political convictions without damaging the Kennedy name. Here, Sorensen had, on multiple occasions, voiced disagreement with Robert entering the primary race, yet he could reframe these comments into a believable change of heart. Sorensen provided Kennedy with unwavering support as soon as he announced, which Kennedy knew he could rely on. Additionally, Sorensen's presence in the car shows the trust

between Kennedy, his younger brother, and Sorensen, which seemed to reflect the trust John Kennedy held for Sorensen when he appointed him as one of three leaders and the only non-family member in his presidential campaign in 1959. It was a significant moment that seemed to repeat an unfinished part in history, which would be followed up by an even more reminiscent public announcement.

After months of speculation among the American public and an equal amount of time of internal conflict, the time came for Kennedy to publicly announce his decision. Robert Kennedy “strode into the Senate Caucus Room to announce he was entering the remaining Democratic primaries to challenge the incumbent president from his own party,” which he did “in the same spot where John F. Kennedy had stood just over eight years earlier” (Palermo, *A Companion to John F. Kennedy* 111). This was the moment where Robert stepped into the national limelight, by himself, as an extension of his brother’s memory. He brought with him a carefully crafted speech. The same speech he had gone over with Sorensen and his brother Ted, Senator of Massachusetts, while sitting in a car outside the Senate building just moments earlier. News reporters would make note of this scene, offering that Sorensen would “undoubtedly play a key role in the [...] political struggle within the Democratic party” that was about to erupt (*New York Times*). Sorensen would support Kennedy in the same article. Sorensen defended Kennedy’s reasons for entering the 1968 race, which was sooner than Sorensen saw fit. He expressed his full support for Kennedy’s decision to run, stating that Kennedy “[felt] he [had] to [make this decision] and I appreciate that because that’s the way I feel about the country,” while also emphasizing his belief in the success of Kennedy’s campaign. In fact, this is where Sorensen develops his role as adviser and speechwriter. Sorensen expressed his hope to “do something about [what happens in Vietnam]” (*New York Times*). Here, he presents a sort of transition process from the “old politics” as they were still demonstrated by the John F. Kennedy administration, where

Sorensen was still a lot like the speechwriter who was a man of influence behind the scenes but hardly ever on the public stage, into the “new politics” where the Robert Kennedy campaign would target specific issues on which to run, where even the advisers, strategists, aides and workers would have more freedom to declare their opinions. This is a development in politics that is still very much present in the constant struggle between Democrats and Republicans today.

In terms of style, Robert Kennedy’s announcement less like his typical speech style and more like that of his brother. Since he made his announcement of candidacy in the exact same room as his brother had done, it was eerily reminiscent of his deceased brother. This brought both its benefits and drawbacks. The differing style would reemphasize the claim that Robert Kennedy had two sides to him, a direct and problem-solving side which was a less “lofty” and more “anguished” side than the ones written by Sorensen that would be much more like the speeches made by his brother John (Hall Jamieson). However, the tone seemed to make Kennedy seem less sincere, as it was unlike the tone that people were used to. Kennedy relied upon his direct manner of speaking and would need to use this in order to address the policy issues he was up against. Sorensen had brought enough of his political baggage into the speech to weigh the announcement down with memories of the past, which was a problem that existed among the entire Old Guard that worked for the Kennedy campaign. Arthur Schlesinger wrote “in an incisive memorandum on ‘the old politics and the new,’ [...] that RFK ‘must not appear to be surrounded by figures from the past’ (qtd. in Sorensen 539). Kennedy’s announcement speech was bogged down by exactly that, as evidenced in the *New York Times* the following day. The news report on his announcement would be titled “Scene is the Same, but 8 Years Later” highlighting the various connections to John Kennedy’s announcement those eight years earlier (Herbers).

After announcing his campaign, Robert asked Sorensen to officially join his campaign in the role of campaign manager. More specifically, Robert Kennedy asked Sorensen to move to Washington D.C. to manage the national campaign from its headquarters (Sorensen, *Counselor* 538). Clearly, this role built on the transformation that Sorensen personally made from “mere” speechwriter during John Kennedy’s initial years, to an invaluable contributor on platform, policy, public image and voice by the time of John Kennedy’s assassination. Robert recognized that Sorensen was capable of much more than simply speechwriting and wanted to make good use of this, just like his brother had done. Robert employed his own speechwriter, one that had already begun to match Robert’s voice instead of John’s voice. This was not to say that Sorensen was left completely out of the speechwriting aspect of the campaign, he would be an important part in bridging Robert’s voice and public image with the idealized memory of John. Sorensen’s efforts were strategically applied where they were needed most, while occasionally being asked by Robert for “help or advice on speeches” (*Counselor* 539). Sorensen’s main role was to “[advise, strategize, analyze delegate numbers, to speak on Robert’s behalf and to contact Democratic leaders]” (*Counselor* 539).

This description sounds straightforward, yet it was anything but. The hiring of Sorensen, the younger Walinsky and Jeff Greenfield, as well as other men from the Kennedy administration like Pierre Salinger, illustrated the beginnings of a chaotic campaign. Sorensen later looked back at himself, Ted Kennedy and Stephen Smith as the three main men of the campaign who would have arguments and differing opinions like any other Triade. Joseph Kraft, columnist for national newspapers, famously said that “there were more chiefs than Indians” and “it was very hard to fit all these people together” (Boomhower 53). Even the three leaders in the national headquarters engaged in discussions over the next move, so it was nearly a given that the rest of the campaign reflected this kind of chaos. There were many egos to please and too little room to do this effectively for each and every one of them.

Friction occurred often during the short-lived campaign, with Arthur Schlesinger Jr. notably writing a memo in full capitalization wondering if “ANYONE [was] IN CHARGE OF ANYTHING, ANYWHERE” (Schlesinger, *Robert Kennedy and His Times* 864). In the case of Sorensen, his personality was one that was reportedly not the easiest to work with, despite his seemingly effortless working relationship with the Kennedy brothers. The *New York Times* reported that Sorensen as a political adviser was “a cool political pragmatist” who had “gained the reputation for being arrogant, blunt, annoyingly cerebral, chilly and aloof,” while also accusing him of lacking any sense of humor, despite reportedly displaying a glimpse of a sense of humor only when least expected. If this was not enough, he was also described as “a tense, thin-lipped man who suffers from ulcers” (*New York Times*). It appeared many of his traits were directly linked to his dedication to the Kennedy brothers, and his outward appearance was as unimpressive as his personality was unappealing. Having become the “behind-the-scenes” man and “invisible speechwriter,” Sorensen seemed to have signed himself up for an unwavering commitment to the Kennedy name long before the 1968 campaign.

