“WE HOLD THESE TRUTHS TO BE SELF-EVIDENT:”
KENNEDY, NIXON, AND THE ISSUE OF CUBAN DEMOCRACY
IN THE AMERICAN PRESIDENTIAL CAMPAIGN, 1960

by

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ABSTRACT

This essay argues that John F. Kennedy and Richard Nixon demonstrated ambivalent feelings toward democracy as they participated in the American presidential campaign of 1960. Their oratory, on the one hand, suggested unqualified reverence for the Western democratic tradition. Both devoted considerable attention in their campaigns to establishing before voters their shared belief that America would eventually triumph over the communist enemy because of the strength and greatness that accrues to a society which recognizes freedom at home. In their campaign discussions of Cuba, Kennedy and Nixon argued that Fidel Castro would ultimately fall from power not because Americans opposed him, but rather because he was reviled and despised as an anti-democratic leader by Cubans. By implication Kennedy and Nixon were suggesting that democracy was not only an ideal they held dear, but one that was universal and intrinsic to the human essence.

As they venerated democracy in these terms, however, Kennedy and Nixon showed by their behavior that they had a marked lack of reverence for the ideals and values underpinning the U.S. political system. Both candidates were ambitious and driven in their pursuit of the presidency, and both were willing to distort truth and contrive public images if these measures appeared expedient to their efforts to achieve victory. Clearly, Kennedy and Nixon must be held accountable for sanctioning and employing campaign tactics of this sort. The essay concludes, however, that scholars should also hold them accountable for their ambivalence, for failure to recognize their duplicity in portraying democracy in iconographic terms while simultaneously demonstrating that they held
victory as more important than principles like honesty. Throughout, an important secondary theme of this study concerns the discourse Kennedy and Nixon used in discussing Cuba and Cubans, and the essay critiques in equal measure their scornful portrayal of Fidel Castro, and their paternalistic attitudes toward the Cuban nation.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Abstract</td>
<td>ii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Epigraph</td>
<td>v</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Foreign Affairs and the 1960 Campaign</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rhetorical Strategy and Presidential Ambition</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>American Exceptionalism and Essentialist Democracy</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusion</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Endnotes</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bibliography</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Tom Mann, on further consideration, has backed away from the idea of a demarche on free elections [in Cuba]. He argues that the risk is too great that Castro might accept the challenge, stage ostensibly free elections, win by a large majority and thereafter claim popular sanction for his regime.¹

---Arthur Schlesinger, Jr.,
Memorandum to President Kennedy,
15 March 1961

The real question concerning the future of the Castro regime and its effect on the United States is whether Castro can in fact succeed in providing a better life for the Cuban people, in making Cuba a little paradise, a real pearl of the Antilles; and whether he can do a better job in this respect than the United States and its friends can do elsewhere in Latin America. In all honesty, one should be wary of dogmatic answers on this point. But if one has faith in the human values of the United States, and if that faith is supported by vigorous and intelligent action, then there is no need to fear competition from an unshaven megalomaniac. To look at the other side of the proposition, it would be a fatal concession to lack of faith in ourselves and our values if we decreed that Castro must go because he might succeed.²

---Senator J. William Fulbright,
Memorandum to President Kennedy,
29 March 1961
Introduction

On January 6, 1961, Richard Nixon sat in a joint session of the United States Congress, overseeing as he later described it, "his own 'funeral.' " As president of the Senate, Nixon presided with House Speaker Sam Rayburn, supervising legislators as they counted ballots submitted to the electoral college from the November 1960 presidential election. The result surprised no one. Returns from the popular vote had been close—indeed they had been disputed in certain key states—but Senator John F. Kennedy’s 303-219 electoral margin was already clearly established by this time.

What may have been a surprise to Americans, on the other hand, was the level of composure and comportment Nixon maintained in loosing. Long renowned as one of the most tenacious competitors in contemporary U.S. politics, the vice president had discouraged calls for a voting recount even though allegations of widespread fraud suggested that Kennedy’s victory may have rightfully been his. Regardless, Nixon fulfilled his constitutional duties with enthusiasm; politics in the United States required subordinating partisan loyalties to the procedural consensus that makes a democratic system possible:

Mr. Speaker, since this is an unprecedented situation I would like to ask permission to impose upon the time of the members of this Congress to make a statement—which in itself is somewhat unprecedented. I promise to be brief.

This is the first time in 100 years that a candidate for the presidency announced the result of an election in which he was defeated and announced the victory of his opponent. I do not think we could have a more striking and eloquent example of the stability of our constitutional system and of the proud tradition of the American people of developing, respecting, and honoring institutions of self-government.

In our campaigns, no matter how hard fought they may be, no matter how close the election may turn out to be, those who loose accept the verdict, and support those who win.

It is in this spirit that I now declare that John F. Kennedy has been elected President of the United States, and Lyndon B. Johnson, Vice
President of the United States. While at one level it is little more than a formality of the archaic electoral college system, congressional ballot counting can in fact perform important ritualistic functions. In this instance, it served as a palliative measure to seal the recrimination that had dominated national politics for the entire preceding year. Beginning in January 1960, the American public had watched as, first, both the Grand Old Party and the Democrats had nearly torn themselves apart in primary season in-fighting. This was followed by two rambunctious national conventions in July, a stalemated and cantankerous Senate session in August, and a general campaign since Labor Day that surpassed all its predecessors in media saturation and coast-to-coast stumping. By bringing together both parties, both houses of Congress, as well as Nixon, a member of the executive branch, ballot counting allowed national representatives of the American people to participate in ceremonial closure. They were demonstrating before constituents that constitutional stability was rooted in orderly leadership transition, and the vice president's comments further emphasized these same ideas. Accepting the verdict and supporting president-elect Kennedy, Nixon hoped to deliver a clear message that he and all the elected officials of the United States not only upheld the rules of the political system, but venerated its unwritten norms and conventions, its “proud traditions,” as well.

Researchers in the field of political communication have devoted considerable attention in recent years to the ritualistic aspects of American public life. This new literature is a valuable contribution to the existing body of work in that it opens new areas of inquiry within the well-established domain of political scholarship. However, it is remarkable that the interpretive models emerging from communication study are predominantly centered around themes of affirmation. For instance, it has been suggested that the structure of American politics virtually guarantees that campaign oratory will provide compelling reasons for voters to renew their faith in the system. Within this paradigm, genuinely republican candidates--reluctant men willing to stand for office only
because they feel duty bound to answer a call for leadership from their peers—\textemdash the only presidential aspirants who can successfully rise through the pre-campaign selective process. Should voters grow skeptical, then, they are reminded every electoral season that “the political system is worthy of praise for the strong candidates it produces.” Under a second model, patriotism constitutes the object of affirmation. Here it has been posited that the important ritualistic function of campaign activities is to reaffirm the prevalent American self-conception as a people defined above all by their distinctiveness vis-à-vis others: “Campaigns get leaders elected, yes, but ultimately, they also tell us who we as a people are, where we have been and where we are going, \ldots they separate our culture from all others.” Transposing this into the historian’s lexicon, campaigns reassert American exceptionalism.

To examine these propositions closely beside the 1960 campaign, though, shows how both are rather simplified. In the first place, Kennedy and Nixon were driven, ambitious individuals. Taking into account the strategies that shaped their campaign oratory, it seems they were motivated less by a call to duty and more by a desire for office. In the second place, the candidates were by no means trying to reinforce a straightforward understanding of American exceptionalism. Instead, in their discussion of democracy and its proper role in world politics, Kennedy and Nixon argued that all of humanity was bound together with the most fundamental of ties in their hopes and strivings for democratic rule. While pursuing these two lines of argument, I also suggest new light in which to consider what is still the most aggravated historiographical question on the campaign: Nixon’s motives in opposing a U.S. intervention to overthrow Fidel Castro. Drawing them together at the end, we see how both candidates held an ambivalent attitude toward the system of governance within which they were acting. Kennedy and Nixon used iconographic terminology in discussing democracy, portraying its attainment as the realization of universal human ideals. At the same time, though, they also treated the American electoral system, proud traditions and all, not as something to be revered,
but instead as an arena of uninhibited partisanship, a contest wherein the end of attaining the presidency justified virtually any conceivable campaign tactics. The discussion centers around Cuba in the campaign, although other elements of the foreign policy discussion are pertinent at times as well.
Foreign Affairs and the 1960 Campaign

Kennedy and Nixon shared a common set of beliefs on the United States and its role in the world in 1960, and these premises shaped the foreign policy positions they articulated in the campaign. Both agreed with the containment doctrine, for instance, believing that a Soviet Union blocked from further expansion would be deprived of its rationale for repression at home, and would eventually collapse upon itself. Both had supported reconstruction aid to Western Europe in pursuit of this goal, and both felt the United States could wage the Cold War in the decade to come by using similar measures to help newly independent and emerging states resist Soviet temptation. Above all, both Kennedy and Nixon were aware of the hazards of a thermonuclear age, and both believed that victory could be attained without world war if Americans merely recalled the lessons of history and showed steadfast opposition to belligerent enemies and tyrants. The vice president, for his part, realized these congruities that linked him to his opponent, and through September and into October he frequently explained that “our disagreement is not about the goals for America but only about the means to reach those goals.”

This assessment, true as it was, did not go far enough. The most fundamental congruity binding the two candidates together was their belief that the United States had global responsibilities to execute. Kennedy and Nixon agreed that Americans were obligated to fight communism not only for their own purposes, but on behalf of those less able as well. As Senator Kennedy put it, “[w]e cannot turn the job over to anyone else. If the United States fails, then the whole cause of freedom fails.”

With a substantial measure of concurrence, then, the disputes Kennedy and Nixon engaged in circulated for the most part around their respective interpretations of President Eisenhower’s record in foreign policy, and whether or not the United States had squandered the position of strength it held eight years earlier. Throughout the 1950s American perceptions of the national standing in the bipolar struggle had waxed and
waned. With the Soviet launch of *Sputnik* in 1957, though, a special period of apprehension began in the United States. In winning the Space Race the communists had proved they had technological capacities at least equal to the West, and many Americans began to wonder if the Soviets might soon overtake America with, for example, superior education and industrial output. Alongside these anxieties came concrete fears for national defence, as it was obvious now that the enemy could and would be developing the most advanced weaponry humankind had yet seen. These concerns were further aggravated by the May 1960 downing of an American U2 reconnaissance aircraft near Sverdlovsk, Russia, an event that was perfectly timed to provide Kennedy with ammunition for his first attack against the incumbents.

