MORAL MASCULINITY: THE CULTURE OF FOREIGN RELATIONS
DURING THE KENNEDY ADMINISTRATION

DISSERTATION

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The Kennedy administration of 1961-1963 was an era marked by increasing tension in U.S.-Soviet relations, culminating in the Cuban missile crisis of October 1962. This period provides a snapshot of the culture and politics of the Cold War. During the early 1960s, broader concerns about gender upheaval coincided with an administration that embraced a unique ideology of masculinity. Policymakers at the top levels of the Kennedy administration, including President John F. Kennedy, operated within a cultural framework best described as moral masculinity.

Moral masculinity was the set of values or criteria by which Kennedy and his closest foreign policy advisors defined themselves as white American men. Drawing on these criteria justified their claims to power. The values they embraced included heroism, courage, vigor, responsibility, and maturity. Kennedy’s focus on civic virtue, sacrifice, and public service highlights the “moral” aspect of moral masculinity. To members of the Kennedy administration, these were moral virtues and duties and their moral fitness justified their fitness to serve in public office.

Five key elements of moral masculinity played an important role in diplomatic crises during the Kennedy administration. A discourse of heroism influenced Kennedy’s decisions during the Bay of Pigs crisis, while his meeting with Nikita Khrushchev in June 1961 hinged on notions of youth and vigor. The Kennedy administration made policy
during the Berlin crisis with attention to the value of patriarchal responsibility.

Kennedy’s conduct during the Cuban missile crisis demonstrates the importance of maintaining the image and ideology of moral masculinity as policymakers focused on deviance and danger. Finally, a discourse of maturity and modernity surrounded policymaking during the protracted crisis in the Congo.

This dissertation is based on research at the John F. Kennedy Library, the National Archives in College Park, Maryland, and in the Department of State’s Foreign Relations of the United States series.
DEDICATED TO MY PARENTS,
GORDON AND MARIA A. WALTON
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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION: MORAL MASCULINITY

On January 1, 1960, the junior senator from Massachusetts issued a ringing statement about the future of the United States. John F. Kennedy lamented that “the signs of our lack of national leadership – of our loss of national vision – are all too clear and present.” He charged that the United States had gone soft – physically, mentally, spiritually soft. . . . we seem to be losing our will to sacrifice and to endure. . . . [t]he slow corrosion of luxury – the slow erosion of our courage – is beginning to show. Nearly one out of every two young American men is rejected by the Selective Service today as mentally, physically, or morally unfit for any kind of military service. . . . We are losing that Pilgrim and pioneer spirit of initiative and independence – that old-fashioned Spartan devotion to “duty, honor, and country.”¹

One day later, Kennedy officially announced that he would seek the office of the presidency in the 1960 election “to ensure ‘a more vital life for our people.’”²

This was not mere campaign rhetoric. Kennedy’s remarks that day signaled the close connections between masculinity, foreign relations, and the future Kennedy administration. His language illustrated his conceptions of masculinity and power by


underscoring the value of courage, sacrifice, and physical and mental strength. Kennedy emphasized the linkages between gender and citizenship and hinted at fears that the nation had been softened by feminine, material pursuits. These ideas influenced Kennedy’s perceptions of power and the foreign policymaking process during his administration. This dissertation examines the influence of these core cultural values on American relations with Cuba, Berlin, and the Congo from 1961 to 1963.

Post-World War II America experienced a crisis of masculinity similar to the gender upheavals during the turn of the twentieth century. Challenges to the established gender and racial order from the civil rights and nascent women’s movement threatened to undermine white middle-class men’s claims to power. Reflecting this crisis, as well as a series of personal challenges, John F. Kennedy embraced a set of values best defined as “moral masculinity.” These values were shared by most of the men at the highest levels of his national security staff.

President Kennedy and his core group of national security advisors operated from a particular worldview that was informed by their privileged positions in the gender-, race-, and class-based systems of power in American society. As historian Robert Dean has argued, foreign policymakers in the Kennedy and Johnson administrations shared a unique outlook, coming of age during an era that inculcated an ethos of “imperial brotherhood” and cementing these values in the experience of the Second World War.

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These men expressed their perceptions of power on a personal and international level in accordance with this worldview. This study will reveal how perceptions of power shaped political reality and will provide a better understanding of both the implementation and the impact of foreign policy, especially for the Kennedy administration period.

Moral masculinity was the set of values or criteria by which Kennedy and his closest foreign policy advisors, Attorney General Robert Kennedy, National Security Advisor McGeorge Bundy, Secretary of State Dean Rusk, Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara, and others defined themselves as white American men. Drawing on these criteria, including heroism, courage, vigor, responsibility, and maturity, justified their claims to power. Kennedy’s focus on civic virtue, sacrifice, and public service reveals the “moral” aspect of moral masculinity. To members of the Kennedy administration, these were moral virtues and duties. Their moral fitness justified their fitness to serve in public office.\(^5\) A sense of American exceptionalism and a belief that the American way of life was superior to the depredations of the Soviet system are also important components of moral masculinity. Kennedy and his national security advisors were certainly focused on the Cold War, but they viewed the U.S.-Soviet struggle through the lens of moral masculinity. Walt W. Rostow, a Special Assistant for National Security Affairs who later served in the Department of State, tied the two themes together when he wrote that “at this stage of history we and all our friends will be in danger unless the United States is strong.” Winning the Cold War, Rostow argued, “requires a nation which is prepared to see the world as it is and to act on that reality with the vigor which

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\(^5\) I am referring to their conceptualizations of public morality, not private morality. While Kennedy’s attitude toward women and numerous documented and rumored extramarital encounters with women doubtless played a role in his view of gender roles, it is not integral to this analysis at this time.
has marked the national character since our beginnings. . . . we are prepared to lay all we
are and all we have on the line.” Pragmatism, responsibility, and sacrifice were all
hallmarks of moral masculinity.

This dissertation assumes that diplomacy is not conducted in a vacuum. Policymakers operate within a particular culture, a framework of values, meanings, and symbols, and this culture influences how they formulate and implement policy. This study argues that gender, race, and class are socially constructed, historically specific categories that influence all aspects of society, including foreign relations. These categories are multifaceted and constantly negotiated.

A cultural analysis focusing on gender is important to the study of foreign relations because definitions of gender are about power. Gender is not the only way in which power is expressed, but it is a recurrent and persistent framework for organizing equality and inequality. Historian Joan Scott has argued that “gender is a primary field within which or by means of which power is articulated.” Scott urges historians of war, diplomacy, and high politics to look beyond “rational actors” to discover how “power relations among nations . . . have been made comprehensible (and thus legitimate) in terms of relations between male and female.”

Multiple categories of difference, especially gender, race, and class, but also ethnicity, religion, sexuality, and age, are used to construct and maintain relationships of power. Dominant groups define differences to legitimate their hold on social, political, or

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6 Themes for a Speech, Mr. Sorensen from WWR, October 9, 1961, President’s Office Files (hereafter POF): Staff Memoranda, Rostow, Walt W., 6/61-12/61, box 65, John F. Kennedy Library (hereafter JFKL).

economic power, and ensure adherence to the system through cultural and social prescriptions. Although scholars disagree as to which category is paramount, most agree that these categories are interlocking and overlapping, reinforcing each other. For example, the social construction of racial difference is dependent on ideologies of masculinity, while together these two categories maintain class relations.\(^8\)

Gender is not an expression of biological difference but is a socially constructed category imposing ideology, values, customs, behavioral prescriptions, and social roles upon men and women.\(^9\) As Joan Scott, Gerda Lerner and others have noted, categories of gender have historically been used to order society and organize equality and inequality. Because gender difference seems “natural” and thus unquestionable, it has been manipulated to justify the unequal distribution of resources, both material and symbolic, which confer power. The Western tradition values what it defines as “masculine” over “feminine” qualities. Masculinity is used to endow, justify, and perpetuate hierarchical

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relationships of power. During the early 1960s, members of the Kennedy administration used the values of moral masculinity to justify their claims to domestic and international power.

Moral masculinity had unusual salience within the Kennedy administration but also spoke to broader concerns prevalent in Cold War-era American society. The late 1950s and early 1960s were a period of transition for American society and culture. The upheaval that would mark the late 1960s and 1970s bubbled beneath the surface. Racial strife, gender tensions, class antagonism, and concerns about nuclear war preoccupied many Americans. As W. J. Rorabaugh has noted, “behind the glittering façade of Camelot as a promising time lurked an awful anxiety.”

Postwar affluence sparked fears of a “soft society” and the loss of American masculinity. Critics charged that America had become domesticated, bureaucratized, and “overcivilized.” “Organization men” underscored American men’s loss of autonomy in the workplace and exacerbated worries about the ability of American society to triumph in the Cold War. American women were entering the workforce in increasing numbers and agitating for equal political and economic rights. At the same time, the increasing activism of the modern civil rights movement threatened to overturn America’s

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established racial order. During Kennedy’s Senate term, civil rights activists won victories in the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision and the Montgomery bus boycott. The first lunch counter sit-ins, the Freedom Rides, and Freedom Summer were not far behind. Many members of the white middle class feared that the United States was losing its frontier values of “masculine” risk-taking and manly autonomy. In 1958, the president of the Southern Political Science Association expressed concerns that the “organization man presidency” under Dwight Eisenhower was weakening the nation.  

These fears shaped foreign policy as well as domestic politics, and many Americans associated the external, Communist threat with domestic subversion, particularly the subversion of traditional gender roles. “Liberated” women, communism, and deviant sexuality threatened national security, not just physically, but morally as well. These challenges threatened to undermine white middle-class men’s claims to political power, and by extension American claims to imperial prerogative. If the United States failed to defeat the Communist menace, its global position would crumble. Liberal anti-Communists adopted a masculinity that “rejected all characteristics considered womanly,” according to Geoffrey Smith.  

Behavior or qualities deviating from the norm of the idealized white heterosexual male were suspect and possibly dangerous.  

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John F. Kennedy was uniquely able to tap into these concerns and contradictions. He had established a personal narrative centered on the qualities of moral masculinity. His well-documented PT-109 ordeal during World War II demonstrated his physical bravery, while Profiles in Courage focused on his moral fortitude.\(^\text{14}\) He adopted “sacrifice” and “challenge” as his campaign themes and pledged to act independently but responsibly. The Kennedy administration would take strong action, but retain flexibility. Its policymakers would show daring and initiative, but stay safely on the side of masculine rationality.\(^\text{15}\) The “New Frontier” campaign theme revealed the influence of moral masculinity on the future president and his advisors. As Kennedy explained, he believed that the new decade “was going to be a period of entirely new material changes . . . we were crossing frontiers which involve the struggle for freedom here in the United States and around the world. . . . the new frontier phrase expressed that hope.”\(^\text{16}\) Drawing on frontier imagery associated the Kennedy campaign with rugged masculinity and American glories while emphasizing the “newness” of the frontier hoped to compel the public to turn away from sitting Vice President Richard Nixon, Kennedy’s opponent.

Some of Kennedy’s campaign rhetoric spoke to fears about President Eisenhower’s old age and poor health and suggested that Eisenhower had allowed the nation to become feminized. Kennedy argued that the Eisenhower administration had “confine[d] our national posture to one of talking louder and louder while carrying a

\(^\text{14}\) Hellmann, *The Kennedy Obsession*.


\(^\text{16}\) Transcript of Remarks During an Interview for British Television, April 19, 1961, *Public Papers of the President 1961* (hereafter *PPP*) (Washington, DC, 1962), 287.
smaller and smaller stick.” He later remarked that serving as president required “even stronger nerves” in the 1960s than the early 1950s, when Eisenhower was president. “[Y]ou really needed no nerves at all,” he noted, “it was only since 1958, when missiles entered the picture, that nerves were needed.” This was more than just electoral or public relations strategy. These values, and fears, lay at the core of Kennedy’s identity, and he surrounded himself with men who believed in the same ideals and shared the same anxieties about masculinity, power and privilege.

This analysis of moral masculinity and foreign relations in the Kennedy administration pays close attention to policymakers’ use of language, both in private deliberations and in public statements. A “discourse” is a regulated language that defines what can be acceptably said, thought, and written, or else excluded and suppressed, on a given subject. This group of terms, categories, and institutions organizes and legitimates power relationships. As diplomatic historian Frank Costigliola explained, “the purpose of analyzing the language of . . . a written document, is to explain the impact that the language makes . . . [a]lthough language does not determine, language shapes meaning as it is conveying meaning.” The discourses of moral masculinity permeate the foreign policy debates and public statements of the Kennedy administration. They influenced internal decisionmaking and dynamics, the relationship between the United States and its allies, and crisis management in the international realm.

This dissertation studies five key elements of moral masculinity and assesses their role in diplomatic crises during the Kennedy administration. A discourse of heroism influenced Kennedy’s decisions during the Bay of Pigs crisis, while his meeting with Nikita Khrushchev in June 1961 hinged on notions of youth and vigor. The Kennedy administration made policy during the Berlin crisis with attention to the value of patriarchal responsibility. Kennedy’s conduct during the Cuban missile crisis demonstrates the importance of maintaining the image and ideology of moral masculinity as policymakers focused on deviance and danger. Finally, a discourse of maturity and modernity surrounded policymaking during the protracted crisis in the Congo.

Chapter two focuses on the attempted invasion of Cuba at the Bay of Pigs in April 1961 and examines how a discourse of heroism encouraged Kennedy to proceed with the invasion plan. Heroism, both physical and mental, was an important component of moral masculinity. Adherents to moral masculinity certainly valued acts of physical heroism, such as Kennedy’s wartime exploits in the Pacific. Mental or intellectual acts of courage were equally respected. The Bay of Pigs operation’s failure was Kennedy’s first real political setback and it undermined the values of moral masculinity and the Kennedy administration’s claims to power. This analysis is influenced by the work of Michael Hunt, who explained in his study of Ideology and U.S. Foreign Policy how Americans have developed different stereotypes of Latin Americans for different contexts, a positive image suited to a policy of paternalism and benevolence and a more negative portrayal
appropriate to periods of tension and confrontation. The Kennedy administration drew on this imagery during the Bay of Pigs crisis, first valorizing and idealizing the Cuban exile brigade as romantic heroes, then vilifying them for their failure.

Kennedy’s failure at the Bay of Pigs put him on the defensive for his first meeting with Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev as head of state. Chapter three examines the Kennedy-Khrushchev meeting in Vienna in June 1961. This confrontation between the two most powerful men in the world illustrated the relationship between masculinity, youth, and power. Vigor was an important criterion for fulfilling the mandate of moral masculinity and proving one’s power, both personal and political. Despite his own physical frailties, which were largely concealed at the time, Kennedy valued physical and mental vigor and considered it an important element of personal power and national strength. His association of vigor with youth colored his perceptions of Nikita Khrushchev and influenced the tenor of his debates with his Soviet counterpart. Kennedy went to Vienna with the goal of demonstrating a strong, vigorous, masculine image to Khrushchev, and he failed in that goal.

The policy consequences of the Vienna meeting for the Berlin crisis are discussed in the fourth chapter, which focuses on the role of patriarchal responsibility in the worldview of moral masculinity. Kennedy and his top coterie of advisors emphasized the role of a strong father figure and an ethos of responsibility to fulfill masculine criteria. Middle-class Americans in the 1950s and early 1960s used domesticity and the nuclear family to shore up the American way of life and ward off the anxieties of the atomic

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The nuclear danger also demanded that the nation’s leaders exercise their power with restraint and responsibility. The focus on the nuclear family extended to the realm of high politics. Kennedy and his men were patriarchs for the nation and their allies. Frank Costigliola has described how American policymakers during the Cold War envisioned the Western alliance as a family, with the United States as the patriarch and uncooperative Western allies as children or hysterical women. This discourse of patriarchal responsibility helped set policy during the Berlin crisis and contributed to tensions in the Western alliance, but it also helped steer Kennedy away from a dangerous military conflict with the Soviet Union by encouraging him to limit U.S. policy goals in Central Europe. When Khrushchev sealed the border around West Berlin, Kennedy had built enough flexibility into his policy to avoid going to war without undermining moral masculinity.

Kennedy’s management of the Cuban missile crisis in October 1962 demonstrated the proscriptive aspects of moral masculinity. A re-examination of those crucial thirteen days reveals the power that moral masculinity held over policymaking in the Kennedy administration. The fifth chapter focuses on the consequences of deviating from the prescribed behavioral and ideological norms demanded by moral masculinity. As they debated policy options, national security policymakers operated within a discourse of deviance and danger. This discourse contributed to the crisis atmosphere and closed off policy options that deviated from the values of moral masculinity. In this case, as with the Berlin crisis, moral masculinity also helped provide a resolution. Fearing the

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21 May, *Homeward Bound.*

appearance of deviance in the eyes of his Western allies, Kennedy ultimately chose a naval blockade rather than an invasion of Cuba. This case study demonstrates the powerful hold of ideologies of masculinity and how operating outside the prescribed framework of masculine norms was not a viable option for the Kennedy administration.

Finally, chapter six takes the story of foreign policy in the Kennedy administration to Africa for an examination of the crisis in the Congo. A discourse of maturity and modernity influenced Kennedy’s policies toward the Congo. In the worldview of moral masculinity, maturity connoted an advanced stage of intellectual, cultural, political, and economic development for both individuals and countries. For many policymakers in the Kennedy administration, newly decolonized regions were still somewhat unqualified for self-rule. Tropes of maturity and modernity updated imperialist discourses for the Cold War era. The Congo crisis highlights Kennedy’s ambivalence toward racial issues. Kennedy spoke out against racial violence and he helped arrange Martin Luther King, Jr.’s release from jail during the 1960 campaign. Observers noted that he was at ease with people of color at home and abroad, he avoided using racial epithets, and he appointed African Americans to high-level and visible government positions.23 The best evidence suggests that Kennedy was preoccupied more with foreign policy than domestic policy and that he considered racial issues mostly in conjunction with their impact on U.S. relations with the developing world. Kennedy believed that segregation hampered the American fight in the Cold War, but because he

23 Thomas Borstelmann, The Cold War and the Color Line: American Race Relations in the Global Arena (Cambridge, 2001), 137-140. For examples of Kennedy’s pre-presidential thoughts on civil rights, see “Draft of Remarks on Civil Rights and Civil Liberties” and “Civil Rights and the International Situation,” Pre-Presidential Papers: House Files: Speech Files: Civil Rights Speeches, box 93, JFKL. See Richard N. Goodwin, Remembering America: A Voice from the Sixties (New York, 1988), 4-5, for Kennedy’s order to desegregate the Coast Guard, issued on the day of his inauguration.
needed the support of southern Democrats he failed to mount a forceful challenge to it. Moral masculinity contained an important racial element in the sense that its adherents were all white men of some privilege; it was a racial ideology as much as gendered, and the definition of masculinity it proffered was inextricably linked to whiteness. The tropes of maturity and modernity targeted developing nations because these countries were inhabited by people of color. This discourse shaped perceptions of Congolese abilities, the Kennedy administration’s choice of leader for the Congo, its relations with the United Nations, and its relations with Western allies during the Congo crisis.

Examining foreign relations during the Kennedy administration through the lens of moral masculinity demonstrates that factors other than strategy, security, or economics contributed to policy decisions. In fact, policymakers defined concepts like strategy, security, and economics through a cultural prism, and moral masculinity was a crucial part of that context. This analysis does not suggest that a relentlessly aggressive machismo spurred Kennedy to ratchet up the Cold War, measuring *cojones* with Castro and Khrushchev across the conference table, and needlessly bringing the world to the brink of nuclear war because he was a sickly child or had a prodigious sexual appetite. Re-examining Kennedy’s foreign policy with attention to gender demonstrates the complex effects of culture on the making of foreign policy and the real policy consequences when top-level policymakers in an administration share a worldview heavily influenced by notions of gender.

The geographically diverse case studies in this dissertation lend a comparative perspective to the relationship between gender and foreign relations. Focusing on key moments of decisionmaking reveals how ideologies of race and gender influenced
foreign policy by illuminating assumptions about foreign leaders or parties, options not considered or ignored, and paths chosen. Illuminating policymakers’ “fabric of reasoning” helps to uncover the cultural roots of diplomacy in the Cold War and contributes to our understanding of foreign policy process and practice.\textsuperscript{24}

\textsuperscript{24} Dean, “Masculinity as Ideology,” 30.
CHAPTER 2

HEROISM: THE BAY OF PIGS

Moral masculinity affected inter-American relations both positively and negatively during the Kennedy administration. The Alliance for Progress reflected a humanitarian impulse behind moral masculinity, though this was hardly the first time that American aid programs had the implicit goal of insuring friendly regimes in Latin America. For one of the United States’s closest neighbors, moral masculinity had less benign consequences. This worldview affected policy in two major crises of the Kennedy administration, the failed Bay of Pigs invasion and the Cuban missile crisis. A discourse of heroism helped propel the new Kennedy administration into an ill-advised and ill-fated adventure in Cuba less than three months after taking office.

Cuban dictator Fulgencio Batista’s early morning flight to the Dominican Republic on New Year’s Day 1959 was just one chapter in the long history of American relations with Cuba. Since the turn of the twentieth century, U.S.-Cuban relations had been marked by ambivalence, economic dependence, and frustration. Fidel Castro, who first launched his attack on the Batista regime in 1953, drew widespread support from

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peasants, workers, students, and the middle classes. Much of his appeal stemmed from the deterioration of the Cuban economy and the perception that Cuba’s ties to the United States had financially crippled the nation.26

The Bay of Pigs operation was conceived and largely implemented in the Eisenhower administration. American policymakers had decided by early 1958 to oppose Castro’s 26 July Movement, and although not initially convinced that Castro was a Communist, regarded his ascendance to power with great skepticism. Castro’s anti-American exhortations, nationalization of U.S.-owned industries, and decision to sign a trade agreement with the Soviet Union contributed to Eisenhower’s decision to create a covert program against the Castro government in March 1960.27 The CIA recruited and trained the paramilitary Cuban Expeditionary Force (CEF), a group of Cuban exiles who would invade the island nation and topple Castro. Preceded by air strikes to destroy Castro’s air force, these troops would launch a sea invasion of Cuba, establish a beachhead, trigger widespread popular uprisings against Castro, and enable a provisional government to take office. Code-named Operation Zapata, the invasion was originally scheduled for February 1961.28


27 Paterson, Contesting Castro, 120-121, 258.

28 The major accounts of the Bay of Pigs invasion are Peter Wyden, Bay of Pigs: The Untold Story (New York, 1979) and Trumbull Higgins, The Perfect Failure: Kennedy, Eisenhower, and the CIA at the Bay of Pigs (New York and London, 1987).
When Kennedy took office, the Cuban expedition became an urgent subject of debate. The CEF was completing its training in Guatemala, and could not be held there indefinitely. The Kennedy administration could continue with the already-approved plan, modify it, or cancel the operation and release the brigade to spread their tale of dissatisfaction and presidential cowardice throughout the exile community.

The new president was under significant bureaucratic, military, and political pressure to go forward with the Cuban operation. Kennedy had emphasized the Cuba issue during the campaign to underscore the Eisenhower administration’s weakness and ineffectuality, and could not afford to have his critiques turned back on his own administration. In addition, Castro had attacked Kennedy, referring to him as “an ignorant millionaire” in a speech before the United Nations in September 1960. Eisenhower advised his successor to act against Castro as quickly as possible.

Although Kennedy was ambivalent about the wisdom of the operation and harbored deep reservations, he reached a decision, filtered through the lens of moral masculinity, to launch the invasion.

During the Cold War, as at the turn of the twentieth century, Cuba figured prominently in the crisis of masculinity. Kristin Hoganson has examined the Spanish-American war through the lens of gender and argues that the “coercive use of gender ideals” propelled the United States into war with Spain. Jingoes drew on the chivalric

29 Quoted in Higgins, The Perfect Failure, 59.

drama, depicting the Cuban revolution as a noble crusade, Cuba as a vulnerable female in need of rescue, and the revolutionaries themselves as heroes and heroines. This discourse helped offset most turn-of-the-century Americans’ racial antipathy toward the mixed-race inhabitants of Cuba. It also aided jingoes in their effort to bring the United States into the war against Spain by painting refusal to intervene on Cuba’s behalf as an act of cowardice. Jingoes effectively silenced their opponents by feminizing them and questioning their right to hold political power, equating “martial policies with manly character.” This tactic ultimately served a domestic purpose, the revitalization of the domestic ideal of politics and the reversal of what jingoes saw as the “feminization” of American society.\(^\text{31}\)

Six decades later, the Kennedy administration drew on similar language when it considered plans to support an invasion of Castro’s Cuba. Kennedy and his national security advisors portrayed the members of the CEF, the exile brigade that manned the anti-Castro invasion, as heroes, and Cuba and Cubans as victims in need of rescue. According to the narrative of moral masculinity, it would have been cowardly for Kennedy to refuse to assist these heroic figures or to come to Cuba’s aid. The mission’s failure had multiple private and public consequences for the Kennedy administration, all informed by moral masculinity and a discourse of heroism. Kennedy wanted to insure the survival and safe return of the men of the Brigade who had been captured by Castro’s forces. In a show of chivalry and grace, JFK took public responsibility for the fiasco. Privately, however, the administration turned on the Cubans it had championed and blamed them for the mission’s failure. Because this failure challenged the narrative of

heroism and success that Kennedy had crafted for himself, it undermined moral masculinity and the Kennedy administration’s claims to power. Fidel Castro bore the brunt of Kennedy’s ire. The administration constructed him as a pathological threat and implemented a covert program, Operation Mongoose, designed to overthrow him.

Kennedy’s definition of heroism touched on several strands of cultural categories, including gender, race, and religion. For John Kennedy, courage was a value inculcated from birth. As biographer Thomas Reeves wrote, the president “had been trained since infancy to face a challenge with unflinching courage,” whether that challenge was an illness, the death of a loved one, or a wartime ordeal. As a sickly, frail youth, JFK escaped into the world of adventure stories, where heroes were literally “white knights.”

A story Kennedy liked to recount illustrates the inextricable connections between physical and moral heroism. An American prisoner of war in Korea, Kennedy related, was singled out of the line-up upon capture and asked his opinion of General Marshall. “General George C. Marshall,” he replied, “is a great American soldier.” Promptly a rifle butt knocked him to the ground. Then he was stood up again to face his captors – and again he was asked: “What do you think of General Marshall?” And again he gave the same steadfast reply – only this time there was no rifle butt, no punishment at all. They had tested his will, his courage to resist, his manhood – and now they knew where to classify him.

The soldier’s answer revealed his willingness to risk physical punishment to uphold his beliefs and thus highlighted not only his masculinity but his civic virtue. Even the North Korean enemy, as Kennedy described it, was forced to respect the American man-to-man.

