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# The Influence of Europe on the Young JFK

*Nigel Hamilton*

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I think that of all twentieth-century American presidents, John F. Kennedy is considered — by Europeans at least — to be the most Eurocentric in his sympathies and political orientation. In the days ahead we shall be reexamining the history of the Kennedy administration in relation to Europe, but before we do, I think it might help to know the true genesis of JFK's personal attitudes towards Europe, so that we may better understand his eventual role in the history of the early 1960s: culminating in the Cuban Missile Crisis and his anti-Communist speech in Berlin in June 1963, as well as the Limited Test Ban treaty of the following month. As Mikhail Gorbachev recently remarked when addressing faculty and students at Harvard University, it was hard even for a Russian Communist in the early 1960s not to warm to the image of John F. Kennedy, to admire his social conscience, his idealism, and his youthful charisma.<sup>1</sup>

That in itself is an extraordinary testimonial. Yet I wonder, candidly, whether there has ever been, in European history, a case quite like Kennedy's, where the father — who held the post of United States Ambassador to Britain at the time of Munich — should have become so universally detested as an appeaser, yet the son become so acclaimed as a crusading U.S. president, determined to defend Western European democracy at any price, only two decades later.

JFK, in his brief life, never did outgrow some of the grotesque attitudes of his father (causing European secret services many a headache), but by and large JFK moved so far away from his father's notorious World War II isolationism that I am often amazed at the paucity of historical attention paid to JFK's early years, in particular the failure of biographers and historians to chart the painful journey JFK was required to make in order to free himself from the stigma and the attitudes of a parent whom Franklin Roosevelt, Jr., characterized as "one of the most evil and disgusting men I have ever known."<sup>2</sup> Yet without understanding the nature and direction of that early voyage, I do not think we can ever do justice to the achievement of

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JFK, or be certain where he — as opposed to his advisers, speech writers, and aides — truly stood on the world historical issues of his presidency.

Appropriately, in terms of this conference, it was the burning question of Europe — and in particular Britain and Nazi Germany in the late 1930s and early 1940s — that became the pivotal point of JFK's student years. His father, the son of a Boston Irish barroom keeper, had made a fortune swindling on the stock exchange in the 1920s, and had then astutely backed Roosevelt's election as president in 1932.<sup>3</sup> After a brief stint as chairman of the nascent SEC ("It takes a thief to catch a thief," President Roosevelt excused the appointment)<sup>4</sup> and at the U.S. Maritime Commission, Joseph P. Kennedy was paid off by Roosevelt with the U.S. ambassadorship to Britain at the end of 1937 — one of the most deplorable appointments, given the gathering European crisis, of Roosevelt's entire career.

Time does not permit me here to record the monstrous performance of Ambassador Kennedy in the years between 1938 and 1941, but in terms of JFK's conflict of loyalties as a son and as a student, it is important to note that Joseph P. Kennedy — who had deliberately avoided the draft in 1917<sup>5</sup> — became not only America's number one isolationist, but virtually an honorary member of Neville Chamberlain's appeasement cabinet: indeed, he was informed *before* the British cabinet of Chamberlain's decision to fly to Bad Godesberg to meet Hitler, prior to Munich,<sup>6</sup> and he personally supplied Chamberlain with Charles Lindbergh's notoriously defeatist estimates of German air power;<sup>7</sup> indeed, he was thanked by Chamberlain in 1939 as the man on whom he had most leaned for advice and support.<sup>8</sup>

Joseph Kennedy's part in the defeatism and surrender of the European democracies to Hitler's menaces was so ignoble that, once Chamberlain was forced to resign in May 1940, the new prime minister, Winston Churchill, refused even to speak to the U.S. ambassador<sup>9</sup> and, instead, communicated directly with President Roosevelt by secret cipher.<sup>10</sup>

For JFK, who had served as personal secretary to his father in 1939, it was impossible not to be deeply influenced by his father's much trumpeted role as American appeaser. Indeed, JFK's elder brother, Joe Jr., became, at Harvard Law School, the chief spokesman of their father's isolationist views, and would establish there, in time, the Harvard Committee Against Military Intervention, giving a series of speeches and addresses to Massachusetts audiences — including some at Jewish temples — that argued passionately against any aid to Britain which might prejudice America's future relationship with the European dictators.<sup>11</sup>

For JFK at Harvard, however — despite one shameful editorial in the *Harvard Crimson* calling for a new American-sponsored Munich<sup>12</sup> — it was to be very much more complicated.