Still campaigning in the Democratic primaries at this time, Kennedy now pointed to the U2 incident as additional evidence of the Missile Gap, a phenomenon of U.S. weakness that he claimed was unknown when Eisenhower had taken over from President Truman in 1953. It was at this time that the senator began to explain how Americans could only overcome the current deficiencies by returning the Democrats to office, and this desire to "get the nation moving again" became his major theme of the campaign to come. Nixon countered these arguments by insisting that Eisenhower had provided sufficiency in national defence, while wisely eschewing needless waste. The vice president also began to formulate his basic campaign message at this time, explaining how his rival's belief in the Missile Gap, a popular myth with no basis in fact, was a sure sign of his inexperience in foreign affairs.¹⁰

As the general campaign began the candidates honed these broad themes, tailoring them to current affairs as they developed in the fall, and two events in particular served to shape the early phases of the foreign policy debate. First, on August 29 rumors began to emerge of a United States Information Agency poll that reported a significant drop in U.S. prestige abroad. Kennedy pounced on these reports, claiming it was quite understandable if international regard for the United States had dropped after the
embarrassment of the U2 incident, and after Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev's cancellation of the Paris Summit in its wake. Furthermore, argued Kennedy, this USIA survey now validated his criticisms of apathetic GOP leadership in policy toward the Third World; Latin Americans, Africans, and Asians had realized that the United States government was "frozen in the ice of its own indifference,"11 and unconcerned with their struggles for social and economic development. Nixon ignored Kennedy's references to the USIA poll, and invoked his own experiences abroad as an alternate gauge of foreign opinion, claiming that he had met people telling a different story of the American image in the international community: "[T]o those who say, my friends, that American prestige is slipping, that America has lost its friends in the world, I say they should travel abroad as I have and they would come back with the conclusion that I have that I give you today: America does have friends in the world, . . . we do stand for what people on both sides of the Iron Curtain believe."12

The second international event which shaped the early campaign was the annual opening of the United Nations General Assembly. The session of 1960, however, was unlike any other that preceded it. Ordinarily a convocation of highly experienced diplomats and functionaries, this year's proceedings introduced representatives from over a dozen newly created states, and featured over a dozen delegations led by their heads of government--Khrushchev and Fidel Castro among them. After weeks of anticipation in the U.S., the Cuban president and the Soviet general secretary arrived in New York, and after several days of their conspicuous behaviour and anti-American rhetoric, the General Assembly finally convened on September 22. President Eisenhower delivered the opening address, devoting the bulk of his attention to welcoming the 13 new African members of the UN, and calling for "a pledge by all countries at this Assembly to respect the African peoples' right to choose their own way of life and to determine for themselves the course they choose to follow." Khrushchev dominated the next day's proceedings with a four hour harangue against his American hosts and their discriminatory policy of confining his
visit to the island of Manhattan. Khrushchev, too, welcomed the new African states, demanding that the West accelerate decolonisation in the region: “The colonial regime, colonial administration in all its forms should be abolished completely so as to make it possible for peoples of such territories to determine their destiny and their form of government.”

The opening of the session lasted nearly three full weeks. Castro spoke after the first weekend adjournment, arguing at length that his hosts had shown undue hostility toward the Cuban Revolution from its start: “As far as the President of the United States is concerned, we have betrayed our people. But this would certainly not have been considered so, if, instead of the revolutionary government being true to its people, it had been loyal to the big American monopolies.” With the passage of another week, Khrushchev took the spotlight once again. On October 3 he proposed his Troika of shared leadership to replace the Secretary General of the UN. On October 7, he reasserted threats of a Soviet-East German peace settlement. Finally, on October 12, he removed his shoe during a speech by Philippine delegate Lorenzo Sumulong, and beat it on the table in front of him to protest accusations that the Soviet Union had “swallowed up” political and civil rights in Eastern Europe. To the great relief of Americans, Khrushchev and his party departed for Moscow the following day. Ever since the Soviet leader announced his trip on September 1, the press had been speculating that his sole intention was to disrupt the campaign, and after all his antics, particularly his ostentatious displays of friendship toward the Cubans, it appeared that suspicions were vindicated.

Through this time, Kennedy and Nixon adopted for their foreign policy discussion the questions raised by the UN spectacle. Kennedy, for his part, persisted with the notion of decline in American prestige, claiming that at one time, particularly under the Democratic leadership of Presidents Wilson, Roosevelt, and Truman, the United States was without rival as a symbol of progress before the world. Now, however, after eight years of bumbling GOP administration, the communists presented a real challenge, and
Kennedy held Eisenhower responsible for his failure to respond with vigor. Events taking place in New York, then, allowed the senator to claim that the Republicans were still sitting idly as foes usurped the proper American role of world leadership, and he was eager to associate Nixon with this self-satisfied element of the incumbents’ record: “The Republican candidate for the Presidency is running on a platform that you never had it so good. . . . I would like them to tell that to those Americans who see our prestige fading around the world, who see the communists who now stride across the stage of the United Nations, who may be quarantined as Mr. Khrushchev and Castro are in Manhattan but are not quarantined as they spread their influence across Asia, and Latin America and Africa.”

Nixon began his response by conceding that “[c]riticism in a political campaign is essential in order to see what is wrong with our country’s record and in order to correct what is wrong.” Through this portion of the campaign the vice president was more than willing to acknowledge his opponent’s role as opposition candidate, his “right and responsibility . . . to criticize the administration record.” However, he took issue with Kennedy’s disparagement of the president’s statesmanship, claiming that Eisenhower had always commanded respect for his poise and composure, and that he continued to do so while the unruly communists made a mockery of the UN: “Now, lets look at the critics a moment. . . . They say, Senator Kennedy did just 2 days ago in New York this: he said ‘I am tired of reading in the paper what Mr. Khrushchev does. I am tired of reading in the paper what Mr. Castro does. I want to read in the paper what President Eisenhower does.’ All that I can say is that he ought to quit talking and start reading the papers, and he’ll see what President Eisenhower is doing. . . . I say that the American people applaud President Eisenhower for his dignity, and they contrast it with the crudeness of Mr. Khrushchev as he has exemplified it in the United Nations.”

This was the context of the first in the series of four nationally televised Great Debates. The first debate, September 26, was largely occupied with domestic policy.
However, right from the beginning of Kennedy's introductory statement, the senator made clear how domestic and international affairs were intrinsically linked. Kennedy opened by quoting Lincoln's comments 100 years previously on the inevitable demise of a nation half-slave and half-free, and recasting them in contemporary terms using slavery as a metaphor for Soviet communism: "In the election of 1960, and with the world around us, the question is whether the world will exist half slave or half free, whether it will move in the direction of freedom, in the direction of the road that we are taking, or whether it will move in the direction of slavery." Many scholars feel that Kennedy won the first debate due to his mastery over evocative rhetoric of this sort.\textsuperscript{17} Nixon, by contrast, appeared especially weak in the first broadcast. Emblematic of the vice president's performance was his inability to answer when asked to clarify his earlier description of Kennedy as "naive and at times immature." Nixon was paralyzed. Hoping at this time both to emphasize his rival's inexperience, and appeal to uncommitted voters by refraining from personal attack, the vice president told Robert Flemming of ABC News that he simply had "no comment." A Gallup Poll two next days later showed Kennedy leading, 48-47.\textsuperscript{18}

Foreign policy discussion in the second and third debates concerned affairs in the Far East for the most part, but at Kennedy's prompting attention finally turned to the Western Hemisphere as the final broadcast approached. For the Democratic nominee, as for many Americans, the sister republics to the South constituted a special region, an area that was underdeveloped but one that was poised to make giant future strides toward progress. "There is much to encourage hope in Latin America," the senator proclaimed on October 18 in Tampa Florida: "The forces of liberal democracy are strong and are working to create the framework of economic advance ... on which the preservation of freedom will ultimately depend."\textsuperscript{19}

In the prevalent American view, however, the Cuban Revolution threatened such hopes for the future in that it stood in opposition to these forces of liberal democracy. According to Kennedy's arguments in the late-summer and through the fall, the
Republicans had shown gross irresponsibility and ineptitude in their response to this challenge. Failing to see that social and economic inequities had produced legitimate grievances and fertile ground for revolution, the Eisenhower team had failed to prevent Castro’s rise, and thereby they had opened the door to communist infiltration into the Americas. It is important to note here that while the Republican administration had indeed been remiss in extending proactive development aid which could have been highly effective toward their anti-communist goals, they had reversed this oversight by 1960. In fact, it was Eisenhower who first launched some of the policies President Kennedy would later claim as his own. Even more important, though, is that the senator went on record in the campaign supporting a number of initiatives to oppose and contain Castro with economic and political measures. Only one of his recommendations, however, actually became a topic for discussion. This was a press release dated October 20 that explained in part the senator’s support for an “attempt to strengthen the non-Batista democratic anti-Castro forces in exile, and in Cuba itself, who offer eventual hope of overthrowing Castro. Thus far these fighters for freedom have had virtually no support from our Government.”

Nixon’s response to this proposition was immediate and indignant. All along the vice president agreed that Castro was intolerable, classifying him a “demagog,” and a “ruthless” communist, “determined to conquer the world.” However, he described the senator’s idea of aid to anti-Castro forces as outrageous. In the fourth debate, October 21, Nixon referred to the previous day’s statement as “the most dangerously irresponsible recommendation that he’s made during the course of this campaign.” The vice president exhaustively traced U.S. commitments to foreign non-intervention under five separate hemispheric treaties, and under the Charter of the United Nations. Moreover, he explained, to follow Kennedy’s line would be to give the Soviets a rationale for intervening to defend Castro: “It would be an open invitation for Mr. Khrushchev to come
in, to come into Latin America and engage us in what would be a civil war and possibly even worse than that."^{22}

Nixon was confronted with a severe dilemma in responding to Kennedy's statement, as his official capacities in Eisenhower's White House went beyond the constitutional duties of the vice presidency and included membership in the National Security Council as well. As such, Richard Nixon was aware, along with only a restricted number of Americans outside the operation itself, that the president had endorsed in March 1960 a program to sponsor anti-Castro Cuban exile forces, and that Central Intelligence Agency personnel were training these forces at that very time on secret bases in Guatemala. From the point of initial approval, Nixon had been the staunchest advocate of this plan within the administration. In fact, he went so far as to press the president throughout the summer and fall to accelerate it, to launch the invasion as soon as possible. All of which is to say that Nixon understood immediately the full political ramifications of Kennedy’s statement, even if the senator himself may not have: “The operation was covert. Under no circumstances could it be disclosed or even alluded to. Consequently, under Kennedy’s attacks and under his demands for ‘militant’ policies, I was in the position of a fighter with one hand tied behind his back.”^{23}

If the vice president felt politically handicapped here, wishing to retort that Kennedy had co-opted his own pet project, he also acknowledged national security concerns that complicated the situation further. Nixon had long felt that Kennedy was prone to indiscretion and misjudgment on foreign affairs, that his volubility on the prestige issue for instance would fuel the rhetoric of America’s enemies at the UN, and thereby become a self-fulfilling prophesy. This matter, however, was far more delicate. Even though Nixon concedes that his opponent had been inflammatory with Cuba rhetoric on earlier occasions, he explained later that the position Kennedy adopted at this point was a fundamental turning point in his campaign. The new vocabulary in this particular press release was so explicit that Nixon believed it would necessarily raise Castro’s suspicions,
and for the vice president jeopardizing the covert plans was in itself a hazard to national security: “There was only one thing I could do. The covert operation had to be protected at all costs. I must not even suggest by implication that the United States was rendering aid to rebel forces in and out of Cuba. In fact, I must go to the other extreme: I must attack the Kennedy proposal to provide such aid as wrong and irresponsible because it would violate our treaty commitments.”

Ironically, it has been suggested that Nixon’s greatest flaw in this whole affair was his ineptitude rather than his duplicity. Scholars arguing this point feel that the vice president failed in his goal of concealing the secret plans because, in explaining his alternative to Kennedy’s recommendation of invasion, the vice president actually indicated that he did not in fact oppose foreign intervention on principle. “We can do what we did with Guatemala,” Nixon explained before national and international audiences in the fourth debate: “There was a Communist dictator that we inherited from the previous administration. We quarantined Mr. Arbenz. The result was that the Guatemalan people themselves eventually rose up and they threw him out.”