In Profiles in Courage, Kennedy detailed eight case studies of courageous individuals,

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33 “Are We Up to the Task?” in The Strategy of Peace, ed. Nevins, 201.
but he chose only men as exemplars of political courage. He emphasized the qualities of sacrifice, public service, loyalty, and “intelligent conscience” as the hallmarks of a hero and noted that “compromise need not mean cowardice.” Kennedy also quoted approvingly Ernest Hemingway’s definition of courage as “grace under pressure.”

Kennedy emphasized courage in his presidential campaign, highlighting his PT-109 ordeal in the Pacific theater during the Second World War. His campaign also emphasized a phone call of concern he made to the pregnant Coretta Scott King while her husband, civil rights leader Martin Luther King, Jr., languished in a jail cell in Birmingham, Alabama. This focus on courage incorporated aspects of both gender and race. By definition, Kennedy’s war hero status was inextricably linked to his maleness, as women could not serve in combat. More importantly, it was inseparable from his masculinity, the definition of which hinged in part on service to the state. He had irrevocably demonstrated his right to citizenship, and his right to lead the citizenry, through military service. His phone call to Coretta Scott King was the act of a powerful, if solicitous and sympathetic, white man providing some “protection” to an African American woman. That Kennedy took this step in the racially charged atmosphere of the 1960 campaign is indeed admirable, but the underlying significance is the power dynamic it revealed. To be defined as courageous, or a hero, in both cases, demanded that he be white and male.

Religion also played an important role in the definition of heroism under moral masculinity. Despite Kennedy’s own Catholicism, many policymakers’ views about Cubans were linked with Protestant religious values. The great masses of Cuban people were stereotyped as adherents to either a primitive, superstitious religion or godless communism. Either way, they were unfit for self-rule and certainly needed their northern neighbors to rescue them.

Catholicism has historically suffered by comparison to American Protestantism among the ruling white upper-class elite. Many Americans viewed Catholicism, especially in Latin America, as primitive and pagan. While Protestantism promoted self-reliance, the Catholic Church’s emphasis on providing charity to its flock weakened Catholics’ moral and economic fiber and encouraged laziness. Catholics were servile, dependent on the Vatican and its corrupt priesthood, and irresponsible because they focused on eternal rather than earthly rewards. Furthermore, American Protestants viewed the importance Catholics assigned to Mary, a feminine power, with suspicion. These attitudes about religion have been intensified by their connection to racial stereotypes. The Spanish, for example, converted Native Americans, while large numbers of the “new” immigrants of the early twentieth century were Catholics from southern and eastern Europe.³⁶

President Kennedy expressed these perceptions as well. Although he practiced Catholicism, this was more of a familial obligation rather than a deep abiding faith in the Roman Catholic Church. Kennedy was an Anglophile who embraced WASP values and

³⁶ Jews suffered from similar unfavorable comparisons. Frederick B. Pike, The United States and Latin America: Myths and Stereotypes of Civilization and Nature (Austin, TX, 1992), 76-85.
attended Mass regularly mostly to please his parents and, later, his wife. His “unorthodox” views on Catholicism led to friction with his mother, who had devoted a great deal of time and energy to making traditional Catholicism an integral part of her children’s upbringing. During the early 1940s, Kennedy began to question his faith, especially its rigid hierarchy and its underestimation of the value of individual thought and will. The deaths of his brother Joe and sister Kathleen intensified these doubts. As Doris Kearns Goodwin has noted, “the concerns of those who feared the influence of the Catholic Church on this most secular of leaders” seem “ironic, in retrospect.”

Moreover, Kennedy was acutely aware of the negative consequences of emphasizing his Catholicism. During the 1960 campaign, JFK faced difficulties in the Wisconsin and West Virginia primaries because of his religion. After Kennedy secured the Democratic nomination, a group of Protestant ministers led by Norman Vincent Peale issued a statement questioning his loyalty to the United States, and he was dogged by similar concerns throughout the campaign, especially in the South. It is possible, furthermore, that these experiences led Kennedy to be more self-conscious about his religious background than a Protestant president might be, and in fact reinforced his


39 Goodwin, *The Fitzgeral and the Kennedy*s, 753.

40 Goodwin, *The Fitzgeral and the Kennedy*s, 798-799, 803; Reeves, *A Question of Character*, 152, 161-165, 191-193; Theodore H. White, *The Making of the President 1960* (New York, 1961), 100-114, 259-262. An awareness of anti-Irish Catholic prejudice tinged Kennedy’s boyhood. Joseph Kennedy moved his family to New York in 1927 partly out of frustration with discrimination in Boston. The president’s father also harbored bitterness over his exclusion from the prestigious Harvard clubs such as the Porcellian Club when he was an undergraduate there, though by the time his sons Joseph Jr. and John attended the college, this rigid social structure had eased somewhat. See Goodwin, *The Fitzgeral and the Kennedy*s, 216, 367, 476.
tendency to embrace WASP values and construct his heroes, if not as Protestant, then at least as not Catholic. Moreover, he could separate North American Catholicism from the more “primitive” form of religion practiced in Latin America that was influenced by African and native traditions.

Kennedy’s definition of heroism holds particular relevance in the Cuban context. White Americans have historically viewed Latin Americans as childlike, primitive, emotional, and effeminate. Since Cuba has had a quasi-imperial, at the least, relationship with the United States, comparisons to the colonial context are appropriate. Postcolonial scholars have argued that morality and sexuality have figured into colonial power arrangements. American imperialists feminized Latin America as a virgin wilderness to be conquered and penetrated. Colonialism was cast in patriarchal metaphors where the western hemisphere was a “family” and the United States was the “father figure” that would provide protection as well as discipline. Images of Cubans were not static, however. As Michael Hunt has noted, stereotypes of Cubans shift depending on context. The “negative” stereotype relied on the “black legend” of the brutal, deceptive Spanish conquerer. It also reflected white Americans’ horror at miscegenation, which had further “polluted” Latin blood. The Latin male was thus not only cruel and exploitive, but lazy, cowardly, and unclean. The “positive” stereotype depicted Latin Americans as redeemable, most often as a fair-skinned damsel in distress

41 Pike, The United States and Latin America, xiii-xvi.

who the United States should rescue and protect. At the turn of the twentieth century, a third stereotype developed, melding the image of “the racially degenerate male and the dependent woman” by depicting Latinos as black children, in need of American tutelage and discipline.\(^{43}\) American ambivalence toward Cubans is revealed in the assessment of Castro by Christian Herter, Eisenhower’s Secretary of State, as childlike, “quite immature regarding the problem of government, and puzzled and confused by some of the practical difficulties now facing him. In English he spoke with restraint and considerable personal appeal. In Spanish, however, he became voluble, excited, and somewhat ‘wild.’”\(^{44}\)

These various race-, sex-, and gender-based stereotypes shifted according to American policy goals. During the Spanish-American War, for example, Americans’ initial views of Cuban men divided into two camps. One interpretation held that Cuban men had proven their fitness for independence through their heroic actions. Jingoism with more imperial ambitions, however, used the rescue paradigm “to write Cuban men out of the romance.” Later, once American soldiers engaged in battle, the paradigm shifted again. Disappointed with the guerrilla warfare utilized by the Cuban revolutionaries, white American men concluded that martial skills were dependent on race and used this to justify the expansion of American power. Cuban men, they argued, did not fulfill the martial ideal necessary to earn full citizenship rights.\(^{45}\) The Cuban men of the CEF found themselves in a similar situation in 1961.


\(^{44}\) Quoted in Higgins, *The Perfect Failure*, 45.

The Kennedy administration applied a discourse of heroism both to the Brigade and to the people of Cuba in general. In its worldview, Castro had become a tyrant, betraying the revolutionary ideals he professed as well as his own people. Cubans were in desperate need of rescue from this dangerous regime. An early Kennedy administration report noted that “the Cuban people are now a captive audience” and that the Castro regime “ruthlessly suppress[ed]” its opposition and “placed the Cuban people under a new slavery.” A State Department White Paper on Cuba argued that “the leaders of the revolutionary regime [in Cuba] betrayed their own revolution [and] delivered that revolution into the hands of powers alien to the hemisphere.” “Never in history,” it concluded, “has any revolution so rapidly devoured its children.” The White Paper stressed the theme of an “assault on the hemisphere” by an alien power, noting that Castro’s increasing ties to the communist bloc had resulted in “a deliberate severing of traditional cultural ties with countries of the [western] hemisphere and of Western Europe. It has meant a massive attempt to impose an alien cultural pattern on the Cuban people.”

Danger threatened Cuba from within in the person of Fidel Castro, but Cuba also faced danger from external sources. American policymakers drew on stereotypes of Soviet communism as a dark, alien threat. In his first State of the Union address, JFK decried the activities of “Communist agents” in Latin America who sought “to exploit that region’s peaceful revolution.” Objecting to the domination of the Cuban people by “foreign and domestic tyrannies,” he “pledged to work with our sister republics to free

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46 The Communist Totalitarian Government of Cuba as a Fact or Situation Endangering the Peace of America, March 1, 1961, National Security Files (hereafter NSF): Countries Series: Cuba, box 35a, JFKL.

the Americas of all such foreign domination.”48 The propaganda designed to blanket Cuba and encourage the popular uprising the CIA predicted would occur after a successful invasion emphasized this theme of betrayal and rescue. It argued that Castro’s revolution had been co-opted by “a negative Soviet, Asiatic, foreign, Communist regime” that was dominated by “foreigners like Che [Guevara], the Soviets, and the Communist Chinese.”49 It implored Cubans to join the “courageous fighters in the hills. . . . a force without foreigners, an army of Cubans who are returning to their own country to save the Revolution.”50 This focus on a dark, foreign power threatening the pristine natural beauty of Cuba and its people not only helped the Kennedy administration make up its own mind about going forward with the operation, but served to justify this interventionist policy.

During the planning stages, the Kennedy administration ascribed some of the characteristics of moral masculinity to the Cuban Expeditionary Force. This association factored into Kennedy’s decision to continue with the operation. It helped him to view the men of the Brigade as heroic rescuers. It would be cowardly for him to abandon them in their hour of need. An Army officer in charge of the training in Guatemala briefed the inter-agency Special Group on covert operations, emphasizing the “motivation, intelligence, and leadership qualities” of the Cuban forces.51

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evaluation of the Brigade gave the force high marks for leadership, enthusiasm, and a strong work ethic. They devoted “long hours outside of training time to study and practice,” the evaluation noted, and it also reported that most of the men were “young . . . and come from the middle class.”

Youth, a middle-class background, and strong leadership ability were all components of moral masculinity. The Kennedy administration’s descriptions of CEF drew on these qualities to suggest that the Cuban exiles had the potential to share in moral masculinity, so the American government should support them and their operation.

Colonel Jack Hawkins, a Marine dispatched to the CIA on assignment for the Cuban operation, drew upon the discourse of moral masculinity even more explicitly. A few days before D-Day, Hawkins was in Puerto Cabezas inspecting the Brigade, and received an urgent cable from Washington requesting his evaluation of the men. Realizing that his superiors sought last-minute reassurance, Hawkins reiterated his confidence in the CEF and its ability to launch the invasion and ultimately overthrow Castro. Drawing on the discourse of heroism, he said that he found the officers to be hardened by their training and eager to get on with the mission. He described them as “young, vigorous, intelligent and motivated with a fanatical urge to begin battle for which most of them have been preparing in the rugged conditions of training camps for almost a

year.” Hawkins went on to say that he was impressed by “the serious attitude of the men,” who “were quiet, disciplined and efficient,” and implored Washington to continue the operation as planned.\(^53\)

As a military man, Hawkins used language that reflected the specifically military values of discipline, efficiency, and strength. Kennedy’s conception of heroism certainly had a military component as well, notably in his emphasis on elite wartime service. Although Hawkins may have approached the topic from a military worldview, Kennedy certainly interpreted his assessment through the lens of moral masculinity.\(^54\)

Kennedy wanted to avoid the perception that he was abandoning the Brigade because the contrast between their courage and his own lack thereof would be too stark. As historian and Special Assistant to the President for Latin American Affairs Arthur Schlesinger noted, “abandonment would conceivably suggest a US failure of nerve.” Yet Schlesinger objected to the operation, and drew on the discourse of moral masculinity to attempt to dissuade Kennedy from approving it. If it failed, Schlesinger warned, the fallout would damage “the new US image – the image of intelligence, reasonableness and honest firmness” which world opinion had already welcomed.\(^55\) Undersecretary of State Chester Bowles also tried to dissuade Kennedy, arguing that the intervention would violate U.S. treaty agreements, that the risk of failure was too great, and that the

\(^{53}\) Telegram from Colonel Hawkins, 13 April 1961, POF: Countries Series: Cuba: Security, 1961, box 115, JFKL. The text of Hawkins’s telegram can also be found in the Taylor Report.

\(^{54}\) Kennedy, who respected Hawkins, certainly saw his cable, and according to RFK, it persuaded him make his decision in the final moments. See Wyden, *Bay of Pigs*, 168-169.

\(^{55}\) Memorandum to the President from Arthur Schlesinger, 5 April 1961, POF: Countries Series: Cuba: Security, 1961, box 115, JFKL. See also Memorandum to the President from Arthur Schlesinger, 10 April 1961, NSF: Countries Series: Cuba, General, 1/61-4/61, box 35a, JFKL.
operation would damage American prestige in the developing world. Like Schlesinger, Bowles tried to reason in the language of moral masculinity, reassuring Rusk that if the invasion failed and Castro succeeded “in solidifying his political position . . . it does not mean that we would be impotent to deal with him.”

The objections of Schlesinger and Bowles fell on deaf ears. In fact, like other members of the liberal wing of the Democratic Party, including Ambassador to the United Nations Adlai Stevenson, they were not informed or consulted about the Cuban operation until it was almost too late. Always suspicious of liberals and “eggheads,” Kennedy did not consider them pragmatic or tough enough for the rough-and-tumble world of foreign policy. He considered Bowles “too ladylike” to be informed of the plan. Advisors who had doubts about the plan held their tongues “out of fear of being labeled ‘soft’ or undaring in the eyes of their colleagues.” Schlesinger and Bowles may have felt that the best way to convince Kennedy to cancel the operation was to use the language of moral masculinity, which they believed would resonate with him. Because they did not adhere to the other criteria of moral masculinity, however, their attempt to dissuade Kennedy failed. The framework of moral masculinity limited the president’s options because he rejected advice from policymakers who he believed were not “morally masculine,” such as Schlesinger and Bowles.

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56 Memorandum from the Under Secretary of State to Secretary of State Rusk, March 31, 1961, FRUS Vol. X, 178-181.

57 Higgins, The Perfect Failure, 107-108; Wyden, Bay of Pigs, 96-97; Garry Wills, The Kennedy Imprisonment: A Meditation on Power (Boston, 1982), 236.

JFK preferred advice from such dashing figures as Richard Bissell, the CIA’s Deputy Director of Plans and head of the Cuban operation, who had a proven track record as the father of the U-2 spy technology. Kennedy did question the wisdom of the operation, strove to avoid direct association with it, and forced several last-minute changes, including shifting the landing site, in hopes of making the invasion “quieter” and avoiding the domestic and international opprobrium that eventually resulted. Several policymakers and scholars have argued that these changes actually sealed the fate of the Brigade. Despite his reservations, however, the notion of abandonment ultimately led Kennedy to sanction the operation. Allen Dulles felt that “it took great courage for the President to overrule some of his advisers and order the invasion to proceed.” Ultimately, the President decided, as he told his brother, that “he’d rather be called an aggressor than a bum.” The consequences of moral masculinity were thus proscriptive as well as prescriptive.

On the night of April 16-17, 1961, the Brigade reached the shores of Playa Girón. The landing force was hampered from the very beginning by coral reefs, which the CIA had not taken seriously despite the Cuban men’s warnings. Supply drops missed their intended targets, the air strikes failed to destroy enough of Castro’s air force, a crucial supply ship that held the enciphering equipment was lost, and the promised popular

59 See, for example, Editorial Note, FRUS Vol. X, 143; Higgins, The Perfect Failure, 85, 97.

60 The shift in location from Trinidad eastward to Bahía de Cochinos, the Bay of Pigs, was particularly disastrous, according to Trumbull Higgins. See Higgins, The Perfect Failure, 167-168.


uprisings never materialized. Over the next two days, Castro’s militia and air force defeated the invasion.\(^{63}\) International public opinion condemned the operation and the obvious role of the U.S. government in it, while Khrushchev expressed “indignation” and warned Kennedy against igniting “the flame of war.”\(^{64}\)

Approximately 1,300 men of the exile force had landed on the beaches, and Castro’s forces captured most of them. The Kennedy administration, feeling remorseful and humiliated, committed itself to rescuing the men left behind. They were fulfilling the chivalric code, and in some respects the Cuban image was already shifting, as the rescuers needed to be rescued and were now dependent on the patriarchal figure. On the morning of April 18, as it became clear that the Brigade was in trouble, National Security Advisor McGeorge Bundy informed JFK that the CIA would likely be asking for additional air support for the men on the beach. Bundy recommended acceding to the request, “because men are in need.”\(^{65}\) Schlesinger noted that “Kennedy was prepared to run more risks to take the men off the beaches than to put them there.”\(^{66}\) The Kennedy administration, through private corporate intermediaries, negotiated with the Castro government for the prisoners’ release. In December 1962, after the resolution of the missile crisis, Castro agreed to exchange the Brigade prisoners for $53 million in food and drugs, and they were released to Miami.\(^{67}\)


\(^{64}\) Telegram from the Embassy in the Soviet Union to the Department of State, April 18, 1961, *FRUS* vol. X, 264-265.

\(^{65}\) Memorandum for the President from McGeorge Bundy, 18 April 1961, POF: Countries Series: Cuba, General, 4/1/61-4/21/61, box 114a, JFKL.

\(^{66}\) Quoted in Wyden, *Bay of Pigs*, 293.
The failure of the Bay of Pigs landing had important public and private consequences for the Kennedy administration. Publicly, President Kennedy took sole responsibility for the failure in Cuba. His supporters viewed this as an act of courage in keeping with the terms of moral masculinity. To publicly flog an advisor or agency would be an unseemly act of cowardice and shirking responsibility. “I’m the responsible officer of the Government,” JFK told a group of journalists. Talking to close advisor Theodore Sorensen, Kennedy elaborated, “it is more difficult to attack a man who manfully says, ‘it was my fault.’”

On April 20, the president spoke before the American Society of Newspaper Editors and defended his new administration’s policies in Cuba. He sounded the themes of heroism and courage, emphasizing that “this was a struggle of Cuban patriots against a Cuban dictator.” Castro was a “fanatic tyrant” whose repressive policies betrayed “the promise of a revolution of hope,” and Kennedy called on Americans to be less complacent about “the menace of external Communist intervention and domination in Cuba.” This theme had the advantage of alluding to Cuba’s alleged inability to govern itself, as well as portraying the Soviet threat to the western hemisphere as an alien invasion that must be repelled at all cost. Americans could defend themselves, Kennedy implied, but Cubans could not. “It is for their sake as well as our own that we must show

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67 Wyden, Bay of Pigs, 302-303.
68 The President’s News Conference of April 21, 1961, PPP 1961, 313.
70 Address Before the American Society of Newspaper Editors, April 20, 1961, PPP 1961, 304-306.
our will” and turn back the Communist invasion of Latin America. Kennedy praised the valor of the men of the Brigade, “this small band of gallant Cuban refugees . . . determined as they were against heavy odds to pursue their courageous attempts to regain their Island’s freedom.” He described the CEF as “freedom fighters” and repeated the final words on the beach of Brigade commander Pepe San Román, “I will not be evacuated. We will fight to the end here if we have to.” San Román, the president thundered, “has gone now to join in the mountains countless other guerrilla fighters, who are equally determined that . . . Cuba must not be abandoned to the Communists. And we do not intend to abandon it either!” Kennedy thus justified the ill-conceived expedition in Cuba as a noble crusade. The United States would have shirked its global responsibilities, he implied, if it had abandoned Cuba to its cruel fate under the alien tyranny of Castro. Abandonment would have constituted an unmanly act of cowardice ill befitting an international power such as the United States. The president was also setting the stage for continued American involvement in Cuban affairs and further attempts to undermine the Castro regime. Kennedy’s concluding remarks that evening demonstrated how much the failure at the Bay of Pigs threatened the ideals of moral masculinity. He alluded to the alleged shortcomings of the Communist system and defended the claims to power made by moral masculinity:

    The complacent, the self-indulgent, the soft societies are about to be swept away with the debris of history. Only the strong, only the industrious, only the determined, only the courageous, only the visionary who determine the real nature of our struggle can possibly survive.72


Kennedy implied that the values of strength, determination, courage, and vision, inherent in moral masculinity, would help him propel the United States to victory in the Cold War. He compared his own administration, which was “determined” and “courageous,” with its predecessor and European critics, who were too complacent and self-indulgent, unwilling to take the necessary risks to ensure the triumph of the free world. Lastly, he exhorted Americans to keep their faith in his administration and the values it projected, values that he believed would protect the United States and its white, middle-class manhood. Kennedy’s public appeal to moral masculinity succeeded. According to a Gallup poll conducted in early May, 82 per cent of the American public supported the president.73

Kennedy’s public act of courage and responsibility also inspired some of his colleagues. One high-level member of the administration recommended that “in the future we must carry out any operations of this type in such manner that the President, who has shown the highest courage, will not have to assume the responsibility.”74 Bundy went so far as to offer Kennedy his resignation, suggesting that perhaps his departure could serve to take the heat off of the Executive Branch. If Kennedy chose not to accept it at that time, Bundy recommended he keep it on file, since staffers should serve at the


74 The speaker was not directly identified in the document, but was most likely Richard Bissell. Memorandum for the Record, Paramilitary Study Group Meeting, 26 April 1961, NSF: Countries Series: Cuba: Subjects: Taylor Report, box 61a, JFKL. See also FRUS vol. X, 365n.
pleasure of the president. “You know that I wish I had served you better in the Cuban episode,” Bundy wrote, “and I hope you know how I admire your own gallantry under fire in that case.”  

Privately, Kennedy blamed his military and intelligence advisors for the failed Cuban operation. After a none-too-obvious lapse of time, JFK asked both Dulles and Bissell to tender their resignations. The president and his closest defenders turned on their enemies, using gendered language to emasculate those they felt betrayed them. “I was assured by every son of a bitch I checked with . . . that the plan would succeed,” an angry JFK told Richard Nixon.

Kennedy and his inner circle regarded the Bay of Pigs as a personal and political humiliation, a failure of moral masculinity that threatened the legitimacy of their values and their claims to power. Robert Kennedy advised his brother that “something forceful and determined must be done” about Castro. “Furthermore,” he continued, “serious attention must be given to this problem immediately and not wait for the situation in Cuba to revert back to a time of relative peace and calm with the U.S. having been beaten off with her tail between her legs.” The Attorney General also presciently noted that “If we don’t want Russia to set up missile bases in Cuba, we had better decide now what we are willing to do to stop it.”

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75 Handwritten letter to the President from McGeorge Bundy, undated, POF: Staff Memoranda: Bundy, McGeorge, 2/61-4/61, box 62, JFKL. In his preface to the 1964 Memorial Edition of Profiles in Courage, Robert Kennedy wrote that when his brother “took the blame completely on himself for the failure at the Bay of Pigs . . . [h]e was demonstrating conviction, courage, a desire to help others who needed help, and true and genuine love for his country.” Kennedy, Profiles in Courage, 10-11.

76 Nixon, RN, 234.

77 Memorandum from RFK to JFK, April 19, 1961, POF: Countries Series: Cuba, General, 4/1/61-4/21/61, box 114a, JFKL.
and the first National Security Council meeting after the operation’s collapse, described the atmosphere as “savage” and singled out RFK as particularly angry. JFK, he noted, was “really quite shattered . . . suffering an acute shock” at the first significant failure in his public career. The harsh, brutal tenor of these meetings alarmed Bowles, who attributed the mood to the fact that “the individuals involved [were] tired, frustrated, and personally humiliated.” Kennedy and his national security team were well aware that they had fallen short of the image of moral masculinity. Grayston Lynch, a CIA operative who was on one of the boats that ferried the Brigade to the Cuban shore, was “absolutely shocked” when he discovered that JFK himself had refused to order American intervention to save the operation. “It was like finding out that Superman is a fairy.”

The Kennedy administration also turned on the Cuban exiles. All the tensions that had been obscured by the discourse of heroism surfaced, magnified by policymakers’ need to find a convenient scapegoat. If their masculine values did not hold up to scrutiny, then their claims to power would be challenged. This rapid turnabout is part and parcel of the process of stereotyping. Kennedy and his advisors romanticized the men of the CEF as dashing heroes who upheld the virtues of moral masculinity, but it was impossible for the Cubans to live up to that image. Ultimately, “the pejorative stereotypes customarily attached to them [came] back into vogue . . . with an intensified virulence.” These stereotypes included the perception of Latin Americans as irrational,


79 Quoted in Wyden, Bay of Pigs, 302.
self-indulgent, sensual, effeminate, and deceptive.\textsuperscript{80} This negative assessment by government leaders reflected larger American opinion about Latin America. By the mid-1950s, American sentiment about Latin America had veered away from the Good Neighbor policy and leaned toward frustration, disappointment, and impatience. American opinion focused on the alleged poverty, economic and cultural backwardness, and political upheaval in Latin America, which journalists, academics, and government officials alike ascribed to character deficiencies among Latin Americans, notably emotionalism, immaturity, and short-sightedness.\textsuperscript{81}

American policymakers attributed the Bay of Pigs operation’s failures, large and small, to Cuban inferiorities. Members of the Kennedy administration expressed their displeasure with the Brigade by attacking their military prowess and declaring them unfit to serve. For example, a small group of the Brigade was supposed to launch a diversionary landing east of Guantánamo in Oriente province three nights before D-Day. The landing never occurred, according to one member of the administration, “probably because of weak leadership on the part of the Cuban officer responsible;” according to Colonel Hawkins, this officer “lost his nerve as they approached the beach and then withdrew.”\textsuperscript{82} The truth was more complex. The officer, Nino Díaz and many of his men were from Oriente and had been told that their mission was to liberate their home province. When they discovered that their landing was merely a diversionary tactic, they

\textsuperscript{80} Pike, \textit{The United States and Latin America}, xiv-xv, 8-10; Hunt, \textit{Ideology and U.S. Foreign Policy}, 60-62.


decided that they would only land if they could do so undetected by Castro’s forces, slip into the mountains, and free Oriente. They twice attempted to land but the presence of Castro’s troops on the shore and rocks along the coastline convinced them that “the deception was not worth the sacrifice.”