When Sorensen signed up, he knew exactly what he had gotten himself into. His previous memoranda had painted the picture of a divisive campaign, one that would draw in voters from President Johnson like it would from Eugene McCarthy. It weakened not only the campaigns of the other candidates, but it ensured that the Kennedy campaign would fight from a weakened position as long as the campaign lasted. Sorensen needed to find the tools to change this trajectory into a more successful run. He needed to weaken the incumbent and strengthen the bridging candidate that Robert Kennedy could become. This would become even more important as President Johnson announced he would not run for reelection. When Kennedy’s main opponent became Eugene McCarthy, his campaign needed to change its approach. McCarthy was an anti-war candidate to a bigger degree than Kennedy was, so



running on that platform would likely cost him the democratic ticket. As Kennedy had long learned, there were incredible levels of inequality within the United States, often hinging on racial differences between the majority and many minorities.

In an effort to build a campaign that fought for civil rights without being as overtly anti-racism to keep the vote from more moderate Democrats, Kennedy began building his campaign around the war against poverty. This approach, including his past record on race, such as his efforts for African Americans and Mexican workers in California, continued to draw more voters from various minority groups. Sorensen had been at the base of these policies as he had contributed the memoranda that expanded Robert Kennedy's perspective on the development of these matters in the American society. Of course, this also meant that Kennedy had to answer questions on his record, including the things that caused an uproar, which he would have rather left in the past. Here, Sorensen played a key role, as he was one of the men who had been by Kennedy's side through most of this political record and knew exactly how to make the man tick. Just as he had for John Kennedy, Sorensen "[prepared] RFK for press interviews and debates, including the list of questions that he should be ready to answer" (Sorensen, *Counselor* 539). He certainly did not hold back, asking questions that went beyond the political agenda that Kennedy wanted to promote and reached for both personal and political questions:

"What accomplishments do you claim? Does that include wiretapping Martin Luther King? How do you explain your association with Senator Joe McCarthy? What is your position on population control in the Third World, in view of your own 11 children? Why did you not run for President until Gene McCarthy in New Hampshire cleared the way?" (Sorensen, *Counselor* 539).

These questions drew out the worst parts of Kennedy history, including that of John Kennedy's presidency. Here, it is clear that there were negative sides to Robert Kennedy

having been involved in his brother's political career. He may not have had much of a political record solely under his own name, but he had definitely contributed to some of the most devastating acts that he was running directly against.

Sorensen worked on the campaign mostly from outside of the public eye at the national headquarters in Washington D.C. He would arrange meetings with key people, such as prominent congressmen in various states, to advance the expanding campaign. He was one of the only men associated with John Kennedy that was a welcomed guest by President Johnson, someone that Johnson believed he could confide in. During the early days of the campaign, Sorensen met with leaders from various states. These meetings were essential in understanding not only the will of the general population, but of the bureaucracy as well. On March 19, Sorensen met with three key Democratic congressmen, John Brademas, Lee Hamilton and Andy Jacobs, to determine whether Kennedy should enter the Indiana primary. The men indicated that Kennedy would be able to beat Eugene McCarthy but would have to increase his efforts with the people of Indiana to hold his own against Governor Roger Branigin (Boomhower 36). Assumably the main strategist of the 1968 campaign, these types of conversations were designated to Sorensen. Sorensen would not be the first one to speak from a stage directly to the general population, instead focusing particularly on relations with leaders all across the nation. Sorensen's role as John Kennedy's speechwriter still held some merit with members of the Democratic Party, so he used his ties to ask important questions that determined the trajectory of the campaign. The three leaders gave Sorensen the answers he was looking for: Robert Kennedy needed to enter the Indiana primary.

The Indiana primary would become the first toe-to-toe between Kennedy and McCarthy, if the Kennedy campaign decided to put Kennedy on the ballot. However, Sorensen was among a gaggle of campaigners who believed that Kennedy should sit out in Indiana. Despite the encouragement that Kennedy could win if he allocated the appropriate

amount of campaign efforts in the state, there was a realistic chance it would still not be enough. Keep in mind that at this point no Kennedy had ever lost any election they had taken part in. The pressure of a loss made Sorensen (as well as Ted Kennedy and others) hesitant to put in the effort in a more conservative state, especially with lacking support from the Democratic Party (Boomhower 42). Another face-off between the various groups of egos within the RFK campaign took place, but the end result is clear: Kennedy won his first primary in Indiana.

One of the reasons that the Kennedy campaign pulled this off, was because they had the sense to call upon the services of John Bartlow Martin, a reporter who had worked with Schlesinger during Adlai Stevenson's presidential campaigns in 1952 and 1956, as well as in John Kennedy's 1960 campaign. He was tasked with finding out how the representation of Kennedy should change to improve his news coverage. Martin highlighted the importance of avoiding the "frantic nature of Kennedy's early days on the campaign trail" as he noted that the typical Hoosier did not want to see a popularity run with a shirtless hopeful, but a calm and collected, rather conservative leader who would bring both peace in Vietnam and peace in the cities (Boomhower 75). While the Indiana primary drew closer, the Kennedy campaign revved up its efforts to improve their candidate's image as Martin conveyed his findings to Sorensen. A significant example of Sorensen's role here was to make RFK look more dignified. Sorensen later recalls the notes he left to himself on the topic, here in relation to the televised debate with Eugene McCarthy: "In clothes and haircut, look old, distinguished, serious, dignified... Make [McCarthy] look far out, unrealistic, making you look more conservative... do not recite too many agonies—bloated bellies" (*Counselor* 540). The effort here illustrates the hope for a better future that Sorensen wanted RFK to embody in order to persuade voters, one that looked back at and drew from the public image of Kennedy's charismatic older brother.

Not only did Kennedy brush up his public image by improving his outward appearance and an improved pool of speechwriters, he would also be coached on additional phrases that he could use to appeal to his crowds. Among the state's voters, there had been a lingering sense that the Indiana primary election did not actually matter. Ted Sorensen observed this sentiment and set out to resolve it. He realized that if he could make voters feel like their efforts made a difference on the national level, he could improve Kennedy's standing with Indiana's voters. This is when he instructed Robert Kennedy to use a short, but effective statement to engage his audiences. During nearly every one of his speeches, Kennedy needed to state that Indiana could help choose a president, which he did. It appears that the Hoosiers responded well to being informed "that they had a chance to pick a president" and Sorensen made one of his first major contributions to the campaign strategy as the campaign took shape (Boomhower, *John Bartlow Martin* 273).