The vice president was referring here to the overthrow of socialist, but democratically elected, Guatemalan President Jacobo Arbenz Guzman in 1954, an ostensibly indigenous uprising that had actually been a CIA-sponsored coup. By 1960 voters in America and the regime in Cuba alike were aware of U.S. involvement in Guatemala six years earlier, and in one view therefore, Nixon’s association of the two issues was a blunder in that it signaled to audiences in both countries that some sort of covert measures against Cuba might be underway. In terms of domestic politics, however, the real issue here is not whether the vice president was unaware that Americans had learned of U.S. covert activities since 1954, nor whether he overlooked that references to Guatemala would undermine the position he was adopting. Instead the important point is that Nixon admitted openly, as he was campaigning for the presidency, that he supported overthrow of foreign governments with irreproachable constitutional legitimacy if they instituted
policies deemed distasteful in Washington. This informs us far more on the vice
president’s disregard for democracy than it does on his rhetorical clumsiness. As for the
national security question, the question of whether Nixon might have tipped off Castro, it
will become evident that the vice president was not particularly concerned with this issue
since he knew that the Cuban president was already aware of plans underway. Instead,
Nixon was interested in whether Latin Americans outside Cuba would associate him
individually with interventionist U.S. policies.26

In any case, more so than recommendations, Nixon spent the subsequent portion of
the campaign attacking. On October 22 in Allentown Pennsylvania, for instance, he
delivered a major foreign policy address, most of it concerned with Cuba and the hazards
of Kennedy's position on the topic: “Let's suppose the Soviet Union does move into Cuba.
Suppose they do move in to help Castro. A major portion of the blame, I say, will rest on
Mr. Kennedy, who two weeks before an election has made a statement which not only is
provocative, but will be interpreted by the Soviets as an express invitation to do exactly
that.” A week later, the vice president grew even more caustic, claiming that Kennedy had
retreated from his October 20 position, and reminding voters that in international
diplomacy statesmen do not have the option of retracting comments they regret. “[C]an
we afford to use the White House,” Nixon asked on November 1, “as a training school for
a man who wants to learn how to be president at the expense of the United States of
America?”27

While it was effective in certain measure, the vice president’s accusation of retreat
was actually unwarranted because Kennedy did not revise his earlier advocacy, instead
contesting the spin that Nixon had put on it. In responding to the vice president’s
challenge for a fifth debate exclusively on Cuba, for instance, the senator claimed that “I
have never advocated and I do not now advocate intervention in Cuba in violation of our
treaty obligations... What I have advocated is that we use all available communications
... and the moral power of the American government.” Unfortunately, however, this
sounded like retreat and denial at the same time, and Kennedy soon enough decided it was best to ignore the controversies Nixon was stirring to whatever extent he could. Significantly, the senator spoke first on hemispheric affairs in the fourth debate, and he made reference only to the administration's failure to respond to early warnings of Cuban discontent, and its insufficient use of Voice of America radio broadcasts to cultivate Latin American friendship. In other words, Kennedy fell back on the themes that had shaped his Cuba discourse all along--Eisenhower's indifference toward proactive of preventative measures that might have blocked Castro's rise or undercut his popular support. The Democrats still held the advantage according to a late-October Gallup poll, 49-45.28

The campaign debate over Cuba continued through to election day, with Nixon refusing to let the issue drop, and with Kennedy ducking his opponent's accusations by starting to critique GOP economic mismanagement as a tactic of distraction. Furthermore, Cuban-American relations continued to deteriorate through this period. On October 19 Eisenhower ratcheted up U.S. export restrictions, implementing a nearly unqualified embargo against Cuba. The next day Philip Bonsal, American ambassador to Havana, was recalled to Washington for extensive consultations. On October 22 the New York Times reported that unidentified alien forces had landed on Cuban shores, and speculated that Castro had ordered a hoax invasion in order to raise anti-American opinion in the international community. The regime in Havana, of course, was not content to endure all this in silence. On October 29 the New York Times led with a headline announcing that a "defiant" Castro had challenged the United States to implement the invasion he had been expecting for months, to test whether he ruled Cuba legitimately by testing whether Cubans would fight in his support. Two days later Cuban foreign minister Raul Roa spoke before the United Nations General Assembly, outraged with both U.S. presidential candidates for their debates on Cuba. Kennedy and Nixon, Roa explained, discussed Cuba's future as if it were "a piece of real estate belonging to the United States."29
Rhetorical Strategy and Presidential Ambition

Without question, both candidates in 1960 were striving to construct images as selfless and magnanimous potential statesmen interested in nothing more than offering themselves before the electorate as public servants. Moreover, each would likely have been gratified to see himself described in posterity as an adherent of this republican ethos in the modern era. This, however, is something quite different from claiming that Kennedy and Nixon were actually driven by motives of this sort. To make this claim is to take campaign rhetoric at face value, and to overlook that the candidates indulged themselves in an ambitious pursuit of presidential power in which virtually any tactics were deemed acceptable. This becomes evident with an inquiry into campaign strategy, and the energy and determination that both Kennedy and Nixon devoted to crafting a preconceived self-representation that was defined above all by the need to win votes.

The idea underlying Kennedy’s rhetorical strategy held that effective campaign oratory could be abstract and repetitive as long as each individual speech was connected in one way or another with his core theme of getting the nation moving again. Kennedy hoped, then, to present himself as the candidate of action by setting out the agenda for American leadership, and by demonstrating that he had the ability to recognize how difficult initiatives must be undertaken if the country was to regain its lost status in the world. This did not, however, merely amount to a program for executive, nor even governmental action. Instead, he emphasized how restoring lost American vitality was a collective endeavor in which U.S. voters played an intrinsic part. "[I]t is especially the responsibility of the next President of the United States," he announced on election eve, "to set before our country the unfinished business of our society. The campaign is now over. The responsibility has ceased to be ours who are candidates, and it is now yours. . . . You must make your judgment between sitting and moving."
Of cardinal importance here is that this reinvigoration of American society required collective action between leadership and citizenry. In one dimension, of course, this placed great burden on the electorate, burden of the sort Kennedy spoke a few months later in his inaugural address. This was a powerful foundation on which to base a candidacy, however, because as Kennedy knew the allocation of burdensome responsibilities was also the bestowal of opportunity and agency. In littering his speeches with the vocabulary of cooperation, then, the senator was making it appear that he, individually, was conferring upon voters status as participants in government. Ordinary Americans, as the source of U.S. power and strength, had the capacity to affect global progress on a sweeping scale if they acted in concert with each other and with Washington: “[O]nly if we extend the hand of American friendship in a common effort to wipe out the poverty and discontent and hopelessness on which communism feeds—only then will we drive back tyranny until it perishes in the streets of Havana. And, so tonight, I address my self not only to the people of Ohio and the people of America, but also to the people of Cuba. And to our friends--the Cuban people--I recall the scriptural injunction: ‘Be of stout heart.’ . . . Here in America we pledge ourselves to raise high the light of freedom.”

To illustrate the ideas of action and collectivity, Kennedy invoked American tradition and American history at any opportunity they were pertinent. This, however, required more than simply calling attention to the collective past. Instead, Kennedy attempted to link together past and future, to demonstrate, as one scholar has put it, how “a bright future is only possible through changes involving making new what is old or returning to the hallowed principles of the past.” In this sense, Kennedy displayed far greater skill than his opponent in using party association to his advantage. Always careful to link his candidacy with the qualities of his Democratic predecessors, with the traditions established by heroic figures with roots in the Democratic party, Kennedy made Nixon’s defence of the Eisenhower record seem uninspiring by contrast, exposing how the vice
president could not appreciate the greatness of the nation’s history, how he could do no more than advocate continuation of past policies: “I run in the tradition of Woodrow Wilson and Franklin Roosevelt and Harry Truman. But I recognize also in 1960 that we are going to face problems that they never dreamed of, and it is our responsibility, as an entirely new generation, to bring new solutions to new problems. . . . I ask you to help build America.”

It is significant as well that the senator could bend the boundaries of party politics when it served his needs. His most compelling analogy was not in associating himself with his Democratic predecessors, but with Lincoln. In borrowing the half-slave and half-free formula, Kennedy was challenging Americans to muster the determination, the nerve, indeed the courage, to fight regardless of the stakes for the defeat of the communist enemy. He was suggesting that just as the nation had rightfully been indivisible 100 years in the past, so too now the human community at large, worldwide, was divided artificially between a bloc of communist enslavement and a bloc standing not only for its own freedom, but for universal freedom. Kennedy represented this universalism as an elemental facet of U.S. foreign policy, and he underscored its validity by demonstrating that it had existed in one form or another since the foundation of the republic: “During the American Revolution Thomas Paine said that the cause of America is the cause of all mankind. Now in 1960, the cause of all mankind is the cause of America.” It is worth recalling as well that many in the United States regarded Kennedy as an expert in American history due to his prize winning 1956 publication, Profiles in Courage.

That all of this amounted to a deliberate strategy is clear from much recent scholarship on Kennedy and the myths surrounding him. We can also, however, find similar indications from sources closer to Kennedy, from individuals who might be expected to present the senator’s campaign without any of its blemishes of self-interest. Theodore White, for instance, writes an extended paean to the Democratic candidate in Making of the President, 1960, even going so far as to confess that his “kindness, respect
and cultivation of the press colored all the reporting that came from the Kennedy campaign," including his own. In certain passages, though, White discusses at length the candidate's meetings with his inner circle, disclosing as he does that these were pragmatic strategy sessions, ones devoted to preselection of rhetorical themes that would serve the candidate best in getting toward the electoral goal.34

Theodore Sorensen, even closer to Kennedy and even more overt in his praise, emphasizes the candidate's mastery of data, his ability to produce at will the current state-by-state figures on poverty and unemployment, and Sorensen evinces this as a gauge by which to measure Kennedy's concern for the plight of Americans. At the same time, however, this author also concedes that Kennedy offered "no new proposals" during the campaign--something which might indicate that his critique of the Republicans was driven by more than partisan interests. Moreover, Sorensen continues by recounting the step-by-step process of research, idea formation, and speechwriting that constituted the implementation of the candidate's rhetorical strategy. Arthur Schlesinger, for his part, feels that Kennedy's anti-Castro rhetoric was a mask for his true analysis of hemispheric politics, one he admits was adopted for the pursuit of votes. "Doubtless it was campaign oratory," claims Schlesinger, referring to all the candidate's discussion of Cuba following his abandonment of a liberal position espoused during the primaries.35

Toward the same point, Kennedy showed his strategic thinking by his inconsistency in discussing Cuba. The senator had released a campaign book, *The Strategy of Peace*, in January, designed to outline his basic position on U.S. foreign policy in the Cold War. This text, as Schlesinger points out, was his appeal for support within the liberal wing of the Democratic party, and in it Castro figures not as a tool of monolithic communism, but rather as "part of the legacy of Bolivar" who deserved a "warmer [American] welcome in his hour of triumph." By September, with the nomination locked up, Castro reemerges in Kennedy's oratory as a communist, and Cuba had now become a Soviet satellite. By October 6, he announced that Castro had "transformed the island into a supply depot for
Communist arms and operations throughout Latin America.” Subsequently, Kennedy abandoned the topic of Cuba and turned to the economy because Nixon was prepared to challenge his position in the October 20 statement.  