Born on May 29, 1917, JFK was two years younger than his bigoted elder brother, Joe Jr. His first trip to Europe was intended to take place in 1933, when JFK was sixteen, along with his brother and his parents, who were going to "meet important people of Europe — Mussolini, etc."<sup>13</sup> However, he'd been so badly behaved at his boarding school — he was eventually expelled<sup>14</sup> — that the school advised against the idea, and it was not until the autumn of 1935, at the age of eighteen, that JFK finally set foot on European soil — not Plymouth, England, as planned, but terra firma at Calais, France, the great transatlantic liner, the S.S. *Normandie*, having been blown off course by a gale. Taking the ferry to Dover, JFK found "the Channel was the roughest of the year," as he described it to a school friend. "We sat out and soon

everyone began to yawk. I was on deck singing to one of the women in the party. I was singing 'The Man on the flying trapeze' and when I came to the part where you break into the chorus with O O o Ohhhh, etc, a woman behind me retched all over me with 'oh my God that's the finish' — you can imagine me covered from tip to toe with hot vomit."<sup>15</sup>

JFK's brother had studied for a year at the London School of Economics under the eminent socialist historian and political scientist Professor Harold Laski, and it was intended that JFK should do the same. However, JFK wasn't well and was contemptuous, as a would-be eighteenth-century London rake, of his fellow students at the "Fresher's social" who, he claimed, were "holding in their arms pimply faced English school-girls." In hospital for tests he met Prince Surloff, "who is supposed to be next Czar or some such shit . . . I have met a number of Earls + Lords here," he recorded, "and am getting rather royal myself."<sup>16</sup>

JFK's irreverent humor and anti-authoritarianism would be his saving grace. His brother, Laski later related, was far more serious and in fact openly determined to become "nothing less than the first Catholic president of the United States."<sup>17</sup> Unknown to Laski, however, this brother was also deeply anti-Semitic and had become, on a trip to Nazi Germany in 1934, a great admirer of Hitler.<sup>18</sup> JFK's own exposure to Nazi Germany had to wait, however, for his health in London deteriorated, and in mid-October 1935 he returned to America and recommenced his college career, this time at Princeton.<sup>19</sup>

Princeton, JFK found, was even more snooty than London high society. Advised after eight weeks to take a year off and recuperate, he went to work on a ranch in Arizona. By the time he returned East in the summer of 1936, he'd decided to follow his brother to Harvard, not Princeton, a decision that was to have an important bearing on his "Europeanization."

The year off college allowed JFK not only to recover his health but to grow up. Though his new teachers at Harvard were unimpressed by his academic diligence, he set his own agenda, becoming so popular that, the following autumn, he achieved what no Boston Irishman and possibly no Catholic had ever done: acceptance into one of Harvard's exclusive "final" clubs, the Spee.<sup>20</sup>

Like his brother, JFK had chosen to study government. Unlike his brother, he had an open, curious mind, a sharp wit, and remarkable objectivity for his age. At the end of his freshman year, having taken an extended course in European history, he hoisted his new car aboard the S.S. *Washington* and, together with his school friend, set off on July 1, 1937, for a two-month motoring tour of Europe.<sup>21</sup>

Luckily, JFK kept a diary of his trip — a journey which was to prove the most formative political and cultural experience of his youth. Driving through France, picking up young hitchhikers who spoke English, interviewing Spanish refugees from the civil war, motoring through Italy to Rome, attending an audience with the pope, listening to Mussolini rant, then heading north to Austria and Nazi Germany, Holland, Belgium, and Britain — and all the time testing his experience against John Gunther's *Inside Europe*, which he was reading — he was determined to see for himself, as an American, the countries that had provided his religious and historical heritage, and to form his own opinions about the revolutionary movements currently sweeping the continent of Europe. Where his brother had applauded the rise of Hitler and excused the ill treatment of the Jews, JFK discerned, even at age twenty, the extent to which truth was distorted by government control of the media. "There is no



doubt about it that these dictators are more popular in the country than outside due to their effective propaganda," he noted sanguinely in Munich.<sup>22</sup> In Nuremberg, shortly before Hitler came to speak, he and his American friend had "the added attraction of being spitten on."<sup>23</sup>

In Britain, staying in the castle of Sir James Calder, owner of the Haig and Haig distillery, JFK went grouse shooting and trout fishing. He found the people snobbish and conceited — ready targets of his derisive wit — but the guardians too of a political tradition that, increasingly, would obsess him in an age of dictatorship: democracy as underdog.

Returning to Europe with two evil-smelling grouse, which his welcoming sister Kathleen immediately pitched into New York harbor,<sup>24</sup> he himself pitched into his studies as a sophomore student — the more so once it was announced, in January 1938, that his father, Joseph P. Kennedy, was to be the next U.S. ambassador to Britain. The elevation of his father to the number one American diplomatic post in the prewar world was to alter JFK's life in many ways, intellectually as well as socially.