Another reason that Robert Kennedy managed to pull off the win, was his public response to the assassination of Martin Luther King. Kennedy was notified of the shooting before taking off on a plane to begin campaigning on the ground in Indianapolis. However, by the time his plane had touched down in that state, MLK had sadly passed away. What Robert Kennedy decided to do next changed the way in which the black population of Indianapolis responded to the news. Kennedy was scheduled to make a speech at a rally after visiting the campaign headquarters in the city. He decided to send his wife Ethel to the hotel, cancelled his appearance at the headquarters, and headed to the site of the rally where people had gathered. Adam Walinsky had arrived in Indianapolis before Kennedy and had written a draft for Kennedy should he decide to speak. By the time he made it to Kennedy at the site of the rally, Kennedy already knew exactly what he wanted to say. He refused Walinsky's draft with a "curt hand signal" and proceeded with his own notes instead (Klein 12). While he was not guaranteed any protection by the police or secret service during his speech, Kennedy

stood on a podium on the bed of a truck parked among the crowd. According to those who could provide him with protection, Kennedy was risking his life in this crowd and they would not have anything to do with it. Yet Robert Kennedy stood among the crowd and with words that were entirely his own, while wearing John's long black coat, Kennedy publicly addressed the event of his brother's assassination for the first and only time. Quoting Aeschylus and asking for a non-violent reaction against another assassination, Kennedy's speech was likely a large contributor to the quiet atmosphere in Indianapolis that evening as riots erupted all over the rest of the nation. Riots took place in 76 cities across America over the course of the next few days. In total "46 people died, 2,500 were injured and 28,000 were jailed" but none of this occurred in Indianapolis (Klein 12). The theme of Robert Kennedy's campaign began to truly evolve into "reconciliation [between the divisions that occurred between all groups of people in America]" and this is exactly what Kennedy created when he noted that his brother, too, had been assassinated by a white man (Arnone). Robert Kennedy showed a dramatically different version of himself from the man that had wiretapped Martin Luther King. No Sorensen or Walinsky could have written a speech more sincere than the careful words that Kennedy spoke that evening, and it gained him increased support among blacks across the nation.

Despite the chaos with which Robert Kennedy's campaign for the Democratic ticket began on March 16, 1968, it will be remembered for the dignified, sincere image that the campaign managed to construct. Part of this is based on Kennedy's relation to John Kennedy, part of it is based on his development from the feared hunter of Communists to a liberal civil rights leader who worked incredibly hard to unite the nation, and part of it is his memory. It is also rooted within the "trinity of killings" that punctured America in the 1960s, and the construct of this memory relies therefore on the positive legacy of these three men who were brutally murdered while working towards a better America (Klein). Robert Kennedy's

campaign, as disheveled as it may have seemed to those on the inside, would become eternalized as the last, and possibly best, of its “gracious, eloquent and true” kind (Klein). Ted Sorensen, as strategist, analyst, speechwriter and consultant contributed greatly to the shaping of this campaign. While Sorensen did not decide that Kennedy would stand up on that truck bed in Indianapolis, but alongside others he had ensured that the platform for the campaign had been structured in such a way that Kennedy’s strengths and his ideas were perfectly represented. This connection shone brightly during that speech. Kennedy’s “personal doubts and rigorous internal moral colloquy that had burdened him throughout his life suddenly became a sword. He was able to take chances—to challenge his audiences and himself—in a way most politicians never would” (Klein).

After this speech, Kennedy reached out to Sorensen to write a draft for the speech that he would deliver in Cleveland the next day. Though Kennedy had managed just fine on his own the day before, the particular nature of that speech meant that he could not create off-the-cuff speeches like that for every occasion. Sorensen took this opportunity to write a piece, or rather, scribble “as quickly as [he] could on scraps of paper,” that would address his own response to MLK’s assassination, a process which he later acknowledged had been done “with the assassination of King in [his] mind, but the assassination of John F. Kennedy in [his] heart (Sorensen, *Counselor* 542). In this sense, when Sorensen wrote his piece for the Cleveland speech, he did exactly what Robert Kennedy had done the previous day. For the purpose of the Cleveland event, Robert Kennedy’s own speechwriting team had written a speech as well. Sorensen’s paragraphs were added as portion of that speech. Sorensen noted in *Counselor* that this speech “carried [his] own deepest convictions then and now” (543).

As he did in Indiana, Kennedy also went on to win Sorensen’s home state of Nebraska. Here, Sorensen called in the assistance of his brother. Where Philip Sorensen’s political career would have been ended over a photo of Robert Kennedy hosting a fundraiser

for his campaign two years earlier, his governorship had ended, and he was now free to pull strings in order to return the favor to both Kennedy and his own brother. Philip's contributions played a significant role in Kennedy's win. After the win, Kennedy had to move on to a state where it would be a close race between Kennedy and McCarthy.

In Oregon, the expectations were initially quite high. Kennedy was confident that he could win. He believed he needed to win to keep his chances of winning the Democratic ticket alive. Counting on winning the state, Kennedy had "assigned some of his top staff to work elsewhere" (Schumacher 256). However, this turned out to be a premature decision. Sorensen, enthusiastic like other top staff excluded from the Oregon campaign, was not involved with the Oregon campaign that resulted in a deception. Kennedy decided to let Edith Green, Oregon congresswoman, run his campaign. Despite her history in Congress and her success with John Kennedy's Oregon campaign in 1960, she was not nearly as successful or effective this time around. Green's belief in the success of Robert Kennedy's campaign was highly questionable, as Edward Schmitt noted in *President of the Other America*: "When a Kennedy strategist asked Green if the state's ghettos were organized, she defiantly pronounced, 'There are no ghettos in Oregon.' Kennedy's Senate aides were horrified by her selection, and Green herself was less than enthusiastic" (207). Sitting comfortably among the more moderate Democrats, Green's name did not evoke the same progressive emotion as Robert Kennedy did himself. On top of that, Green held no great national power and was not really a household name. During that era, the name Sorensen would have drummed up far more interest. Taking into consideration Green's moderate political views and her unenthusiastic leadership, there was more at work against the Kennedy campaign in Oregon.

Robert Kennedy seemed to rub Oregonians the wrong way, no matter what he tried. For a city as big as Portland, the campaign was extremely understaffed with just "two desks and three workers" (Schumacher 256). Kennedy did not appeal to the political officials within

the state, including the mayor of Portland. He was reluctant to change his mind about Kennedy as he “had never forgiven Bobby for investigating racketeering there a decade before.” (Tye 487). The same sentiment existed among the Teamsters, the labor union suspected of foul play, which Robert Kennedy had tried very hard to bring to their knees. The media did not improve these views. Larry Tye notes in *Bobby Kennedy: The Making of a Liberal Icon* that:

“Every media image of Bobby hit the wrong note—diving into the icy Pacific in May [...] constituted showboating to locals who didn’t wade in until August; being mobbed by blacks and Chicanos in neighboring California, which didn’t play well in a place where minorities were just 2 percent of the population; pushing for federal gun controls, which were anathema to the many Oregonians convinced it was their God-given right to pack a pistol or shotgun; and being lambasted by Drew Pearson for ordering phone taps five years before on Martin Luther King, Jr. which offended a population passionate about their civil liberties” (487-8).

The one opportunity to face McCarthy during campaigning efforts in Oregon left Kennedy with a dented public image. When McCarthy and Kennedy were both campaigning in a park above Portland, a young McCarthy aide approached Kennedy’s convertible to see if the Senator was interested in a confrontation. Kennedy responded with a snippy response before he turned to his driver and “ordered [him] to floor it” (Tye 488). Having been caught by TV crews, this further contributed to the negative media image.