All of this suggests the lengths to which Kennedy was willing to go in his singular ambition to take the White House, and with this in mind it is worth recalling the senator’s 1956 comments on the inevitable predicament of an individual in his position. Politics in the United States, he argued in Profiles in Courage, requires public figures to locate themselves by their behaviour and their language choices on a spectrum between self-interest and detachment, and the senator described this onerous task as a choice between courage and conscience on the one hand, and what he suggests is an understandable temptation toward pursuing the popular stance, on the other: “Perhaps if the American people more fully comprehended the terrible pressures which discourage acts of political courage, which drive a senator to abandon or subdue his conscience, then they might be less critical of those who take the easier road.”

Richard Nixon, of course, had presidential ambition at least to the extent Kennedy did, and there is evidence for this in both private and public sources. First, it seems that the vice president had a consistent and absorbing concern for the sheerly political aspects of Cuban-American relations through this period. As early as December 10, 1959, for instance, Nixon urged the president in the NSC to wrest from Congress—a Democratic Congress—control over the upcoming review of the Cuban sugar subsidy, confessing at the same time to fearing “a massive assault on our Latin America policy” if legislative deliberations were to proceed independently. At the next week’s meeting he turned to the international front, arguing that it was necessary “to find a few dramatic things to do with respect to the Cuban situation.” This too was a question of damage control, as the vice president was worried that liberals in the State Department had hurt the administration by publicly calling for forbearance toward Cuba. On the occasion of Eisenhower’s approval of Bay of Pigs planning in March, Nixon’s prime concern was making sure that
U.S. business interests had the opportunity to pull out before the plan advanced too far, and on several occasions through the Summer he stressed the importance of publicizing at home and throughout the hemisphere all evidence of Castro’s socialist leanings that could be gathered. Finally, Nixon continued to press Eisenhower for action on Cuba through the fall, and he made a special request on October 17 that he be closely associated with the decision to expand the export restrictions already in place. As has been noted in several places, the vice president had been the political voice in the NSC since the beginning of the administration. It is not to be overlooked, however, that Nixon’s campaign for the presidency was well underway even before December 1959.  

More directly pertinent to the campaign itself, though, is the public record on Nixon’s lies. This incident is ubiquitous in the historiography of the campaign, but it is worth tracing here in greater detail because the vice president’s strategic motives are generally overlooked. Some authors have been generous with Nixon on this issue. Ralph de Toledano, for instance, lets him off the hook entirely by failing to treat the controversy at all. Ted Sorensen, interestingly, absolves the vice president for misrepresenting his position on an anti-Castro invasion, only correcting in polite terms his presumption that Kennedy was aware of Eisenhower’s covert policy. Earl Mazo and Stephen Hess are somewhat more complicitous, recounting uncritically Nixon’s own explanation in Six Crises, and Theodore White, writing in 1975, goes so far as to suggest that the vice president “would not play campaign politics” with Cuba. Garry Wills and Jules Witcover are more critical, but both concede a grudging admiration for Richard Nixon’s ability to decry with such passion the very policy he had been pushing in the NSC so tenaciously. Witcover suggests that “he was like the geography teacher, who when asked by a school superintendent whether he believed the world was round or flat, said he could teach it either way.”

Other authors have been more critical. Robert Divine and Stephen Ambrose sit next to Wills and Witcover on the spectrum, willing to see the nuances and ironies of the story
but in the end finding basic fault in the vice president's reasoning and the decisions it led him to. Ambrose is one of the scholars who feels that Nixon was deluding himself if he believed he was effectively covering up state secrets after raising the Guatemala analogy. Divine's account emphasizes the lamentable condition whereby political candidates in modern America do not take seriously their obligation to educate voters through rational discussion of the basic realities of foreign affairs. Nixon, as a confessed liar, is clearly a major culprit here, even though Divine is careful to relate how complex the situation was. Finally, Nixon comes in for harsh criticism at the hands of Leonard Lurie, who refers to the Cuba incident as an "incredible deception . . . that forces one to question not only his morality but his judgment." Fawn Brodie, similarly, refers to "the baldest lie of his vice presidency."41

The superior account of these events, however, both for its detail and its analytic rigor, is Kent Beck's "Necessary Lies, Hidden Truths." Focusing directly on Cuban-American relations and on the reasons behind postures adopted by both Kennedy and Nixon, Beck demonstrates how scholarship on this topic is unduly influenced by authorial predispositions toward the individuals involved. Because of this, historians have overlooked that Kennedy was more cautious on the issue than is generally believed, while Nixon was "decidedly half-hearted" in his cover up. Within his argument, Beck touches on several points generally overlooked in other accounts. First, his suggestion that "Kennedy tried to be moderate, militant, and imprecise at the same time" is a highly apt characterization of the senator's discourse, a description that could apply nicely to Nixon's as well. Further, Beck produces evidence to show that Kennedy and his staff were interested in raising foreign policy--and Cuba in particular--as early as August, and that their aim was both to confront Nixon's charges of inexperience, and to produce a "'counter-attack weapon' to distract the South from divisive questions like civil rights and religion." The senator began to employ this weapon in September, Beck continues, and even before the first debate, September 26, Nixon "became dismayed by two
Kennedy statements strongly hinting that there should be an active American role inside Cuba." Finally, Beck points out that Nixon's rejoinders to Kennedy's October 20 "moment at the brink," were driven by a search for "the only political position that was salvageable."42

All of these accounts, however, even Beck's, concur on one crucial point. All attribute great significance to Kennedy's purported recommendation on October 20 of a Cuban invasion, while failing to probe why and how this issue became so contentious in the first place. All, in other words, treat the statement as nothing more than a call for U.S.-sponsored counterrevolution, whereas it actually contained much more.43 To begin Kennedy noted, in a close adaptation of his familiar line criticizing the incumbent administration, that "Mr. Nixon's new Cuba policy is too little and too late." Continuing, the senator retraced GOP failures in preventing Castro's rise; upbraided the Republican embargo as "a gesture which will have so little impact on Castro as to be almost meaningless;" returned to the vice president and his embarrassing praise for the "competence and stability" of Batista's regime in 1955; and returned again to berate the Republican party as a whole for ineptitude in fighting hemispheric communism.

Only at this point, three-quarters of the way into the text, does Kennedy turn to recommendations. First, he advocated collective action "with both the Organization of American States and our NATO allies" in opposition to Castro and Castroism. This passage in particular must be overlooked if Kennedy is to be portrayed as suddenly adopting unilateralism as the basis for his foreign policy. Second, the senator recommended more effective economic measures, programs that would be multilateral by definition so as to prevent supplies from reaching the island from third party states. In effect, this is the germ of the Helms-Burton policy of the 1990s; however, it also resembled Richard Nixon's quarantine very closely. At this point, Kennedy reached what has been treated as the crucial passage: "Third, we must attempt to strengthen the non-Batista democratic anti-Castro forces in exile, and in Cuba itself, who offer eventual hope
of overthrowing Castro. Thus far these fighters for freedom have had virtually no support from our government.” The statement then concluded with Kennedy’s support for preventative measures against the spread of communist influence, and directing attention toward the 12-point program he had outlined two days before in Tampa, the Alliance for Progress.

Given the length of this statement, given Kennedy’s parallel recommendations of multilateral and non-military containment, and given that the object of its reproach is not Castro but the Republican Party of the United States, it is difficult to read the statement as a simple call for invasion unless the penultimate paragraph is isolated from what precedes it. Nixon, however, responded in the campaign to this one decontextualized passage of the press release, and in his 1962 memoir he seems to have set the agenda for subsequent scholarship by referring to it once again as an isolated entity. Almost without exception, none of the authors surveyed in this account reproduce any of the October 20 statement outside this paragraph, and none conveys adequate sense of this context in analyzing Nixon’s response.44

In the second place historians have also treated the October 20 statement, much as Nixon did, as a basic shift in the terms of Kennedy’s discussion of Cuba. However, taking as a cue Beck’s vague suggestion that Kennedy may have offered earlier intimations of the same sort, a thorough inquiry indicates that the paragraph in question scarcely deviated from the tone of his earlier discourse. The “freedom fighters” rhetoric, for instance, appeared as early as September. In Syracuse NY, September 29, Kennedy outlined GOP failures in “six key areas of the world . . . where the cause of freedom is in serious trouble.” In each of these areas—Poland, Japan, Ghana, Laos, India, and Cuba—Kennedy argued that, “early action by this nation or the West--before the communist threat reached its present state--might well have gone a long way toward strengthening the forces of freedom within that country.” Four days later, in Springfield Illinois, Kennedy elaborated further. In this instance the senator proclaimed that “[I]n regard to Cuba, itself, I feel that
the United States should sustain the cause of freedom. . . . We will hold out the hand of friendship to those who have been driven out of Cuba by Castro . . . There are undoubtedly those in the mountains now who are growing beards in preparation for undoing Mr. Castro.” This last passage in particular has strong and unmistakable implications.45

Three days following Syracuse, Kennedy delivered a major foreign policy address in Cincinnati devoted entirely to the topic of Cuba. Once again he struck the same themes, assailing the GOP for ineptitude and oversight. In this instance, reaching the climactic point of the speech, Kennedy declared that “[t]oday time is running out in Latin America. . . . Hopefully, events may once again bring us an opportunity to bring our influence strongly to bear on behalf of the cause of freedom in Cuba. But in the meantime we can constantly express our friendship for the Cuban people--our sympathy with their economic problems--our determination that they will again be free. At the same time we must firmly resist further communist encroachment in this hemisphere--working through a strengthened organization of American States--and encouraging those liberty-loving Cubans who are leading the resistance to Castro.” Or, rephrasing himself once again on October 15 in Johnstown Pennsylvania, Kennedy explained that “we must end the harassment, which this government has carried on, of liberty-loving anti-Castro forces in Cuba and in other lands. While we cannot violate international law, we must recognize that these exiles and rebels represent the real voice of Cuba, and should not be constantly handicapped by our Immigration and Justice Department Authorities.”46

Any of these remarks, if removed from their proper context, might have appeared just as inflammatory as the penultimate paragraph from October 20 was reputed to be. In other words, ever since he abandoned the legacy of Bolivar argument, Kennedy was relatively consistent in his vague and ambiguous calls for some form of undisclosed support to anti-Castro forces of freedom. If this was the case, though, Nixon's consternation does not make sense. The vice president later explained that his immediate and vitriolic response
was a function of his shock upon discovering Kennedy's new position. "As early as September 23," Nixon wrote in 1962, "Kennedy had given an exclusive statement to the Scripps-Howard papers in which he said 'The forces fighting for freedom in exile and in the mountains of Cuba should be sustained and assisted.' But he had not followed up by advocating what was, in effect, direct intervention in Cuba in violation of our treaties with other Latin American countries—until now. . . . For the first and only time in the campaign, I got mad at Kennedy—personally. I understand and expect hard-hitting attacks in a campaign. But in this instance I thought that Kennedy, with full knowledge of the facts, was jeopardizing the security of a United States foreign policy operation. And my rage was even greater because I could do nothing about it."47