No sooner had the new American ambassador settled into Prince's Gate in March 1938 than Hitler's troops moved to annex Austria. Yet for all his astuteness as a businessman, Joseph P. Kennedy could see no possible concern for Americans. He remained convinced that economic self-interest was the root motive behind Hitler's machinations, and that the German führer could be "bought" off by British and French business and commercial concessions, while America waited patiently by the sidelines to trade with whichever parties proved the more successful. In the meantime, using his privileged position as ambassador, he went on speculating through nominees on the stock exchange, to his own personal profit.<sup>25</sup>

For his son JFK, studying European history under distinguished American professors such as Carl Friedrich and Thomas Yeomans, the gathering crisis in Europe thus became a very real and tangible focal point of his university education. He spent the late summer of 1938 in London and the south of France, where his father rented a villa, and through his father's personal involvement became privy to much of the British government's appeasement dealings — dealings which Ambassador Kennedy supported and to some degree personally engineered since, as he put it (in a draft speech that was censored by the State Department), he knew of no "dispute or controversy existing in the world which is worth the life of your son, or of anyone else's son. . . . For the life of me I cannot see anything involved which could be remotely considered worth shedding blood for."<sup>26</sup>

For JFK, who had been shown the draft of the speech by his father, it was an excruciating introduction to the mounting controversy over American isolationism, particularly once JFK returned to Harvard for his junior year and experienced bitter university denunciation of the Munich pact. His father had — against all protocol — begun a burst of cheering from the Visitors' Gallery of the House of Commons for the prime minister, Neville Chamberlain,<sup>27</sup> but the recent publication of Joseph Goebbels's diaries makes it clear how little Chamberlain had gained by his abject surrender to Hitler's threats. The only defensible border of Czechoslovakia fell without Hitler having to fight — indeed, incited the Nazis to step up their armament program to even greater levels: "*Nun heisst es rusten, rusten, rusten* [Now we must arm, arm, arm]," Goebbels confided.<sup>28</sup>

It was at this juncture in his life, in the autumn of 1938, that JFK decided to ask Chester Hanford, dean of Harvard (and one of JFK's junior year professors of government), if he might spend six months working at the London embassy and traveling across Europe on behalf of his father, in lieu of his Harvard second-half-year courses. Hanford agreed provisionally, and by dint of taking six courses instead of four in the fall and winter of 1938–1939 and getting placed on the Dean's List for academic achievement — entitling him to write a fourth-year honors thesis — JFK left Harvard in a minor blaze of glory early in February 1939, bound for the London embassy.<sup>29</sup> “Met the King this morning at a Court Levee,” he soon boasted to a friend back in America. “Thursday night am going to Court in my new silk knee breeches, which are cut to my crotch tightly and in which I look mighty attractive.”<sup>30</sup>

Few twenty-one-year-old American undergraduates can have had such an extraordinary experience as part of their college education. JFK was invited to 10 Downing Street and met all the great appeasers of the day, from Lord Halifax to R. A. Butler. He spent a month working for Ambassador William Bullitt at the U.S. Embassy in Paris, then stayed with Ambassador Anthony Biddle in Poland. He traveled through the Soviet Union, he visited Palestine in a demi-official capacity, paid a trip to German-occupied Prague, went to Munich, Berlin, and Danzig, the tinderbox of Europe in the high summer of 1939. From Berlin, a few days before the outbreak of the Second World War, he wrote to his friend saying he still did not think there would be war,<sup>31</sup> but that the Germans had gone so far with their propaganda over Danzig that it would be difficult for them to back down; moreover, there was a dangerous misapprehension in Germany — thanks to Munich — about Britain's firmness of purpose in guaranteeing Poland's frontiers.

The discovery and recent publication of Goebbels's diaries bear out JFK's contention. On September 1, as German troops prepared their invasion, Goebbels noted: “*Der Führer glaubt noch nicht daran, dass England eingreifen wird* (The Führer still doesn't believe that England will get involved).”<sup>32</sup>

JFK's father, however, had become convinced that the democracies, having appeased the dictators with his full support and even *einmischung* (meddling) as U.S. ambassador, were now doomed to military defeat if they resisted, and he made it his life's purpose to keep America out of the subsequent conflagration. Though he had categorically refused to serve in World War I, he believed every bogus figure and assertion of Charles Lindbergh regarding the German Luftwaffe. He secretly rented a private mansion, with seventy rooms, twenty-five miles outside London to avoid the fate of the capital.<sup>33</sup> There, for the next year, he quaked in fear of German bombs<sup>34</sup> and predicted disaster,<sup>35</sup> attempted to make secret deals with the Nazis,<sup>36</sup> and became America's most cowardly and self-serving ambassador of the twentieth century.<sup>37</sup>

Joseph P. Kennedy's lack of moral fiber and profound pessimism<sup>38</sup> were not only a dark chapter in American international relations, but were bound to rub off on his children — and, to JFK's later shame and embarrassment, they did. In October 1939, after the fall of Poland, JFK wrote an editorial for the Harvard University newspaper, the *Crimson*, abjectly recommending that the United States president, through his ambassador to Britain, organize a new Munich-style peace conference. JFK's editorial was titled, ominously, *Peace in Our Time*.<sup>39</sup>