The Taylor Report, a post-mortem internal investigation led by Kennedy’s military advisor General Maxwell Taylor, located the immediate cause of the operation’s failure in an ammunition shortage. The Report attributed the shortage in large part to the loss of the ammunition-laden freighters *Rio Escondido* and *Houston* on the morning of D-Day. But it also noted that “the Cubans wasted their ammunition in excessive firing, displaying the poor ammunition discipline which is common to troops in their first combat.”

Lt. Colonel Wall, who helped train the force in Guatemala, told the Taylor committee that “physically [the men of the Brigade] were in good shape. I would say, however, that in a fight it would be like putting our Marines against Boy Scouts.” This comparison pits the image of “real” American heroes, the Marines, in stark contrast to the childish Latin Americans.

The Kennedy administration turned on the Brigade pilots as well. Despite his earlier praise of the CEF, Colonel Hawkins unfavorably compared the Cuban pilots to their American counterparts. “I just don’t know what is so difficult about strafing out a few aircraft,” he complained. “I thought we could knock them out and I’m surprised we didn’t. I think American pilots would have knocked them out. I think a good American

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pilot could have totally destroyed the Castro air capability."\textsuperscript{86} Another witness interviewed by the Taylor Committee emphasized that “one lesson that could be learned was in regard to the inability of the Cuban crews to do an effective job under tough combat conditions. He pointed out that when the going was easy and morale was high, they did a good job, but that by the end of the operation, when things were very difficult, it had been almost impossible to get them into the air at all.” This same witness also noted that “the Cuban pilots’ fuel control procedures were bad” and, when pressed by Robert Kennedy, surmised that “not over 35 per cent” of the Cuban pilots “did their job.”\textsuperscript{87}

Another oft-repeated criticism of the Brigade concerned the numerous security leaks at the training camp in Guatemala, in southern Florida, in New York, and in Washington, which made the existence of the invasion force and its ties to the American government the worst-kept secret in the western hemisphere. In fact, Kennedy pressured both \textit{The New York Times} and \textit{The New Republic} into withholding or changing news stories revealing details of the operation.\textsuperscript{88} Certainly, secrecy is paramount in a covert operation. Eighteen months later, during the Cuban missile crisis, limiting policy discussions to a small circle of advisors and keeping a tight reign on the press allowed Kennedy the time and space to formulate an ultimately successful resolution. So the value of secrecy cannot be underrated. It is significant, however, that both Cubans and

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{86} Memorandum for Record, Paramilitary Study Group Meeting, Twenty-First Meeting, 30 May 1961, Interview of Colonel Hawkins, NSF: Countries Series: Cuba: Subjects: Taylor Report, box 61a, JFKL.
  \item \textsuperscript{87} Memorandum for the Record of the Taylor Committee, 24 April 1961, NSF: Countries Series: Cuba: Subjects: Taylor Report, box 61a, JFKL.
  \item \textsuperscript{88} Higgins, \textit{The Perfect Failure}, 117-118; Wyden, \textit{Bay of Pigs}, 153-155.
\end{itemize}
Americans disregarded conventions of secrecy, but only Cuban breaches of confidence were cited as contributing factors to the operation’s failure. Moreover, some policymakers viewed this behavior as inherently “Cuban.”

Colonel Hawkins, despite his enthusiasm for the operation itself, did not trust Cubans, and had recommended against notifying the Cuban underground of the invasion plans. “With those dumb bastards over there, it’ll be all over town. If we tell them it’s going to be on a certain day, the whole goddamn island will know about it. . . . I don’t trust any goddamn Cuban,” he told a CIA official.89 Jake Esterline, who headed the CIA’s Bay of Pigs Task Force, explained to the Taylor Committee that “Cubans cannot keep quiet and before you knew it we had a Roman Circus on our hands.”90 He later declared, with some frustration, “I’ve never encountered a group of people that were so incapable of keeping a secret.”91 His frustration extended to the exile community based in New York and Miami and the Brigade itself. While the CEF trained in Guatemala, its CIA handlers feared that their cover would be blown as the men had a habit of leaving the training camp and going to town to carouse and visit women. As Esterline noted, “When you take a lot of hot-blooded Cubans, it’s pretty hard to shut them up and not let them get out, and to say that some of them did not get out at night would not be true,

89 Quoted in Wyden, Bay of Pigs, 115.

90 Memorandum for the Record, April 24, 1961, Second Meeting of the Green Study Group, NSF: Countries Series: Cuba: Subjects: Taylor Report, box 61a, JFKL.

91 Memorandum for Record, Paramilitary Study Group Meeting, Nineteenth Meeting, 22 May 1961, NSF: Countries Series: Cuba: Subjects: Taylor Report, box 61a, JFKL.
because they did.”

Esterline’s remark ties together negative stereotypes of Latinos as untrustworthy with the image of Latin Americans as sensual or, in this case, overly sexual, willing to risk the operation for the sake of physical pleasures.


Kennedy named Brigadier General Edward Lansdale Chief-of-Operations for Mongoose and installed him in the Pentagon. Lansdale had gained renown for his work in the 1950s with Filipino leader Ramón Magsaysay to defeat the Hukbalahap guerrilla rebellion, and, less successfully, in South Vietnam with President Ngo Dinh Diem. Kennedy admired Lansdale’s penchant for covert operations and his tales of risky

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92 Memorandum for Record, Paramilitary Study Group Meeting, Nineteenth Meeting, 22 May 1961, NSF: Countries Series: Cuba: Subjects: Taylor Report, box 61a, JFKL.

93 Kennedy remained friendly with Bissell, and acknowledged that concerns about public image contributed to his decision to ask for Bissell’s resignation. “If this were the British government, I would resign, and your being a senior civil servant, would remain. But it isn’t. In our government, you and Allen have to go, and I have to remain,” he told the CIA man. Quoted in Wyden, Bay of Pigs, 311.

ventures, and the General identified with the values of moral masculinity. “It is our job,” he wrote to the Mongoose task force members, “to put the American genius to work on this project, quickly and effectively. This demands a change from the business as usual and a hard facing of the fact that we are in a combat situation.”95

The Special Group Augmented (SGA), an interagency task force, supervised Lansdale. Taylor chaired the SGA, whose members included Bundy, McCon, U. Alexis Johnson from the Department of State, Roswell Gilpatric from the Defense Department, Joint Chiefs of Staff Chairman General Lyman Lemnitzer, Secretary of the Treasury C. Douglas Dillon, and Robert Kennedy, who was there to protect his brother’s interests and serve as his eyes and ears. William Harvey headed Task Force W, the CIA unit for Mongoose.96 The SGA maintained tight control over Mongoose, demanding detailed information and minutiae for each proposal Lansdale issued.97 Clearly, Kennedy did not want a repeat of the Bay of Pigs, when he felt manipulated by the intelligence community. At the same time, however, he clearly wanted some kind of action taken against the Castro regime. In the early fall of 1961, the Kennedy brothers told Bissell in no uncertain terms to “get off your ass about Cuba.” As the Church Committee noted, “it is clear from the record . . . that the defeat at the Bay of Pigs had been regarded as a humiliation for the President personally and for the CIA institutionally.”98

95 Lansdale memorandum of 20 January 1962, quoted in Alleged Assassination Plots, 142.

96 According to Fursenko and Naftali, unlike Mongoose, “Task Force W was one secret organization whose code name carried inner meaning. The ‘W’ signified William Walker, the nineteenth century American adventurer who declared himself the ruler of Nicaragua.” “One Hell of a Gamble,” 147n.

97 Alleged Assassination Plots, 144-145.
Lansdale believed that the best way to get rid of Castro was to incite and support an internal revolt of Cubans that would result in Castro’s exile or death and pave the way for the Revolutionary Council, the government-in-exile, to make a triumphant return to govern the island. The men in power who believed that Operation Zapata had failed due to Cuban inferiority were unwilling to risk another venture if Cubans did not first “prove” themselves by rising up against Castro.

Many of the proposals suggested by Lansdale and the Mongoose group reflected the Kennedy administration’s perceptions of Cubans and their shortcomings, especially relative to moral masculinity. This was particularly true in the case of religion. Lansdale hoped to harness Cubans’ alleged loyalty to the Catholic Church for the purpose of eliminating the Castro regime. He thought that he could use the Church to convince Cubans that communism was a threat to their families.99 Another of Lansdale’s ideas, sarcastically dubbed “Elimination by Illumination” by his subordinates, centered on the notion of Cubans’ supposedly primitive religious beliefs and fanatical faith. The CIA would blanket the island with propaganda suggesting that “the Second Coming of Christ was against Castro (who) was [the] anti-Christ.” On the supposed date of the second coming, an American submarine would surface off the coast of Cuba and explode some starshells. This “celestial” light show would supposedly inspire Cubans to rise up and overthrow Castro.100

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98 The Senate Select Committee on Intelligence, chaired by Senator Frank Church of Idaho, investigated alleged assassination plots against foreign leaders and other CIA abuses in the mid-1970s. Alleged Assassination Plots, 141, 135.

99 Alleged Assassination Plots, 143.

100 Alleged Assassination Plots, 142n.
The CIA under the Kennedy administration was also involved in other plots against Castro that were connected at least indirectly to the Mongoose operation. In addition to Task Force W, William Harvey also supervised the plan to use organized crime boss Johnny Rosselli in assassination plots against Castro. In April 1962, Harvey flew to Miami to deliver poison pills to Rosselli, who then passed them on to a Cuban exile. He also provided explosives, boat radar, radios, and small arms for Rosselli. After nearly a year and no discernable activity, Harvey instructed Rosselli to break off communication with his Cuban contact in mid-February 1963.\textsuperscript{101}

As inept or farcical as many of these plots against Fidel Castro may seem today, they had dangerous policy consequences for the United States, Cuba, and the Soviet Union. Castro, alarmed by American hostility, drew ever closer to Moscow. The desire to protect socialist Cuba was at least in part responsible for Khrushchev’s decision to deploy offensive nuclear weapons to Cuba in the spring of 1962, a move that eventually prompted the Cuban missile crisis.\textsuperscript{102}

\textsuperscript{101} Alleged Assassination Plots, 83-85. Previous similar plots carried out under the Eisenhower administration and earlier in the Kennedy administration also included Chicago underworld figures Sam Giancana and Santos Trafficante. One of JFK’s rumored girlfriends, Judith Campbell, was also involved with Giancana. At the likely counsel of FBI Director J. Edgar Hoover, who had discovered the CIA’s Mafia ties as well as the Kennedy-Campbell-Giancana connection, Kennedy broke off his relationship with Campbell in March 1962. It seems likely that Hoover informed JFK of the CIA’s anti-Castro assassination plots at that time. At the very least the Attorney General knew of the various CIA-organized crime schemes. See Alleged Assassination Plots, 129-133.

\textsuperscript{102} Fursenko and Naftali, \textit{“One Hell of a Gamble,”} 136-137, 166-168, 187.
Another consequence of the failure of Operation Zapata, and the shifting views of Cubans, was that the Kennedy administration increasingly referred to Fidel Castro in terms of pathology. Policymakers argued that they had to protect not just Cubans, but other “innocent” Latin Americans from the Castro menace. The Kennedy administration viewed the United States as the guardian of Latin American virtue and security.

The Kennedy administration utilized the discourse of both physical and mental illness to describe Castro’s pathology. In a memo written less than a week after the collapse of Operation Zapata, Assistant Special Counsel Richard Goodwin told McGeorge Bundy that while Castro’s threat to the Caribbean remained significant, it had declined recently, “as Castro has become increasingly erratic in his personal behavior.” In fact, Goodwin said, “the communists are looking for another, more stable hero – perhaps Cardenas of Mexico.”

The United States Information Agency suggested that the post-Bay of Pigs strategy work to “excise the Castro cancer.” Its own role would be to convince Cubans that “Castro is in the pathological sense mad, that his megalomania is such that he is ready to gamble the destruction of the world to maintain himself in power.”

Moral masculinity’s connection between Cuba and pathology played a role in policy decisions throughout the Kennedy administration. At the height of the Cuban missile crisis in October 1962, American policymakers used the language of pathology to

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103 Memorandum from Dick Goodwin to McGeorge Bundy, 26 April 1961, NSF: Countries Series: Cuba, General, 1/61-4/61, box 35a, JFKL.

104 Internal USIA Memorandum to Edward R. Murrow on “Talking Points for NSC Meeting,” 26 April 1961, NSF: Countries Series: Cuba, General, 1/61-4/61, box 35a, JFKL.
describe Soviet activities in the Caribbean. Alleged Soviet and Cuban deviance served as a justification for the aggressive U.S. stance against Khrushchev’s missile deployment to Cuba.

The Kennedy administration arranged for the release of the survivors of the Brigade held in Castro’s prisons. The former prisoners returned to Miami in December 1962, where they met with the president and presented him with their flag during a ceremony in the Orange Bowl. Despite the recent missile crisis scare, Kennedy’s anti-Castro sentiment was as strong as ever. He greeted the men of the Brigade warmly and spoke of their heroics. He assured them of American “respect for your courage and for your cause” and lauded their “conduct and valor.” JFK praised the men for their attempt to rescue their native land from the captivity of communism and glossed over their failure, shouting that one day, “this flag will be returned to this brigade in Havana!” and concluding that “Cuba shall one day be free again.” Jacqueline Kennedy spoke to the crowd in Spanish, “I feel proud that my son has met the officers [of the Brigade]. . . . I will make it my business to tell him the story of your courage as he grows up.”

The discourse of heroism and rescue played a role in the Kennedy administration’s Cuban policy, both publicly and privately. Heroism was an important component of moral masculinity. For Kennedy, courage was a value inculcated from birth. In addition, he was influenced by historic North American perceptions of Latin Americans, and especially Cubans, as victims in need of rescue. The failure of the Bay of Pigs challenged the narrative of heroism and success that Kennedy had crafted for himself, and it undermined moral masculinity and the Kennedy administration’s claims to

105 Remarks in Miami at the Presentation of the Flag of the Cuban Invasion Brigade, December 29, 1962, _PPP_ 1962, 911-913; Wyden, _Bay of Pigs_, 303-304.
power. Fidel Castro bore the brunt of Kennedy’s anger and Operation Mongoose worked to unseat the Cuban from power. As the Soviets became aware of these plans, Khrushchev grew increasingly concerned about the viability of the Castro government, and this concern contributed to his decision to deploy offensive nuclear weapons to the Caribbean in the summer of 1962. American discovery of this deployment prompted the Cuban missile crisis, the most dangerous period of the Cold War.
CHAPTER 3

VIGOR, YOUTH, AND POWER: KENNEDY AND KHRUSHCHEV AT VIENNA

In June 1961, John F. Kennedy and Nikita Khrushchev met in Vienna for their first and only conference as heads of state. The American president had badly bungled the Bay of Pigs invasion less than two months before the talks and faced worsening crises in Laos, the Congo, and Berlin. He hoped to polish his image with a productive and successful meeting with Khrushchev. In Vienna, the intractable Soviet Premier shocked Kennedy by forcing a fruitless ideological debate and issuing an ultimatum on the status of Berlin. Hours after his last encounter with the Soviet leader, Kennedy told James Reston of the New York Times that it was the “roughest” meeting he had ever experienced. The President believed he had not adequately demonstrated his power to Khrushchev and that his failure at the Bay of Pigs had left him vulnerable. He told Reston:

I think he [Khrushchev] thought that anyone who was so young and inexperienced as to get into that mess could be taken. And anyone who got into it and didn’t see it through had no guts. So he just beat [the] hell out of me . . . I’ve got a terrible problem. If he thinks I’m inexperienced and have no guts, until we remove those ideas we won’t get anywhere with him. So we have to act.\(^{106}\)

\(^{106}\) Quoted in David Halberstam, The Best and the Brightest (New York, 1972; 1983), 96-97.
Kennedy left Vienna disturbed and angry. He had hoped to launch a U.S.-Soviet détente with the meeting, but Khrushchev’s behavior portended difficulties in reaching a nuclear test ban agreement and peacefully resolving the Berlin crisis. The Soviet Premier’s harsh treatment questioned American hegemony, and by extension the President’s own political and personal power. Khrushchev questioned the president’s strength and courage and painted Kennedy’s youth as a negative, rather than positive characteristic. Kennedy feared that his comparatively poor performance in Vienna did not measure up to the criteria of moral masculinity.

Early critics of the Kennedy administration emphasized the contentiousness of the debate in Vienna and Kennedy’s grim, frightened reaction, depicting the conference as a disaster. Kennedy’s advisors have since dismissed this “legend,” claiming that although Khrushchev’s bellicosity and dogmatism disappointed the President, who earnestly sought open communication, the two left Vienna with greater respect for each other. More recent interpretations question the idea that Khrushchev “bullied” Kennedy but acknowledge that the meeting shocked the President and reinforced his hostility towards the communist world. It is clear that the Vienna conference had an important effect on John Kennedy, but this was not simply due to Khrushchev’s belligerent confrontation or boorish behavior. Kennedy’s failure to demonstrate a strong,

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107 See for example Halberstam, The Best and the Brightest, 95-97.


masculine image in Vienna struck a deeper chord, undermining his presentation of power and shaking his confidence. The impact was so deep because Kennedy’s worldview and his perceptions of power were inextricably linked to ideas about gender, youth, and vigor.

While age can be quantified as a biological reality, youth, like gender, helps to maintain hierarchical power relationships. Children and the elderly are often disregarded as primitive, atavistic, and powerless, but young adulthood, especially young male adulthood, represents the peak of physical and social power. Old age is a stark reminder of the fragility of the human body, a source of deep fears.¹¹⁰ Youth connotes beauty, physical strength, and fertility, characteristics cherished by the Western tradition. At the turn of the twentieth century, Theodore Roosevelt drew on this connection when he articulated the ideology of the “strenuous life.”¹¹¹ Faced with a similar cultural crisis in the post-World War II era, young adults sought to take the reins of power from the old hands of the previous generation, which seemed hopelessly mired in the nineteenth century. Kennedy implicitly acknowledged the power of this desire when he emphasized the relative youth of his New Frontier.¹¹²

The value that adherents of moral masculinity placed on youth was tied to their emphasis on vigor. During the 1960 campaign, Kennedy argued that the Eisenhower administration had sapped the country of its vigor and lost ground in the Cold War. “We are fighting to demonstrate to people all over the world that here in this country there are endless sources of vitality and strength,” he remarked, “that our brightest days were not


¹¹¹ Bederman, Manliness and Civilization.

in the past but are in the future.”

Kennedy pledged to “make this country move again.” He did not conceive of vigor as just a measure of an individual’s physical health but as an important component of American strength, both figurative and literal. He considered vigor an integral part of national security, observing that “the vigor of our country, its physical vigor and energy, is going to be no more advanced, no more substantial, than the vitality and will of our countrymen.” The president called on his fellow citizens to lead “a more active and vigorous life” and to encourage this attitude in the country’s youth.

In the worldview of moral masculinity, physical and intellectual vigor was an important part of exhibiting, justifying, and maintaining power. This relationship between masculinity, youth, and power had an important effect on Kennedy’s meeting with Khrushchev in Vienna. It shaped the president’s perceptions of his own position of power and his image of and attitude toward Khrushchev.

The Vienna meeting occurred in the shadow of Khrushchev’s January 1961 speech pledging Soviet support for wars of national liberation and Kennedy’s failure to oust Fidel Castro at the Bay of Pigs. This one-on-one meeting held particular importance to JFK because he placed great faith in the powers of personal diplomacy. Concerns about power and gender infused the conference from its inception. Early in the

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administration, American ambassador to Moscow Llewellyn Thompson informed Kennedy that Khrushchev’s plan to attend the United Nations in March was a pretense for a personal meeting with the President. Kennedy sent Thompson back to Moscow with a confidential letter for Khrushchev proposing an informal conference.\textsuperscript{116} Khrushchev waited until the end of April to reply.\textsuperscript{117} The timing irritated Kennedy, who was on the defensive after the Bay of Pigs. He did not want to appear too eager to meet his adversary, believing that domestic opponents would accuse him of weakness. But if he now refused the conference, the Chairman might release the contents of his February letter and claim that after the Cuban debacle, the President was too frightened or embarrassed to meet with him.\textsuperscript{118} Kennedy informed Khrushchev in May that he would meet him in Vienna in early June, and the Premier agreed. Advisors told JFK that the White House announcement of the conference should make clear that this subject had been under discussion for several months at the President’s initiative and that the administration was not acting out of “anxiety or desperation.”\textsuperscript{119} The press was not fooled, however, and the \textit{New York Times} observed that “Khrushchev cleverly avoided


\textsuperscript{117} Khrushchev asked through his intermediary, KGB agent Georgi Bolshakov. Beschloss, \textit{The Crisis Years}, 155.

\textsuperscript{118} Fursenko and Naftali, \textit{“One Hell of a Gamble}, 105-106; Beschloss, \textit{The Crisis Years}, 80, 150-151, 155, 158, 163; \textit{FRUS Volume VI}, 18-21.

\textsuperscript{119} Memorandum of Telephone Conversation, May 16, 1961, Records of Ambassador Charles E. Bohlen, Memoranda of Telephone Conversations Series, box 19, RG 59, NA.
accepting Kennedy’s tentative invitation until the bloom had faded from the American peach and we were not shrewd enough to postpone the project.” Kennedy went to Vienna, the newspaper concluded, “at a needless disadvantage.”

Many policymakers also recognized that Kennedy did not approach Vienna from a position of strength. The president’s instincts, as well as the advice he received, counseled him to compensate for this by projecting a strong and masculine image to Khrushchev. Kennedy went to Vienna with the objective of demonstrating his power to the Soviet leader. He viewed Vienna as a test of his own self-image, his masculine values, and his personal and political power.

Kennedy’s perceived weaknesses stemmed from policy problems as well as personal ones. Advisors warned Kennedy that recent American setbacks in Cuba and Laos led Khrushchev to believe that American policy was confused and haphazard, “thrash[ing] about ineffectively.” In addition, advisors warned Kennedy to be prepared for a “paternal” lecture from Khrushchev about American policies in Latin America. To counter that, they urged the President to warn the Chairman that his policies would lead to war unless he “exercises much more caution.” It was “crucially important” that JFK engage in some “muscle-flexing” and deliver a “strong and confident pitch to Khrushchev.” Kennedy must convince the Soviets “of our determination not to collapse in the face of Soviet pressure.”

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121 Memorandum to McGeorge Bundy from Walt W. Rostow, May 26, 1961, POF: Staff Memoranda Series, box 65, JFKL; Memorandum to McGeorge Bundy and Walt W. Rostow from Robert W. Komer, May 23, 1961, NSF: Trips and Conferences Series, box 234a, JFKL.

122 President’s Talking Paper, East-West Issues, March 31, 1961, Lot Files: Conference File 1832, box 244, RG 59, NA.
cautioned that “the one thing which must be avoided . . . is any conclusion that the United States is feeble on Berlin.”\(^{123}\) The last image the Kennedy administration wanted to project to its adversary was that of an ineffectual, cowed leader with an easily defeated policy. These characteristics would detract from Kennedy’s power as well as national power and prestige and hamper the American Cold War crusade. In Vienna, Kennedy would have the opportunity to reassert himself and regain the initiative in U.S.-Soviet relations.

Kennedy was also painfully aware that Khrushchev would be taking his personal measure. Kennedy’s anxieties about presenting an appropriately masculine and powerful image at Vienna were exacerbated by his relative youth and his physical debilities. He knew that the Soviet Chairman had made public and private statements emphasizing the American president’s age. While a young, vigorous image was a domestic political asset for the New Frontier, it seemed that Khrushchev was impervious to these charms. On several occasions, for example, the Soviet called attention to the fact that Kennedy was young enough to be his son and that he looked “boyish.”\(^{124}\) The President tried to turn his youth to his advantage and correct Khrushchev’s perception that he was immature, frivolous, and in need of tutelage. Instead of signaling weakness, he depicted youth as a marker of strength, fortitude, and vigor. He equated his own chronological youth with the relative youth of the United States, sending the message that both president and nation were forces to be reckoned with. He decided to present the Soviet leader with a

\(^{123}\) Memorandum to the President from McGeorge Bundy, May 29, 1961, POF: Countries Series: USSR, box 126, JFKL.

\(^{124}\) Telegram to Secretary of State from Thompson, March 10, 1961; Telegram from Thompson to Secretary of State, May 24, 1961; Telegram to USIS from Vienna, June 6, 1961; NSF: Trips and Conferences Series, box 234, JFKL.
meaningful gift, a replica of the U.S.S. *Constitution*. JFK told a friend that the ship represented the United States in 1812, “a young republic, strong, youthful, in love with freedom – exactly the kind of message I want to send Russia.”

In addition to his youth, Kennedy faced physical obstacles. His own weak body belied the very masculine ideals he embraced and propagated. The president suffered from Addison’s disease and chronic debilitating back pain as well as ulcers and colitis. He consented to complicated back surgery in 1954 despite the grave risks because he would have rather died than live out his life on crutches. A few weeks before he left for Europe in May 1961, the president had re-injured his back planting a ceremonial tree in Canada. Suffering intense pain, he resorted to using crutches for the first time in years in the privacy of the White House. Against his doctors’ recommendations, JFK refused to bring the crutches to Europe. He would not meet Khrushchev “as a cripple.”

Kennedy went to Vienna with the goal of restoring a powerful, masculine image, both personally and politically.

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125 JFK to LeMoyne Billings, quoted in Beschloss, *The Crisis Years*, 179.


127 O’Donnell and Powers, *Johnny, We Hardly Knew Ye*, 326; Beschloss, *The Crisis Years*, 186, 188-191. Dr. Max Jacobson, popularly known as “Dr. Feelgood,” traveled to Europe with Kennedy and administered shots of amphetamines, hormones, amino acids, and other substances, in addition to the cortisone that his personal physician, Dr. Janet Travell, administered. There is no direct evidence that these injections impaired JFK’s critical thinking skills in Vienna. See Dallek, “The Medical Ordeals of JFK,” 60-61; Beschloss, *The Crisis Years*, 188-191; Hotel Listings [Dr. and Mrs. Max Jacobson, Hotel Kummer, Room 404], Vienna, June 1961, POF: Subjects: Trips, box 107, JFKL.
Kennedy had mixed feelings about Khrushchev, an ambivalence that was filtered through moral masculinity. He simultaneously respected and feared his Soviet counterpart as a worthy masculine adversary, and dismissed him as an enfeebled patsy. These seemingly contradictory perceptions of Khrushchev all stemmed from JFK’s uniquely gendered worldview. Gendered images of Khrushchev reinforced Kennedy’s desire to project a strong masculine image in Vienna. Because Kennedy’s claims to power rested upon maintaining this image, his failure to achieve his goals in Vienna made a profound impression.