By his own logic, then, Nixon's self-assigned imperative duty to protect the covert operation came into effect at the very first instance he realized that Kennedy was advocating what the Republicans had already begun to execute. It is possible, certainly, that Nixon's shock was genuine; however, there is also evidence to suggest that the vice president was overdramatizing, that he was contriving to make it appear that Kennedy's position had substantively changed. First, his mention in *Six Crises* of the September 23 Scripps-Howard press release suggests in some measure that he was diligently keeping up on the evolution of Kennedy's campaign oratory. That the vice president would be likely to do this is fully plausible given that he had workaholic tendencies and given that Nixon was his own campaign manager and director in 1960.49 At very least, he would have undoubtedly been familiar with the text of Kennedy's Cincinnati speech. This was one of his opponent's major foreign policy addresses of the entire campaign, and it was delivered the evening before the first debate at which foreign affairs were slated for discussion. Furthermore, the very fact that Nixon characterized October 20 as a shift in Kennedy's position suggests that he must have been following the senator's speeches in a meticulous fashion. If he was not versed in its antecedents, Nixon's claim that he discerned a change in this press release is baseless. Finally, even if all the earlier
intimations had escaped him, Nixon would have undoubtedly been aware that purported advocacy of invasion occupied a minor portion of the press release. Nixon learned of the statement, according to his own account, while reading the New York dailies. Of these, the Times at least had published Kennedy’s text in its full version.\textsuperscript{50}

So it seems that Nixon only disclosed a part of the story. Historians have begun to fill the gaps by pointing out that the vice president could have simply ignored the Kennedy statement, and that his diligence in keeping Cuba on the agenda from October 21 through to November 8 raises suspicion about his conduct.\textsuperscript{51} What they have not explored, however, are his strategic motives for doing so. Nixon’s strategy for self-representation was conceived at an entirely different level from Kennedy’s, taking the campaign as a whole as the basic unit of planning instead of treating the contest as an agglomeration of individual speeches. As such, there is little overlap between the candidates here—except in that both deliberately tailored their rhetoric to suit a preformulated plan. Theodore White explains the vice president’s approach:

A campaign, according to the Nixon theory, has its ebbs and surges; and it is essential not to “peak” too early, essential not to “wear” the public, essential to change mood and pace at the appropriate moment. Specifically, then, the Nixon campaign would be paced this way: it would open in a bland low key of quiet confidence and optimism. “We have to erase the image of pugnacity first” was the way the Nixon campaigners in Round One phrased it, or as Nixon is reported to have replied in early October when he was already under attack from Republican regulars for his “kid-glove” campaign, “I have to erase the Herblock image first.” Gradually as October wore on he would take off the kid gloves and step up the pace of the attack. Finally in the last three weeks of the campaign he would unload, with every “control element” of TV and media advertising the Republican National Committee could finance, and let Kennedy have it.\textsuperscript{52}

The final push of Richard Nixon’s strategy was predetermined from the beginning of the general campaign, and his ultimate return to attack politics was scheduled to commence precisely in that week of October 16-22. Furthermore, White notes a crucial GOP strategy session on the evening of Sunday October 16 at which Nixon’s inner circle
“pressed him for a more dynamic, harder-hitting campaign—a bit more of the ‘Old Nixon’ manner in advocacy of the ‘New Nixon’ positions.” Kent Beck reports a similar meeting on October 20 with not only the campaign team, but with party leaders as well. In this instance Thomas Dewey, former Republican presidential candidate and still highly influential within the party, urged him to “attack and attack and attack.” Neither of these authors, however, discloses whether there were specific issues that would provide the script for the second debut of the ‘Old Nixon.’ Instead, the idea held that political appeal would derive from the very fact of the attack. White, in his analysis of the initial strategy, provides the building blocks for a comprehensive picture, but does not assemble them. Beck comes very close to doing so, recognizing that “Nixon had decided that adopting Dewey’s advice to attack offered his best hope to win.” It appears, however, that the vice president was not so much salvaging the best political position that he could, but rather deliberately inflaming an issue, and most importantly, doing so in order to implement a pre-existing strategy. \(^53\)

Much of this seems highly implausible. The implication is that Nixon deliberately chose to advocate a “soft” Cuba policy, thereby undermining the reputation for virulent anti-communism he had been building since the beginning of his career. On the other hand, though, it is clear that the vice president was hoping to represent himself as all things to all voters in the campaign, much as any candidate will be tempted to do. Furthermore, most historians have admitted this in concurring with Theodore White’s description of the New Nixon/Old Nixon strategy. \(^54\) We also know from Nixon’s later career when he did take the White House that he had an acute sense of the latitude at the disposal of an individual renowned for staunch Cold War credentials. \(^55\) Confident that voters would find it absurd if Kennedy were to try to use the appeasement metaphor against him, he may have perceived the risk of an attack from the left as marginal. Taking advantage of this, he could return to attack politics, and along the way he could also rebuke Kennedy for impetuosity and inexperience in keeping with his established themes,
and broadcast the senator’s new hawkish position so as to confound his supporters among the liberal wing of the Democrats.

Finally, if Nixon was motivated by electoral calculations in part, his foreign policy interest lay more in concealing his own connection with Bay of Pigs planning, rather than in preserving the secrecy of the operation itself. First, it is virtually assured that the vice president was aware of Castro’s prior knowledge, making it irrelevant whether Kennedy might have sent a signal of some sort to Havana. Beyond this, the vice president was still pressing Eisenhower to execute the operation before election day, and Nixon believed at the time that if the president had done so the Republican ticket would have been assured of victory. In this event it would have been imperative for ‘president-elect Nixon’ to appear in ignorance before members of the OAS and the world at large. This may have been why he mentioned the link with Guatemala; he could have been hoping to signal to Latin Americans that Eisenhower kept his vice president in the dark, or that the CIA kept the White House in the dark, by indicating that he believed the Guatemalan anti-Arbenz revolution to have been an indigenous affair.56

In any case, the actual point is not to attempt an all-encompassing solution to this long-standing controversy. Nor is it to let Nixon off the hook since he undeniably misrepresented himself in a way that Kennedy did not by going beyond vagueness and self-contradiction to the point of actually lying. Instead, my intent is to emphasize how far both candidates were willing to go in trying to win the election. The desire held by both Kennedy and Nixon to appear presidential or selfless—or, for that matter, hawkish, or liberal, or so on--was carried out in their rhetorical strategies. Kennedy’s rhetorical strategy unfolded for the most part in the context of individual speeches, dictating that he would present to each audience his grand vision of America, its past and its future, its role in the world. The senator’s proclaimed goal of getting the nation moving again was above all a hope to get it moving back into the Democratic column. Nixon was just as deliberate in composing his speeches, without a doubt, but his route to the presidency was presumed
to lie in mounting—that is, escalating—an attack. He planned all along to escalate in mid-
to late-October, and the position he adopted on the Cuba controversy was in part defined
by this plan.

Neither Kennedy nor Nixon had the confidence to simply enter the arena, offer his
best understanding of what Americans required of their leaders, and let the electorate
decide with benefit of full disclosure. Instead, both went to great lengths to determine
what voters wanted to hear, and how they wanted it presented. Finally, if it might seem
these evaluations indulge in retrospective judgment, there were contemporary observers
who saw clearly that Kennedy and Nixon were being highly opportunistic in attempting to
make political advantage from a sensitive foreign policy issue. Milton Eisenhower
pointed out quite rightly that both were negligent in their duties as candidates: "In the
1960 presidential campaign, both candidates made assertions about the dangerous
situation in Cuba which did nothing to enlighten the people of the United States and
caused considerable puzzlement in Latin America. I was disappointed. It has always
seemed to me that a nationwide presidential campaign should be a mammoth exercise in
adult education. Each candidate should adhere scrupulously to the truth as he sees it and
give his honest judgments on major issues."
American Exceptionalism and Essentialist Democracy

Kennedy and Nixon, without question, did rely on notions of American exceptionalism in their respective campaigns, reaffirming self-perceptions of distinctiveness in U.S. political culture. However, probing deeper it becomes evident that they were also attempting at one and the same time to show congruity and similarity between Americans and foreigners. The discussion of Cuba shows in particular how the candidates were able to envision this commonality because they believed that all human political behaviour—not just politics in America—was driven by an essential human yearning for freedom. Kennedy and Nixon regarded this notion as a laudable acknowledgment that foreigners had as much capacity for good common sense as did Americans, and in this sense it was an intentional attempt to oppose the prejudices and xenophobias, so often entailed in U.S. exceptionalism. Nevertheless, it was highly presumptive of them to claim that they had a true understanding of how Cubans thought and felt about political affairs. To see all this it is necessary to trace Nixon’s and Kennedy’s respective portrayals of Cuba and Cuban-American relations.

Nixon’s campaign oratory on the past, present, and future of Cuba was a parable that began with a vision of crisis. The dilemma, quite simply, was the emergence of a hostile and presumed communist figure in authority, controlling a state with both historic and concrete present ties to the United States. Castro’s policies, however, his incursions on U.S. interests in Cuba through measures such as agrarian reform and nationalization of major industries, were not the vice president’s lone concern. Instead, Nixon’s campaign oratory demonstrates how he located the true menace in the source from which these derived—the Cuban president’s character and personality.

To begin, Nixon loaded his vocabulary with pejoratives, labeling his adversary for instance as an international criminal, a “little demagogue,” a “hydra-headed monster,” and “a cheap, egotistical enslaver.” By doing this the U.S. vice president was assigning Castro
an inhuman, or subhuman profile; he denied that the Cuban president had capacity for rational thought, and he precluded any counterargument for good intentions that might underlie recent Cuban political reforms. Confident that he knew the situation, confident that “Mr. Castro was not a man truly interested in the Cuban people,” Nixon insisted that he knew Cubans, and that he knew they deserved something better: “The third [problem] is a current one. It is terribly difficult. It involves a people, wonderful people, that are among the best friends Americans have. I don’t know how many of you have ever been to Havana. My wife and I have been there several times, and each time we always marvel at the great friendship that the people of Havana, the Cuban people, have for the people of the United States. . . . But what happened? . . . [Castro] was not a man who brought true revolution to the Cuban people. He was a man who brought and is bringing to the Cuban people a dictatorship, a slavery, which in some respects is even worse than that of Mr. Batista, the man that he threw out and deposed.”

In Nixon’s view, however, there was still ample cause for optimism. “Cuba is not lost,” claimed the vice president when his rival directed back at the GOP their own ten year old charge of the Democrats loosing China. Instead, there were concrete reasons why Americans should still hold confident hopes that Castro’s rule would be temporary. First, there were clear and effective courses of action facing U.S. policy makers. In accordance, Nixon called for a multilateral quarantine and other measures implemented collectively through the OAS: “We have been trying to work through the Organization of American States, our friends in the American States, trying to bring it about so that the people of Cuba, themselves, can get what they deserve, and that is the realization of the Cuban Revolution’s true objectives.” More so than U.S. measures, though, the real cause for optimism was that Castro held no legitimate authority at home. In this Nixon was not making a legalistic argument against revolutionary means, but rather he was claiming that Castro lacked the basic capacities for sharing values and aspirations of ordinary Cubans: “[L]et me say this in all fairness: The Cuban people needed a revolution. The Cuban
people are a wonderful people. . . . But the last thing they needed was a Communist-directed revolution, and that's what Castro has given them. And I'm confident that they will assert themselves and that they will get the progress with freedom which they deserve, and with honest government. . . . I think the Cuban people in their good time will see to it that they do get leadership which represents the true ideals of the Cuban revolution.  