A majority of Harvard students, according to a contemporary poll, felt likewise. Harvard's faculty, however, was by and large interventionist, and it was in this bitter campus debate that JFK began work on his honors thesis, “Appeasement at Munich:

The Inevitable Result of the Slowness of Conversion of the British Democracy to Change from a Disarmament Policy to a Rearmament Policy.”<sup>40</sup>

Though an English fable, this topic went to the heart of the historical and moral controversy raging at Harvard. By having to explore the antecedents of the debate — from Versailles in 1919 to the absconding of America from its promised role in the League of Nations in 1920 and the rise of British postwar isolationism — JFK gained an abiding insight into the weaknesses of democracy in the face of totalitarian intransigence. His thesis, painstaking and jejune, was given the lowest honors grade at Harvard, yet it was not only a remarkable document in its balance and detail, but it reflected the political soul of its young author in a way that no later work would ever do.

By setting England’s complacency and indolence against the backcloth of a weary, postwar era, he not only drew a terrible lesson for America, but, in a sense, put his father in his historical place. He was accused of whitewashing Stanley Baldwin and Chamberlain — and by extension, his father — but the significance of the thesis was that it enabled JFK himself to gradually and honorably divest himself — unlike his obedient and blinkered elder brother — of his father’s political baggage and, at age twenty-two, to move towards his own, independent political philosophy.

By June 1940, shortly after the Anglo-French evacuation at Dunkirk, JFK was writing in the *Crimson* to protest against a recent editorial that had argued against an American arms buildup.

If anyone should ask why Britain is so badly prepared for this war or why America’s defenses were found in such shocking condition in the May investigations, this attitude toward armaments is a substantial answer [JFK warned]. The failure to build up her armaments has not saved England from a war, and may cost her one.<sup>41</sup>

Moreover, he privately advised his father not to resign, as he was threatening to do, “as it might undo the work of 7 years.” He suggested instead that he and his sister come to war-torn England “as it would show we hadn’t merely left England when it got unpleasant.”<sup>42</sup>

Courage was the issue here, as it would be later in JFK’s life. Joseph P. Kennedy reluctantly heeded his son’s advice, but hid nightly in his seventy-room mansion twenty-five miles from the capital and by the fall of 1940 became so cowardly that he blackmailed Roosevelt into recalling him to the safety of America, threatening, if Roosevelt did not comply, to publish a denunciation of the president in the run-up to the 1940 presidential election.<sup>43</sup> Once back in the United States he bad-mouthed Britain to all who would listen, predicted defeat for the democracies, warned Hollywood producers not to make any more anti-Nazi films<sup>44</sup> — and gave a press conference in which, while still ambassador to London, he prophesied not only that Britain was doomed but that the Queen of England (Elizabeth, wife of King George VI) — who, he claimed, had more brains than the British Cabinet under Churchill — would make a peace settlement with Hitler.<sup>45</sup>

All this, for the ambassador’s second son as he recuperated from mysterious intestinal illness at Stanford University in California, was deeply embarrassing. Father and son had not seen each other for a year, and the ambassador’s bullying, bigoted Boston-Irish personality had lessened in its influence as JFK distanced himself from



his father's position. He had also, in the meantime, become a best-selling author at age twenty-three, when his thesis was successfully turned into a book, *Why England Slept*.<sup>46</sup> However, in December 1940, having visited JFK in San Francisco for a few hours on his self-appointed mission to keep America out of the war, Joseph P. Kennedy sent JFK a telegram, demanding his son send him an "Outline on Appeasement," which he could use when announcing to the press his forthcoming formal resignation as ambassador to Great Britain.<sup>47</sup>

For JFK, this was perhaps the cardinal psychological and intellectual crisis of his early life. In an agonizing, recently discovered letter, he responded as best he could, making every excuse for his father's disastrous performance as ambassador. Yet his heart was not in it, and as he boarded a plane to Los Angeles to attend an academic conference on the world crisis and read reports of Roosevelt's proposed Lend-Lease legislation — which his father, as America's Number One Appeaser, was threatening to derail — JFK penned a handwritten note that reflects not only the turning point in his maturation, but provides us with the key to his attitude towards Britain and Europe for the rest of his brief but dramatic life. "Dear Dad," he began gingerly.

It seems to me that our actual aid to Britains pretty small, and that the defense program calling for more and more planes is falling behind. . . . We seem to be in the same psychological pattern that England was during the year from Sept. 1938 to Sept. 1939. As Munich awakened England — so the events of the month of May awakened us. But like England we are rearming in much the same leisurely fashion that England did — note the lack of genuine legislation empowering the defense commission.