In addition to the reluctance within Oregon politics and its media, Kennedy simply did not appeal to the Oregonians. Made up of a homogenous population, a campaign platform that played into the needs of minorities did not fit with the “middle-class, college educated, left-leaning independent, and comfortable” people of Oregon (Schumacher 257). Kennedy grew increasingly aware of this issue, having reportedly said “let’s face it, I appeal best to



people who have problems” (qtd. in Tye 488). After all this negative attention, one of the major problems of the Kennedy campaign at this point was the fact that Kennedy was fighting with someone who had a nearly identical platform. The fight over policymaking detracted from the fight against the issues. As Tye simply put it, “two candidates who should have been joining forces to take on the establishment had somehow ended up duking it out with each other” (Tye 489). Kennedy lost by six percentage points. The experience of being disliked, having put too little effort in campaign efforts in the state, and the error in his response to the McCarthy aide led Kennedy to blame himself for the loss in Oregon. Kennedy would look back on his failure deciding that he had misjudged his appeal in “one giant suburb,” the disposition by which he would remember Oregon (Schmitt 207).

After being pressed on the results in Oregon, Kennedy said that “except for the distinction of being the first Kennedy to lose. [He’d] just as soon have passed.” The loss was a reminder that the efforts of the campaign and all its workers and volunteers mattered significantly. Kennedy could not rely merely on his family name in order to reel in another win. When Kennedy acknowledged the defeat, he also acknowledged the important role of everyone involved with his campaign. By doing so, he showed that “this Kennedy might be a bit more fragile and less ruthless than [imagined]” as he accepted his defeat in Oregon with grace (Tye 490). With a newfound fragility, Kennedy reinvested energy in a push for the involvement of his top staff. Refusing to go down with a fight, Kennedy implemented their skills from the start and moved his attention to California.

One week before the California primary, Kennedy asked Sorensen to fly to California to campaign all across the state. These increased efforts even among high-ranking campaign workers were a result of the painful loss in Oregon. While Kennedy had been advised by around half of his California advisers to “tone things down,” he decided to “go down swinging, not playing it safe the way he had in Oregon” (Tye 490-1). Sorensen later noted

how Kennedy had drawn an increasing amount of support from people of all walks of life throughout the growth of his campaign. This proved fruitful in California, when Kennedy decided to once again increase his attention for the minority groups that had been only a small portion of the population in Oregon. Sorensen noticed the popularity of his candidate buzzing through the Golden State. As Joe Klein noted the “gracious, eloquent, and true” nature of Kennedy’s campaign in *Politics Lost*, so noted Sorensen the “idealism, energy and enthusiasm” that such a campaign awakened in the American people (544).

On May 17, 1968, the San Bernardino Sun reported that Thomas C. Sorensen, Ted Sorensen’s brother, quit his job as Vice President of the University of California to help the campaign in preparation of the California primary. For Thomas Sorensen, the decision to quit his day job in favor of campaigning for Kennedy must have been easier with the thought that his successful brother supported the presidential hopeful. Kennedy, who was raised with strong sibling ties, profited from the efforts by another Sorensen with decent standing. Guided by the same parental advice, Thomas Sorensen’s contributions aided in the positive reception to Kennedy among Californians who were not part of the minority groups that Kennedy was already so popular among. Though the competition was tough in California, Kennedy and Sorensen knew there was no other option but to win. As a result of Kennedy’s late entry into the race, the campaign would have likely been too weak to win the primaries if they lost another state. Kennedy had already noted this in the press after his loss in Oregon, insinuating that the campaign would have to be suspended.

Luckily for Kennedy, the campaign managed to pull off another win, despite only winning the state’s primary by a small margin of four percent. Unfortunately, his race ended that night when just after his victory speech, he was assassinated in the kitchen of the Ambassador Hotel. Between his moment of victory and his murder, Robert Kennedy “had for a brief moment stepped out from beneath his brother’s shadow to become a national leader in

his own right” (Palermo, *A Companion to John F. Kennedy* 112). It seemed as if for the first time since he had entered the race, Kennedy believed he could become the next President of the United States. Before going out to declare victory, Kennedy “held a series of one-on-ones with Smith, Sorensen, Walinsky, and other trusted lieutenants, and began charting plans for the campaign ahead” (Tye 495). By sharing his thoughts on the future of his campaign with these trusted few, Kennedy left them with an impression of the expectations he had for the future of his campaign, which indirectly informed them of his vision for a possible presidency. Since Kennedy was the last one in a line of political leaders assassinated for their affiliation, his “abbreviated 1968 presidential run has assumed mythical proportions in the American memory. His campaign has been romanticized in part because of its tragic end, but also because of the foreign and domestic crises that made politics in that year seem a matter of life and death” (Schmitt 1). William Vanden Heuvel writes that:

“RFK’s politics turned out to be prophetic. A year after his voice was silenced, the bombing of North Vietnam had stopped, the president of the United States had offered the Vietcong a chance to participate in elections, the plight of the California grape pickers was on the cover of *Time* magazine, and a Native American has been chosen to head the Bureau of Indian Affairs. [...] By all, he will be remembered as a generous, wise, and passionate man. At a time of life when most accede to the pressure of convention, he used his last years to change himself and all who knew him and to show his country what it could and ought to be” (94).

Kennedy died with the promise of a better tomorrow, a message that many had grown to believe in.

As soon as the devastating news hit Kennedy’s closest confidants, a shockwave rippled through their lives. Sorensen had fully committed to another Kennedy only to have it

all ripped out from under him once again. Reflecting upon the momentum of the campaign, Sorensen wrote:

“I have no doubt that Robert Kennedy, had he lived, would have been nominated, garnering all the McCarthy delegates after Gene’s defeat in California, and many of the Humphrey delegates who wanted a winner in November. Bobby would have united the divided party, thereby winning the presidency. What a president he would have been” (*Counselor* 547).

Having committed years of his life to supporting John Kennedy for it to finish with an assassination and going through the same experience with his younger brother less than five years later, Sorensen set out to defend the honor of both men. Staying with the same law firm that he had joined after leaving the White House, Sorensen spent much of his free time writing articles and books that defended the honor and political decisions of both brothers. He wrote opinion pieces that criticized the work of following presidents while upholding the political platform he had built from John Kennedy to Robert Kennedy, expanding only slightly and along with his expectations of the Kennedy legacy as times progressed.

### Other Influences

The defense of the Kennedy legacy began well before Robert Kennedy's assassination. After John Kennedy died, Sorensen spent "his post-assassination career attempting to persuade people that 'Kennedy was the true author of all his speeches and writings,'" a claim he supported by noting that Kennedy was the literal voice of the works (Windt 97). Sorensen supplemented his argument with his earlier argument that he had adapted his writing to Kennedy's voice, simply putting down the basis upon which Kennedy could perform. While he was the author of many pieces of writing about the Kennedy family after the assassinations of both John and Robert Kennedy, Sorensen would still not admit being the mind behind some of the earlier writings. Instead, he upheld his position that whatever words he may have contributed on paper, they were an extension of the President and should be attributed as such. After working with Robert Kennedy, Sorensen stated that he would provide segments, but never took credit for writing full speeches. This is likely due to the fact that Walinsky was the main speechwriter, despite having to cooperate much more with the Old Guard than Sorensen had to do during the JFK administration. Sorensen's claims of Kennedy authorship have been pulled into question, especially after documents showed that Sorensen may have been forced to distance himself from some of his writing by the Kennedy patriarch.