Nixon was not alone in making these sorts of arguments; Castro's illegitimacy was an article of faith for many in Washington, perhaps most, including both candidates, the president, and high officials in the State Department. That this was, as Louis Pérez points out, "a result of a mixture of self-deception and an instance of North Americans believing their own propaganda," did not impede the popularity of this view. The vice president, however, embellished the illegitimacy arguments by adding on an inevitability thesis as well. Cubans, according to Nixon, when they were to come to a realization of Castro's personal, political, and ideological profile, when they were to see that he was a communist and that communism was slavery, would see that the Cuban leader had betrayed them and the "true objectives" or "true ideals" of their revolution. At this point, almost foreordained under Nixon's forecast, they would rise up and cast off his tyranny: "[T]his little pipsqueak, Castro, down there stirring it up; and, so, everybody says: Why don't we get rid of him? Why don't we send the marines in? My friends, the reason we don't is that we don't want to make a second Hungary out of 5 million people on the island of Cuba. The reason we don't is that we know the people of Cuba will take care of this or any other dictator in their good time if they get the moral support of the United States."  

Kennedy, for his part, began his narrative by sketching a broader problem. Under his assessment, the crisis at hand was not merely that Castro had emerged as leader of the Cuban state, bringing the communist threat to within 90 miles of U.S. shores. In addition, the real source of worry the senator presented to Americans was that this situation had
been so easily preventable if U.S. policy and diplomacy had simply been getting the
correct kind of leadership through the 1950s. Kennedy repeatedly called attention to the
ineffectuality of American economic sanctions imposed since 1959, the lack of attention
paid by the Eisenhower administration to social and economic grievances that had driven
Cubans to action, and the repeated warnings of GOP ambassadors in Havana, warnings of
Castro's threat to U.S. interests that were ignored by a complacent foreign policy team in
Washington. "[T]oo little and too late," he described Nixon's campaign ideas over and
over, asserting that these would be insufficient to remedy seven years of "blunder,
inaction, retreat, and failure."61

Nevertheless, within this scenario Kennedy held out a source of optimism as well.
The prospects for improvement, though, were more heavily qualified than those under
Nixon's version. First, Kennedy's ideas required that steps be taken by the United States
to work toward progress, more steps than the vice president's abstract advocacy of
quarantine and working through the OAS. Notwithstanding the vagueness rife through so
many facets of Kennedy's own campaign, he was in this instance quite specific. Among
his major speeches, the senator included a four-point program for U.S. policy toward
Cuba, a similar five-point program, and a 12-point plan on his proposed U.S. partnership
with Latin America, the Alliance for Progress. Recurrent proposals in these variants on
Kennedy's agenda included economic measures such as encouraging moderate land
reform, and stabilizing commodity prices; social and cultural contacts including greater
opportunities in the United States for Latin American students, and more funding for
Voice of America radio broadcasts; and a commitment on the part of the United States
government to facilitate productive communication with neighbors by revamping the
OAS and training diplomats in Spanish and Portuguese. Standing behind all these
measures was an overt desire to return to the spirit of Franklin Roosevelt's Good
Neighbor Policy, and a concomitant hope of buttressing hemispheric containment.62
At the root of it all, however, was one very simple advocacy question around which the whole line of argument turned. The overriding thrust of Kennedy's recommendations was that the United States electorate must come to see that getting rid of the Republicans was a prerequisite for any future progress. "The American people want to know how this was permitted to happen," Kennedy explained in his Cincinnati speech, "how the Iron Curtain could have advanced almost to our front yard... It is the party in power which must accept full responsibility for this disaster." Under Kennedy's formula, then, resolution was not contingent upon a realization by Cubans of the truth about Castro and his programs, but rather on a decision by Americans to pass an ultimately negative verdict on the Eisenhower record. Once again devolving agency, Kennedy gave American voters a chance to right the wrongs of the recent past, and thereby to envision themselves transcending history. The United States, Kennedy argued, "must identify itself with the people around the globe against poverty, misery, disease, and ignorance... We are going to have to do much better, and I believe, with a new Democratic administration, committed to progress... we can demonstrate that we are a strong and vital and progressive society. And we shall show the people of the world to the south of us that we do care, that freedom is the road for them, because what we do they can do, what we do they will do, what we must do they must do. That is the opportunity on Tuesday... November 8." 63

Leaving aside partisanship, Kennedy also made the case for Castro's illegitimacy. Using the same terminology as his opponent, Kennedy explained on October 3 that "sooner or later people want to be free. The whole Castro movement was based on a desire of the people in Cuba to be free from Batista. Castro betrayed the revolution." Three days later he opened the Cincinnati speech with the same point: "They [the Cuban revolutionaries] promised individual liberty and free elections. They promised an end to harsh police-state tactics. They promised a better life for a people long oppressed by both economic and political tyranny. But in the two years since that revolution swept Fidel
Castro into power, those promises have all been broken. There have been no free elections—and there will be none as long as Castro rules. . . . Castro and his gang have betrayed the ideals of the Cuban revolution and the hopes of the Cuban people.” Finally, he reiterated this a week later in Johnstown by describing forces of counterrevolution as the “real voice of Cuba.” These comments avoided the determinism of the sort Nixon succumbed to, but they reflect the same self-deception Peréz has identified.64

This is where the overlap between Kennedy’s and Nixon’s analysis of the Cuba situation becomes most evident. Both use the vocabulary of betrayal to describe the evolution of Castro’s policies, and both use language which makes it appear that the regime had taken the nation hostage, much as the states of Eastern Europe were regarded as “captive nations” at this time.65 In addition, this discourse held in common was underpinned by a common line of reasoning: since Castro had betrayed an authentic and justifiable revolution, he was illegitimate in leadership; since he maintained his rule despite this, he was enslaving the Cuban people; and since terminating the enslavement could only be realized by placing a representative leader in the Cuban presidency, freedom and democracy were synonymous. Garry Wills has described this strain of thought in the American outlook on the world:

In foreign affairs, that accepted framework has been what we may loosely call Wilsonian. We possess a devotion to freedom for all peoples, a freedom to be measured in terms of ‘self-determination’—which boils down to American-style elections. Right and Left are agreed on these norms for judging others (and therefore for dealing with them). We do not offer a counter-philosophy to communism, but a procedure: freedom is the machinery of suffrage, judged by the distribution, frequency of use, and access to ballot boxes; by the number of electoral alternatives put before people and actually decided by them. Measured by such standards, America scores, let us say, 70 percent, and Russia scores, say 15 percent. That is the measure of the two systems’ excellence. One land is free, the other is not.66
To be sure, Kennedy and Nixon each articulated this framework and its application to Cuba in distinctive fashion. Kennedy placed agency almost exclusively in the hands of Americans. Much of the New Frontier discourse, certainly, was comprised of the very opposite of this, the vocabulary of working with Latin Americans, Africans, and Asians, returning agency to these parties so that all could prosper in partnership. At the same time, however, the senator persistently laid the decision for future direction of the United States—and thereby, often explicitly, for the future of the world—in the hands of American voters. This was the strain of his diction that appeared most in reference to Cuba, the appeal for votes dressed up as a call for action and change. Nixon, on the other hand, spoke in declarative grammar rather than in entreaty. If he had any doubt of Castro's eventual fate he did not disclose it, instead stating with assurance that Cubans would rise and deliver Castro's ouster. The vice president's was a teleological narrative that bordered on inevitability.

Both of these attitudes have been remarked upon in the historiography of American foreign relations and political culture. Kennedy's allocation of sweeping global responsibilities to the American voter, for instance, resembles closely Geir Lundestad's model of "provincialism."\(^\text{67}\) Nixon's confidence in the future path of Cuban politics, in its turn, is in close parallel with the "complacency" Rush Welter has described in the national self-conception during the Nineteenth Century: "Americans of almost every political persuasion testified to a belief that the United States had somehow appropriated the progress of liberty to itself. . . . The future would be an occasion only for the elaboration and extension of institutions the Americans had already introduced."\(^\text{68}\) Finally, Nixon and Kennedy both resuscitated the City on a Hill theme pervading U.S. politics and external relations since their very first days. The candidates differed here only in that Kennedy felt Democratic leadership was necessary for peoples abroad to continue looking toward America as a shining beacon of freedom and democracy, while Nixon
argued that it was the United States—as a state, not under any particular government—that would spellbind foreigners, enticing them to walk in the American shadow.

In its typical form, though, the City on a Hill paradigm requires that foreigners remain outside the United States, remain Other, aspiring to make themselves over in the image of Americans. However, Kennedy and Nixon took the argument in a slightly different direction, arguing that foreigners actually were like Americans. The sum of Kennedy's vision, New Frontier and all, held that "[t]his is a great country. It represents the best system of government there is. It represents in a real sense the kind of system that everyone wants to live under because it fits a basic aspiration of human beings, to live in an independent nation in a free way themselves." Nixon expressed the same idea: "America is on the right side. I know this. I have been around the world. I have been on both sides of the Iron Curtain, and in the minds and hearts of men throughout the world what we stand for [is what] the world wants." 69

This notion that all of humanity were essentially the same in their strivings for free governance was a basic element of the liberal democratic ideology that Kennedy and Nixon shared. Moreover, it was a vital plank in the American reading of cold war politics; without this version of human nature it would have been difficult to understand the bipolar world as an implacable struggle between forces of good standing for universal freedom and forces of evil suppressing the true voices of captive nations. Most important, though, American exceptionalism did not dominate the oratory of the 1960 campaign, but instead coexisted with Kennedy's and Nixon's insistence that strong forces bound all of humanity together. We are left at the end with a body of oratory that reaffirmed American exceptionalism, yes, but that also diffused it by presenting messages of distinctiveness intermingled with exhaustive discussion of essentialist democracy.
Conclusion

What stands out as the most conspicuous element of the Cuba issue in the 1960 campaign is the manner in which both candidates projected their own beliefs and values onto others, presupposing that their shared evaluation of the regime in Havana was nothing more than simple, observable fact. That Castro was an illegitimate demagog, in other words, was for Kennedy and Nixon neither opinion nor ideological judgment; rather, it was a self-evident truth, and as such both candidates were certain that they were vindicated in speaking on behalf of those “betrayed” by the revolution. As an example of this, I reiterate the vice president’s highly narcissistic assurance that the “wonderful people” of Cuba would eventually come to their senses and come to see Castro in the same light as he, Nixon, saw the Cuban president. Similarly, Kennedy’s reductive view of the forces driving hemispheric politics, and his confident assertions that the United States had acquired “the best system of government there is,” were exclusive and introspective, and they are difficult to reconcile with the open-mindedness that was vaunted as the attitude of the New Frontier.