Of course the reason we are so confident as a nation is that we know, especially after watching England hold out during the summer, that we cannot be *invaded*. — We are safe. We are failing to see that if England is forced to give in by summer due to our failure to give her adequate supplies, we will have failed to meet our emergency, as did England before us. As England failed from September 1938 to September 1939 to take advantage of her year of respite due to her feeling that there would be no war in 1939, we will have failed just as greatly.

Now as this affects your position. I realize that aid for Britain is part of it but in your message for America to stay out of the war — you should not do so *at the expense of having people minimize aid to Britain*. The danger of our not giving Britain enough aid, of not getting Congress and the country stirred up sufficiently to give England the aid she needs now — is to me just as great as the danger of our getting into war now — as it is much more likely.

If England is defeated America is going to be alone in a strained and hostile world. In a few years, she will have paid out enormous sums for defense yearly — to maintain armaments — she may be at war — she even may be on the verge of defeat or defeated — by a combination of totalitarian powers.

Then there will be a general turning of the people's opinions. They will say "Why were we so stupid not to have given Britain all possible aid. Why did we worry about money etc. *We should have put in more legislation*. We should have given it to them outright — after all — if we voted \$13,000,000,000 for defense in 1940 at home we should have been ready to give England money — they were definitely another arm of our defense forces" . . .

Just as we now turn on those who got us into the last war, Hines Page etc. (which after all may have been the best thing when all the accounts are added



up) — so in the future they may turn on those who failed to point out the great necessity of providing Britain in the crucial months of 1940–1941.<sup>48</sup>

Time, unfortunately, does not permit us to recount the sequel to this letter beyond its obvious importance for JFK. It is interesting to note, however, that Joseph P. Kennedy, some weeks later, stunned the isolationist movement in America by dropping his objections to Lend-Lease at the congressional hearings, and the bill passed safely, enabling Britain to hold out another year.<sup>49</sup>

JFK was beginning to show a remarkable sense of judgment, not least in the loving, gentle way he shepherded his father away from catastrophe. While Joseph P. Kennedy retired into sullen obscurity, his son finally became, in November 1941, a month before Pearl Harbor, an open interventionist.<sup>50</sup> And when America was tumbled into war by the Japanese attack upon Pearl Harbor and Hitler's declaration of hostilities against the United States, JFK was already in uniform, as an intelligence officer in Washington. By the following summer he was training — despite concealed ill-health — to be a combat PT boat officer, and in 1943 he got his wish as commander of the *PT-109* and later 59. Sunk, abandoned by his colleagues, rescued by Christian natives, and becoming a legendary skipper in his squadron, JFK by the age of twenty-six had proved himself a hardened leader of men with a precocious grasp of global political problems.

That the United States would have to take a major role in the postwar world order was clear to JFK by 1943. Moreover, it was a role in which, increasingly, he felt he had a personal stake. "This war here is a dirty business," he wrote to the love of his early life, Inga Arvad, in September 1943, soon after his sinking and rescue.

It's very easy to talk about the war and beating the Japs if it takes years and a million men, but anyone who talks like that should consider well his words. We get so used to talking about billions of dollars, and millions of soldiers, that thousands of casualties sound like drops in the bucket. But if those thousands want to live as much as the ten that I saw, the people deciding the whys and wherefores had better make mighty sure that all this effort is headed for some definite goal, and that when we reach that goal we may say it was worth it, for if it isn't, the whole thing will turn to ashes, and we will face great trouble in the years to come after the war.<sup>51</sup>

In the winter of 1944–1945, after his medical discharge from the Navy, JFK made the fateful pact with his father that would send him to Congress.<sup>52</sup> As the war moved towards its climax in Europe, he was disposed to see world disarmament and an effective United Nations as the "goal" which the United States should pursue.<sup>53</sup> However, once again personal experience qualified and altered his perspective.

Attending the birth of the United Nations in San Francisco in April and May 1945 as a Hearst newspaper correspondent, he met Anthony Eden, Clement Attlee, Jan Masaryk, as well as distinguished American diplomats such as Chip Bohlen and Averell Harriman. "Winston Churchill once said that Russian policy was an enigma wrapped in a mystery. I'd like to report to Mr. Churchill that the Russians haven't changed," JFK began his column on April 30.<sup>54</sup> "It is unfortunate that more cannot be accomplished here," he lamented the next day. The UN would become, he warned "merely a skeleton. Its powers will be limited. It will reflect the fact that there are deep disagreements among its members. . . . It is unfortunate that unity for war

against a common aggressor is far easier to obtain than unity for peace. We are beginning to realize how difficult and long the road is ahead. San Francisco is only the beginning.”<sup>55</sup>