One of the prime examples of discussion surrounding Kennedy/Sorensen authorship is the continued debate about John Kennedy's Pulitzer Price-winning *Profiles in Courage*. Based on other pieces that Sorensen wrote around this time, the authenticity of Kennedy's writing was pulled into question. Whether it was to protect John Kennedy's reputation or to establish official proof of authorship, Joe Kennedy had an affidavit set up which Sorensen signed in December of 1957. In this document, Sorensen officially declared that John Kennedy was the sole author of the document. It is important to note here that "*Profiles in*

*Courage* played an important role in shaping the public perception of John F. Kennedy and raising his profile,” yet if Sorensen’s role in writing the book had been acknowledged as fact, it may have raised the question whether the public perception of John Kennedy and his political decisions were actually Sorensen’s instead (Ulyatt 59-60). Additionally, the writing of the book and consequential debate on authorship “established the process that shaped their work together and reinforced their shared political philosophy” (Ulyatt 60). The possibility of Sorensen being the true author of the book does support the argument that Ted Sorensen played a much more influential role in shaping the public understanding of John Kennedy policies and could lead one to believe that the proverbial buck of Sorensen’s vast behind-the-scenes contributions keeps rolling into Robert Kennedy’s political efforts after the assassination of John Kennedy.

During John Kennedy’s few years in the Senate, Ted Sorensen “worked diligently and unstintingly on a large number of articles that were published in the Senator’s name. They helped to establish awareness of his views on topical issues and drew larger audiences to the events at which Kennedy spoke. Sorensen’s work behind the scenes kept Kennedy’s name in the papers throughout the four-year period and bred a familiarity with his name and his views that kept him on the radar of voters in important states” (Ulyatt 65). Again, this behavior supports the assumption that Sorensen was the author of *Profiles in Courage*. Regardless of whether this rumor is true, Sorensen did provide Kennedy with expertly written articles. This work set the tone for Kennedy’s platform and required full devotion from Sorensen. Having poured all this effort into ambitious articles, it is not surprising that Sorensen continued to dedicate his time to the Kennedy name after the two untimely deaths, never clearing up whether he was or was not the true author of *Profiles in Courage*.

The media did not only question John Kennedy’s authorship of one book. They questioned his capabilities as president, had a moment of doubt about his general health and

were concerned about his political platform. As Robert Kennedy had been heavily involved with John Kennedy's campaign and was appointed Attorney General during his presidency, his abilities were questioned at near equal rate. There was a constant flow of debate about the younger Kennedy's capabilities, but also about his previous political contributions. To ensure that the media emphasized the positive contributions of both Kennedy brothers and the Kennedy administration, both brothers tried to maintain positive relationships with the White House reporters. They would defend the criticism by deflection and humor, but also by forming basic friendships to distract from any issues at hand. One of the most obvious examples of this would be the fact that *New York Times* reporters believed the Kennedy administration when it was reported that John Kennedy was more than healthy enough to serve as president, despite battling fairly severely with Addison's disease out of the spotlight.

When the time came for Robert Kennedy to run for Senate and later the Presidency, he had shifted towards a more progressive platform than the John Kennedy platform. This was something that he had to defend towards the media while not straying too far from his brother's moderate base. Sorensen, who had spoken out against the Vietnam War and poverty before, also needed to reign in the effects of his statements in order to evoke full support for Robert Kennedy's campaign. Additionally, he had to rectify his statements discouraging Kennedy to run. When Sorensen was reported as the strategist of the campaign in newspapers like the *New York Times* as mentioned previously in this paper, he was expected to be one of the minds behind the platform and further course of the campaign. This meant his political arguments of the few years between John Kennedy's assassination and Robert Kennedy's presidential campaign had to fit the narrative of the campaign or could be molded to fit. For the most part, Sorensen's progressive agenda aligned with that of Robert Kennedy, but he would have to defend his connection to the instigator of the Vietnam War, John Kennedy,

just as much as Robert. Therefore, his statements needed to be tailored specifically to ensure his previous statements fit the new narrative.

Sorensen bridged the small gap between the political entities of John and Robert Kennedy. He worked to smooth over any differences that persisted between the younger Kennedy's platform and the memory of John Kennedy's administration. By doing so, Robert Kennedy's previous actions as Attorney General could be justified as part of John Kennedy's presidency and distanced from his own campaign, while the positives could be used as examples of the Kennedy brothers' successes. Sorensen used both his writing and his speech as methods to ensure a smooth overlap. Working on Robert Kennedy's announcement speech ensured that Sorensen could positively influence the trajectory of the campaign and straighten out any last errs from the Kennedy administration to now.

It was this knack for writing that Sorensen had also used after the assassination of President Kennedy. Much of what Ted Sorensen wrote after his work in the Kennedy administration was inspired by the assassinated president. So, too, his writing for Robert Kennedy's announcement speech as well as Kennedy's speech in Indiana. Sorensen never stopped building the legacy, only strengthening his efforts after the killing of yet another Kennedy brother. In 2003 he delivered a commencement speech at American University, the same place where John F. Kennedy held his "Strategy for Peace" address in 1963, which was also delivered at the university's commencement. Sorensen's speech was a look back at the significant speech of the slain president, elaborating mostly on Sorensen's recollection of the policies that drove Kennedy's presidency and his Strategy for Peace speech as part of that. Looking back at this speech so many years later, it is evident that the Kennedy legacy has stood the test of time and one major contributor to its survival was Ted Sorensen.



## Legacy

When both brothers were assassinated, there was an even bigger drive to support the Kennedy legacy than before. According to Joseph A. Palermo's chapter "Robert Kennedy" in *A Companion to John F. Kennedy*, "the trauma of having the chief executive murdered by an assassin's bullet" skewed all following writing "toward the celebratory" (97). He writes that:

"John Kennedy's friends, speechwriters, and political allies, most notably Theodore Sorensen (1965) and Arthur M. Schlesinger Jr. (1965), were such gifted and compelling writers that their sympathetic portrayals set a template for subsequent works. In June 1968, this trend was solidified when, almost beyond belief, Robert Kennedy was assassinated while pursuing his own presidential bid" (97).

The reason for this was not only the way that the Kennedy brothers died, but the ways in which both men had inspired many. They both ran on a platform of hope, but due to the political climate of 1968, Robert Kennedy's went above and beyond the level of hope that his brother had inspired. Robert Kennedy had rapidly become one of the few white members of Congress who was able to connect with minority leaders like César Chávez, Rep. John Lewis and Martin Luther King Jr., connecting with a variety of minority population while hanging on to just enough of his brother's moderate electorate and legacy to have a shot at the presidency. Michelle Ulyatt notes that:

"for Sorensen, Kennedy's death marked the end of a second period of influence at the height of American politics and the termination of any dreams of a place within a second Kennedy White House. He initially worked to maintain his role in shaping the Kennedy legacy by editing *Thirteen Days*, [as his] bitter criticisms of President Nixon [which] characterized Sorensen's contributions to American political discourse after 1968 were heavily influenced by the disappointment that he felt at losing yet another of his idols" (206).