Closely related was the gross oversimplification Kennedy and Nixon indulged in. At the general level, Cuban foreign minister Raul Roa was quite right in pointing out that both candidates discussed Cuba in proprietary, possessive terms. Moreover, campaign discourse typecast and homogenized all Cubans, despite the social, ethnic, and cultural diversities and the political, ideological, and economic cleavages that characterized life in Cuba no less than they did life in America or anywhere else. But instead, Kennedy and Nixon could only see one axis of tension when they looked South. Presuming they had a clear understanding of the true character of the revolution, both candidates were only able to identify a simple opposition between Castro on one hand and his opponents on the other.
If the campaign revealed Kennedy’s and Nixon’s presumptive and oversimplified attitudes toward Cuba specifically, it also demonstrated how both held ambivalent attitudes toward democracy. On one hand, both candidates showed by their decisions and actions in directing their campaigns that they did not see themselves as ethically responsible to American voters. Kennedy, for instance, based his entire candidacy around his skill in discussing current affairs in abstract, metaphorical terms, and he avoided actual deliberation over public policy to a remarkable extent. Close members of his supporting team have conceded that the senator was interested in winning votes more so than in generating new ideas for leadership, or in genuine self-representation. The foreign policy debate showed him unable to clarify how and why his Cuba statement had been misconstrued, and willing to raise the economy as a topic of distraction rather than explaining thoroughly, trusting that voters would be intelligent enough to grasp his ideas. Nixon’s campaign was conducted at the same level. The vice president distorted the content of Kennedy’s Cuba statement, inflated its significance to unjustifiable proportions, and lied in claiming he would support only political and economic measures against Castro.

It might almost go without saying that Kennedy and Nixon tried not to let on that they considered all of these measures an intrinsic part of the presidential contest. Kennedy spent much of the campaign trying to obfuscate his ambition by reminding audiences that only they could decide if he would remain in the Senate or move to the White House, while Nixon, immediately following the election, congratulated himself for respecting the proud traditions of U.S. democracy. Both candidates, then, tried to present themselves as selfless public servants, while beneath this republican veneer both acted as political realists. However, since voters were not only choosing a president on November 8, 1960, but also renewing their consent to be governed from Washington, Kennedy and Nixon undoubtedly had an ethical responsibility to conduct themselves otherwise. In subordinating honesty and genuine self-representation to the dictates of electoral and
rhetorical strategy they violated the trust of millions of Americans expecting them to adhere to democratic, rather than Machiavellian, values.

On the other hand, though, both candidates exalted democracy and democratic values in their campaign oratory even as they spared no effort in pursuit of victory, and their discussion of Cuba acted as a major carrier for this theme in the discourse. Implicitly associating democracy with freedom, and explicitly opposing freedom against tyranny and enslavement in the discussion of Fidel Castro's rule, Kennedy and Nixon portrayed American democracy as an *a priori* good. It was not a political system to be adopted for utilitarian purposes, and it was not, as suggested in the old maxim, the worst system of governance we know—except for all others we have tried. Instead, for Kennedy and Nixon American democracy was the natural order of human society, and reverence and desire for it constituted an essential element of the human character. These were deeply-held values for both men, and both believed that the majority of Americans, and foreigners, shared their views. They were undeniably correct, of course, in arguing that freedom is a universal value which, after a fashion, binds all of humanity together. Given that neither could recognize his own ambivalence, though, given that neither could see how his conduct rendered democratic rhetoric hollow, it is difficult not to wonder what Kennedy and Nixon had in mind when they advocated universal free governance.

If Kennedy and Nixon were blind to these aspects of their own thought and oratory, they had even greater difficulty making sense of the situation in Cuba. One of the major conclusions drawn here is that the logic both candidates employed in arguing for Castro's illegitimacy was deeply flawed and highly contrived; it is because they were predisposed against the revolutionary leader that they chose to recognize only his opposition as the real voice of Cuba. Beyond problems in the reasoning process, however, there is also good reason to believe that Castro enjoyed broad domestic support in 1960. The Cuban president, of course, was no more insightful, for he too was influenced by predispositions and by his own bombast as he interpreted the adversary across the Florida Strait.
Nevertheless, Castro was in large measure correct when he argued before United Nations General Assembly that “there seems no chance of correcting the impressions that the politicians of this country have regarding the questions of Cuba. They seem unable to understand the true facts of the story.”  

Castro exaggerated, of course, in suggesting that all American public figures were entirely misled in their analysis of the Cuba situation in and around this time. Senator William Fulbright, for one, showed astute judgment in explaining to President Kennedy shortly before the Bay of Pigs invasion, that the “real question” in Latin American policy concerned “whether Castro can in fact succeed in providing a better life for the Cuban people. . . . One should be wary of dogmatic answers on this point.” In addition, there remains the possibility that even Kennedy and Nixon might have privately recognized some validity in this perspective, that they at least may have seen how Castroism was a vastly complex phenomenon with strong appeal in many sectors of Latin American society at this time. Had they chosen to espouse this perspective, Kennedy and Nixon might have been able to inculcate tolerance among Americans for the still uncommitted Cuban Revolution, while at the same time using the campaign to demonstrate before Latin Americans that amicable hemispheric relations were both attainable and a foreign policy goal to which the United States was committed. However, in their campaign oratory Kennedy and Nixon relied on precisely the dogmatic answers Fulbright warned against. In doing so, they chose to entrench popular myths of Castro’s betrayal of the revolution rather than trying to lay the groundwork for some sort of rapprochement.
Endnotes


5. The “Praeger Series in Political Communication” is the best place to start in this literature. It should be noted that political communication scholars employ diverse methodologies and engage with many aspects of the communicative process. It should also be noted that electoral historians have shown scant interest in these ritualistic functions that the communication scholars describe as “metapolitics.”


Hinck’s model for interpreting campaign communication is sophisticated and valuable in many respects. However, a close reading of his first chapter will reveal his belief in a purported direct and causal relationship between the institutions and traditions of the American system, and the characteristics of the candidates that it “produces.” That is, because campaigns force candidates to present themselves before the electorate in an extended and high-publicity process, only potential candidates who fit a certain profile will rise through the apparatus of candidate selection to actually become nominees. Hinck argues that this profile—nearly guaranteed in a given candidate due to this causal relationship—includes “moral excellence, or the capacity to represent symbolically the moral values” of the electorate; and “good will,” or, “a politician’s motives, whether he is interested in the needs of the people before whom he argues and whether his actions will support and protect the community he represents.” With candidates of this high caliber, in turn, the campaign exercise ends in a celebration of the democratic ethos. “Regardless of their outcomes,” argues Hinck, campaigns “reinforce democratic values and reassure audiences that the democratic system is working as it should.” See Hinck, Enacting the Presidency, 5-8 especially.

Because Hinck focuses solely on campaign rhetoric, however, he does not sufficiently consider whether candidates might be driven by underlying self-interest. In my own interpretation, candidates are quite capable of feigning an image of self-abnegation in pursuit of electoral victory.


See also, for instance, *Kennedy Speeches*, 275, 715, 720, 735.


15. *Kennedy Speeches*, 287. See also, for instance, *Kennedy Speeches*, 283, 530, 556, 610.


18. *Joint Appearances*, 78; George H. Gallup, *The Gallup Poll: Public Opinion, 1935-1971, Volume Three*, 1959-1971 (New York: Random House, 1972), 1686. This poll was restricted to a survey in the Eastern States. Over the course of the following week Gallup found that Kennedy led 50-45 in the West; that Nixon led 48-47 in the Midwest; and that the candidates were tied in the South, 46-46.


22. *Joint Appearances*, 265; *Joint Appearances*, 266.

It remains unknown whether Kennedy actually knew that the Eisenhower administration was training Cuban exiles, and in fact there is considerable dissension among the sources on this topic. The majority suggest that he had likely learned of its general parameters in intelligence briefings with CIA chief Allen Dulles, and the plurality of authors writing on the topic seem to feel that Nixon was correct in thinking his opponent had at least some concrete knowledge of the program. James Giglio gives the best account of this; see Giglio, *The Presidency of John F. Kennedy* (Lawrence, KS: University of Kansas Press, 1991), 48-50.

There is also a controversy surrounding whether Kennedy had a chance to review the October 20 press release before it was distributed. Richard Goodwin, who actually composed the statement, claims that the candidate was asleep at the time of its release. Since Goodwin is accepting blame for a sizable indiscretion here, his account seems fairly reliable. See Richard N. Goodwin, *Remembering America: A Voice from the Sixties* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1988), 124. See also Michael R. Beschloss, *The Crisis Years: Kennedy and Khrushchev, 1960-1963* (New York: Edward Burlingame Books, 1991), 28, for further evidence of Kennedy's ignorance of the statement at the time of its release.

On the other hand, Herb Parmet points out that the statement was dated October 20, but that it was not released until the morning of the 21st. Since the sleep Goodwin refers to was Kennedy's customary afternoon nap, Parmet has a very good point in arguing that if Kennedy had not approved the statement, he had at least been in a position to do so. See Herbert S. Parmet, *JFK: The Presidency of John F. Kennedy* (New York: The Dial Press, 1983), 48.

I avoid taking a stance on either of these controversies because the evidence is indeterminate on both. And in any case, neither has direct bearing on my argument; below, I use the Cuba affair as evidence toward Nixon's unrelenting ambition, not Kennedy's.


It is worth noting as well that Nixon's claim to have learned of the Kennedy statement in "all the afternoon papers" may be incorrect. See discussion of Parmet’s evidence above, note 23.

25. *Joint Appearances*, 266.


26. Philip Bonsal reported in 1971 that planning for a U.S. invasion was common knowledge in Havana in 1960. If the American ambassador knew this, presumably it would have been brought to the attention of the NSC, and thereby to the attention of the

27. *Nixon Speeches*, 712; *Nixon Speeches*, 926. See also, for instance, *Nixon Speeches*, 744, 804, 934, 983, 1025, 1044, 1113.


29. For Nixon’s efforts in not letting the issue drop, see, for instance, *Nixon Speeches*, 744, 804, 994, 1033, 1038; for Kennedy on Republican economic mismanagement, see, for instance, *Kennedy Speeches*, 765-768, 780-782, 887-892.


   *Foreign Relations of the United States* volume cited hereafter as FRUS.


   Kennedy’s depiction of time in this campaign, according to DePoe, took place on a “qualitative locus,” while Nixon’s was “quantitative.” For the distinction, see DePoe, “Space and Time,” 217.

   Invocations of Wilson, Roosevelt, and Truman—as well as Thomas Jefferson and Andrew Jackson—were frequent in Kennedy’s campaign. See, for instance, *Kennedy Speeches*, 362, 531, 612-613, 1041.

33. *Kennedy Speeches*, 612. Kennedy was fond of this particular quote, and it appears 35 times in the volume of Kennedy’s speeches. For comparison, quotes from Lincoln appear 38 times, Benjamin Franklin, 10 times, and Thomas Jefferson, 5 times. Winston Churchill’s words appear 15 times, and George Washington’s not at all.

with which Kennedy and his team approached the construction of a candidacy through oratorical self-representation, see Making, 292-298, 384-387.


35. That Sorensen and Schlesinger were still acolytes at the time they published their respective books on Kennedy is clear from the beginning of each text. The former gives full disclosure of this. See Theodore C. Sorensen, Kennedy (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1965), 5-7. The latter is slightly more cryptic, but he does trace his 'conversion,' so to speak, in 1959 and 1960 from a Stevenson-man to a Kennedy-man, as well as his passing interest in joining Hubert Humphrey's team. See Schlesinger, Thousand Days, 9-26.

For Sorensen's discussion of Kennedy's mastery over raw information and for the light he sheds on the candidate's rhetorical strategy, see Kennedy, 181-182. For Schlesinger on Cuba and Kennedy's campaign oratory, see Thousand Days, 224.

For further disclosures, see Goodwin, Remembering America, 74-75, 116-119, 122-123. As evidence for my point this carries somewhat less weight than the material cited above since Goodwin, writing in 1988, no longer feels the adulation for Kennedy that he did in 1960. Nevertheless, these passages are relevant and engaging.