Youth and vigor factored into Kennedy’s assessments of Khrushchev. The president received a lot of advice about how to approach the Soviet, much of it conflicting. He chose to focus more on negative assessments of Khrushchev because these views fit more closely with the ideology of moral masculinity. Because he assumed that Khrushchev lacked vigor and was a weak opponent due to his old age, Kennedy was less prepared for the Soviet leader’s sparring in Vienna. He could not handle Khrushchev and felt defeated by his encounter. That defeat, in turn, threatened his claims to power based on moral masculinity, and he felt he had to react forcefully.

The president was intrigued by his Soviet counterpart and voraciously read all of the briefing material he received to prepare for the conference. He believed that the Chairman could potentially be a tough and formidable opponent. During the 1960 campaign JFK had described the Premier as “shrewd,” “vigorous” and “tough-minded, articulate, and hard-reasoning,” qualities that any New Frontiersman could embrace.129

At the same time he believed Khrushchev was prone to certain unmanly weaknesses, including old age, liquor, and the propensity to engage in long, moralistic tirades. The State Department acknowledged these contradictions, crediting Khrushchev for “bold policies” and a “pragmatic” approach to domestic affairs, but also describing him as “volatile” and highly emotional. The Kennedy administration acknowledged that Khrushchev was a difficult personality to grasp and that some observers found him impressively well informed and incisive. For example, Kennedy’s briefing papers included testimony from journalist Joseph Alsop and others about Khrushchev’s alleged intellectual prowess, quick thinking, and toughness. But most policymakers found the weight of evidence demonstrating the Chairman’s intellectual laziness, fatigue, and dependence on others more persuasive.

Kennedy’s briefing books and official Department of State descriptions of Khrushchev suggested that the Soviet leader failed to conform to the hallmarks of moral masculinity and described him as intellectually stunted, profoundly insecure, addled by old age, and prone to histrionics. State Department documents emphasized that Khrushchev’s political faith in Communism limited him intellectually and made “many of his major goals fundamentally irrational.” Khrushchev relied “heavily on briefings” from a large staff that functioned as a “private secretariat, speech-writing crew, and information channel.” Moreover, in spite of these resources, some contended that

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130 Background Paper, Soviet Aims and Objectives, May 25, 1961; Background Paper, Khrushchev: The Man, His Manner, His Outlook, and His View of the United States, May 25, 1961, Lot Files: CF 1905, box 254, RG 59, NA.

131 Background Paper, Khrushchev, May 25, 1961, NSF: Trips and Conferences Series, box 234a, JFKL.
“Khrushchev has not always lived up to his reputation for factual grasp and debating skill.” This was particularly clear during his 1959 visit to the United States, when he was reported to be “very tired . . . less alert than usual” and “repeatedly fumbling for words.” In general, Khrushchev espoused “simple solutions to complex problems” and while he was a man of action if he saw issues clearly, he grew “confused and hostile when confronted with shades of gray.” The Kennedy administration valued risk-taking, but not if it stemmed from a senseless or irrational source. The State Department also told Kennedy that Khrushchev would be needy and approach the conference insecure in his, and his nation’s, power. “Soviet feelings of inferiority” had historically been focused on the United States, and Khrushchev himself would seek “recognition as a respectable equal” from Kennedy. The President was also warned that the Chairman “craves the respect of the outside world.” Khrushchev was overly sensitive to imagined slights as well as a compulsive name-dropper. Thompson reinforced this image, informing Kennedy that Khrushchev was “anxious” about the forthcoming meeting and “deeply troubled” about how to handle discussion of the Berlin issue in particular. Kennedy went to Vienna assuming that Khrushchev lacked vigor and was no longer at the top of his game.

132 Khrushchev -- A Personality Sketch, POF: Countries Series: USSR, box 126, JFKL.

133 Background Paper, Khrushchev, May 25, 1961, NSF: Trips and Conferences Series, box 234a, JFKL; Khrushchev -- A Personality Sketch, POF: Countries Series: USSR, box 126, JFKL.

134 Background Paper, Khrushchev, May 25, 1961, NSF: Trips and Conferences Series, box 234a, JFKL.

135 Background Paper, Khrushchev, May 25, 1961, Lot Files: CF 1905, box 254, RG 59, NA.

136 Khrushchev -- A Personality Sketch, POF: Countries: USSR, box 126, JFKL.

137 Telegram to Rusk from Moscow, May 24, 1961, Lot Files: CF 1906, box 255, NA.
While Khrushchev had used Kennedy’s youth and relative inexperience to illustrate the Soviet advantage, New Frontiersmen emphasized the Chairman’s advanced age as a point of weakness. Old men, women, and children equally deviate from the norm of a healthy heterosexual male, and like women and children, the elderly are often regarded as weak, irrational, disorderly, and uncontrollable.\(^{138}\) Policymakers noted that at the age of 67, Khrushchev had “slowed down somewhat” and “takes vacations more often.”\(^{139}\) The older and more tired he became, the less able he was to control his “rages.”\(^{140}\) The linkage between advanced age and weakness in the worldview of moral masculinity is quite clear.

Thompson routinely described the Soviet Premier’s appearance, demeanor, and drinking habits in his cables from Moscow, probing for signs of unmanly weakness. In March 1961 he reported that Khrushchev “appeared extremely tired” and took pills during lunch.\(^{141}\) Just before Kennedy left for Europe, Thompson lunched with Khrushchev and noted that although the Chairman’s doctor had “strictly forbidden any hard liquor . . . he took five or six brandies.”\(^{142}\) Drinking alcohol was not inherently unmanly; as Geoffrey Smith has pointed out, during the Cold War, “real men drank


\(^{139}\) Biographic Information on Khrushchev, Lot Files: CF 1909, box 255, RG 59, NA.

\(^{140}\) Background Paper -- Khrushchev, May 25, 1961, NSF: Trips and Conferences Series, box 234a, JFKL.

\(^{141}\) Telegram to Secretary of State from Thompson, March 10, 1961, NSF: Trips and Conferences Series, box 234, JFKL.

\(^{142}\) Telegram to Secretary of State from Thompson, May 24, 1961, NSF: Trips and Conferences Series, box 234, JFKL.
bourbon and rye." Imbibing and losing control, however, was both unmanly and dangerous. American policymakers suggested that Khrushchev’s propensity to do so was tied to his advanced age and attendant lack of judgment.

According to the President’s briefing papers, Khrushchev’s oration tended to be emotional and fervent, a style at odds with the bold yet responsible, calm and controlled leadership of the Kennedy administration. Policymakers warned that Khrushchev’s propensity to indulge in overconfidence and bluster would likely be reinforced by the recent Soviet success in space and American failure in Cuba. That overconfidence might prompt him to force the Berlin issue, and in such a state, “Berlin must offer a temptation that may very well be too strong to resist . . . [Khrushchev] must, therefore, be warned in the firmest and most solemn manner that the U.S. has no intention whatsoever of being forced out of Berlin.”

Furthermore, Khrushchev’s probable haggling over the Bay of Pigs would be strictly for propaganda purposes. The State Department assured Kennedy that Khrushchev realized that he was “impotent” to give Castro effective military support. Susceptible to irrational whims, prone to histrionics, and in the final analysis unable to back his feverish language with strong action, Khrushchev deviated from the New Frontier code of masculinity. This code dictated that the President should take him

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144 Position Paper on Berlin and Germany, May 25, 1961, NSF: Trips and Conferences Series, box 234, JFKL; see also President’s Talking Paper, East-West Issues, March 31, 1961, Lot Files: CF 1832, box 244, RG 59, NA.

firmly in hand, as one would an unruly child, and deliver a stern warning. If the Soviets
were capable of taking “realistic and responsible action” regarding world problems, the
United States would follow in kind, but that did not seem likely.\textsuperscript{146}

Kennedy demonstrated his eagerness to show his strength and vigor in an unusual
personal appearance before Congress at the end of May. The address sent a message to
Khrushchev, signaling the power contest that was about to take place. In this “Re-State”
of the Union, Kennedy told the American people that in these “extraordinary times . . .
we face an extraordinary challenge.” He asked Congress to appropriate an additional
$760 million for international military and economic assistance, the armed forces, and the
space program. He acknowledged that this would involve “hardship” and “sacrifice,” but
was confident that Americans were up to the challenge. Kennedy accused the Soviets of
cowardice, noting that although they sent weapons, technicians, and propaganda to areas
in upheaval, “where fighting is required, it is usually done by others.”\textsuperscript{147} Some advisors
feared this message would offend Khrushchev on the eve of the conference, but others
argued that it would send the President to Vienna with “a pretty sizeable stick.”\textsuperscript{148} In
Boston a few days later, Kennedy spoke of his impending meeting with Khrushchev and
concluded by quoting William Lloyd Garrison: “I am in earnest, I will not equivocate, I
will not excuse, I will not retreat a single inch, and I will be heard.”\textsuperscript{149}

\textsuperscript{146} Special Background Paper: Line of Approach to Khrushchev, June 1, 1961, Records of Ambassador
Charles E. Bohlen, box 18, RG 59, NA.


\textsuperscript{148} Memo to McGeorge Bundy and Walt Rostow from Robert Komer, May 23, 1961, NSF: Trips and
Conferences Series, box 234a, JFKL.

\textsuperscript{149} Remarks at the President’s Birthday Dinner in Boston, May 29, 1961, \textit{PPP} 1961, 416-418.
Upon arriving in Vienna, Kennedy strove to make a powerful first impression. Introduced to Khrushchev on the steps of the American embassy in Vienna, Kennedy shook his rival’s hand. He then stepped back and coolly evaluated the Soviet Premier from head to toe, giving him “quite an eyeballing.” Once the formal meetings began, however, Kennedy was taken aback by Khrushchev’s strong and forceful approach. The Soviet leader noted the president’s youth on several occasions. He assured JFK of the inevitable triumph of communism. Mocking the idea that a tiny nation like Cuba could really be a threat to the allegedly powerful United States, he chastised Kennedy for the Bay of Pigs operation. He argued that American policy in the Congo was “timid,” and he criticized U.S. support of “rotten” regimes in Pakistan and Latin America. Khrushchev continued that the American policy of surrounding the Soviet Union with military bases was “unreasonable” and “unwise.” He also charged that the United States suffered from “megalomania” and “delusions of grandeur” because of its excessive wealth. Perhaps unwittingly, the Chairman had referenced an important part of the American crisis of masculinity, the fear that postwar prosperity brought about degeneracy and effeminacy. Kennedy tried to fight back by discussing the growing strength of China, a nation that had been directly threatening Khrushchev’s own power. He also pointed out that the weak nations of Turkey and Iran should be as little threat to the Soviets as Cuba was to the United States, but that Khrushchev nevertheless objected to American bases there. Khrushchev responded with an ideological primer on the flaws of U.S. policy in general.

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and Sino-American relations specifically. When Kennedy equated Soviet support for the Polish regime with American support for unpopular governments elsewhere, Khrushchev sharply criticized his lack of respect. Most disappointingly for the President, the two leaders failed to make progress on a test ban agreement, a project Kennedy had hoped to reinvigorate in Vienna.151

On the final day of the conference, Khrushchev informed Kennedy that he intended to reconvene a peace conference and that if the United States would not participate, the Soviet Union would sign a separate treaty with East Germany. This treaty would establish West Berlin as a free city and terminate Allied occupation rights. Kennedy retorted that American contractual rights in Berlin stemmed from its great sacrifices in the Second World War. Khrushchev stood firm, noting that Soviet wartime losses dwarfed those of the United States and feigning disbelief at the irrationality of Kennedy’s position. In their final exchange, Khrushchev threatened Kennedy with war over Berlin, informing him that the Soviet Union would sign a treaty by December.152 “If that is true,” the American president said grimly, “it’s going to be a cold winter.”153

Kennedy journeyed to London and then home, cognizant that his values of vigor and youth and thereby his claims to power had fallen short. Khrushchev had, perhaps unconsciously, upended the power relationship, treating Kennedy as an irrational or unruly child in need of discipline. After this final meeting with Khrushchev, Secretary of State Dean Rusk described Kennedy as “very upset” and unprepared for the “brutality of

151 Memorandum of Conversation, June 3, 1961, 12:45 pm; June 3, 1961, lunch; June 3, 1961, 3:00 pm, NSF: Trips and Conferences Series, box 233, JFKL; Beschloss, The Crisis Years, 155.

152 Memorandum of Conversation, June 4, 1961, 10:15 am; NSF: Trips and Conferences Series, box 233, JFKL.

153 Quoted in Beschloss, The Crisis Years, 224.
Khrushchev’s presentation.” Other American officials also believed that the Soviet Premier had returned to Moscow unimpressed by the President’s resolve. Senate Majority Leader Mike Mansfield argued that the Chairman formed an image of Kennedy as “a youngster who had a great deal to learn and not much to offer,” while Vice President Lyndon Johnson sneered, “Khrushchev scared the poor little fellow dead.” American ambassador to Yugoslavia and expert on Soviet affairs George Kennan concluded that the Soviets left Vienna believing that Kennedy was “a tongue-tied young man who’s not forceful and who doesn’t have ideas of his own.” Observers in London found the President “depressed” and “stunned,” and JFK told Prime Minister Harold Macmillan that Khrushchev had been “much more of a barbarian” than he expected. At a party, the President backed a startled journalist against the wall, declaring “I just want you to know, I don’t care what happens, I won’t give way, I won’t give up, and I’ll do whatever’s necessary.” Soviet Ambassador to the United States Anatoly Dobrynin surmised that Khrushchev “did not greatly respect the young U.S. president.” JFK had seemed too “needy” and “vulnerable to pressure.” Moscow now believed that “if the Soviet Union pushed hard enough, [Kennedy] would yield.” A few weeks after the meeting Khrushchev transposed his age-based criticism of the United States. He publicly

154 Ibid., 224.
155 Ibid., 234.
157 Quoted in Beschloss, The Crisis Years, 228, 227.
158 JFK to Joseph Alsop, quoted in Montague Kern, et al., The Kennedy Crises: The Press, the Presidency, and Foreign Policy (Chapel Hill, 1983), 64.
compared the United States to “an already aged runner” living on “yesterday’s glory” and unable to compete with the “young, fresh, strong” socialism of the Soviet Union.  

Kennedy retorted, “the United States is not such an aged runner and, to paraphrase Mr. Coolidge, ‘We do choose to run.’”  

A KGB official used a colorful metaphor of sexual conquest. He told his American contact that the Soviets were “amazed” that Kennedy appeared to be so “affected and scared” by his encounter with Khrushchev. “When you have your hand up a girl’s dress, you expect her to scream, but you don’t expect her to be scared.”  

Kennedy placed a high value on youth, but his weak performance in Vienna underscored the danger of approaching policy from the prism of moral masculinity. JFK assumed that Khrushchev was too old and tired to be a true rival but was unable to stand up to the Soviet leader’s forceful rhetoric. He feared that the Soviets now believed his youth to be a sign of weakness. Instead of a tough young American president, he was now portrayed as a silly and frightened young girl whom the Soviet Union could take advantage of.  

An examination of policy debates and decisions in the wake of the conference demonstrates that the Kennedy-Khrushchev talks had a formative effect on the President. Kennedy had gone to Vienna to demonstrate his power and project an image of strength and masculinity but failed in this objective. Kennedy immediately had to face Khrushchev’s ultimatum on Berlin when he returned to Washington. As the Berlin crisis

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160 Khrushchev Speech at Alma Ata, Foreign Broadcast Information Service Daily Report, June 26, 1961, POF: Countries Series: USSR, box 126a, JFKL. According to the cover memo, Kennedy specifically requested to see a copy of the speech.


162 Georgi Bolshakov to Frank Holeman, quoted in Beschloss, *The Crisis Years*, 234.
intensified during the summer of 1961, the encounter in Vienna set the context for
Kennedy’s policy choices. His ideas about gender and power discouraged substantive
negotiations with the Soviets, but a discourse of patriarchal responsibility also prevented
Kennedy from pushing the crisis to the brink of war. Reluctant to grant concessions to
the Soviets but unwilling to irresponsibly consign Western Europe to a nuclear holocaust,
the Kennedy administration made policy based on ideologies of gender and power.163

Kennedy’s failure to fulfill his goals at the Vienna conference continued to weigh
heavily on his mind. To his constant confusion and irritation, he found Khrushchev’s
behavior unpredictable and uncontrollable. He described the Soviet Premier as having
two irreconcilable dimensions to his personality, a feeling of insecurity and a feeling of
“great superiority. It was difficult to balance these two.”164 Even a year later, JFK
probed Llewellyn Thompson for answers, asking him why Khrushchev took “such a
tough tone” in Vienna. Thompson tried to reassure Kennedy that Khrushchev was “very
impressed with your determination and that’s what’s important,” but JFK continued to
wonder whether the Bay of Pigs incident “might have given [Khrushchev] the impression
that we were going to give way over Berlin.”165 The connections between gender and
power and the memory of his failure in Vienna remained an important part of Kennedy’s
foreign policy framework throughout his administration.

163 For a complete discussion of the Berlin Crisis, please see the following chapter of this dissertation.

164 Kennedy made the remark to Finnish President Urho Kekkonen. Memcon, October 16, 1961, Lot Files:
Executive Secretariat, Presidential Memorandums of Conversation, 1956-1964, box 2, RG 59, NA.
Kennedy made a similar remark to Konrad Adenauer a month later. Memcon, November 21, 1961, Lot
Files: CF 1993, box 268, RG 59, NA.

165 Meeting 1, 8/8/62-8/9/62, POF: Presidential Recordings Collection, Meeting Recordings, Tape 8, JFKL.
CHAPTER 4

PATRIARCHAL RESPONSIBILITY: THE BERLIN CRISIS

Since the end of the Second World War, the division of Germany and its former capital, Berlin, was a major point of contestation in U.S.-Soviet relations. From 1945 to 1963, the German question prevented the stabilization of the international order, and the city of Berlin was the symbolic and physical manifestation of that tension. A strategic liability but a powerful representation of the American commitment to Western Europe, Berlin also served to remind the Soviets of the dangers of German power. The Soviet blockade of Berlin in 1948-1949 signaled Josef Stalin’s objection to the U.S. plan to establish a West German government. Nikita Khrushchev came to accept the existence of the Federal Republic, but the Eisenhower administration’s desire to withdraw from Europe and Konrad Adenauer’s push for a West German nuclear force in the mid-1950s rattled Moscow.\(^{166}\)

In 1958, Khrushchev issued an ultimatum to Eisenhower demanding resolution of the Berlin question within six months. He called for an end to Allied rights in West Berlin and the creation of a “free city” of West Berlin, or the Soviets would sign a separate treaty with East Germany. Secretary of State John Foster Dulles managed to defuse the crisis and Khrushchev allowed the deadline to pass. When the U-2 incident

derailed the Paris summit, the Soviets agreed to let the issue lie until after the 1960 American presidential election. They did not wait long. When Khrushchev conferred with Kennedy in Vienna in June 1961, he re-ignited the Berlin question, threatening the American president with war.

Smarting from his defeats at the Bay of Pigs and in Vienna, Kennedy now emphasized American resolve in Berlin. He boiled down the essence of his strategy in a conversation with journalist James Reston, vowing to show Khrushchev that he had “guts.” The President was determined not to back down to Khrushchev again and perceived West Berlin as “the touchstone of American honor and resolve.” In a public address upon his return to the United States, Kennedy pledged to uphold American obligations in Berlin. Drawing on the discourse of moral masculinity, he told the American public that they would have to make sacrifices, be determined, be courageous, and accept risks. As Kennedy had told Reston, “we have to act.” The administration shifted gears into crisis mode, and Kennedy ordered a policy review on Berlin strategy and contingency planning. At the end of June, Kennedy stated that “we now appear to be on a collision course with the Soviet Union on the Berlin issue.”

167 Quoted in Halberstam, The Best and the Brightest, 96-97.

168 Radio and Television Report to the American People on Returning from Europe, June 6, 1961, PPP 1961, 441-446.

169 Sorensen, Kennedy, 658, 660-661.

The Kennedy administration constructed the American obligation to Berlin as one of patriarchal responsibility. The U.S. had to reassert its leadership position in the “family of nations” and demonstrate that it could fulfill its obligations and maintain its authority within the Western alliance and against the Soviet Union. Kennedy portrayed the Soviets as cowardly and irresponsible. By abrogating their allied rights, the Soviets abandoned sacred commitments and demonstrated their inherent weakness. Sacrifices were required, and the masculine act of sacrificing justified American power. As United States Information Agency head Edward R. Murrow noted in July 1961, “the price of leadership is to lead . . . the resolution of this crisis will require a cold, unemotional act of national self-discipline . . . our national honor has been pledged.”\textsuperscript{171} By identifying the Berlin crisis as an issue of “national honor,” the Kennedy administration revealed the hold that moral masculinity had over policymakers’ views of acceptable policy options, and also ensured public support for their handling of the crisis.

The discourse of patriarchal responsibility affected policy during the Berlin crisis on three levels. First, it determined the private discourse of the Kennedy administration, setting policy and closing off options. Moral masculinity set the tone for public discourse about the crisis as well. Second, moral masculinity contributed to conflict in the Western alliance, as the Kennedy administration grew increasingly frustrated with West Germany. Finally, as Kennedy limited U.S. goals in Berlin within the proscriptions of moral masculinity, the crisis was defused.

\textsuperscript{171} Memorandum to Dean Rusk from Edward R. Murrow, July 21, 1961, NSF: Countries Series: Germany, box 82, JFKL.
The growing dissatisfaction of middle-class women, the emerging sexual revolution, and changing attitudes about marriage all contributed to a sense of unease about the family unit during the late 1950s and early 1960s.¹⁷² This discomfort and concern contributed to a crisis of masculinity in the early Cold War, which shaped the ideology of moral masculinity. Policymakers in the Kennedy administration feared that they were losing their grip on private and public power, and adhered to a particular set of values, including patriarchal responsibility, to justify their claims to power.

Moral masculinity emphasized responsibility, both taking responsibility for one’s own actions and taking responsibility for the safety or security of others. In this way responsibility echoed the traditionally masculine values of sacrifice and courage, and intimated a certain amount of power, private and public, domestic and international. Top officials in the Kennedy administration who shared the mores of moral masculinity drew on the virtue of responsibility to justify their power. Fulfilling their definition of “masculinity” meant that they exercised this power responsibly. Patriarchy and fatherhood also played an important role in moral masculinity, as white middle-class American men sought to re-establish their importance in the nuclear family. For adherents to moral masculinity, “manhood” included taking responsibility for child-rearing, in part to inculcate the proper masculine values in their sons.

The link between upholding patriarchal responsibility and maintaining power in the worldview of moral masculinity gelled neatly with the emphasis on family imagery in both state-to-state diplomacy and domestic discourse during the Cold War. At the turn of the nineteenth century, concurrent with the growth of the market economy and the rise of

the middle class, American men began to forge their identities more in individual rather than communal pursuits. Occupation, ambition, and economic worth increasingly determined social status. In this new system of gender relations, women carved out a niche for themselves as the custodians of communal virtue through child-rearing, and the importance of the father’s role in the family declined. During the twentieth century, however, American men began to redefine their positions as patriarchs, placing more emphasis on childrearing responsibilities and the father’s role as head of household.\textsuperscript{173}

This discourse held constant during the 1950s and early 1960s, but it was manifested in ways particular to moral masculinity and the context of the Cold War. The notion of patriarchal responsibility resonated with white American middle-class men at a time when the Cold War seemed to threaten the very survival of the American way of life. Elaine Tyler May has shown how Americans reinvigorated traditional family roles in the 1950s, using domesticity and the nuclear family to ward off the anxieties of the atomic age. Social and cultural prescriptions encouraged men and women to find fulfillment and purpose in a commitment to family and home. In this era of rabid anti-Communism, any variation from the norm of the nuclear family was a sign of irresponsibility, immaturity, and weakness, symptoms of deviance and therefore susceptibility to foreign intrigue. In America, “husbands, especially fathers, wore the badge of ‘family man’ as a sign of virility and patriotism.” McCarthyist attacks on the foreign policy establishment often conflated accusations of communism and homosexuality. This emphasis on the nuclear family did not just serve a domestic purpose; it was a weapon in the Cold War. Vice President Richard Nixon’s “kitchen

\textsuperscript{173} Rotundo, \textit{American Manhood}, 1-30, 284-293.
debate” with Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev in 1959 highlighted American policymakers’ belief that the abundance, stability, and happy nuclear families in American suburbs would inevitably trump the drab, de-sexed drudgery of the Soviet system.\footnote{May, Homeward Bound, 16-36, 94-98; see also Dean, Imperial Brotherhood, 63-96.}

John F. Kennedy’s own nuclear family, his glamorous wife and photogenic children, had been politically useful to him. Despite later reports of philandering and marital strife, at the time the Kennedys seemed to be a cohesive and secure family unit. Although their wealth and power differentiated them from the middle class, these were differences that most people could gloss over. Rather than alienating her from the public, Jacqueline Kennedy’s mystique and style appealed to many women and they sought to emulate her.\footnote{Rorabaugh, Kennedy and the Promise of the Sixties, 130-132.} Although his controversial father stayed largely behind the scenes during the 1960 campaign, Kennedy’s mother Rose and his sisters played important roles, as they had during his earlier campaigns. They coordinated “house parties” that brought the candidate directly to the voters and they hosted afternoon teas as his surrogate. Rose Fitzgerald Kennedy appealed to women across class lines by speaking about motherhood and her experiences in raising nine children.\footnote{Goodwin, The Fitzgeralds and the Kennedys, 716-718, 765-766, 801.} The image of the Kennedy family offered “reassurance about family as a source of stability at a time when many families faced redefinition, if not crisis.”\footnote{Rorabaugh, Kennedy and the Promise of the Sixties, xvi.} Having strong family ties resonated with the value of
patriarchal responsibility and demonstrated JFK’s fitness to lead the nation during a period when family roles seemed crucial to the future of the white, middle-class American way of life, but appeared to be threatened by emerging social conflict.

From the pre-World War II period to 1960, the divorce rate rose from one in six to one in four, and public mores increasingly accepted divorce.¹⁷⁸ The reality of middle-class suburban housewives’ lives often defied the happy, contented stereotypes popular at the time. Betty Friedan described “the problem that has no name” for many of these housewives, many of whom suffered from fatigue, depression, and a sense of purposelessness as they floundered in the “comfortable concentration camps” of American suburbs. These problems were not entirely invisible, Friedan discovered. Magazine editors, physicians, and mental health professionals all claimed to notice profound dissatisfaction among married middle-class women.¹⁷⁹

Just as middle-class women’s roles were uncomfortably in flux during the postwar period, men’s roles, especially their family roles, were being redefined as well. For adherents to moral masculinity, a stronger role for the patriarch seemed to be the appropriate solution to this problem. Cold War-era fathers were encouraged to take an active role in their children’s lives and to live up to their responsibilities to their families. They needed to set an example of masculinity for their sons and daughters, to help preserve the American middle-class ethos from the threat of communism and internal decay.