To the editor of the *Atlantic Monthly*, who had asked to print JFK’s draft article on world disarmament, JFK now sent a regretful no. “I have delayed answering,” he apologized,

as I wanted to see for myself whether there was any possibility that a world security organization strong enough to permit comprehensive world disarmament would come out of San Francisco. Frankly, and though the conference is only in its first week, it appears as though there will not be. The Russians have demonstrated that they believe a country’s voice in the conference should be heard only in direct ratio to its military power — and it hardly seems feasible to advocate disarmament under that condition. Furthermore they have demonstrated a suspicion and lack of faith in Britain and the United States which, while understandable in the light of recent history, nevertheless indicates that in the next few years it will be prudent to be strong. I am naturally disappointed in this, as I haven’t changed my views that disarmament is an essential part of any lasting peace.<sup>56</sup>

The jigsaw of JFK’s political philosophy was filling up. In June 1945 he arrived in England to cover the British general election — in which Churchill was resoundingly defeated — and visited for the first time the country of his ancestors to report on partition in the postwar era. “De Valera is fighting politically the same relentless battle they fought in the field during the uprising of 1916, in the war of independence and later in the civil war. . . . At this weekend, the problem of partition seems very far from being solved,” he cabled confidently to Hearst newspapers.<sup>57</sup>

There was one final — and crucial — journey to make. In mid-July 1945, American Secretary of the Navy James V. Forrestal made good his promise to take Jack to Germany. Although President Harry Truman failed conspicuously to invite him to Potsdam, Forrestal flew anyway, picking JFK up in Paris and taking him in his personal aircraft to Berlin, Bremen, Frankfurt, Salzburg, and Hitler’s aerie in Berchtesgaden.<sup>58</sup> Not only did JFK meet General Dwight D. Eisenhower, the Supreme Allied Commander, but he obtained an eyewitness idea of the iron curtain as it descended. He had traveled through Russia himself in the spring of 1939 and had been singularly unimpressed by Soviet propaganda; now, interviewing local commanders, political advisers, and the president’s entourage at Potsdam and walking through the ruins of Berlin with Russian officers, he saw for himself Europe’s looming struggle after the fall of Hitler.

The anti-Communist whose younger brother would work for Joe McCarthy was born that year; his anti-Communism had nothing to do — as others have sometimes assumed — with his father’s right-wing views but everything to do with JFK’s growing maturity as a would-be politician. By the following year, having won the Democratic nomination for Massachusetts’s Eleventh Congressional District, he unequivocally declared to a meeting of the Young Democrats of New York that he was not a fellow traveler.

“The time has come when we must speak plainly on the great issue facing the world today,” he afterwards declared on Boston radio, revealing how, in answer to a question about Soviet Russia, he had told the group of Young Democrats “that I felt

that Soviet Russia today, is run by a small clique of ruthless, powerful and selfish men, who have established a government which denies the Russian people personal freedom and economic security.”

I told them that Soviet Russia is embarked upon a program of world aggression. I told them that the freedom-loving countries of the world must stop Soviet Russia now, or be destroyed. I told them that the iron curtain policy and complete suppression of news with respect to Russia, has left the world with a totally false impression of what is going on inside Soviet Russia today. I told them that the people in the United States have been far too gullible with respect to the publicity being disseminated throughout the world by the clever and brilliant Moscow propagandists. . . .

This crisis is both moral and political. The years ahead will be difficult and strained, the sacrifices great, but . . . only by supporting with all our hearts the course we believe to be right, can we prove that course is not only right but that it has strength and vigor.<sup>59</sup>

I think I speak on behalf of most Europeans in paying tribute today to the young politician who emerged from the ignoble and defeatist shadow of his father and, by his intellect, courage, and conviction, went on in the years afterwards to bolster the American-European ideal of democracy and personal freedom.

Let me end with some words from an address which JFK gave in Faneuil Hall in Boston, in the presence of his revered grandfather, a Democrat who had been, in his own time, Boston's youngest-ever elected congressman and mayor, and whose witty, endlessly energetic interest and compassion were the model on which JFK would base his political life. It was the annual Fourth of July oration, and in it JFK attempted, on the eve of his own election to the House of Representatives, to put into words his abiding beliefs. He began quietly:

Conceived in Grecian thought, strengthened by Christian morality, and stamped indelibly into American political philosophy, the right of the individual against the state is the keystone of our Constitution. Each man is *free*. He is *free* in *thought*. He is *free* in *worship*. To us, who have been reared in the American tradition, these rights have become a part of our very being. They have become so much a part of our being that most of us are prone to feel that they are rights universally recognized and universally exercised. But the sad fact is that this is not true. They were dearly won for us only a few short centuries ago and they were dearly preserved for us in the days just past. And there are large sections of the world today where these rights are denied as a matter of philosophy and a matter of government.

We cannot assume that the struggle is ended. It is neverending. . . .