For scholars who discuss Nixon's attempts to pressure Eisenhower, see Ambrose, Nixon, 590-591; Beck, "Necessary Lies," 40; Rabe, Eisenhower and Latin America, 169. For discussion of Nixon's role as a political advisor, see Ambrose, Nixon, 309; Beschloss, Mayday, 154; Garry Wills, Nixon Agonistes: The Crisis of the Self-Made Man (New York: The Houghton Mifflin Company, 1969), 125-126. For an account of the decision to run, and the very early phases of the campaign planning, see Nixon, Six Crises, 300-302.


Other accounts surveyed here are somewhat more difficult to place within this spectrum. Some, however, shed considerable light on these events. See Giglio, Presidency of John F. Kennedy, 48-50; Goodwin, Remembering America, 124-125; Klein, Perfectly Clear, 94-96; Lasky, JFK, 449-456; Schlesinger, Thousand Days, 72-73, 223-226; Peter Wyden, Bay of Pigs: The Untold Story (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1979), 65-69. Once again, the sensationalized version can be found in Hersh, Dark Side, 155-184; and Matthews, Kennedy & Nixon, 163-168.

42. Beck's article deserves to be read as a whole. Passages directly cited appear on pp. 38, 47, 44, 46, 51.

43. See Kennedy Speeches, 679-681.
44. On Kennedy's claims that he was referring to moral support for anti-Castro Cubans, see Ambrose, *Nixon*, 595; Divine, *Foreign Policy and Presidential Elections*, 269; Sorensen, *Kennedy*, 206; and *Kennedy Speeches*, 726.


45. *Kennedy Speeches*, 1069-1070; *Kennedy Speeches*, 475.

46. *Kennedy Speeches*, 515; *Kennedy Speeches*, 608.


In this case as well authors writing on the topic have not adequately contextualized their material. Again, Beck comes very close, and Goodwin and Parmet are the exception to the rule.

In addition, Giglio, Schlesinger, and Wyden make vague references to Kennedy's earlier intimations of the sort I discuss here, but none pursues the notion. All other accounts overlook this entirely. See citations under note 44.

48. Beck points out, quite rightly, that the headline leading Peter Kihiss' article in the *New York Times* was a sensationalized representation of the press release, and thereby it is possible that Nixon was misled. See "Kennedy Asks Aid for Cuban Rebels to Defeat Castro," *New York Times*, 21 October 1960. This, however, was probably not a decisive factor; Nixon's disdain for the media is well known, and there is little reason to think he would have relied on a journalist's report of the statement when he also had the full text in his possession.

It is also possible that the vice president was misled in matters relating to these questions by information from the White House that may have been incorrect. Upon reading of the statement, apparently, Nixon sent campaign aide Fred Seaton to check into what had been covered in Kennedy's intelligence briefings, and Seaton reported back that full disclosure of the operation had taken place. However, the vice president would have only directed Seaton to inquire after his dander had been raised. White House information, then, may have been what led Nixon to believe so firmly that Kennedy knew details of the planning process, but his proclaimed shock would have already been aroused.

49. Nixon's workaholic streak appears throughout the literature. Certain fragments in his own memoirs, for instance, suggest this. See discussion of awareness that his wife, Pat

With a little more distance, Nixon’s biographers have remarked on this as well. Ambrose has written the definitive work; see *Nixon*, 27-30, 75-76, 542. Lurie, writing the consummate anti-Nixon biography, refers to an “insatiable desire to achieve” and connects Nixon’s personal drive with alleged mental illness; see *Running*, 23-27, 202-203. Mazo and Hess, with the polar opposite interpretation of their subject, open their character sketch with a synopsis of Nixon’s career designed to establish their inquiry around the basic question of “What kind of man pushes himself this way?” They proceed, as do most biographers, to trace Nixon’s drive back to early childhood influences. See Mazo and Hess, *Nixon*, 1-4.


For further corroboration on my point here, see Klein, *Perfectly Clear*, 95. In this passage Klein describes Nixon giving Willard Edwards of the *Chicago Tribune*, a special off the record interview on October 9, three days after Kennedy’s Cincinnati speech. Klein quotes Edwards’ version of the interview:

Killed, [Nixon] said, was pounding away at what he called the Eisenhower-Nixon failure to take some strong action to control Castro in Cuba. The Central Intelligence Agency at that very moment, he confided, was training a band of Cubans for invasion of Cuba in Central America. *Kennedy knew this,* he insisted, he was being ‘briefed’ on all foreign policy developments, but, knowing Nixon was bound by security injunctions not to discuss this top-secret project, *kept hammering away on the subject.* [Emphasis added.]

Unfortunately, Klein does not cite this passage, and I have not been able to find it. Moreover, its reliability is also suspect in that there is an implication the vice president was trying to leak the Bay of Pigs planning so that he could strike back at Kennedy. In itself, this is plausible; what seems amiss, though, is that Nixon appears to have given up when Edwards failed to take his cue. If the vice president was trying to use a leak strategy, he would have made sure it worked. All in all, then, Klein’s rendition of this story is not compelling evidence. However, it is topical, and it may add something to the overall picture.
It is also worth noting that ever since September Nixon had been setting up the idea of an invasion as a straw man to knock down. Consider the following from September 21:

There are those who say, “Why don’t we send the Marines to Cuba?” We could do it and we could give it to Mr. Castro in 24 hours, but getting rid of Castro in Cuba would not get rid of Castroism in Cuba or in Latin America and it would set in motion, in my opinion, a chain reaction of opposition to the United States.

The vice president pursued this line of argument regularly, even going so far as to explain that if the U.S. Marines were sent in, American foreign policy toward Cuba would be comparable to Soviet action against Hungary in 1956. Notice, then, how the vice president makes the same argument before and after October 20, but, once he begins to implement the attack strategy, he attributes the inflammatory comments to his opponent rather than to anonymous voices. See, for instance, Nixon Speeches, 219, 376, 389.

51. See Ambrose, Nixon, 593, 595; Beck, “Necessary Lies,” 58; Divine, Foreign Policy and Presidential Elections, 269-270; Wills, Nixon Agonistes, 139; Witcover, Resurrection, 47.

52. White, Making, 318-319.


54. This idea of the Kennedy statement placing the vice president in a position where he appeared soft is Nixon’s own. See Nixon, Six Crises, 355, 357.

For historians who agree with White on the New Nixon/Old Nixon strategy, see Allen, Eisenhower and the Mass Media, 174-176; Ambrose, Nixon, 560, 569-571; Beck, “Necessary Lies,” 40, 51; Divine, Foreign Policy and Presidential Elections, 236-238, 275; Troy, See How They Ran, 209. Furthermore, Nixon himself has all but conceded to White’s interpretation. For fragmentary suggestions of this, see Six Crises, 358, 364, 370, 372.

55. On the question of hawkish credentials and political latitude, Nixon reported in 1978 telling Mao Zedong upon first meeting of the two leaders, “I think the most important thing to note is that in America, at least at this time, those on the right can do what those on the left can only talk about.” Conditions had changed in the twelve years preceding this meeting, of course, as had Nixon himself. Nevertheless, this kind of analysis should certainly inform our overall picture of his self-conception. See, Nixon, RN, 562.


58. *Nixon Speeches*, 661; *Nixon Speeches*, 376; *Nixon Speeches*, 804; *Nixon Speeches*, 711; *Nixon Speeches*, 709; *Nixon Speeches*, 709-710.

It should be noted, of course, that the vice president did discuss his concern for Castro's policies as well as deriding him personally. By no means, however, was the Castro threat merely a political matter; it was a question of good and evil, and thereby it was intimately bound up in Nixon's thoughts on the Cuban leader's person. For Nixon on Castro's policies, see, for instance, *Nixon Speeches*, 220, 660, 803.

59. *Joint Appearances*, 147; *Nixon Speeches*, 376; *Nixon Speeches*, 1095. In a September 13 speech Nixon disclosed his thoughts on revolution quite clearly. Though Cuba appears nowhere in this address it is worth speculating on whether the vice president's ideas on 'the true ideals of the Cuban Revolution' were connected with what he believed to be the universal ideals of the American revolution:

> My friends, we shall win the struggle for peace and freedom not because we are militarily stronger than the Soviet Union, as we are, not because ours is the most productive economy in the world, because it is, but because America has the moral and the spiritual strength, because our ideals, the ideals of the American Revolution, are the way to the future, not the communist ideals which are presented in contrast to them.”

See *Nixon Speeches*, 90.


*Nixon Speeches*, 1038. The vice president does not seem to have used the term “betrayal” to describe Castro's departure from the ideals of his original movement, although he came very close. See, for instance, *Nixon Speeches*, 376, 709-710.


63. *Kennedy Speeches*, 512; *Kennedy Speeches*, 513.

64. *Kennedy Speeches*, 476; *Kennedy Speeches*, 511; *Kennedy Speeches*, 608.

66. Wills, Nixon Agonistes, 392.

   Lundestad uses this term in a very particular context, as the title of his article suggests. However, an implicit part of my argument here is that campaign oratory was in some sense a contribution to U.S. historiography, loosely defined, in the early- and mid- cold war years.

   Like Lundestad, Rush Welter also deals with very particular subject matter, in this case the American intellectual tradition in the Middle Period. The parallels, however, are remarkable. Contrast, for instance, Welter’s observation that Americans of the era he discusses tended to “see themselves as heirs of all the ages, who at one and the same time put ancient ideals into practice and transcended the very best that had first given impetus to those ideals,” with a selection from Nixon’s thoughts on continuity in Western intellectual history:

   To those who boldly work for and arrogantly say that they stand for the victory of communism over all the world, the only answer is to stand for freedom throughout the world. This is an American ideal, not new, but as old as the nation is old and as old as civilization is old, because these ideas did not come full blown in America. Our great founders were well schooled in the traditions and the cultures and the philosophies of all times, and they incorporated them in our Declaration of independence and in our Constitution. . . . Tyrants have always underestimated the force of moral strength. . . . This goal of the right of people to the government they want can be attained, and Americans must never lose sight of our ability to attain it for our friends throughout the world.


69. *Kennedy Speeches*, 94; Nixon Speeches, 1050.
   For an interesting discussion of the City on a Hill notion, see Brian Klunk’s first chapter in *Consensus and the American Mission* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1986), 1-26.
   For more on this notion of Americans’ reluctance or inability to see that foreigners—especially Latin Americans—may not have shared essential similarities with themselves, see Jules R. Benjamin, *The United States and the Origins of the Cuban Revolution: An Empire of Liberty in an Age of National Liberation* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1990), 197-198; Robert Dallek, *The American Style of Foreign Policy: Cultural


70. See, again, Bonsal, Cuba, Castro, and the United States, 141; and yet again, Pérez, Ties of Singular Intimacy, 248-249. See also Benjamin, United States and the Origins of the Cuban Revolution, 198-201; and comments by Jorge Domínguez in Blight and Kornbluh, Politics of Illusion, 79.


73. Both Kennedy and Nixon had been willing to see the complexity of Castroism, and its strong appeal—even if they ever fully conceded that this might be rational appeal as well—in the period directly following the triumph of the Cuban Revolution. Clearly their views had changed by September 1960, but it is significant that neither vilified Castro in the terms they did later during 1958 and 1959. See Kennedy, Strategy of Peace, 132-141; Nixon, RN, 201-203.
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