¹⁷⁸ Rorabaugh, Kennedy and the Promise of the Sixties, 145, 141.

Sociologist William H. Whyte, in his study of suburbanites in the postwar era, noted that “rootless” young couples in the suburbs faced marital stress after moving away from their extended family and support network. This stress was ameliorated through a shared concern for their children. Whyte noted an intense interest among both suburban mothers and fathers, for example, in their children’s schools. He also discovered that while men often brought work home or stayed in the office in the evenings and on weekends, there was now a sense of guilt or sheepishness about this time away from their families, especially their sons.\textsuperscript{180} Women’s magazines trumpeted “togetherness,” in which men contributed to the household while maintaining a leadership role in the family. Husbands were encouraged to make the major decisions for the home, including decorating, shopping, and child care, while leaving the more mundane tasks of cleaning, diaper-changing, and laundry to their wives so that their children learned to “recognize and respect the abilities and functions of each sex.”\textsuperscript{181}

Embracing the role of family patriarch did not just stave off homosexuality, juvenile delinquency, and communism in the next generation. It also helped to soothe the post-World War II crisis of masculinity. After the anxieties of depression and war, American men had to “do nothing more than be fathers” to fulfill the criteria for fatherhood. The simplicity of this solution was reassuring during a time when men had to strike a balance between overconformity and its attendant loss of identity, and abandoning their responsibilities. Feminine behavior was not an option, but

\textsuperscript{180} Whyte, \textit{The Organization Man}, 147-149, 355, 382-392.

\textsuperscript{181} Friedan, \textit{The Feminine Mystique}, 48-51, quoted from \textit{McCall’s}.
hypermascularity also demonstrated gender insecurity. Men had to tread a fine line between the “overdomesticated dad and the irresponsibility of the absentee father.”182 Asserting the father’s unquestionable authority in the home helped resolve that dilemma.

Patriarchy was an important component to the subculture of moral masculinity. Many policymakers who operated within this framework had been affected by McCarthy’s accusations of communism and homosexuality, and they fought against the stereotype of the effete intellectual or “genteel patriarch” of an earlier era.183 They had to reassert patriarchal authority, not only in their families, but to the nation. Policymakers needed to demonstrate their strength and firmness to the nation to justify their claims to power. Maintaining authority on a global scale, particularly in allied relations, was important as well. Kennedy’s national security team had to demonstrate responsibility for the nation, for the alliance, and for Berlin.

This discourse of responsibility was evident during the 1960 campaign. In his campaign tract, The Strategy of Peace, Senator Kennedy noted that Americans “now belong simultaneously to a national and international constituency,” and as such, had “world responsibilities.” In a speech outlining his foreign policy agenda, JFK stated that “we must remain precise in our determination to meet our commitments [in Berlin] until a change in Soviet policy permits a constructive solution.” As a candidate, in fact, Kennedy had demonstrated some flexibility regarding Berlin. He proposed the creation of a corridor that would guarantee free access to Berlin and be controlled by the United


183 For a discussion of the “genteel patriarch” ideal of manhood, see Kimmel, Manhood in America, 16. For a discussion of “lavender-baiting” during the Red Scare and its effects on members of the Kennedy administration, see Dean, Imperial Brotherhood, 63-167.
Nations, the West Germans and Berliners, or Britain, France, and the United States. If
the Soviets agreed to this corridor, JFK was willing to withdraw some American troops
from Berlin or reduce U.S. propaganda activities there. He affirmed that in coming years,
“great pressure will be brought to bear over the question of Berlin.” The real danger, the
candidate warned, was not of a Soviet invasion of Western Europe, but “the more subtle
struggle for Berlin, where they try to choke us off, where they try to end it not with a
bang but with a whimper, which never seems quite worth a war, because they choke us
off step by step. That’s going to be the real struggle. It’s going to be a test of nerve and
will.” Kennedy implicitly suggested that the Eisenhower administration was not up to
this task of fulfilling American responsibilities and tarred his opponent, incumbent Vice
President Richard Nixon, with the same brush.

In Vienna, Kennedy had hoped to achieve a viable east-west settlement that
would solidify the status quo. He offered to respect the USSR’s vital interests in Eastern
Europe, and implied that his administration would prevent Adenauer from developing a
national nuclear force. The president believed that he had offered a responsible,
reasonable policy alternative. Khrushchev’s response, threatening war in “the most
violent language that a Soviet leader had ever used with an American president,” shook
Kennedy. Soviet demands included a four-power agreement and official peace treaties
with the Federal Republic and the German Democratic Republic. Moscow also wanted to
reorganize West Berlin into a free, demilitarized city and extract an American pledge to

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184 “A New Approach on Foreign Policy: A Twelve-Point Agenda,” speech on the Senate floor, June 14,
1960, n.p.; introduction to Section IV, “America’s Readiness for World Responsibility,”160; Discussion

185 Trachtenberg, A Constructed Peace, 322.
halt subversive activities against the GDR. If Khrushchev signed a separate treaty with Walter Ulbricht’s regime, Soviet allied rights in Berlin would transfer to an East German government determined to isolate West Berlin.  

After his experience in Vienna, Kennedy was reluctant to make the kinds of concessions to the Soviet Union that would be necessary to hold substantive negotiations on Berlin. His administration refused to consider the “free city” proposal, to recognize Walter Ulbricht’s East German regime, or to assuage Soviet concerns about rearming Central Europe. Many of the President’s advisors believed that the U.S. had shown weakness to the Soviets in Vienna, a failing that they would have to work doubly hard to overcome by convincing the Soviets that American power was as vigorous and unyielding as ever. Former Secretary of State Dean Acheson, called in as a special advisor, was particularly adamant in describing the U.S.-Soviet confrontation over Berlin as a “test of will” or “conflict of will,” while Eugene Rostow complained that the Soviets were “testing our nerve.” Acheson argued that negotiations with Khrushchev would be “dangerous” and “result in an appearance of weakness.”

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187 Memorandum to the President from Dean Acheson, April 3, 1961, NSF: Countries Series: Germany, box 81, JFKL; Memorandum to Chester Bowles from Eugene Rostow, June 16, 1961, NSF: Countries Series: Germany, box 81a, JFKL. Roger Hilsman, head of the Intelligence and Research (INR) division of the Department of State, however, argued that while Khrushchev may have hoped to weaken Western resolve and divide the Allies, his main objective was to resolve the Berlin issue and the question of the two Germanies. If it came to it, Khrushchev may be willing to face a confrontation to achieve his goal, but he preferred, Hilsman believed, to reach a negotiated settlement. It seems as though Hilsman’s perspective never got out of the State Department. See memorandum from Roger Hilsman to Foy Kohler, June 30, 1961, NSF: Countries Series: Germany, Berlin, General, 6/29/61-6/30/61, box 81a, JFKL.
Kennedy’s national security advisors believed that the United States had to convince the Soviets that it was willing to use nuclear power to defend Berlin. To accomplish this, Acheson advocated a declaration of national emergency, rapid nuclear and conventional military preparations, and an increase in civil defense capabilities.\(^{188}\) Although Kennedy did not agree with all of Acheson’s recommendations, he allowed the former Secretary of State to set the agenda on Berlin policy and magnify the crisis atmosphere, at least in part because he agreed that the crisis was a test of will and feared that his performance in Vienna gave the Soviets cause to doubt his resolve. JFK focused on salvaging the image of his administration as a force of strength that could exercise responsibility for the West. The public and private importance of patriarchal responsibility in the worldview of moral masculinity demanded that the Kennedy administration demonstrate its efficacy in the Berlin situation.

Officials who questioned the efficacy of the Acheson plan also perceived their options through the lens of moral masculinity. Some feared that a refusal to make concessions would actually undermine American power. Planning complex military maneuvers while refusing to elaborate a political course of action, one advisor pointed out, “casts the U.S. as rigid and unreasonable.”\(^{189}\) Others argued that the United States was willing to negotiate, but that Khrushchev’s inherent irrationality prevented success. Henry Kissinger noted with concern the administration’s objections to negotiations: “I am somewhat uneasy to have refusal to negotiate become a test of firmness. . . . firmness . . . should not . . . be proved by seeming to shy away from diplomatic confrontation.”

\(^{188}\) Acheson Report, June 28, 1961, NSF: Countries Series, box 81a, JFKL.

\(^{189}\) Memorandum to the President, July 7, 1961, POF: Countries Series: Germany, box 117, JFKL.
fact, he argued, since Khrushchev was unlikely to accept a “reasonable” proposal, an offer to negotiate would actually strengthen the American position.\textsuperscript{190} McGeorge Bundy concurred, stating that “the word ‘negotiation’” should not become anathema. On the contrary, he continued, “our policy is to seek serious understanding.”\textsuperscript{191} Kennedy himself expressed frustration on several occasions that the Soviets were “unreasonable” and explicitly informed Gromyko that “compromise” meant that “neither side is lessened by agreement.”\textsuperscript{192} “The mere will to negotiate,” Kennedy informed Federal Republic Chancellor Konrad Adenauer, “is [not] a confession of weakness.”\textsuperscript{193} In this instance, the notion of patriarchal responsibility could have tempered the crisis, as these advisors suggested that working to resolve the crisis was the most responsible option.

The Kennedy administration portrayed itself as a rational actor capable of discussing international tensions calmly and reasonably. This trope implied that the Soviets were not as reasonable. In the worldview of moral masculinity, the United States was behaving responsibly and adhering to masculine values, while Khrushchev endangered world peace with irrational, unreasonable behavior. Yet it was Kennedy who underestimated Khrushchev’s internal pressures, dismissed Soviet concerns about Central Europe, and refused to consider the “free city” proposal.\textsuperscript{194}

\textsuperscript{190} Memorandum to McGeorge Bundy from Henry Kissinger, July 14, 1961, NSF: Countries Series: Germany, Berlin, General, 7/14/61, box 81a, JFKL.

\textsuperscript{191} Memorandum to Ted Sorensen from McGeorge Bundy, July 22, 1961, NSF: Countries Series: Germany, box 81a, JFKL.

\textsuperscript{192} Memcon, September 13, 1961, Lot Files: Executive Secretariat: Presidential Memorandums of Conversation, 1956-1964, box 2, RG 59, NA; Memcon, October 6, 1961, Records of Ambassador Charles E. Bohlen, 1942-1971, box 20, RG 59, NA.

\textsuperscript{193} Memcon, November 20, 1961, Lot Files: CF 1993, box 268, RG 59, NA.

\textsuperscript{194} Beschloss, \textit{The Crisis Years}, 233.
In mid-July Soviet Ambassador Menshikov informed Walt Rostow that a peace conference would be held in the second half of November, and that if the United States did not participate and help negotiate a treaty with both Germanys, the USSR would sign a treaty with the GDR. Menshikov also stated that the East Germans would grant access to Berlin under certain circumstances, but that the Allies would have to negotiate with East Germany alone to make these arrangements. Rostow gleaned the impression, however, that these arrangements would not necessarily have to be predicated on full recognition of East Germany. The Soviets would be satisfied by smaller steps.\footnote{Memorandum of Conversation with Ambassador M.A. Menshikov, USSR, Monday, July 17, 1961, POF: Staff Memoranda, Rostow, Walt W. 6/61-12/61, box 65, JFKL.}

Despite this opening, the crisis continued to escalate, and the Kennedy administration continued to paint the Soviets as irresponsible and unreasonable. Acheson’s advice, for example, “gave special emphasis to the idea of the trust of Berlin and the peace which exists there, and argued that the real themes should be that Khrushchev is a false trustee and a war monger, and these themes should be hammered home.”\footnote{Memorandum for the Record, Discussion at NSC Meeting, June 29, 1961, NSF: Meetings and Memoranda: National Security Council Meetings, 1961, No. 486, 6/29/61, box 313, JFKL.} By initially allowing Acheson to set the tone of the internal policy debate, focusing on his perceived “failure” at Vienna and emphasizing a discourse of responsibility, Kennedy closed off policy options that, if explored, may have resolved the Berlin crisis earlier.

The Kennedy administration adhered to the discourse of patriarchal responsibility in its public statements as well, emphasizing in press conferences and interviews that the Soviet Union was cowardly neglecting responsibilities which it, like the United States, had pledged to fulfill. Kennedy noted during a press conference that the United States...
“carried out our responsibilities and exercised our rights of access” to West Berlin despite Soviet interference, and stated that if Moscow unilaterally signed a peace treaty with East Germany, it would be “a repudiation . . . of multilateral commitments to which they solemnly subscribed.” He then turned the discourse of responsibility against the Soviet Union by warning that if the peace was disturbed, “it will be a direct Soviet responsibility.” Several weeks later, he reiterated that “if [the current state of] peace is destroyed by the unilateral actions of the Soviet Union, its leaders will bear a heavy responsibility before world opinion and history.” In his public statements, the president made it clear that he considered the American responsibility to Western Europe to be more than a treaty obligation, rather “an irrefutable legal, moral and political position.” The United States and the Kennedy administration were bound within the strictures of the worldview of moral masculinity to protect West Berlin, in keeping with moral, political, and personal values.

Kennedy adhered to the tropes of responsible manhood during a televised address to the nation on July 25, 1961. His speech, drafted by advisor Theodore Sorensen, emphasized that the current crisis “required endurance rather than emergency actions.” Sorensen hoped that the speech would “underline our commitments to . . . protect the people of Berlin.” Bundy advised Sorensen to take a responsible tone with the speech


199 Statement by the President Concerning the U.S. Reply to the Soviet Government’s Aide Memoire on Germany and Berlin, July 19, 1961, PPP 1961, 521.

200 Memorandum to the President from Theodore Sorensen, July 17, 1961, POF: Countries Series: Germany, box 116a, JFKL.
and to gently guide the American public, in a fatherly way, to support the President’s policies. “This speech should be full of information, and should leave the American people with the feeling that they know where they are and why,” Bundy recommended. “To me this indicates a cool tone, a willingness to explain lots of things . . . the President will do well in a quite literal sense to speak softly while he describes his new big stick.”

Bundy’s suggestions demonstrate the influence of patriarchal responsibility on policymaking in the Kennedy administration. JFK was a father figure to the American public, explaining the crisis to them but providing reassurance that he was powerful enough to solve the problem. Drawing on this image would, in turn, help garner support for the President’s policies.

In his speech, Kennedy emphasized the values of sacrifice and courage to win support for his Berlin policy. He told the American public that they needed to maintain their “courage and perseverance” and to act “with calm determination and steady nerves.” West Berlin, he emphasized, was “the great testing place of Western courage and will.” Kennedy also used this opportunity to try to correct any misconceptions Khrushchev may have derived from their meeting in Vienna. He warned the Soviets that they should not make the “dangerous mistake of assuming that the West was too selfish and too soft and too divided” to resist aggression in Berlin. Although he did not declare a national

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201 Memorandum to Theodore Sorensen from McGeorge Bundy, July 22, 1961, Theodore C. Sorensen Papers: Classified Subject Files: Berlin (folder 1 of 7), box 42, JFKL.
emergency as Acheson had urged, JFK asked Congress for a more than $3.5 billion increase in the defense budget and requested the authority to call up reservists, expand the draft, and extend existing tours of duty.  

While Kennedy’s speech effectively communicated the severity of the crisis to the American public, he may not have been as successful in winning their confidence. In fact, the July 25 speech sparked a war scare in the United States and thousands rushed to prepare for nuclear attack. During the summer of 1961, a civil defense panic gripped the nation and get-rich-quick shelter schemes sprung up across the country.  

Had Americans believed that Kennedy was truly a patriarchal figure, they would have implicitly trusted him to resolve the crisis without harm to the nation. Clearly, Khrushchev’s saber-rattling and the president’s failures in the Bay of Pigs and Vienna had left an impression of weakness that JFK had to continue to combat. This war scare may have contributed to Kennedy’s later decision to temper the crisis, perhaps feeling that it was irresponsible to induce such panic. The Kennedy administration continued to frame policy debates within the discourse of patriarchal responsibility, both privately and publicly.

Attorney General Robert Kennedy asked Walt Rostow to develop a public relations “theme” for the Berlin problem, a concept that would be palatable both domestically and internationally and would boost support for U.S. policy. Rostow’s

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203 Schlesinger, A Thousand Days, 685-686; Margot Henriksen, “The Berlin Crisis, the Bomb Shelter Craze and Bizarre Television: Expressions of an Atomic Age Counterculture,” in Alison M. Scott and Christopher D. Geist, eds., The Writing on the Cloud: American Culture Confronts the Atomic Bomb (Lanham, Maryland, 1997), 151-173. In this situation, it is possible that Kennedy emphasized civil defense in his speech to underscore the American will to fight to Khrushchev, but that this discursive strategy backfired with his other intended audience, the American public.
suggestion fell squarely within the prescriptions and proscriptions of moral masculinity. “What we now face is not a Berlin crisis,” he told the President. “What we face is a test of the unity, the will, and the creativity of the North Atlantic Community.” Loyalty, courage, and creative thinking were all hallmarks of moral masculinity. By invoking these values, Rostow hoped to encourage support for the Kennedy administration’s Berlin policy. Relying on these themes had served them well during the presidential campaign, and now Rostow hoped that this discourse would strike a chord in Western Europe as well. “Mr. Khrushchev has questioned the unified will and the ability of the North Atlantic Community to maintain its commitment to the freedom of the people of West Berlin,” Rostow noted. He suggested that the Kennedy administration appeal to community spirit to convince the allies to make the necessary military and economic arrangements to meet their commitments in West Berlin. He also underscored the fact that the North Atlantic Community bore a “total responsibility to the world community” to protect self-determination and freedom in West Berlin.204 This extended the notion of an American obligation to the Western alliance in the domestic context, to a global allied obligation in the international context. These appeals were not received as positively as Rostow or Robert Kennedy hoped because the cultural context of the Western allies differed from that of the United States. West Germany in particular faced an acute gender crisis in the postwar period. Women outnumbered men and former German soldiers contended with defeat and were more overtly physically and psychologically damaged than American veterans. The values of loyalty and courage were more problematic for West German men than Americans. West German politicians tried to

204 Memorandum to the President from W.W.R., July 20, 1961, POF: Countries Series: Germany, Security 7/61, box 117, JFKL.
“resurrect a positive German tradition of brave and obedient soldiers” while avoiding the militarism and fascism of the past. Rostow failed to recognize that the discourse of moral masculinity was particular to the American context, foreshadowing the Berlin issue as a source of inter-allied tension.

The discourse of patriarchal responsibility was not aimed solely at internal critics and the domestic audience, but at the Western allies as well. During the Cold War, the relationship between the United States and its Western allies was fraught with tension. As Frank Costigliola has noted, although most American officials would have claimed that relations in the Western alliance were cooperative, their use of language demonstrates that the relationship was more controlling. American policymakers implicitly viewed the position of the United States in the alliance as predominant and used language that described West Germany and France, at various points, as children or hysterical women. This enabled them to trivialize allied objections to U.S. policies and to justify American predominance in the alliance. By casting the United States in patriarchal terms, its greater role in NATO seemed natural and in fact, an alternative seemed impossible. The United States thus took on the role of husband or father to the needy, recalcitrant, or wayward allies.

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205 Uta G. Poiger, *Jazz, Rock, and Rebels: Cold War Politics and American Culture in a Divided Germany* (Berkeley, 2000), 73, also 4-9, 71-105. West German officials were also hostile to the perceived negative influences of American popular culture, which they believed threatened German values and encouraged overaggressive young men and oversexualized women. There were broad areas of overlap between American and West German conceptions of proper masculinity, however, including the value of a strong patriarch and a caretaker mother figure.

206 Costigliola, “The Nuclear Family,” 163-183. Andrew Rotter has also explored how political cultures are shaped by ideas about family. See *Comrades at Odds*, 116-149.
The seeming unpredictability of the Western alliance constantly frustrated the Kennedy administration. West European policymakers would jump on any hint of “weakness” or sense that Kennedy might be backing down on Berlin. Kennedy expressed concern that the allies would question his claims to moral masculinity and thereby his claims to power. At the same time, this allied pressure was acutely frustrating to JFK because, from his perspective, it was the allies who were weak and unwilling to bear an equal share of the burden of their defense. This not only negatively affected Kennedy’s relationship with members of the Western alliance, but it also affected policy. The Kennedy administration weighed and chose policy options based in part on whether they would make the White House seem irresponsible, weak or otherwise unaligned with the criteria of moral masculinity in the eyes of its allies. Kennedy’s relationship with his allies was thus ambivalent – he was frustrated with and contemptuous of them, but this masked a fundamental insecurity. Cold War foreign policy was predicated on the United States assuming a dominant, patriarchal role in the Western alliance, despite, or perhaps because of, the postwar crisis of masculinity.

As Senator, Kennedy had criticized the Eisenhower administration for allowing American policy to “be lashed too tightly to a single German government and party.” Yet his administration allowed concerns about adhering to moral masculinity circumscribe policy options. In January 1961, the State Department pondered a version of the “free city” proposal that would make Berlin a “guaranteed city.” The Four Powers would guarantee Western military and civil access to West Berlin, with the Western powers suspending their occupation rights as long as the agreement was observed.

207 Kennedy, “A Democrat Looks at Foreign Policy,” 49.
Authorities in West Berlin could request a certain number of foreign troops to be stationed there, with full access guaranteed. The United Nations would oversee the arrangement. According to the State Department, this option was preferable to the “free city” proposal, but ultimately untenable, because it “would probably cause a political crisis within the Western Alliance, since it would be interpreted as a sign of weakness and loss of determination . . . [n]either the French nor the West Germans would find it acceptable.”\textsuperscript{208} This policy alternative thus died a premature death because it seemed weak and thus unmasculine, calling American predominance in the alliance into question.

Kennedy allowed allies’ image of the United States to constrict policy options because he did not want to seem weak andemasculated. At the same time, he believed he could not count on the allies, especially West Germany and France, for support because they were weak and faithless. In May 1961, Henry Kissinger warned JFK that “a defeat over Berlin . . . would inevitably demoralize the Federal Republic. . . . [a]ll other NATO nations would be bound to draw the indicated conclusions from such a demonstration of the West’s impotence.”\textsuperscript{209} Near the height of the Berlin crisis, a State Department official warned his superiors that “acceptance of German reunification on the minimum Soviet terms would mean the emasculation of the North Atlantic Alliance.”\textsuperscript{210} Menshikov, in fact, may have hit a little too close to home when he assured Rostow in

\textsuperscript{208} Department of State paper on “The Berlin Problem in 1961,” January 10, 1961, NSF: Countries Series: Germany, Berlin, General, 1/61, box 81, JFKL.

\textsuperscript{209} Memorandum for the President from Henry Kissinger, May 5, 1961, NSF: Countries Series: Germany, Berlin, General, Kissinger Report, 5/5/61, box 81, JFKL.

\textsuperscript{210} Memorandum for Abram Chayes from Richard Kearney, June 12, 1961, NSF: Countries Series: Germany, Berlin, General, R.D. Kearney Report, 6/30/61, box 81a, JFKL.
mid-July 1961 that if war threatened, “the West Germans would leave West Germany as fast as the East Germans were leaving East Germany, and that [the U.S.] should not count on the French.”

Kennedy had particular difficulties with West Germany. Beginning with his Inaugural Address, which the West Germans noted with concern did not mention Berlin, Kennedy was constantly forced to assuage FRG concerns throughout his administration. He was simultaneously tied to them out of fear of seeming weak and ineffective, and, because in his view they did not adhere to the values of moral masculinity, dismissive of them.

Many of Kennedy’s problems with the Federal Republic stemmed from his uneasy relationship with Konrad Adenauer. While his predecessor had worked closely with the Chancellor, Kennedy’s relationship with him was polite but distant. In 1957, he had written that “the age of Adenauer is over.” The Kennedy administration used the discourse of moral masculinity to dismiss the Chancellor’s objections to its policies.

The Kennedy administration’s attitude toward Adenauer became clear during their first state meeting in April 1961. Moral masculinity placed a high value on youth and vigor; so many policymakers took a patronizing tone toward the eighty-five year old Adenauer. They appeared to believe that he was either too old or too hysterical, or

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211 Memorandum of Conversation with Ambassador M.A. Menshikov, USSR, Monday, July 17, 1961, POF: Staff Memoranda, Rostow, Walt W. 6/61-12/61, box 65, JFKL.

212 For example see Memcon, JFK, Rusk, Dowling, Kohler, von Brentano, February 17, 1961, or Memcon, JFK, Grewe, Kohler, March 10, 1961, both in Lot Files: Executive Secretariat: Presidential Memorandums of Conversation, 1956-1964, Presidential Memcons January – April 1961, box 1, RG 59, NA.

213 Mayer, Adenauer and Kennedy, 4-10, 19-23.

214 Kennedy, “A Democrat Looks at Foreign Policy,” 49.
perhaps both, to be taken seriously. Kennedy’s briefing papers for the meeting described Adenauer as the “grand old man of West European politics,” which may not have been a compliment. The State Department papers acknowledged that even at his advanced age, the Chancellor was “still shrewd, vigorous, and masterful” but also noted that he was rigid, suspicious, and “unduly autocratic.” The President was warned that since the end of the Second World War, Adenauer had “suffered from an almost pathological fear” that the United States and the Soviet Union would conspire against Germany, and that “this was not the kind of fear which can be exorcised by rational argument.” Adenauer would be highly emotional during the discussion on Central Europe. Kennedy should be aware of the fact that Adenauer was sensitive about his age and faced pressure to demonstrate his vitality at home and abroad. The State Department suggested that JFK discuss current world events, such as problems in Laos and the Congo, with Adenauer to give him a sense that his opinion was still valid and that he still exercised leadership. While Kennedy maintained an attitude of polite respect toward the Chancellor, it was clear that Adenauer did not measure up to the president’s standards of moral masculinity. He was too old, too hysterical and emotional, and too unreliable to be an equal partner in the relationship.

Adenauer’s colleagues fared no better in the eyes of the Kennedy administration. The State Department observed that Foreign Minister Heinrich von Brentano, for example, was not “an effective orator or a forceful leader” and that Adenauer dominated

215 Confidential (biographical summary of Konrad Adenauer), Lot Files: Conference Files, 1949-1963, CF 1834, Adenauer Visit 4/12-13/61, box 245, RG 59, NA.