May God grant that, at some distant date, on this day, and on this platform, the orator may be able to say that these are still the great qualities of the American character and that they have prevailed.<sup>60</sup>

JFK was barely twenty-nine. Fifteen years later he would be president of his nation and leader of the free world. How far he'd come from his father's cowardice and isolationism remains for me at least one of the great personal odysseys of our century — and one for which we Europeans will always, always be grateful. Though he never lived to see the fall of Soviet communism, his role in upholding the



democratic ideals of the United States and Western Europe was courageous, noble, and in the end, it has proved triumphant. 🍀

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## Notes

1. *Boston Globe*, March 16, 1992.
2. Ralph G. Martin, *A Hero for Our Time* (New York: Macmillan, 1983), 24. Supreme Court Justice Felix Frankfurter used almost identical words in describing Joseph P. Kennedy to Richard Goodwin — Goodwin to author, October 12, 1992.
3. Doris Kearns Goodwin, *The Fitzgeralds and the Kennedys* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1987), 327–328. Kennedy never pretended, later, that his stock market dealings were ethical; indeed, he often boasted at his cleverness in manipulating the unregulated market prior to the creation of the SEC. Interviews with, inter alia, John Kenneth Galbraith, William Walton, and Charles Spalding.
4. Michael R. Beschloss, *Kennedy and Roosevelt: The Uneasy Alliance* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1980), 88.
5. Goodwin, *The Fitzgeralds and the Kennedys*, 268–283; Nigel Hamilton, *JFK: Reckless Youth* (New York: Random House, 1992), 29–40.
6. James M. Landis, draft manuscript for the unpublished “diplomatic memoirs” of former Ambassador Joseph P. Kennedy (hereafter referred to as JML), Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.; John F. Kennedy Library, Boston, Massachusetts, ch. 14, 21.
7. JML, ch. 15, 3; Hamilton, *JFK*, 237–238.
8. JML, ch. 17, 1; Hamilton, *JFK*, 239.
9. JML, ch. 49, 8–10; Hamilton, *JFK*, 343.
10. JML, ch. 36, 3; David Irving, *Churchill’s War* (New York: Avon Books, 1991), 195; Hamilton, *JFK*, 305.
11. Original press release, December 15, 1940, HUD/36, Harvard University Archives, Cambridge, Massachusetts; Hamilton, *JFK*, 392–393.
12. *Harvard Crimson*, October 9, 1939; Hamilton, *JFK*, 290.
13. George Owen minute, September 26, 1933, JFK Student File, Choate School Archives, Wallingford, Connecticut; Hamilton, *JFK*, 100.
14. Maurice Shea, JFK Library Oral History; Hamilton, *JFK*, 124.
15. JFK to K. Lemoyne Billings (hereafter referred to as KLB), October 9, 1935, KLB Papers, JFK Library; Hamilton, *JFK*, 140.
16. JFK to KLB, n.d. (October 1935), KLB Papers; Hamilton, *JFK*, 42.
17. *As We Remember Joe*, ed. John F. Kennedy (Cambridge, Mass.: University Press, 1945), 44; Hamilton, *JFK*, 109.
18. Joseph P. Kennedy, Jr., to Joseph P. Kennedy, April 23, 1934, quoted in Goodwin, *The Fitzgeralds and the Kennedys*, 471; Hamilton, *JFK*, 108.
19. Dr. William Murphy to Joseph P. Kennedy, October 10, 1935, JFK Personal Papers, Box 4B, JFK Library; Joseph P. Kennedy to R. Bingham, October 21, 1935, and November 12, 1935, quoted in Goodwin, *The Fitzgeralds and the Kennedys*, 490; Hamilton, *JFK*, 144–145.
20. Interviews with James Rousmaniere, April 6, 1989, Holton Wood, January 9, 1989, Donald Thurber, June 7, 1990, and Ralph Pope, January 24, 1989; Hamilton, *JFK*, 207–210.
21. JFK Diary, European Trip (hereafter referred to as DET), entry of July 1, 1937, JFK Personal Papers, Box 1; Hamilton, *JFK*, 178.