Though not initially intended to become a posthumous release, *Thirteen Days* served as Robert Kennedy's reflection upon the Cuban Missile Crisis. While his time with Senator Joe McCarthy had ended due to waning support for McCarthy's methods, Kennedy had not lost his opposition to Communism. In *Thirteen Days*, he noted that the "struggle against Communism throughout the world was far more than physical survival—it had as its essence our heritage and our ideals, and these we must not destroy" (Hillstrom 167). When Sorensen revised the book to prepare it for release, he maintained statements of the like. It was not only in line with Kennedy's previous political behavior, but also with the perpetuating anti-Communist sentiments within the United States. It highlighted how Kennedy, despite his position as civil rights leader, still held certain views that were seen as ruthless. They also fit the narrative of the era. However, Sorensen very clearly filtered certain segments of the book with public response in mind, allowing Kennedy's retelling of certain events despite their factual errors. Kennedy expressed "support for McNamara's position in favor of a blockade," which the release of tapes later disproved (Hillstrom 166). In other words, Sorensen connects the two sides of Kennedy while connecting it to the popular sentiments present in the United States at the time. These efforts served to improve the public response to the Kennedy legacy while smoothing out Robert Kennedy's previous public image.

The creation of the Kennedy legacy had begun earlier on as a method to cope with the death of John F. Kennedy and was now continued not only as a way to mourn Robert Kennedy, but also as a form of rebellion against the changed political landscape and acceptance of a controversial political figure after his death. Other authors would follow this unwritten rule until the 1980s and 1990s, when criticism toward the government became louder and previous governments and other leaders were subjected to a delayed amount of critical perspectives. As Palermo states in his chapter on Robert Kennedy: "[They] paid greater attention to the negative facets of the Kennedys' private lives, as well as to their

exercise of political power” (97). For naysayers, “the Kennedys had the added burden of being heavily identified with American liberalism (as well as with the Democratic Party). Criticizing John and Robert Kennedy’s legacy therefore became shorthand for condemning the ideas they represented” (Palermo 97). Though it became clear that they simply had dedicated their lives to the Kennedy family, initial positive accounts by Sorensen and Schlesinger could have been attributed to potential fears over publishing difficulties.

While Sorensen and Schlesinger were able to write and publish books about their time with John and Robert Kennedy, other authors with relatively positive earlier accounts of the Kennedy family that focused largely on John Kennedy would have trouble releasing their books in the 1960s and 1970s. For example, in 1967, the Manchester affair caused some uproar and demonstrated the difficulty of releasing a Kennedy biography. William Manchester had written an accurate account of the John Kennedy assassination, which was initially authorized by both Robert and Jackie Kennedy. The book was supposed to be published shortly after the event occurred, but by 1967 both had their doubts about their previous approval. Jackie was concerned with her privacy, while Robert was testing the waters for a potential presidential run. Neither had read the book, but as parts were published in *Look* magazine the book geared up to become a bestseller. Since the book was reportedly critical of President Johnson, it could be seen as a political ploy by Robert Kennedy, which he could not use if he did decide to announce his candidacy. One of the critical reviews of this move would later appear in *American Political Mythology*, where Richard Bradley writes that “Robert Kennedy was not so much concerned with exploitation of his brother’s memory as he was with his presidential aspirations and how works of history could impinge upon them” (71). Of course, Sorensen would not put it this way in any of his writings. He was, after all, one of the main protectors and servants of the family. Here, Palermo notes that “Robert had not only been John Kennedy’s hard-charging campaign manager and advisor; he

was also the keeper of many of the family secrets, particularly those pertaining to John's dalliances with women and the true state of his health. For example, the attorney general was among only a handful of people (mostly doctors) who knew the full extent of John's health problems. [...] Schlesinger and Sorensen, who must have been aware of the president's condition, were apparently unwilling to violate his privacy by divulging too much information" (Palermo 102-3).

Sorensen protected the Kennedy brothers in all aspects of their political careers, both during and after their lives. Before Robert Kennedy was assassinated, Sorensen supported the younger brother in his endeavors much like he had done for John Kennedy. Despite rejecting the idea that a 1968 presidential campaign was a good idea earlier, Sorensen quickly turned around once the unlikely became real. Sorensen manipulated his previous statements in newspapers, interviews and during the occasional campaign speech. Later, he would recall that,

"a Robert F. Kennedy administration offered the possibility of leading the country and healing it at the same time, and relieving the nation's grief and still aching sense of loss after JFK's death, moving it into an era of peace abroad in Vietnam, and moving ahead at home with civil rights—and in all these ways and possibly more, ushering in another golden age in Washington" (Sorensen, *Counselor* 546).

Emphasizing positive hopes for a near future with a term that reminded of historic glory days like the "golden age" while looking back at one of the bleakest moments in (then) recent American history, Sorensen juxtaposed recent pain with dreams for a better tomorrow. By doing so, he incited the legacy that now surrounded the Kennedy name. He effectively "[touted] the former president's accomplishments in his personal biographies of Kennedy and in his own memoirs" and pushed these expectations onto Robert Kennedy, which sadly ended in a nation torn by the cycle of hope and despair (Selverstone).

During Robert Kennedy's political campaign, there was a shift in the way that politics were conducted. The new politics focused on the issues at hand, steering the Democratic party to the left. In a sense, Robert Kennedy was one of the men who set this transformation in motion. Whether he intended to or not, he knew he had to meet the demands of the public, focusing his platform on the outcries of the people. The Vietnam War had turned sour and the civil rights movement had dealt with the assassinations of multiple leaders – which, in April 1968, would also include Martin Luther King Jr. Initially building his platform on the rejection of LBJ's war strategy, Kennedy realized quickly this was not enough to convince the public that he should be president. Having worked closely with Sorensen in attempting to keep the relationship with President Johnson civil, Kennedy realized he would have to take a stance on an issue equally—if not more—divisive as the war: civil rights. With this realization, Kennedy and Sorensen, as well as Walinsky and others, would target the issue of poverty as part of the civil rights movement. The significance here is that Kennedy, though targeting an issue that veered significantly to the left, had managed to find an argument that kept it within the realm of the center. This was partially his own belief system, but it was also an idea that aligned with Sorensen's perspective on civil rights and poverty as it should be fought in the long run, not with radical decision-making as supported by Walinsky.