216 Scope Paper and “Points for the President to Make,” both in Lot Files: Conference Files: CF 1834, Adenauer Visit, 4/12-13/61, box 245, RG 59, NA.
West German foreign policy, keeping a tight rein on von Brentano. Using coded language that hinted that von Brentano was gay, Kennedy’s briefing papers described the Foreign Minister as “a bachelor of fastidious tastes, fond of good literature, antiques and rare wines.” While good sartorial sense and an appreciation for antiques are not necessarily markers of homosexuality, these characteristics were suspect to members of the Kennedy administration. These policymakers had lived through Joseph McCarthy’s lavender-baiting during the Red Scare. This “sexual inquisition” played political struggles out in the personal realm, forcing members of the foreign policy bureaucracy to conform to gender and sexual norms. Adherents to moral masculinity imbibed this lesson, firmly grasping the image of the patriarchal nuclear family as the only legitimate political actor. The Kennedy administration’s veiled suggestion that von Brentano was gay effectively nullified any policy recommendations he might make. The fact that Adenauer would have such an advisor, furthermore, tainted his entire cabinet in the eyes of American policymakers.

The Kennedy administration shared its misgivings about the West Germans with its closest ally, Great Britain. American Ambassador to Great Britain David Bruce confided to Foreign Secretary Lord Home that, regarding Berlin policy, “the West Germans unfortunately were unimaginative as long as they abrogated their own

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217 Confidential (biographical summary of Heinrich von Brentano), Lot Files: Conference Files, 1949-1963, CF 1834, Adenauer Visit 4/12-13/61, box 245, RG 59, NA.

218 Dean, Imperial Brotherhood, 65-70, 164-167.
responsibilities and pinned them on the West.” The Kennedy administration accused both the Soviets and the Western allies of irresponsibility, reflecting policymakers’ belief that only the values of moral masculinity and the policies of its adherents held legitimacy.

Acheson formulated his plan for the Berlin problem with this view of the West Germans in mind. He cautioned that the U.S. would have “the gravest difficulty . . . in getting its allies, including the Germans, to agree in advance to fight for Berlin.” Kennedy should prepare to fight, in part to deter the Soviets. Yet he had to do so discreetly, lest the allies “become frightened and tempted to make concessions on Berlin, without our agreement.” The Kennedy administration sought an effective carrot as well as an effective stick to persuade the Western alliance to submit to American leadership on the Berlin problem. Part of RFK’s instructions to Rostow when he asked him to develop a public relations “theme” for the Berlin problem included the requirement that it “provide Western European politicians with a concept which would counter the latent anti-German feeling there; and, if possible, put them in the position of risking wider losses if they do not respond effectively to the American initiative.”

In keeping with the discourse of patriarchal responsibility, the Kennedy administration viewed the Western alliance as a marriage, with the United States in the position of patriarch. As Eugene Rostow noted “the whole object of the European exercise is to embrace Germany in a Franco-German-British marriage – a marriage of

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219 Memcon, Berlin, April 4, 1961, Rusk, Bowles, Bruce, Kohler, Home, Caccia, et al, Lot Files: Conference Files: CF 1833, Macmillan Visit, 4/4-9/61, Memcons, box 244, RG 59, NA.

220 Memorandum for the President from Dean Acheson, April 3, 1961, NSF: Countries Series: Germany, Berlin, General, 4/61, box 81, JFKL.

221 Memorandum to the President from Walt W. Rostow, July 20, 1961, POF: Countries Series: Germany, Security 7/61, box 117, JFKL.
convenience, if not love, but a marriage nonetheless.” Mirroring social tensions in the American family in the 1950s and early 1960s, the alliance was strained, and the role of the patriarch came increasingly under question. Kennedy once compared the Bonn government to “a wife who asks her husband every night, ‘Do you love me?’ and, when he keeps repeating he does, nevertheless asks again, ‘But do you really love me?’ – and then puts detectives on his trail.”

Walt Rostow used a slightly different metaphor that was equally rooted in the values of moral masculinity and patriarchal responsibility. He advised Kennedy to prepare for a “High Noon stance on Berlin.” Just as Gary Cooper dealt with the bandits alone in the 1952 film, the United States would have to deal with the Soviets alone. Rostow argued that this was natural, since the United States was the dominant power in the alliance. Moscow would “ultimately focus” on the “will and power” of the United States, he asserted. “We may have to pay something in the end for a degree of wilting on the part of our allies. But the final formula will be heavily determined by what we will take or not take.” This view portrays the United States as the responsible party, fecklessly abandoned by its erstwhile allies, and the Soviets as bandits or criminals engaging in lawless behavior. Rostow’s appeal to the rugged, stoic, duty-bound heroism of Cooper’s character in *High Noon* fit in perfectly with the values of moral

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222 Memorandum to Chester Bowles from Eugene Rostow, June 16, 1961, NSF: Countries Series: Germany, Berlin, General, 6/16/61, box 81a, JFKL.


224 Memorandum to the President from Walt Rostow, July 22, 1961, NSF: Countries Series: Germany, Berlin, General, 7/19/61-7/22/61, box 81a, JFKL. Rostow was, it should be noted, gentler on the allies than many others in the Kennedy administration. He took a broader view of the situation, remarking that Europeans’ capacity for war “is – and should be – somewhat lower than ours, given the history of the last half century.”
masculinity. Cooper had to protect not only the little town of Hadleyville but his own sense of morality and principle, at the expense of his marriage, economic interests, and possibly his very life. He is abandoned by the people whom he spent most of his life protecting, a frustration that Kennedy could relate to, as he felt he spent significant resources protecting Western Europe despite his allies’ seeming refusal to reciprocate or take responsibility for their own defense. Kennedy’s ambivalence toward his allies and the conflicting pressures of moral masculinity complicated his ability to manage the Berlin crisis.

Ultimately, however, patriarchal responsibility gave the Kennedy administration a way out. As the crisis intensified, Kennedy redefined and limited American goals in Berlin, seeking a more flexible strategy that was less reliant on the early use of nuclear weapons. He was no warmonger, and his sense of responsibility was infused with recognition of how easily a miscalculation could bring nuclear conflagration. An errant war, especially in the nuclear age, was itself irrational. “Before I back Khrushchev against the wall and put him to a final test,” Kennedy told friends, “the freedom of all of Western Europe will have to be at stake.” Walt Rostow pushed Kennedy to resist attempts by the “weak,” “incompetent,” and “irresponsible” Ulbricht regime to “lead us by the nose into war.” The two irrefutable American rights in Berlin were maintaining


228 Memorandum to McGeorge Bundy from Walt W. Rostow, August 14, 1961, NSF: Countries Series; Germany, box 82, JFKL.
access and an American military presence there. If these were not threatened, Kennedy would not wage war. JFK stated that if Khrushchev “did not try to deny us our rights” then there would be no war. But, he added, “we will not knuckle under to . . . threats.”

Kennedy limited American obligations and responsibilities to West Berlin, a “thriving and vital city.” In part this stemmed from the administration’s identification with Willy Brandt, the charismatic mayor of West Berlin. A member of the Socialist Democratic Party, Brandt exhibited “the same qualities of youthfulness and vigor” that Kennedy so valued. Even in the Senate, Kennedy had argued that while Adenauer was a loyal and skilled ally, the United States “has in its public statements and in the more informal workings of its diplomacy unduly neglected the contribution of the democratic opposition, the German Socialists.”

Unlike Adenauer, Brandt adhered to the ideology of moral masculinity. A member of the Social Democratic Party, Brandt fled to Norway and later Sweden when Hitler seized power in Germany. After the war ended, he regained his German citizenship and rejoined the SPD, enjoying a successful political career. Brandt served in various offices including terms in the Bundestag and the Bundesrat and was elected mayor of West Berlin in 1957. The Kennedy administration identified with Brandt and described him in terms of moral masculinity. The State Department noted his “political


231 Scope Paper, Adenauer Visit, Lot Files: CF 1834, box 245, RG 59, NA.

intuition and his ‘super salesmanship’ for” West Berlin, as well as his “keen political sense, tremendous drive and vigor, and winning personality.” Brandt had also faced hurdles due to his “relative youth,” a situation JFK could relate to. Moreover, Brandt’s alleged tendency to behave impulsively in private while “exud[ing] seriousness and statesmanship” in public could not have helped but strike a chord with the American President.\footnote{Biographic Information, Willy Brandt, March 1961, POF: Countries Series: Germany, Security 1/61-6/61, box 117, JFKL.}

Ulbricht’s East Germany, in contrast, was “bleeding to death, through an open wound.” In July 1961, 30,000 people fled to refugee camps in West Berlin, and 50,000 left in the first two weeks of August alone. The longer the emigration crisis continued, “the more miserable and desperate” this Soviet satellite was likely to become.\footnote{Memorandum to Secretary of State from Harlan Cleveland, July 18, 1961, NSF: Countries Series: Germany, box 81a, JFKL.} American policymakers described the flow of refugees as a “hemorrhage of life and talent” and East Berlin as an “infectious city.”\footnote{Dean Rusk with Richard Rusk, \textit{As I Saw It}, ed. Daniel S. Papp (New York, 1990), 218; McGeorge Bundy, \textit{Danger and Survival: Choices About the Bomb in the First Fifty Years} (New York, 1990), 361-362.} The discourse surrounding East Berlin stood in unfavorable contrast to the “thriving and vital city” of West Berlin.\footnote{The President’s News Conference of June 28, 1961, \textit{PPP}, 1961, 476.} The image of East Germany as a gaping wound or contaminant justified the turn in American policy. The association of East Berlin with pathology set the stage for the American reaction to the construction of the Berlin Wall. The U.S. could not be expected to embrace this diseased “other” on an equal plane, or to risk a war to protect it.
American policymakers prepared for another blockade, not a wall. East German closure of the border on August 13 caught the Kennedy administration by surprise. Yet once they realized that the Wall did not limit American access to West Berlin, they viewed it as a blessing in disguise. It provided a mechanism to stem Khrushchev’s enormous refugee problem, which they feared would lead to a disastrous uprising as had occurred in 1953. At the same time it did not directly challenge Kennedy’s stated obligations. JFK sent one battle group to reinforce the garrison in Berlin and issued a statement of protest. To boost morale, he also sent Lyndon Johnson and General Lucius Clay, hero of the airlift, to West Berlin.\(^{237}\)

The Wall temporarily defused the crisis enough to reestablish the status quo in the U.S.-Soviet confrontation. The Kennedy administration interpreted the construction of the Berlin Wall as a sign of Soviet weakness. As Bundy noted, “since it was bound to happen, it is as well to have it happen early, as their doing and their responsibility.”\(^{238}\) This relief, however, was coupled with a sense of vigilance. Robert Komer of the National Security Council staff counseled that the confrontational Soviet posture on Berlin and Khrushchev’s resumption of nuclear testing were signs not of Soviet strength, but of its weakness and position of strategic inferiority. “The very shrillness” of Khrushchev’s threats indicated that the Soviet leader was using a “war of nerves to soften


\(^{238}\) Memorandum for the President from McGeorge Bundy, August 14, 1961, POF: Staff Memoranda, Bundy, McGeorge 8/61, box 62, JFKL. Emphasis in original.
us up.” policymakers counseled the president to remain firm, responsible, and rational. One policymaker suggested responding with a combination of “vigor in preparation, readiness for action, and caution against going off half-cocked.”

Even Adlai Stevenson, while pushing for a call to negotiations sooner rather than later, seemed to toe the party line, and was “more cheerful and less worried about his own problems than usual.”

Publicly, the Kennedy administration protested the East German action, continuing to adhere to the trope of patriarchal responsibility. The White House noted that it had “always taken great care to see that the special status of [Berlin] as a whole is protected and preserved.” Administration statements also highlighted the “deception . . . irresponsibility . . . and illegal and provocative activities” of the Soviet Union. Kennedy issued a “solemn warning” to the Soviets that any interference with free access to Berlin would bear serious consequences. He assured the United Nations that “the United States has both the will and the weapons to join free men in standing up to their responsibilities,” responsibilities that the United States met calmly and reasonably while

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240 Notes of unknown origin, Meeting, Cabinet Room, 10 am, October 20, 1961, POF: Countries Series: Germany, General, 8/61-10/61, box 116a, JFKL.

241 Memorandum for the President from McGeorge Bundy, August 21, 1961, POF: Staff Memoranda, Bundy, McGeorge 8/61, box 62, JFKL.

the Soviet Union remained intent on threatening world peace.\textsuperscript{243} According to the administration’s public discourse, Kennedy and the United States continued to fulfill their responsibilities, while the Soviets had flagrantly abandoned their commitments.

The issue of the Western allies continued to plague the Kennedy administration even as they attempted to formulate a response to the construction of the Wall. Carl Kaysen pointed out to Bundy that the administration needed to call publicly for negotiations while privately emphasizing to Khrushchev its willingness to fight. This private communication, Kaysen warned, “must be such that our allies are not able to dilute its effect,” presumably a reference to the West Germans.\textsuperscript{244} The State Department expressed frustration with France’s reluctance to back American policy, telling French Ambassador Herve Alphand that “we don’t feel weak, and we don’t believe the Soviets think we are weak. . . . We can show the world we are ready to negotiate and that the Soviets are at fault if negotiations do not occur.”\textsuperscript{245} A journalist asked about allied military response to the Berlin crisis, and the president hedged, admitting that he would not know for several weeks what the allied commitment would be but that his administration had asked other NATO members to increase substantially the resources they pledged to the defense of central Europe. “And I think if they do not, then, Europe

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244 Memorandum for Mr. Bundy from Carl Kaysen, August 14, 1961, NSF: Countries Series: Germany, Berlin, General, 8/11/61-8/15/61, box 82, JFKL. \\
245 Memorandum of Conversation between Secretary of State and Herve Alphand, August 24, 1961, NSF: Countries Series: Germany, Berlin, General, 8/23/61-8/24/61, box 82a, JFKL. Quote is from Foy Kohler, head of the State Department’s Berlin Task Force and later Kennedy’s ambassador to Moscow.
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has diminished to that degree,” the Kennedy continued. “I am hopeful that we’re going
to meet our responsibilities and we’re asking them to meet theirs.” Although Kennedy
had shifted his policy, the allies continued to hamper his scope of action.

Kennedy realized that “the unification of Germany was distinctly mythological in
foreseeable circumstances,” and was frustrated that American policy was tied so
inextricably to a goal that was neither practical nor desirable. Advisors warned him,
however, that if he discarded this goal West Germany would withdraw from NATO and
abandon West Berlin. Bundy advised the President that “you could end this crisis
tomorrow by recognizing Ulbricht, and you could probably get some fairly juicy
guarantees in return. But the West Germans would feel deeply betrayed. This is foolish,
but factual.” In the early autumn of 1961, Kennedy moved toward calling a peace
conference and working toward “parallel peace treaties.” He made it clear to Rusk that
the Western Peace Plan, based on the reunification of Germany under free elections, was
not a serious negotiating posture. The President sought “a real reconstruction of our
negotiating proposals” rather than the same tired position papers and recognized that to
do so, he would have to find someone who could “bend” Adenauer’s will. Bundy
lamented the danger that if the U.S. posture had enough “firmness for Adenauer, we may
sound to Khrushchev like the lady who protests too much – after all, we have been saying

246 The President’s News Conference of August 30, 1961, PPP 1961, 578.

247 Memorandum to Foy Kohler from Harlan Cleveland, September 5, 1961, NSF: Countries Series:
Germany, Berlin, General, 9/9/61, box 82a, JFKL.

248 Memorandum to the President from McGeorge Bundy, August 28, 1961, NSF: Countries Series,
Germany, Berlin, General, 8/26/61-8/28/61, box 82A, JFKL.

249 Memorandum to the Secretary of State from the President, September 12, 1961, NSF: Countries Series:
Germany, Berlin, General, 9/9/61-9/12/61, box 82a, JFKL.
it and saying it.” The Kennedy administration feared that its allies would so limit its policy that the Soviets would believe that they had weakened their adversary. Bundy succinctly expressed American policymakers’ frustration with the West Germans, whose constant need for reassurance threatened to undermine Washington’s negotiations with the Soviets and emasculate the United States. Khrushchev highlighted this fear when he claimed that “Berlin is the testicles of the West. Every time I want to make the West scream, I squeeze on Berlin.” This “rude remark” did not escape JFK’s notice.

In a long memorandum to Rusk outlining the White House policy on the Berlin crisis and negotiations with the Soviets, Bundy encouraged the State Department to make clear to the West Germans that a new day had dawned for their role in Cold War politics:

The Berlin crisis requires a much heavier engagement of the interest and responsibility of the West German government itself. We are losing, now, from the fact that the West Germans are playing the role of off-stage conscience. We stand to gain if the West Germans are brought to a more active and responsible role in all the processes of the crisis . . . on the one hand, the Germans, lacking responsibility, are ready to engage in minor adventures of publicity and propaganda which are indeed revanchist in tone. They are also able to take a severe view of any possible concession . . . again because they are not responsible. But at the same time, and in the same irresponsibility, they are able to engage in all sorts of relations with the . . . GDR, and they are also spared the decisive test of will and of readiness to fight . . . The West Germans need to be engaged in full responsibility in the series of choices that are ahead. We have based our policy on the possibility of a mature, stable, Western-oriented Bonn republic. . . There can be no good result of this crisis without firmness, wisdom, and flexibility in Bonn.

250 Memorandum to the President from McGeorge Bundy, October 12, 1961, NSF: Countries Series: Germany, Berlin, General, 10/5/61-10/12/61, box 83, JFKL.


252 Memorandum for the Secretary of State from McGeorge Bundy, “Part II: Notes on the Road to a Serious Negotiating Position,” September 11, 1961, NSF: Countries Series: Germany, Berlin, General, 9/9/61-9/12/61, box 82a, JFKL.
The Kennedy administration thus summarized its frustrations with West Germany, which it believed had been blithely playing both sides against the middle, reaching out to Ulbricht while criticizing Washington for making overtures to the Soviets, happily going about its business with nothing at stake, knowing that the United States would protect it regardless of consequence. The FRG never had to make the sacrifices or difficult choices the United States had. Its refusal to accept its responsibilities would continue to hamper Western policy unless a change was made. Bundy offered the only solution Kennedy’s circle of advisors could suggest. West Germany would have to be schooled in the values of moral masculinity, forced into accepting the tutelage of its patriarch, which had grown tired of coddling the relatively young state and now hoped to push it into adulthood.

Kennedy weighed the pros and cons of inviting Adenauer to Washington in order to mollify him, but even this path was fraught with risk. A bipartite discussion might offend the remaining allies. “Even the British would need some soothing messages,” Bundy warned, and de Gaulle might go off “sulking in his tent” like a petulant child. He suggested that it might be safer to convene all of the Western allies and spread the inevitable blame. Otherwise, “the hard men say that you brainwashed the Chancellor, and the soft men say that he brainwashed you.”

As it became clear that the French and British would not object strongly, Bundy advised bringing Acheson and Robert Bowie in to help the President deal with Adenauer, who traveled to Washington in November 1961. With this assistance the Kennedy administration could garner the Chancellor’s sincere support. “We can probably browbeat [Adenauer] into acceptance of a reasonable

253 Memorandum for the President from McGeorge Bundy, October 18, 1961, POF: Countries Series: Germany, Security, 8/61-12/61, box 117, JFKL.
negotiating position,” he noted, “but what we want is his leadership, not his surrender.”

George Ball noted that a little flattery and stern bucking up from the President would help Adenauer fulfill his role responsibly, while Bundy encouraged JFK to give the Chancellor “a shot in the arm.” The Kennedy administration hoped to inculcate its ally with the values of moral masculinity to serve its policy purposes.

During the course of the Chancellor’s visit, however, it became clear that he was unable to fulfill the role and responsibilities of moral masculinity. In a recent West German election, Adenauer’s Christian Democratic Union had lost its majority in Parliament, while Brandt’s SPD had won twenty-one seats. Kennedy observed to Norwegian Prime Minister Einar Gerhardsen that Adenauer “is, of course, getting rather old.” Rusk noted that “for the first time the Chancellor was showing his age. . . . he did not seem quite as vigorous as usual. [The new Foreign Minister Gerhard] Schroeder and [Defense Minister Franz-Joseph] Strauss did much of the talking.” The Kennedy administration would have to continue to go it alone, at least in the near future. In its view, it was the only power willing to take responsibility.

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254 Memorandum for the President from McGeorge Bundy, October 24, 1961, POF: Countries Series: Germany, Security, 8/61-12/61, box 117, JFKL.

255 Memorandum to the Secretary from George W. Ball, October 28, 1961, Lot Files: Conference Files, CF 1993, Adenauer Visit, 11/20-22/61, Briefing Book and Miscellaneous, box 268, RG 59, NA; Undated handwritten memorandum for the President from McGeorge Bundy, POF: Countries Series: Germany, General, 11/61-12/61, box 116a, JFKL.


In the spring of 1962, Kennedy summed up the linkage between moral masculinity and his Berlin policy for West German Foreign Minister von Brentano. He noted that critics, including the West German press, had demanded that the wall be removed “brick by brick.” But he had “adopted the course we considered most responsible.”

A few weeks later, in a meeting with Alphand and André Malraux, French Minister of Cultural Affairs, JFK expressed his acute frustration.

[Kennedy] then reviewed his own personal experience since becoming President. We had made a tremendous effort after Vienna and the President believed it was these military efforts which had led Khrushchev to veer away from the showdown which had loomed in Berlin at the end of the year. Yet General de Gaulle seemed to say it was his determination which had produced the results. The President did not enjoy making these great military efforts. The United States was carrying a very large load, and in particular he found it hard to understand this latent, almost female, hostility which appeared in Germany and France, and an apparent sentiment that we might not be reliable in keeping to our engagements.

Kennedy summarized his views on French and German objections to U.S. policy. He felt that their challenges to his policies questioned his claims to power and American claims to predominance in the Western alliance. He dismissed their dissent by questioning the West German and French commitment to the alliance and to peace. By suggesting that their lack of commitment or sense of responsibility emasculated them, Kennedy trivialized their policy objections, reinforcing the U.S. position as the only seemingly reasonable and appropriate response, and limiting the options of not just his administration, but of NATO as a whole.

258 Memcon, April 30, 1962, Lot Files: Executive Secretariat: Presidential Memorandums of Conversation, 1956-1964, box 2, NA.

259 Meeting in the Cabinet Room, May 11, 1962, NSF: Meetings and Memoranda: Meetings with the President, General, 2/62-5/62, box 317, JFKL.

The United States and the Soviet Union held an uneasy truce over Berlin for almost a year after the construction of the Wall, but in the late summer of 1962, policymakers in the Kennedy administration grew uneasy about Soviet intentions in Central Europe. Near the end of August, Bundy observed that “the Berlin crisis has warmed up a lot in recent weeks and looks as if it is getting worse.” Despite indications of Soviet intentions to change the status quo in Berlin, the Kennedy administration believed that it remained ever responsible and calm, in keeping with the tenets of moral masculinity. They believed that this calmness belied greater strength rather than weakness. Bundy advised Sorensen, about to meet with Dobrynin, that he should warn the Soviet ambassador that “it would be a most dangerous business to confuse our calmness and good manners with any weakening of determination whatsoever. Any move against our vital interests in Berlin will be met by appropriate, prompt, and energetic responses.”

In less than two months, U-2 photographs of offensive missile installations in Cuba would reveal exactly what the Soviets were planning. In the aftermath of the Cuban missile crisis settlement, Kennedy re-worked NATO policy and ultimately set a relatively stable system in place in Central Europe, based on maintaining the status quo in Berlin. The Kennedy administration continued to work closely with Willy Brandt, identifying him and his city with the values of moral masculinity. JFK traveled to West Berlin in June 1963 and delivered his famous “Ich bin ein Berliner” speech. Doubtless, the President got caught up in the heat of the moment.

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261 Memorandum to Mr. Sorensen from McGeorge Bundy, August 22, 1962, Theodore C. Sorensen Papers: Classified Subject Files: Berlin (folder 4 of 7), box 42, JFKL.

262 See following chapter for a discussion of the Cuban missile crisis.

and the adulation of the crowd. He certainly hoped that a rousing speech would drive home the U.S. commitment to West Berlin, on both sides of the iron curtain. Yet the language he used that day also reflected the values of moral masculinity, particularly the notion of West Berlin as a center of moral and physical courage, a place worth taking risks and making sacrifices for. Kennedy professed to be inspired by the people of West Berlin, claiming that “the story of West Berlin is many stories – valor, danger, honor, determination, unity and hardship. But, above all, it is the story of achievement.” He pledged that “our vigilance will be eternal. Our access will be maintained. . . . That is our commitment – and the United States of America is true to its commitments. Those commitments have been tested in this city many times – and they have stood the test. And you, the people of West Berlin, by your own courage and convictions, have earned our enduring friendship and admiration as well as our commitment.”

The president spoke as the proud patriarch.

From the moment Khrushchev issued his ultimatum to Kennedy in Vienna, American policy was filtered through the lens of moral masculinity. The Kennedy administration’s internal deliberations and public discourse evoked an image of the cowardly Soviets, shirking their responsibilities. The Kennedy administration, in contrast, was willing to make serious sacrifices to live up to its commitments. This willingness signaled Kennedy’s adherence to masculine values and, in his view, justified his claims to power, claims that had been shaken after his relatively disastrous first
months in office. In this context, it was difficult for Kennedy to contemplate the kind of serious negotiations and compromises with Moscow that would resolve the crisis peacefully.

Policymakers’ perceptions of their West German ally further complicated the process of resolving the crisis. Because the Kennedy administration did not view the Adenauer government as a legitimate partner, national security advisors believed they had to make a show of force to demonstrate resolve to the Soviets as well as to reassure the West Germans. At the same time, they were unsure whether this was an ally worth fighting for.

The worldview of moral masculinity, however, did provide an avenue of resolution by limiting American obligations in Berlin and providing the basis for an eventual settlement of the Berlin question. Some historians credit Khrushchev for constructing the Berlin Wall to deescalate the crisis. The Soviet leader’s act of brinksmanship did defuse tensions, but it would have failed if Kennedy had not limited American interests to Berlin’s western sector. After he had taken a strong stand and reasserted the United States’s position in the “family of nations,” Kennedy felt able to pull back in Central Europe. He broke from Acheson’s policy recommendations and asserted control over Berlin policy.265 Ultimately, Kennedy decided that bringing the world to the brink of nuclear war was irresponsible and unacceptable.

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. . . And then President John began to speak
And I knew right away we wouldn’t be weak
Well, he said he’d seen some missile bases
And terrible smiles on Cuban faces
Close Pictures
carryin’ land reform too far
Giving land to the USSR . . .