22. DET, entry of August 18, 1937; Hamilton, *JFK*, 193.
23. DET, entry of August 20, 1937; Hamilton, *JFK*, 193.
24. KLB interviews, Joan and Clay Blair Papers, University of Wyoming Archives, Laramie, Wyoming; JFK Library Oral History; Hamilton, *JFK*, 199.
25. Joseph P. Kennedy to Arthur Krock, April 14, 1938, Arthur Krock Papers, Seeley Mudd Manuscript Library, Princeton University, Princeton, New Jersey; Hamilton, *JFK*, 226–227; Perowne minute, September 27, 1939, FO 371/22827, and Scott minute, September 30, 1939, FO 371/22827, Public Record Office, Kew, England; *The Diaries of Sir David Cadogan*, ed. David Dilks (London: Casell, 1971), 215; Hamilton, *JFK*, 292. See also David E. Koskoff, *Joseph P. Kennedy: A Life and Times* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1974), and Richard Whalen, *The Founding Father: The Story of Joseph P. Kennedy* (New York: New American Library, 1964).
26. JML, ch. 13, 5–6; Hamilton, *JFK*, 237.
27. JML, ch. 16, 16; Hamilton, *JFK*, 239.
28. Goebbels Diaries, *Der Spiegel* 31/1992.
29. JFK Harvard University Student File, 1938–1939, JFK Personal Papers, Box 2, JFK Library; Hamilton, *JFK*, 242, 253.
30. JFK to KLB, n.d. (March 1939), KLB Papers; Hamilton, *JFK*, 55.
31. JFK to KLB, July 17, 1939, KLB Papers; Hamilton, *JFK*, 261.
32. Goebbels Diaries, *Der Spiegel* 31/1992.
33. JML, ch. 41, 4–5; interview with Harvey Klemmer, Joseph P. Kennedy's publicist, U.S. Embassy, 1938–1941; Peter Collier and David Horowitz, *The Kennedys: An American Drama* (New York: Summit Books, 1984), 107; Hamilton, *JFK*, 324, 343.
34. Interview with Harvey Klemmer; Collier and Horowitz, *The Kennedys*, 107; Hamilton, *JFK*, 343.
35. Hamilton, *JFK*, 373.
36. Charles Higham, *American Swastika* (New York: Doubleday, 1985), 27, 33; Koskoff, *Joseph P. Kennedy*, 292; Goodwin, *The Fitzgeralds and the Kennedys*, 572–573.
37. Koskoff, *Joseph P. Kennedy*, 293; Goodwin, *The Fitzgeralds and the Kennedys*, 511.
38. Breckenridge Long Diary, entry of November 10, 1940, Breckenridge Long Papers, Library of Congress, tss, 256; Hamilton, *JFK*, 370.
39. *Harvard Crimson*, October 9, 1939; Hamilton, *JFK*, 290.
40. JFK Personal Papers, Box 26, JFK Library.
41. *Harvard Crimson*, June 9, 1940; Hamilton, *JFK*, 328.
42. JFK to Joseph P. Kennedy, n.d. (1940), JFK Personal Papers, Box 1, JFK Library; Hamilton, *JFK*, 323.
43. Lord Halifax to Lord Lothian, October 10, 1940, FO 371/24251, Public Record Office; Hamilton, *JFK*, 362 (see also 361–369).
44. Douglas Fairbanks, Jr., to Franklin Delano Roosevelt, November 19, 1940, Mellet Correspondence, FDR Library, Hyde Park, New York; Hamilton, *JFK*, 378.
45. *Boston Globe*, November 10, 1940; Hamilton, *JFK*, 372.
46. John F. Kennedy, *Why England Slept* (New York: Wilfred Funk, 1940).
47. Joseph P. Kennedy to JFK, telegram, December 5, 1940, JFK Personal Papers, Box 4A, JFK Library; Hamilton, *JFK*, 383.

48. JFK to Joseph P. Kennedy, n.d. (December 1940), JFK Personal Papers, Box 4A, JFK Library; Hamilton, *JFK*, 391.
49. JML, ch. 52, 10; Hamilton, *JFK*, 397.
50. John F. Kennedy, draft narrative, "Dinner at Mrs. Pattersons. About November 10, 1941," Speech and Book Material, 11/10/41–1/23/42, JFK Pre-Presidential Papers, Box 11, JFK Library; Hamilton, *JFK*, 412.
51. JFK to Inga Arvad, September 26, 1943, Ron McCoy Papers; Hamilton, *JFK*, 616.
52. Joe Kane interview, Ralph Martin Papers, Boston University Archives, Boston; Hamilton, *JFK*, 674.
53. John F. Kennedy, draft narrative, "Post War Disarmament," JFK Pre-Presidential Papers, Box 73, JFK Library; Hamilton, *JFK*, 688.
54. *New York Journal American*, April 30, 1945; Hamilton, *JFK*, 696.
55. *New York Journal American*, May 4, 1945; Hamilton, *JFK*, 699.
56. JFK to Edward Weeks, n.d. (May 1945), Atlantic Monthly Archives, Boston, Massachusetts; Hamilton, *JFK*, 700.
57. *New York Journal American*, July 29, 1945; Hamilton, *JFK*, 715.
58. James Forrestal to Joseph P. Kennedy, July 26, 1945, James Forrestal Papers, Box 89, Seeley Mudd Manuscript Library, Princeton University; Hamilton, *JFK*, 716.
59. Radio speech on Russia, JFK Pre-Presidential Papers, Box 94, JFK Library; Hamilton, *JFK*, 787.
60. "Some Elements of the American Character: Independence Day Oration," July 4, 1946, JFK Pre-Presidential Papers, Box 94, JFK Library; Hamilton, *JFK*, 774–776.