When Robert Kennedy died, the media and the people let little time pass before demanding the third Kennedy brother enter the presidential race. Ted Kennedy, grieving the loss of two assassinated brothers, refused. Had he accepted the invitation that year, Sorensen would have likely backed him like he had backed both John and Robert before. In fact, before working with Robert Kennedy to ensure a Senate Seat in New York, he had also done so for Ted Kennedy in Massachusetts, though it seemed more to ensure “that Edward stuck to the ‘party line’ on issues that had the potential to embarrass President Kennedy during the campaign” (Ulyatt 206). The devotion that Sorensen had towards John Kennedy and the

Kennedy legacy knew no bounds. This is also what influenced him to continue his efforts when Robert Kennedy became the living, continuing embodiment of the assassinated president. As he had protected John, Sorensen protected Robert. And as he had protected Robert, Ted Sorensen protected Ted Kennedy. Even during the Chappaquiddick incident could the surviving Kennedy son count on the protection of his brother's main strategist. As Ted Kennedy had been the younger living Kennedy brother during Robert Kennedy's presidential campaign, he fulfilled the duties that Joe Kennedy had asked John to fulfill for Joe Jr. and had asked Robert to fulfill for John when Joe passed. Ted Kennedy continued this approach like Sorensen continued the Kennedy legacy. He "would speak up on issues that he believed would have been important to his brothers, following their political platforms and issues they had previously chosen to discuss" (Ulyatt 207). Both Ted Sorensen and Ted Kennedy were an integrated part of the legacy, albeit the surviving parts. They were burdened with the expectation of keeping the memory alive, which they did to the best of their abilities. In fact, despite his missteps in his political career:

"Edward trod a fine line between eulogizing his brothers and appearing to invoke their names for partisan political purposes. He negotiated congressional relationships with care and demonstrated a skill that John Kennedy had not shown during his years of political service. Edward reached across the political divide to secure progress. In time, he became a leading liberal figure in the Senate, working to implement many of the programs that John Kennedy, in rhetoric drafted by Theodore Sorensen, had long advocated" (Ulyatt 208).

Again, Ted Sorensen's contributions are present. It started with John Kennedy but continued with Robert Kennedy during a brief period. The difference between John and Robert Kennedy is how the masses responded to the assassination. While after John Kennedy's death there was another Kennedy whose political efforts had been so tightly intertwined with

President Kennedy that the legacy could be continued in living form, Ted Kennedy's presence was not as evident with Robert's campaign as that Robert's presence had been during John's campaign. Robert Kennedy embodied the public's temporary adherence to slightly leftist ideologies that Ted Kennedy simply did not meet, carefully treading the line of the political center. Palermo writes:

“The well-respected journalist who served on Robert Kennedy's 1968 campaign staff,

Jeff Greenfield (2011), tries to answer the question ‘What would have been?’

Although this kind of speculation can be entertaining, it is a fruitless enterprise that plucks its subjects out of their historical context and implants them in a fictional world where they are barred any real agency” (Palermo, *A Companion to John F. Kennedy* 112).

There is room to wonder whether this is also the case for the “romantic” perspectives that Schlesinger and Sorensen delivered after the death of both John and Robert Kennedy. This could also be pondered about in relation to the negative responses in the 80's and 90's. These perspectives may very well be skewed, despite more information being released, for rumors on Robert Kennedy's extramarital affairs are still factually unproven. The legacy upholds a sentiment that makes it very difficult to present a neutral view of the public lives of the two Kennedy brothers and the lack of transparency in certain areas of their political careers and decision-making do not lend to simplifying the matter.

Finally, it seems that though hopes and dreams of what could have been skew the actual history of the Kennedy family. Throughout the past few decades, documents have been released that reveal parts of the Kennedy administration and Kennedy family affairs that were shielded from the public up until that point. Those revelations have not brought clarification upon the rumors of murder conspiracies, but they have exposed Robert Kennedy's rumored extramarital affairs, for example, which were much more hidden than John's. On a more

political front, there have been recordings that were released from the decision-making surrounding the Cuban Missile Crisis, which paint Robert Kennedy in a much more hawkish light than Sorensen's more positive version of that sequence of events. These kinds of updates on the historical facts that were presented to us throughout history reflect the general trajectory of history. It is only those who are given the pen that determine what is written into history—and sometimes this may not be exactly how others remember it.



## Conclusion

Robert Kennedy began his political career under the wing of Joseph McCarthy, honing his black and white perspective of the world while making the American people acquainted with an arguably split personality. Ted Sorensen came from a progressive background that did not condone the persecution of Americans like McCarthy demonstrated. Throughout the next years, Kennedy, by way of supporting his brother John and joining forces with Ted Sorensen to most effectively do so, slowly made his way from being an anti-Communist hardliner to a civil rights hero. Sorensen contributed his time and political understanding to Robert Kennedy after John Kennedy was assassinated. These contributions served to expand and support the Kennedy legacy as it had formed under the Kennedy administration. This legacy as formed by Ted Sorensen promotes the support of civil rights under the law and developed an anti-war sentiment over the course of Robert Kennedy's politically active years.

Kennedy prioritized personal over public/institutions. He had not been exposed to the oppression of blacks during his privileged upbringing, it was not until he was exposed to it that he began to realize the severity of the issue within the United States. Sorensen had grown up with oppression but was also influenced by the moderation necessary in his role as JFK's aide at the time. This meant that both men opted to tackle the issue with a more moderate approach, attempting to keep both whites and blacks happy while not committing with too much dedication to either side. Kennedy had shifted towards the left but could still connect to the center in certain areas. When Sorensen was relieved from his duties as John Kennedy's special counsel after the president was assassinated, he could more freely act in support of equality as he had been raised to do by his parents. Robert Kennedy would become increasingly exposed to poverty and oppression as he upheld relations with Martin Luther

King and made a connection with César Chávez. As Sorensen built a campaign strategy to bridge the “old” Robert Kennedy with the “new,”

“Kennedy offered all the more promise of bridging the nation’s economic and racial divides. In the end, there is no way of knowing whether he would have disappointed his emerging constituency, but for a brief moment the hope that many excluded Americans vested in Robert Kennedy brought a greater sense of community to the United States. And that, as he once counseled, makes a hell of a difference” (Schmitt 230).

Visiting poverty-stricken areas of the nation and speaking with the locals opened Kennedy’s eyes to extreme poverty and racial oppression that would earlier be regarded as a Third World problem. The personal connection that Robert Kennedy made with the people in these areas would drive him during the final years of his life and would largely motivate his decision to run for president of the United States. Meanwhile, Ted Sorensen had been taught about poverty by learning the history of his parents and was well-equipped to connect the issues revolving poverty with legislation, putting Robert Kennedy’s experiences into a political movement.

Sorensen and Kennedy well and truly connected over their shared grief over President Kennedy’s assassination, both being impacted by this loss in a way that continued the legacy that was started by the older Kennedy son. Sorensen contributed not only in writing or political advice, but also in mental support and as a partner to debate political ideologies with. Sorensen would push Kennedy’s buttons to ensure proper preparation before political appearances, events and debates, but he would also lend the memory of John Kennedy having internalized the president’s voice. Newspapers would attribute an even more significant role to Sorensen and so did his own books after the assassination of both brothers. Not only did Sorensen instruct Robert Kennedy to change his hair and posture to seem more mature than

his political opponent, he also bridged the gap in political ideology between the two.