Yes, it seemed the President’s stand was strong and plain
But some Republicans was a’goin’ insane
And they still are
They said our plan was just too mild
Spare the rod and spoil the child
Let’s sink Cuba in to the sea
And give ‘em back democracy
Under the water

Well, the deadline was set for ten o’clock
For a cold war it was a-gettin’ hot
Well, the Russians tried, the Russians failed
Homeward bound those missiles sailed
Mr. Khrushchev said, “Better Red than dead.”
-- Phil Ochs, “Talkin’ Cuban Crisis,” 1964266

The Cuban missile crisis was a momentous period in the Kennedy administration

and in the Cold War generally. On the morning of October 16, 1962, national security

advisor McGeorge Bundy informed President Kennedy that American reconnaissance

266 Phil Ochs, “Talking Cuban Crisis,” All the News That’s Fit to Sing, Elektra Records, 1964.
had detected Soviet offensive nuclear weapons on Cuban soil. The President immediately called the most trusted members of his foreign policy team into a special meeting. These advisors included the President’s brother, Attorney General Robert Kennedy, the Secretaries of State, Defense, and Treasury, Dean Rusk, Robert McNamara, and C. Douglas Dillon, CIA chief John McCone, Joint Chiefs of Staff Chairman General Maxwell Taylor, and Theodore Sorensen and Bundy from the White House. This group was later formally organized into the Executive Committee of the National Security Council, or Ex Comm. For the next week, these men secretly debated the Kennedy administration’s options, considering an air strike, an invasion, and a blockade. Finally settling on a naval blockade of Cuba, the President then announced the discovery of the Soviet missiles to the nation and the world in a dramatic televised address on October 22. Surprised, Soviet leaders in Moscow debated their response, and for six days the world seemed to hover on the brink of nuclear war. Soviet ships bearing military equipment approached the quarantine line, and then turned back. On October 28, Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev announced that he was withdrawing his missiles from Cuba, and in return Kennedy pledged that the United States would not attempt to invade Cuba. Although no public *quid pro quo* was established, JFK also agreed to remove U.S. Jupiter missiles from Turkey.

Kennedy’s conduct during the Cuban missile crisis has become the touchstone for evaluations of his presidency. Kennedy’s supporters have pointed to the crisis as his greatest triumph, emblematic of his wisdom and unfailing judgment, while early critics saw it as the worst example of JFK’s irresponsibility and recklessness. More recent scholarship has drawn a distinction between Kennedy’s management of short-term crises
and his inability to craft successful long-term policies. While faulting Kennedy for targeting Castro and sending mixed signals to Khrushchev, many historians praise JFK’s caution and restraint during October 1962.267

The filter of moral masculinity adds a new dimension to the debate over the contradiction between Kennedy’s long-term policies and his short-term successes. A preoccupation with deviance set the terms of debate for the Kennedy team during the Cuban missile crisis. Members of Ex Comm operated within the “bipolarity of normal/pathological,” defining those masculine qualities they valued, such as vigor, courage, health, and responsibility, as natural and “normal.”268 They drew on these values to justify their claims to power, using them to demonstrate to domestic and international audiences that they were best equipped to guide the country and the “free world” through the pitfalls of the Cold War. The binary opposites of these characteristics were “pathological,” posing a threat to order and creating a danger. Any quality deviating from the norm of moral masculinity threatened to undermine the Kennedy administration’s legitimacy and challenged its power and privilege.


268 Campbell, Writing Security, 100. Campbell argues that “danger is not an objective condition,” but rather an effect of interpretation that states use to create their identities and thus, secure their status as actors on the world stage. Specific dangers change over time but always pose a threat to order by deviating from what is considered “normality.” See pages 1-3, 43, 55-56. See also Costigliola, “The Nuclear Family, 163-183.
Members of the Kennedy administration utilized multiple expressions of deviance during the missile crisis. Diverging from established nuclear family roles or traditional gender norms challenged the authority of moral masculinity. Sexuality was also a major category of difference. Expressions of sexuality outside the bounds of the heterosexual, often male, ideal, including impotence, frigidity, hypersexuality, and homosexuality, were deviant in the context of moral masculinity. Deviance was also often represented as disease, whether mental or physical, which signaled a loss of control. Good health was a condition of normality, but illness was alien and frightening. This fear of illness was especially true in the case of mental illness or pathology, which undermines control and reason, values cherished by adherents to moral masculinity. This dichotomy established a power relationship with the authority making the diagnosis, in this case foreign policymakers, occupying the position of physician. The discourse represented threats or challenges, such as Soviet missiles in Cuba, as infections emanating from an external source. The authority would opt for violent intervention to destroy the infection.\(^{269}\) Given JFK’s long history of illness, this type of discourse was doubtless quite powerful. Kennedy’s sense of a crisis of masculinity was fueled in part by his own physical inferiorities, which may have heightened his desire to seize the power dynamic of deviance for himself. The Kennedy administration used the discourses of deviance to express the danger of Soviet and Cuban policies.

A fear of deviance and danger influenced the Kennedy administration’s responses to the Cuban missile crisis in several ways. American policymakers defined the discovery of the missiles as a crisis they had to manage because they perceived it as

deviant, and thus dangerous. A discourse of deviance informed the terms of debate within Ex Comm. Kennedy refused to make public concessions to Khrushchev. Although JFK engaged in back-channel diplomacy and relied upon private understandings with Khrushchev to bring an end to the immediate danger, he was adamant that his own image, and the image of the United States, remain resolutely vigorous, firm, and strong. This prolonged the crisis, perhaps unnecessarily. Yet this discourse also served to mitigate the crisis and help shift Kennedy to a more political, rather than military, solution. Unwilling to appear deviant in the eyes of allies who could not understand the Kennedy “obsession” with Castro, the Kennedy administration ultimately accepted a naval blockade rather than an air strike or invasion of Cuba, and came to a private compromise with Khrushchev to defuse the crisis. Cultural proscriptions also affected internal dynamics in the Kennedy administration. Kennedy ignored substantive recommendations made by his United Nations ambassador, Adlai Stevenson, because Stevenson did not adhere to the qualities of moral masculinity.

Informed of the Soviet missile deployment, Kennedy and his advisors immediately decided that the weapons had to be removed. This decision created a crisis atmosphere in Washington and set the tone for the resulting deliberations within the administration and between Washington and Moscow. Kennedy’s determination to remove the missiles stemmed from a concern with deviance. He interpreted the Soviet

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action as a betrayal and therefore deviant, a danger that he had to overcome. JFK also feared that challenges from domestic opponents would make his administration appear weak and powerless if he did not act forcefully to remove the missiles.

Certainly, the existence of nuclear weapons just ninety miles from the Florida coast was a cause for concern. The Soviet MRBMs had a range of 1,100 nautical miles, threatening American territory south and east of a line from Dallas to Washington, D.C. The SAMs, light bombers, and other tactical weapons in Cuba were also nuclear-capable. Yet several high-level officials in the Kennedy administration did not believe that these weapons changed the nuclear balance of power. The Soviets had ICBMs in Eastern Europe capable of reaching the eastern United States, and American ICBM bases in the Midwest could comfortably target Moscow, as could Jupiter missiles in Turkey and Italy. According to McNamara, neither he nor JFK believed that the United States possessed first-strike capability, before or after the missile crisis. Even if Kennedy launched the first attack, he would not be able to destroy enough Soviet missiles to prevent an unacceptable level of damage to the United States after Soviet retaliation. They did recognize that there was a “gross imbalance in numbers” between American and Soviet strategic nuclear warheads, with the United States holding roughly 5,000 and the Soviets in possession of an estimated 300. The sheer number of American warheads, the President and McNamara believed, was an effective deterrent. The Soviet deployment to Cuba, though large, was not enough to threaten U.S. numerical

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271 Fursenko and Naftali, “One Hell of a Gamble”, 216-17, 242. At the time, the Kennedy administration was unaware of the extent of the Soviet mission, for example estimating the number of Soviet troops on the island to be 8-10,000 when it was closer to 42,000. For the purposes of this analysis, however, American policymakers’ perceptions of the threat are more significant than the details of the Soviet deployment. For a full description of the equipment and personnel planned for Operation Anadyr, see Fursenko and Naftali, “One Hell of a Gamble”, 188. See also White, The Cuban Missile Crisis, 85-86.
superiority. Other administration officials concurred. For example, Sorensen argued that “it is generally accepted that these missiles . . . do not significantly alter the balance of power . . . they do not significantly increase the potential megatonnage capable of being unleashed on American soil.”

JFK thus did not consider the Cuban missiles a strategic threat. Instead, he viewed them through the lens of moral masculinity as a symbolic threat and a challenge to order and authority. Kennedy believed that he and Khrushchev shared a private, businesslike agreement about the status of Cuba. He accepted Soviet military and technical assistance to Cuba as long as it remained defensive, and issued strong public statements to that effect. He perceived the Soviet deployment as an act of deviance and therefore a threat he had to face down, but also feared that his own administration would appear deviant to allied observers who might consider the Kennedy administration’s preoccupation with Cuba and Castro to be evidence of pathology. Kennedy and his advisors placed the onus for the crisis firmly on the Soviet Union. By portraying Soviet actions as unnatural, pathological and therefore dangerous, American policymakers were able to deflect criticism about why they did not discover the weapons earlier and why they had allowed Castro to remain in power in the first place. This imagery also helped conceal the role that JFK’s own policies toward Cuba played in precipitating the crisis.

272 James G. Blight, et al, Cuba on the Brink: Castro, The Missile Crisis, and the Soviet Collapse (New York, 1993), 136-137. McNamara probably overestimated the amount of Soviet warheads in Cuba. Other administration officials, including Ray Cline and John Mc Cone of the CIA, disagreed with McNamara’s views, but McNamara had the “complete trust” of the President and thus his opinion probably carried more weight. See The Kennedy Tapes: Inside the White House during the Cuban Missile Crisis, eds. Ernest May and Philip Zelikow (Cambridge, Mass., 1997), 41.

273 Memorandum from Theodore Sorensen to President Kennedy, October 17, 1962, POF: Countries Series: Cuba, General, 1/1/62-10/20/62, box 114a, JFKL.
Domestic criticism from the right and Khrushchev’s belligerent attitude in the fall of 1962 heightened Kennedy’s sense that the Soviet deployment threatened his power. Since August, Kennedy had been deflecting attention from the media and his Republican opponents about military activity in Cuba. He trusted Khrushchev’s assurances that the Soviet weapons shipments to Castro were strictly defensive. When this proved false, his anger and humiliation were compounded.

Throughout August and September 1962, the press repeatedly questioned Kennedy about Soviet activity in Cuba. Criticism from Republican senators, including Homer Capehart of Indiana and Kenneth Keating of New York, prompted these inquiries. The President’s critics charged that the Kennedy administration was perilously ignoring a grave threat in Cuba. Capehart, for example, called for an American invasion of Cuba to prevent the island from becoming a Soviet military base. The Kennedy administration posed two responses to this line of questioning. One tactic was to assert superiority over Castro, downplaying the possibility that Castro could ever pose a threat to the United States. In fact, many policymakers interpreted Soviet aid to Cuba as a sure sign of Castro’s decline. George Ball told a Congressional committee that although a Communist dictatorship ninety miles from Florida was not ideal, it was important to remember that Cuba was a “small enfeebled country with an incompetent government, a limping economy and a deteriorating standard of living.” In a draft of suggested remarks for a Presidential press conference, Sorensen noted that “As his industries

274 See White, *The Cuban Missile Crisis*, 89-114.


276 Statement by George W. Ball before the Select Committee on Export Control of the House of Representatives, October 3, 1962, NSF: Countries Series: Cuba, General, 10/1/62-10/14/62, box 36, JFKL.
stagnate, his harvests decline and his own followers grumble about rationing, it should
not be surprising that Mr. Castro in his efforts to bolster his regime, arouses the Cuban
people to fear a U.S. invasion and begs the Soviets to send both military and economic
help to prop him up.\footnote{277}

The Kennedy administration’s other response to domestic criticism over Cuba
was to set strict limits on acceptable Soviet aid to Cuba. In his responses to press
inquiries, Kennedy emphasized the distinction between defensive and offensive weapons.
The President argued that “unilateral military intervention” in Cuba was unwarranted at
this time, but reassured the public that “[i]f at any time the Communist buildup in Cuba
were to endanger or interfere with our security in any way . . . or become an offensive
military base of significant capacity for the Soviet Union, then this country will do
whatever must be done to protect its own security.”\footnote{278} The Kennedy administration took
the media attention quite seriously. Just before one press conference, Bundy warned the
President that Congressional pressure about Soviet military activity in Cuba may make

\footnote{277} TCS – Press Conf., 9/13/62, NSF: Countries Series: Cuba, General, 9/62, box 36, JFKL. State
Department intelligence analysts and the CIA also agreed with this assessment. See Memorandum from
Roger Hilsman to Acting Secretary of State, August 25, 1962, POF: Countries Series: Cuba, Security,
1962, box 115, JFKL. See also Notes on Cuban Issues for Vice President Johnson, October 2, 1962, NSF:
Countries Series: Cuba, Memo to Bundy: Briefing Paper for the Vice President, box 36, JFKL, which
states, incorrectly, that the increased Soviet military, technical, and economic assistance was a “response to
insistent demands from Castro for help.” See also Meeting between JFK, John McCone, Maxwell Taylor,
August 22, 1962, POF: Presidential Recordings: Meetings Recordings: Tape 15A, JFKL.

\footnote{278} The President’s News Conference of September 13, 1962, \textit{PPP} 1962, 674.
the administration “appear to be weak and indecisive.” Bundy recommended that Kennedy use the press conference to reassure the American public that as commander-in-chief, he had the situation under control and firmly in hand.279

After staking his authority on the distinction between offensive and defensive weapons shipments, Kennedy perceived Khrushchev’s deception as a direct challenge. This perception was compounded by mixed signals that Khrushchev seemed to send in the late summer and early autumn of 1962. Khrushchev expended a great deal of effort to conceal the deployment. He had decided in May to supply Castro with nuclear weapons, but planned to keep them a secret until the installations were complete and the American midterm elections were over. He would then travel to the United States to inform Kennedy personally of the missiles, and the President, Khrushchev believed, would have no choice but to accept the fait accompli. Later, Khrushchev would sign a treaty with Castro to formalize the arrangement.280

The Chairman went to great lengths to ward off American detection of the missile installations. In late August and again in early September, Kennedy’s close advisor Theodore Sorensen met with Ambassador Anatoly Dobrynin at the Soviet Embassy. Dobrynin, who did not know about the missile deployment, initiated these private, informal meetings to reassure Kennedy that the Soviets would not interfere with the congressional elections. In essence, Dobrynin promised, the Soviets would not blindside the Kennedy administration with a separate German peace settlement just before Election


Day, handing the Republicans a substantial public relations victory. When Sorensen countered that Soviet movements in Cuba fueled attacks from Senator Keating and others in the press, Dobrynin underscored that his country’s interest in the Caribbean island was strictly defensive and “did not represent any threat to the security of the United States.”

Nor was the President’s own brother immune to Soviet subterfuge. Khrushchev used the well-established back-channel between Robert Kennedy and KGB agent Georgi Bolshakov to try to prevent Kennedy from detecting the weapons shipments until it was too late. As freighters laden with nuclear warheads, tactical missiles, and MRBM steamed toward the Caribbean, Bolshakov, at the Kremlin’s instruction, convinced Kennedy to halt reconnaissance flights over international waters in the Atlantic. Several weeks later Bolshakov hinted to RFK that Khrushchev might be softening on the test ban issue. Just ten days before American U-2 flights detected the missile bases in Cuba, Bolshakov pledged to the Attorney General that the Soviet weapons shipments were defensive.

Khrushchev worked assiduously to reassure Kennedy, but combined this carrot with a forceful stick, challenging Kennedy’s authority in private contacts with American policymakers. In September, Khrushchev summoned Interior Secretary Stewart Udall, who happened to be touring Soviet hydroelectric facilities, to his dacha on the Crimean Sea. The Chairman underscored his demands for respect. He wanted the United States to acknowledge Soviet power and military strength. Kennedy, Khrushchev declared, lacked

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281 Memorandum for the Files, August 23, 1962 and September 6, 1962, Theodore Sorensen Papers: Classified Subject Files: Cuba, General, 1962, box 48, JFKL.


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the “courage to solve the German question.” Berlin was of no strategic importance, he argued, but “a war could easily begin there – if someone struck a blow at us, we would strike back. . . . War in this day and age means no Paris and no France, all in the space of an hour. It’s been a long time since you could spank us like a little boy – now we can swat your ass.” Gathering steam, the Chairman continued, “so let’s not talk about force. We’re equally strong. . . . if you want to do anything, you have to start a war. . . . The economy of your country is more developed than ours, but ours will be as strong as yours one day.” Hoping that a combination of threats and pledges would further delay the inevitable, Khrushchev then reiterated his promise not to make any international moves until after the American elections.283 In a conversation with U.S. Ambassador Foy Kohler a few weeks later, Khrushchev mocked the Kennedy administration’s concerns about Soviet activity in Cuba. He suggested that Americans were “frightened and our leaders’ nerves were bad. . . . Who would believe that Cuba was a nightmare for the U.S.? . . . Had [the] U.S. become a coward? Such people end by shooting themselves. . . . Is this the state in which American imperialism now finds itself? . . . You are so afraid of Cuba, you almost lost your pants.”284 Whether or not Khrushchev intended it, his attacks hit close to the heart of moral masculinity. He suggested that Kennedy was weak, cowardly, and irresponsible and questioned the legitimacy of his administration. Khrushchev’s challenges to JFK only served to heighten the American President’s determination to remove the Cuban missiles when he discovered their existence.


When Bundy informed Kennedy of the missiles, “his first reaction, from which he never wavered, was that more than words would be needed to respond to this Soviet challenge.” Reacting to the Soviet betrayal, American policymakers depicted their adversary as deviant, dangerous, and pathological. In private and public statements, the Kennedy administration emphasized the Soviet betrayal in deploying offensive weapons to Cuba. Policymakers believed that the difference between offensive American weapons in Western Europe and Turkey and the Soviet shipments to Cuba was that the Soviets had conducted their policies with secrecy and duplicity. JFK and his advisors saw the United States as the dominant power, but Khrushchev had challenged this position with his betrayal, and that challenge had to be met. The Kennedy administration could not simply accept the missile deployment.

Memoranda and audiotape transcripts from the first hectic, tense meetings after the missiles were detected reveal that the President and his advisors stressed that the Soviets had lied to them about the deployment and emphasized the secrecy of the operation. Kennedy described it as a “clandestine” act and a “deliberate and provocative challenge.” He wasn’t sure whether to regard Khrushchev’s motivation as “desperation or ambition, or both.” Robert Kennedy professed shock at the Soviets’ “duplicitvity” and hypocrisy.

285 Bundy, Danger and Survival, 392.

286 Memorandum of Telephone Conversation between President Kennedy and Prime Minister Macmillan, October 22, 1962, FRUS vol. XI, 163; The Kennedy Tapes, eds. May and Zelikow, 207, 282-283.

287 Memorandum from the Attorney General to the President, October 24, 1962, FRUS vol. XI, 175-76.
On October 18, Kennedy attended a previously planned meeting with Soviet
Foreign Minister Andrei Gromyko. The President decided not to tell Gromyko that he
knew about the missiles, hoping to retain the initiative. An advisor used a telling
metaphor to describe Kennedy’s rationale: “It is rather like finding your wife unfaithful.
She may know, but when you tell her, things are different. Then you had better be
prepared, for things will begin to happen.”288 The Kennedy administration viewed the
U.S. position to be one of greater authority, while the Soviet Union’s proper place was to
be passive and reticent. The radical departure from its prescribed role, expressed here as
wifely infidelity, was deviant. The deviance was a challenge as well as a danger. This
imagery implied that by deviating from the norm, the Soviet Union was responsible for
the crisis. It also justified a tough American response.

In addition to tropes of gender, American policymakers used the language of
pathology to describe Soviet activities in the Caribbean. In an Ex Comm meeting the day
after his talks with Gromyko, Kennedy went over various responses to the missiles,
trying to discern what the potential Soviet reaction would be in each case. He grew
frustrated, remarking that Gromyko and his delegation “were so remote from reality that
there’s no telling what the response” would be.289 Former Secretary of State Dean
Acheson, who had been called in as an ad hoc advisor, described Khrushchev as a
“madman.”290 Rusk wondered whether the Soviet leader was “entirely rational” and if he
really understood the seriousness of the situation. He thought it possible that Khrushchev

288 Llewellyn Thompson, quoted in Beschloss, The Crisis Years, 455.
289 Off-the-Record Meeting on Cuba, October 19, 1962, 9:45 a.m., The Kennedy Tapes, eds. May and
Zelikow, 186.
290 Record of Meeting (Ex Comm), October 19, 1962, FRUS vol. XI, p. 118.
was “just a little crazy” and could not be trusted. Kennedy expressed disgust that Khrushchev would allow a nuclear war to begin in “that sort of half-assed way.” In his televised address to the nation on October 22, Kennedy emphasized the Soviets’ “deliberate deception” in their “clandestine decision” to transport offensive weapons to Cuba under “a cloak of secrecy.” He juxtaposed the “reckless and provocative” Soviet action with the “patience and restraint” of the United States.

The perception of a Soviet betrayal and Soviet pathology influenced the course of American policymaking during the crisis. The Kennedy administration pledged to stand firm in the face of Soviet deception. Kennedy and his advisors strove to maintain their position as the strong, courageous, manly power. An advisor warned the President that “if our courage and our commitments are ever to be believed,” the United States would have to take some kind of action. Dillon agreed, remarking that negotiations would “convey to the world that we were impotent in the face of a Soviet challenge.” Kennedy tersely informed Khrushchev that he had underestimated the “will and determination of the United States.” Above all, the President recognized that the missiles had to be removed because it made Cuba appear to be “coequal” with the United

291 Off-the-Record Meeting on Cuba, October 16, 1962, 11:50 a.m., POF: Presidential Recordings, JFKL transcript, 10, 15; Thursday, October 18, 11 a.m., The Kennedy Tapes, eds. May and Zelikow, p. 148.

292 Off-the-Record Meeting on Cuba, October 16, 1962, 11:50 a.m., JFKL transcript, p. 25.


294 Memo, Theodore Sorensen to JFK, October 17, 1962, POF: Countries: Cuba: General, January 1, 1962-October 20, 1962, JFKL.

295 Minutes of the 506th Meeting of the National Security Council, October 21, 1962, FRUS vol. XI, 146.

296 Letter from President Kennedy to Chairman Khrushchev, October 22, 1962, FRUS vol. XI, 162.
States.\textsuperscript{297} He informed British Prime Minister Harold Macmillan that the Soviet deployment “must be met promptly and fearlessly.”\textsuperscript{298} Although the crisis was resolved when Kennedy publicly agreed not to invade Cuba in exchange for the withdrawal of the missiles, his pledge was vaguely worded and contingent upon United Nations inspection of the missile sites, which Castro never allowed. Privately, Kennedy also agreed to remove the Jupiter missiles from Turkey, but was adamant that no \textit{quid pro quo} be established and that the deal be kept completely confidential. He also recognized that withdrawing the Jupiters would not harm the U.S. strategic position because he planned to replace them with Polaris submarines in the Mediterranean, which were even more effective weapons.\textsuperscript{299}

Once the immediate crisis passed, JFK no longer viewed the Soviets in terms of dangerous deviance. The Soviet Premier had returned to his passive role of weakness and impotence. During the second week of the crisis, as the tide shifted in favor of the White House, Schlesinger and Averell Harriman noted that Khrushchev was sending “desperate signals to get us to help take him off the hook.” Schlesinger argued that “if we act shrewdly and speedily, we can bail Khrushchev out and discredit the tough guys around him – the ones who sold him the Cuban adventure on the theory that Americans were too liberal to fight.”\textsuperscript{300} Although Kennedy instructed his staff not to gloat too openly in the press about their victory, he had more subtle means of showing his rival

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\textsuperscript{297} Off-the-Record Meeting on Cuba, October 16, 1962, 6:30 p.m., JFKL transcript, 14.

\textsuperscript{298} Telegram from the Department of State to the Embassy in the UK, October 22, 1962, \textit{FRUS vol. XI}, 150.

\textsuperscript{299} Minutes of the 505\textsuperscript{th} Meeting of the National Security Council, October 20, 1962, \textit{FRUS vol. XI}, 136.

\textsuperscript{300} Memorandum to Governor Stevenson, October 24, 1962, POF: Countries Series: Cuba, Security, 1962, box 115, JFKL.
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that he had bested him. He haggled over UN inspections of the missile sites and departing weapons, and whether the light bombers constituted offensive weapons, to force Khrushchev into additional humiliating concessions. The President privately noted with satisfaction that he had “cut [Khrushchev’s] balls off.”

Cultural imperatives also played a role in how American policymakers viewed Cuba during the crisis. In its justification for the Bay of Pigs landing, the Kennedy administration emphasized the qualities of valor and heroism in the ideology of moral masculinity. Part of this effort required demonizing Fidel Castro as a threat to the Cuban people, enabling the Kennedy administration to paint itself as a heroic rescuer. This emphasis on Castro’s deviance continued after the Bay of Pigs, and only intensified during the missile crisis.

In May 1961, a State Department White Paper on Cuba emphasized how Castro “betrayed” his revolution. Those who fought for freedom and democracy with him were now exiled or jailed as he consolidated dictatorial power. The White Paper used a metaphor of maternal pathology to note, “Never in history has any revolution so rapidly devoured its children.” A USIA paper sent to Kennedy from Arthur Schlesinger relied on tropes of mental and physical disease to describe additional aspects of the Castro regime’s degeneracy. This paper reported on conditions in Castro’s prisons, where, it emphasized, many of his former allies landed. It highlighted the dirt and disease rampant in the prisons, full of “brutality, filth, threats . . . overcrowded, unsanitary conditions . . .

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301 Quoted in Beschloss, The Crisis Years, 549.

women suffering miscarriages in crowded prison cells . . . prisoners were screaming for food, and fighting their way through a litter of filth and excrement.” A physician who was an alleged eyewitness to these horrors reported that the conditions were not only “intolerable hygienically with the probability of an epidemic, but many persons were showing signs of a mental crack-up.”

The Kennedy administration found Castro’s supporters to be as pathological as their leader. His student and intellectual followers were not “susceptible to logical and reasoned appeal. . . . Castro’s Messianic appeal to this group elicits an emotional response.”

The Kennedy administration viewed the Castro regime through the lens of degeneracy, and used the language of pathology to suggest solutions to the Castro problem, before and during the missile crisis. The President’s public statements, for example, stressed how Castro needed to be “isolated” from the rest of the western hemisphere and described his regime as “feeble.” George Ball told a Congressional committee that the Kennedy administration’s policy was geared toward “nullifying

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303 “Justice and the Mistreatment of Political Prisoners in Castro’s Cuba,” ca. May 1961, POF: Staff Memoranda, Schlesinger, Arthur, 5/61-6/61, box 65, JFKL. The point is not to question whether conditions in Castro’s prisons were indeed deplorable, but rather to note that a discourse of degeneracy was most often used to describe aspects of Castro’s regime, particularly in documents that found their way to the President’s desk.