Sorensen functioned as a sort of “fixer” for what could potentially be deemed “broken” while boosting the positive aspects of the 1968 campaign. Perhaps his contributions do not seem as extensive as previously expected, but one cannot underestimate the continuation of the Kennedy legacy as it exists today. Looking at the current riots in American streets, it is impossible not to look back at the hopeful spirit that arose in dark times that existed during Kennedy’s 1968 presidential campaign. Kennedy created a lot of the momentum himself, but having Sorensen, the most loyal contributor to his brother’s campaign, by his side must not have hurt.

Ted Sorensen was part of the Old Guard that embraced a moderate political approach. However, with the influence of young faces, Sorensen embraced some of the more progressive political stances that he supported in private. Through Sorensen’s efforts alongside the efforts of the younger crew, Robert Kennedy was prepped to enter the era of New Politics. As his life was tragically cut short, Sorensen continued his work and embraced the policies that had been present under Robert Kennedy. Both men were aware of the fact that they wanted to continue the work that John Kennedy had started, but only Sorensen was granted the opportunity to do so for a long time. After Robert Kennedy’s assassination, Sorensen also worked to protect his personal and political work. Despite positively framed biographies about his time working with both John Kennedy and Robert Kennedy and focusing his work mainly on John Kennedy, it is still evident that Robert Kennedy was the brother who underwent the biggest transformation – and Sorensen continuously stood by his side.

## Works Cited

- Boomhower, Ray E. *John Bartlow Martin: A Voice for the Underdog*. Indiana University Press, 2015.
- . *Robert F. Kennedy and the 1968 Indiana Primary*. Indiana University Press, 2008.
- Bradley, Richard. *American Political Mythology from Kennedy to Nixon*. Peter Lang, 2000.
- Carroll, Maurice. "Kennedy Choice of Sorensen Seen: Stratton Charges "Buildup" of Lawyer." *New York Times*, 10 January 1967.
- Edelman, Peter. In "Bobby Kennedy for President" episode 3, Netflix.
- Goduti, Philip A. Jr. "Sorensen, Theodore Chaikin." *American National Biography*, 2018.
- Hall Jamieson, Kathleen. *Eloquence in an Electronic Age: The Transformation of Political Speechmaking*. Oxford University Press, 1990.
- Herbers, John. "Scene is the Same, but 8 Years Later." *New York Times*, 17 March 1968.
- Heymann, C. David. *RFK: A Candid Biography of Robert F. Kennedy*. William Heinemann, 1997.
- Hillstrom, Laurie Collier. *Cuban Missile Crisis*. Omnigraphics, 2015.
- Hilty, James W. *Robert Kennedy: Brother Protector*. Temple University Press, 1997.
- Klein, Joe. *Politics Lost: How American Democracy Was Trivialized by People Who Think You're Stupid*. Doubleday, 2006.
- Leamer, Lauren. *The Kennedy Men: 1901-1963 The Laws of the Father*. HarperCollins, 2001.
- Lee, Ronald Emery. *The Rhetoric of the 'New Politics': A Case Study of Robert F. Kennedy's 1968 Presidential Primary Campaign*. University of Iowa, PhD dissertation, 1981.
- O'Donnell, Lawrence. *Playing with Fire: The 1968 Election and the Transformation of American Politics*. New York, Penguin Random House, 2017.
- Palermo, Joseph A. *In His Own Right: The Political Odyssey of Senator Robert F. Kennedy*. Columbia University Press, 2001.
- . "Chapter Five: Robert F. Kennedy" in *A Companion to John F. Kennedy*. John Wiley & Sons, 2014.

- Reeves, Thomas C. *A Question of Character: A Life of John F. Kennedy*. Three Rivers Press, 1991.
- Reeves, Richard. "The Making of a President." *New York Times*, 31 March 1968.
- . "The People Around Bobby." *New York Times*, 12 February 1967.
- Richardson, Michael. "Ghosting Politics: Speechwriters, Speechmakers and the (Re)crafting of Identity." *Cultural Studies Review*, vol. 23, no. 2, 2017.
- Rorabaugh, W.J. *The Real Making of the President: Kennedy, Nixon and the 1960 Election*. University Press of Kansas, 2009.
- Schlesinger, Arthur M. Jr. "Commentary on *The 'Invisible' Speechwriter*." *The Wilson Quarterly*, vol. 16, no. 3, Summer 1995.
- . *Robert Kennedy and His Times*. Houghton Mifflin, 1978.
- Schlesinger, Robert. *White House Ghosts: Presidents and Their Speechwriters*. New York, Simon & Schuster, 2008.
- Schmitt, Edward R. *President of the Other America*. University of Massachusetts Press, 2010.
- Smith, Terence. "Sorensen Advises Same Ticket in 1968." *New York Times*, 24 November 1967.
- Sorensen, Theodore C. *Counselor: A Life at the Edge of History*. HarperCollins, 2008.
- . "JFK's Strategy of Peace." *World Policy Journal*, vol. 20, no. 3, 2003, pp. 2-6.
- . *Kennedy*. Harper & Row, 1965.
- "Strategist for Kennedy: Ted Sorensen." *New York Times*, 19 March 1968.
- Talese, Gay. "Sorensen Argues the Case for a Friend as Suburbs Debate 'Bobby' Issue." *New York Times*, 27 October 1964.
- Theodore C. Sorensen Personal Papers. Subject Files, 1961-1964. Civil rights: Legislation, 1963: Sorensen – LBJ phone conversation, 3 June 1963 [The document in this folder was donated to the John F. Kennedy Library in January, 1995]. TCSPP-030-013. John F. Kennedy Presidential Library and Museum.
- Tye, Larry. *Bobby Kennedy: The Making of a Liberal Icon*. Random House, 2012.

- Ulyatt, Michelle. *Theodore Sorensen and the Kennedys: A Life of Public Service*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2019.
- Weiner, Tim. "Theodore C. Sorensen, 82, Kennedy Counselor, Dies." *New York Times*, 31 October 2010.
- Wicker, Tom. "Kennedy, LBJ Dispute 'Deal': Reports on Naming Viet War Commission Conflict." *The San Bernadino Sun*, 18 March 1968.
- Williamson, Eric. "Unseating Segregation for a Night: How Robert F. Kennedy '51 Helped Ensure Nobel Prize Winner Ralph Bunche a Desegregated Audience at UVA." *UVA Lawyer*, Spring 2018.
- Windt, Jr., Theodore O. "John F. Kennedy: Presidential Speechwriting as Rhetorical Collaboration." *Presidential Speechwriting: From the New Deal to the Reagan Revolution and Beyond* ed. by Kurt Ritter and Martin J. Medhurst. Texas A&M University Press, 2004.
- Witcover, Jules. *The Year the Dream Died: Revisiting 1968 in America*. Warner Books, 1997.