304 Memorandum from Donald Wilson, USIA, to Edward Lansdale, July 20, 1962, NSF: Meetings and Memoranda: Special Group (Augmented), General, 7/62, box 319, JFKL.

Cuba’s usefulness as a source of infection for international Communism.” Economic measures taken by the United States and its allies made Cuba “a pariah among the member nations of the American system.”

While it viewed Castro’s supporters as deviant, the Kennedy administration expressed sympathy for the Cuban masses, who allegedly opposed the dictator. In pathologizing Castro and his regime, American policymakers drew on the theme of victimization that had served them so well during the Bay of Pigs. As with the Bay of Pigs, this may have served the dual purpose of reassuring themselves about the dangerous course they embarked on, and of convincing domestic critics and wary allies that their policies were justified and appropriate.

The Kennedy administration emphasized how Castro had allowed Soviet domination to co-opt the revolution and betrayed the Cuban people. One official suggested sending a message to the Cuban people to point out that their government had brought them “to a point of disaster, and a point of risk.” Kennedy instructed Voice of America and other USIA programs to emphasize this theme in broadcasts to Cuba. Informational programs were to underscore the “Soviet Union’s long history of lies, broken promises, deceptions and aggression,” to bring home their unsuitability as a partner. Castro was complicit in this betrayal, as the “sordid history” of his “sell-out of

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306 Statement by George W. Ball before the Select Committee on Export Control of the House of Representatives, October 3, 1962, NSF: Countries Series: Cuba, General, 10/1/62-10/14/62, box 36, JFKL.

307 John McCloy, Friday, October 26, 10 a.m., The Kennedy Tapes, eds. May and Zelikow, 453.
the revolution to Communism” would reveal. In his public statement, Kennedy directly addressed the “captive people of Cuba” as a friend who “watched with deep sorrow how your nationalist revolution was betrayed.”

This theme of victimization extended to Castro himself during the missile crisis. Some policymakers suggested that the Kennedy administration send “word to Castro that USSR [is] selling him out.” Rusk suggested sending Castro a message to emphasize that “Cuba is being victimized” and that the Soviets have put his regime in jeopardy by placing him in a position vulnerable to American attack. This message would also inform Castro, falsely, that the Soviets had begun negotiating to trade the Cuban missiles for concessions in Berlin, and are “threatening to bargain [Cuba] away.” The Soviets had “deserted” the Cubans and would betray them. “Cuba was merely being exploited” for Soviet gain. Eventually, such a message was passed to Castro, and it stressed that Cuba had become a “pawn” in the Soviets’ “desperately risky struggle for world domination” and suggested he “divorce” himself from “Soviet control.”

The CIA described

308 Memorandum from Thomas C. Sorensen, October 22, 1962, Theodore Sorensen Papers: Classified Subject Files: Cuba, General and Historical Information, box 48, JFKL.


310 Handwritten notes, TCS notes at 11:45 a.m. meeting on Cuban missile discovery, October 16, 1962, Theodore Sorensen Papers: Classified Subject Files: Cuba, General, 1962, box 48, JFKL.

311 The message was passed to Castro through the Brazilian ambassador in Havana. Off-the-Record Meeting on Cuba, October 16, 1962, 11:50 a.m., JFKL transcript, p. 9; Off-the-Record Meeting on Cuba, October 16, 1962, 6:30 p.m., JFKL transcript, p. 5-6; Dean Rusk, Friday, October 26, 10 a.m., The Kennedy Tapes, eds. May and Zelikow, 459; Telegram from the Department of State to the Embassy in Brazil, October 26, 1962, and Telegram from Embassy in Brazil to the Department of State, October 28, 1962, FRUS vol. XI, 228-229, 278; “Approach to Castro,” undated memorandum of unknown origin, “Executive Committee Meetings, Meetings 1-5, 10/23/62-10/25/62” folder, NSF, Meetings and Memoranda Series, box 315, JFKL; Draft Telegram to Ambassador in Rio de Janeiro from Secretary of State, October 26, 1962, NSF, Meetings and Memoranda: Executive Committee Meetings, Meetings 6-10, 10/26/62-10/28/62, box 316, JFKL.
Castro’s televised address on October 23 as “mild,” “lacklustre,” “nervous and hesitant,” traits which they attributed to both fear and Soviet domination. This imagery is consistent with the interpretation of the Soviets as deviant and dangerous. It also has the advantage of portraying American policy as right and just, an honorable effort that was not motivated by crass self-interest but a desire to rescue and protect a helpless victim.

Identifying the Soviet missile deployment to Cuba as a threat, American policymakers emphasized the notion of an alien power, the Soviet Union, intruding on the relative safety of the western hemisphere. This helped to identify Castro, the Soviet Union, and the missile deployment as pathological. It also spoke to the Kennedy administration’s concerns about their own deviance. If the Soviet presence was alien, then U.S. policies in Latin America, before and during the missile crisis, were natural and justifiable.

In September 1961, Kennedy told Argentinian President Arturo Frondizi that “it was important to take action to discredit the Cuban revolution, identifying it as foreign, alien, and anti-Christian . . . He said that it was necessary to show that Castro and company were subversives in the hemisphere.” An administration report warned that “a foreign force, a foreign ideology, and a foreign apparatus of conspiracy” were “intruding on this Hemisphere.” Castro’s alliance with the Soviet Union, this report argued, posed “special dangers” to the United States and its Latin American allies.


313 Memcon, JFK and Frondizi at the UN General Assembly, September 26, 1961, Lot Files: Executive Secretariat: Presidential Memorandums of Conversation, 1956-1964, Presidential Memcons August-December 1961, box 2, RG 59, NA.
Castro’s “alien ideology” was having a “corrosive effect upon the inter-American system” and threatened to “render impotent and to discredit the entire regional system of the Hemisphere.”

Family imagery sometimes expressed these perceptions of a hemispheric danger. American policymakers have historically held a vision of the western hemisphere as a nuclear family, with the dominant, masculine, white, and wealthy United States acting as a patriarch over the weak, darker, feminine, and poor nations of Latin America. The Kennedy administration held this perception as well, arguing that by betraying his people for the sake of an “alien ideology” and inviting foreign subversion into his country, Castro threatened the family of the western hemisphere. Kennedy urged Venezuelan President Romulo Betancourt to sponsor an OAS resolution urging Castro “to return to the inter-American family of nations.” The President thought it was unlikely that Castro would do so, but predicted that “action against his regime would be easier once he had refused to break his ties with the Sino-Soviet bloc.” Bundy noted that Castro’s close links to Moscow moved Cuba “further than ever from the family of freedom and hope.” During the missile crisis, the Kennedy administration objected to the presence of “an extra-continental, anti-democratic and expansionist power [in] the bosom of the

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314 “A Doctrine to Preserve the Independence of the Latin American Revolution,” undated and author unknown, Theodore Sorensen Papers: Classified Subject Files: Cuba, General, 8/17/61-8/29/61 and undated, box 48, JFKL.


American family.”  

In public statements, the President also stressed that Cuba’s “sister republics” in the Organization of American States had unanimously approved the naval quarantine. Castro’s deviance lay in challenging the patriarchal authority of the United States, while the Soviet Union threatened the very existence of the family, which the Kennedy administration had to protect.  

Discourses of danger and pathology influenced the way the Kennedy administration perceived its relationship to its allies during the missile crisis. In his dealings with allies, Kennedy felt he had to tread a fine line between resolution and hysteria. He wanted to demonstrate that his administration possessed the necessary qualities to lead the Western world to victory in this crisis. At the same time, he feared that if his policies went too far, his allies would accuse him of harboring a dangerous obsession that would provoke a nuclear war.

During an Ex Comm meeting on October 18, Rusk informed his colleagues that he believed Cuba posed a military threat to the United States, and felt justified in countering that threat with military action. “Failure on our part to act would make our situation unmanageable elsewhere in the world,” Rusk argued. “This would be an


319 Message to the President of the Inter-Parliamentary Council, November 1, 1962, PPP 1962, 820.

320 While it might seem “natural” for “adolescents” to challenge fatherly authority, it is significant to note that during the 1950s, public discourse in the United States was preoccupied with the phenomenon of juvenile delinquency, perceived to be a threat to American society. See John Patrick Diggins, The Proud Decades: America in War and in Peace, 1941-1960 (New York, 1988), 198-201 and James T. Patterson, Grand Expectations: The United States, 1945-1974 (New York and Oxford, 1996), 80-81. Traditional family and gender roles were integral to the values of moral masculinity.
indication of weakness which would have serious effect on our Allies.”

Rusk referred to Western Europe, but others in the administration were concerned about allies closer to home. Dillon told Ex Comm that “if the missiles are not removed or eliminated . . . the United States will lose all of its friends in Latin America, who will become convinced that our fear is such that we cannot act.”

At the same time, other members of the Kennedy administration feared that its allies would view the United States as pathological if it pushed the Cuban crisis into a war. Just after the Bay of Pigs, for example, Walt Rostow warned Sorensen that among America’s allies, “the view is that we are now obsessed with Castro and the paramilitary problem in Southeast Asia, to the exclusion of the great issues of the Free World.”

During one Ex Comm meeting, Robert Kennedy “raised the question of the attitude of Turkey, Italy, Western European countries, all of which have been ‘under the gun’ for years, and would take the position that now that the U.S. has a few missiles in their backyard, they become hysterical.”

The President was well aware of the dilemma he faced. He told advisors that a military strike “would be opposed by the alliance – on the other hand, lack of action will create disunity, lack of confidence and disintegration of our several alliances and friendly

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321 Memorandum for the File, John McCone, October 19, 1962, FRUS vol. XI, 106-109. Rusk changed his mind again a few days later, urging a naval quarantine and arguing that an air strike “had no support in the law or morality, and, therefore, must be ruled out.” Minutes of the 505th Meeting of the National Security Council, October 20, 1962, FRUS vol. XI, 133.

322 Minutes of the 505th Meeting of the National Security Council, October 20, 1962, FRUS vol. XI, 132.

323 Memorandum from W.W. Rostow to Theodore Sorensen, May 3, 1961, NSF: Countries Series: Cuba, General, 5/61, box 35a, JFKL.

324 Memorandum for the File, John McCone, October 17, 1962, FRUS vol. XI, 95-100.
relations with countries who have confidence in us.”

During an Ex Comm meeting on October 18, JFK acknowledged that other members of NATO “think we’re slightly demented” on the subject of Cuba. He noted that “whatever action we take against Cuba . . . a lot of people would regard this as a mad act by the United States, which is due to a loss of nerve because they will argue that taken at its worst, the presence of these missiles really doesn’t change the balance” of strategic nuclear power. Kennedy underscored this point the next day, expressing concern that the Soviets might use a U.S. air strike against Cuba as a pretense for taking Berlin. If that happened, his administration “would be regarded as the trigger-happy Americans who lost Berlin. We would have no support among our allies. . . . And [people would believe] that we let Berlin go because we didn’t have the guts to endure a situation in Cuba.” These concerns helped propel Kennedy away from a military solution to the Cuban crisis. Although he did not completely rule out the possibility of invading Cuba, he opted to first institute a naval quarantine of Cuba, a solution that ultimately resolved the crisis.

A discourse of danger, articulating a threat to the Kennedy administration’s values and power, influenced the course of external policy during the missile crisis. Kennedy’s responses to Adlai Stevenson demonstrate the effects of moral masculinity on the internal dynamics of the Kennedy administration. Kennedy had never liked Stevenson, and many of his objections centered on the fact that Stevenson did not adhere to the qualities

326 JFK, Tuesday, October 18, 11 a.m., The Kennedy Tapes, eds. May and Zelikow, 134.
327 JFK, Friday, October 19, 9:45 a.m., The Kennedy Tapes, eds. May and Zelikow, 175.
inherent in moral masculinity. He had a reputation as an intellectual, seemed indecisive when faced with key decisions, and enjoyed the full support of the liberal wing of the Democratic party, a difficult constituency for Kennedy to please. The Kennedys remained bitter about Stevenson’s refusal to back JFK before the 1960 Democratic Convention and his last-ditch effort there to secure the nomination. Kennedy considered Stevenson to be an effeminate loser and was one of the few officials in Washington who took seriously J. Edgar Hoover’s charge that Stevenson belonged to an elite gay group in New York and went by the code name “Adelaide.”  

From Kennedy’s point of view, Stevenson deviated from the norms of moral masculinity in every way. He was weak, irresolute, cowardly, soft, and engaged in deviant sexual behavior. Kennedy’s contempt for Stevenson caused him to disregard the UN Ambassador’s proposals, limiting the terms of debate during the missile crisis.

Like his colleagues, Stevenson objected to the presence of the missiles in Cuba, but he advocated a peaceful solution mediated through the UN rather than military force. After examining the situation from the Soviet and Cuban point of view, he also suggested granting concessions to Khrushchev to persuade him to resolve the crisis. When he offered these proposals during an Ex Comm meeting on October 20, his colleagues rebuked him.

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328 White, *The Cuban Missile Crisis*, 178-82.

329 For a written outline of Stevenson’s proposals, see “Why the Political Program Should be in the Speech,” undated, marked “from Adlai Stevenson,” Theodore Sorensen Papers: Classified Subject Files: Cuba, Standing Committee 9/62-10/62 and undated, box 49, JFKL.
Stevenson’s error, according to historian Lawrence Freedman, was not in advocating a trade between the Jupiters and the Cuban missiles, but in suggesting the U.S. also offer to evacuate the naval base at Guantánamo Bay. Kennedy “sharply rejected” the idea of giving up Guantánamo, arguing that “such action would convey to the world that we had been frightened into abandoning our position.” The UN Ambassador reiterated his proposals the following day, adding the suggestion of convening a summit meeting with Khrushchev, but JFK believed this would indicate to Moscow that “we were in a state of panic.” The U.S. naval base in Cuba was just too symbolically important for Kennedy to consider abandoning it.

Stevenson never suggested the Guantánamo or Jupiter trade independent of a blockade. He simply advocated combining the quarantine with diplomatic alternatives, including negotiations, and the solution that he advocated was similar to the agreement Kennedy and Khrushchev ultimately reached. As one recent scholar has noted, had Kennedy modified and implemented Stevenson’s proposals when he made them, on October 20, “it may have been possible to resolve the crisis several days before 28 October.”

After the immediate crisis was resolved, JFK punished Stevenson. When talks on the missile crisis shifted to the United Nations, Robert Kennedy reminded his brother that Stevenson seemed “upset” and “disturbed” during the preceding days, and that he was not

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330 Freedman, *Kennedy’s Wars*, 460n.

331 Minutes of the 505th Meeting of the National Security Council, October 20, 1962, *FRUS vol. XI*, 134. Unfortunately, this particular Ex Comm meeting was not recorded.


333 White, *The Cuban Missile Crisis*, 181-84.
“strong enough or tough enough” to represent the Kennedy administration during such a dangerous time. John McCloy, who had a reputation as a “tough” negotiator, was sent to New York to stiffen his resolve, despite Stevenson’s impressive performance in his confrontation with Soviet UN Ambassador Valerian Zorin on October 25. Later, a post-crisis article in the Saturday Evening Post quoted an anonymous but high-level official who stated that “Adlai wanted another Munich.” Charles Bartlett, a close personal friend of Kennedy’s, authored the piece and allowed the President to vet it. Kennedy, who equated “Munich” with weakness, irresolution, and irresponsibility, did not object to, or change, the portrayal of Stevenson. He also used the article to defuse rumors about a Turkish missile trade, attributing those rumors to Stevenson and his camp. Michael Forrestal, Bundy’s assistant, told Bartlett that “it was all Adlai’s fault,” that Stevenson had angered JFK when he suggested a trade for the Jupiters, and that the President prevented Khrushchev from getting the deal.

The latest historical synthesis on the Cuban missile crisis assigns JFK responsibility for provoking the crisis. His antagonistic policies toward Castro and his mixed signals to Moscow precipitated Khrushchev’s decision to send offensive nuclear weapons to Cuba. This argument also holds, however, that Kennedy deserves significant credit for acting with caution and restraint during the two weeks of deliberations in

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October 1962. His first instinct was to order an air strike, but he decided on the blockade and offered compromises to resolve the crisis. Evidence suggests that he would have offered even more concessions to prevent nuclear war.\textsuperscript{336}

Incorporating a cultural analysis can add to this recent revision of Kennedy’s conduct. Viewing the Cuban missile crisis through the lens of moral masculinity demonstrates that policymakers make decisions based on factors other than strategy, security, or economics. Believing the Soviet deployment to be an example of dangerous deviance, the Kennedy administration defined it as a crisis. The discourse of deviance also explains Kennedy’s long-term hostility to Fidel Castro. Interpreting Castro’s regime as a threat to the “family” of the Western Hemisphere, Kennedy refused opportunities for rapprochement with Havana and sought to overthrow him using covert means. These antagonistic policies encouraged Khrushchev to use Cuba as a nuclear base. At the same time, a fear of deviance explains Kennedy’s reluctance to risk nuclear war over weapons in Cuba, pushing him toward a political, rather than military solution to the crisis. Finally, the discourse of moral masculinity limited the terms of debate in Ex Comm because Kennedy disdained his UN Ambassador, Adlai Stevenson, and disregarded Stevenson’s proposals.

\textsuperscript{336} White, \textit{The Cuban Missile Crisis}.
CHAPTER 6

MATURITY AND MODERNITY: CRISIS IN THE CONGO

The ideology of moral masculinity, particular to the Kennedy administration but resonant throughout broader American society, influenced all aspects of foreign policy in the early 1960s. It strained U.S.-Soviet relations, but its reach was not limited to the western sphere. The crisis in the Congo demonstrates the effects of moral masculinity on Kennedy’s policies toward the newly decolonized regions of Africa.

During the Berlin crisis, a commitment to patriarchal responsibility shaped U.S. policy, as the weight of the NATO alliance and the future of central Europe fell on Kennedy’s shoulders. The challenge of Fidel Castro and Americans’ historical stereotypes of Latin Americans gave heroism an important role in the Kennedy administration’s policies toward Cuba. In the Congo crisis, the influence of modernization ideology and the recasting of older forms of imperialism and racial domination combined to produce a discourse of maturity and modernity. This discourse shaped the Kennedy administration’s perceptions of Congolese abilities, its choice of leader for the Congo, its decision to work with the United Nations to achieve its goals in central Africa and tensions in that partnership, and relations between the United States and its European allies.
When Kennedy assumed office, civil strife battered the Democratic Republic of Congo, formerly the Belgian Congo. In response to a burgeoning nationalist movement and urban rioting, the Belgian government had abruptly granted independence to its colony in the Congo on June 30, 1960. Several days later, the Congolese army rebelled when soldiers discovered that white Belgian officers would remain in command, and the revolt quickly spread throughout the country. Belgian paratroopers and naval forces crushed the mutiny, setting off a civil war and killing hundreds of Congolese. The United Nations Security Council called on Belgium to remove its troops and dispatched a peacekeeping force to the Congo, the United Nations Operation in the Congo (UNOC). The UNOC was assigned to oversee the withdrawal of Belgian forces, maintain the Congo’s territorial integrity and political sovereignty, and prevent civil war.

Congolese politics were highly factionalized and organized largely around regional and ethnic divisions, complicated by the fact that the Belgians had not permitted the formation of political parties until 1959. Premier Patrice Lumumba was the only Congolese leader with widespread popular support. His party, the Mouvement National Congolais-Lumumba (MNC-L), had ties to Ghana’s Kwame Nkrumah and Guinea’s Ahmed Sékou Touré, advocates of “left nationalism.” Lumumba called for a neutralist

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337 During the colonial period, there were two Congos. France established control of the territory east of the Congo River in the 1880s. This colony, later to become part of French Equatorial Africa, was known during the Kennedy administration as Congo-Brazzaville, after its capital. The Belgian Congo, formerly the Congo Free State, was ruled first by Belgian King Leopold personally, and later by the Belgian government. David N. Gibbs, *The Political Economy of Third World Intervention: Mines, Money, and U.S. Policy in the Congo Crisis* (Chicago, 1991), 38-40; Piero Gleijeses, *Conflicting Missions: Havana, Washington, and Africa, 1959-1976* (Chapel Hill, 2002), 5n.

foreign policy. Sources of MNC-L support included rural peasants, young urban
militants, and other disaffected groups. Lumumba and President Joseph Kasavubu led
the coalition Central Government, headquartered in Léopoldville.

Belgium had hoped for a peaceful transition to independence whereby it would retain *de facto* political and economic control of the new nation. When violence broke out, Belgian leaders narrowed their focus to the most valuable province of the Congo, Katanga, hoping to isolate it from the rest of the country. Katanga, described by one historian as “the bastard child of Leopold and Rhodes,” was a strategically located province guarding access to large amounts of uranium, copper, diamonds, and cobalt. It flourished economically under the guardianship of the Union Minière du Haut Katanga, a privately held Belgian corporation that poured millions of development dollars into the area, resulting in far greater social status, standard of living, and education level than the rest of the Belgian Congo. Without Katanga, the Congolese economy could not possibly survive. The province accounted for one-third of domestic production and income, between 40 and 50% of foreign trade, and 40% of public revenue. Its mineral wealth included copper, uranium, industrial diamonds, and cobalt, and almost 40,000 Europeans lived there. Union Minière and the Belgian government provided financial and military

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340 The Central Government was established by the *Loi Fondamentale*, a constitution that established a bicameral legislature and provided for a prime minister and a ceremonial president. It was passed by the Belgian Chamber and Senate and signed by King Baudoin just prior to independence. See Gibbs, *The Political Economy of Third World Intervention*, 75.


support to Moïse Tshombe, a member of the elite Katangese class and leader of a secessionist movement. As central authority in the Congo broke down, Tshombe seized the opportunity to declare Katanga’s independence in July 1960.\footnote{Weissman, American Foreign Policy in the Congo, 66-72.}

The Eisenhower administration viewed developments in the Congo with alarm. It considered Lumumba an anti-western radical Communist and feared that the instability and chaos in the Congo would invite Soviet influence.\footnote{Weissman, American Foreign Policy in the Congo, 52-53.} Desperate to unify the country in the wake of the Katanga secession and other challenges, Lumumba requested military and technical assistance from the United States, but Eisenhower rebuffed him. Lumumba then turned to the Soviet Union, intensifying American suspicions. With U.S., UN, and Belgian support, President Kasavubu dismissed Lumumba in September 1960. Lumumba convinced Parliament to reinstate him, but Kasavubu’s forces kept him under virtual house arrest until he was captured during an escape attempt two months later. In response, Lumumba’s colleague, Antoine Gizenga, established a rival regime in Stanleyville.\footnote{I am using the European names of cities and provinces, as they appear in the documents. When Mobutu renamed the country Zaire in 1971, city and province names changed as well. Léopoldville is present-day Kinshasha, Elisabethville is Lubumbashi, Stanleyville is Kisangani, and Katanga was renamed Shaba, although it returned to Katanga in 1997, the same year Mobutu was deposed and Laurent Kabila reinstated the name Democratic Republic of the Congo. I also use the term “Congolese” to describe the inhabitants of the Congo, who actually come from a variety of African ethnolinguistic groups, including the Baluba, Kuba, and Lunda.}

A few days before Kennedy’s inauguration, Lumumba was murdered while in Tshombe’s custody and possibly with CIA complicity, although his death was not revealed to the White House or the public until February 13. During the first few months of 1961, the Kennedy administration focused on reintegrating the Stanleyville
and Léopoldville governments. American policymakers feared that Gizenga would invite
Soviet influence and further destabilize the region. Later, Kennedy and his advisors
worked to end the Katanga secession.

More than most Cold War-era presidents, Kennedy paid attention to Africa and
was sympathetic to African nationalist aspirations. As a U.S. senator, he had made a
name for himself in foreign policy circles with a 1957 speech criticizing French
imperialism in Algeria. His support for anticolonialism stemmed from both
international and domestic political concerns. Kennedy believed that anticolonialism was
the wave of the future and that the United States needed to be on the “right” side of it or
risk losing influence on the African continent to the Soviets. In the Algeria speech, for
example, he pointed out that by its inaction, the United States was “abandoning African
nationalism to the anti-Western agitators and Soviet agents.” At the same time,
advocating African nationalism appealed to African American voters without taking
domestic steps that would alienate southern white Democrats. Despite this promise,
the Kennedy administration was a period of lost opportunity for African nationalism.

Kennedy was informed about African issues, took African concerns seriously, and

346 See Theodore C. Sorensen, ed., “Let the Word Go Forth: The Speeches, Statements, and Writings of

347 Roger Hilsman, To Move a Nation: The Politics of Foreign Policy in the Administration of John F.

348 Mahoney, JFK: Ordeal in Africa, 25-26, 30-33; Rotter, Comrades at Odds, 162-163; Alexander
DeConde, Ethnicity, Race, and American Foreign Policy (Boston, 1992), 145.
genuinely sympathized with nationalists, but ultimately failed to enact policies in support of African independence. Most scholars suggest that anticommunism and the desire to channel revolution ultimately won out over Kennedy’s support for anticolonialism.\(^{349}\)

A cultural analysis can add another dimension to the Kennedy administration’s policies during the Congo crisis. Viewed through the lens of moral masculinity, it becomes clear that a discourse of maturity and modernity also influenced JFK’s policies in the Congo. Maturity was a key characteristic of moral masculinity. Policymakers in the Kennedy administration did not define maturity strictly in terms of chronological age. Maturity connoted an advanced stage of intellectual, cultural, political, and economic development, and it applied to countries as well as individuals. The Kennedy administration cast the United States as the power best qualified to defeat the Soviet menace and lead newly created nations into the modern era. American success hinged on the leadership abilities of a group of men who were rational, intelligent, and mature, and who were therefore capable of making the proper decisions and enacting them effectively. Policymakers in the Kennedy administration believed that they possessed these qualities, and this worldview influenced the decisions they made in the Congo crisis.

As Frank Ninkovich has noted, twentieth-century American statesmen have defined “modernity” not just in terms of quantifiable statistics like industrial development, infrastructure, and literacy rates, but as a shared set of beliefs and values,

including law and order, interdependence, internationalism, and peaceful cooperation.\textsuperscript{350} American policymakers assumed that the West, and particularly the United States, had achieved modernity, while the cultures of peoples of color languished in backwardness. The combination of maturity and modernity stemmed from an imperial discourse that justified the colonial conquest by identifying colonized peoples as primitive, atavistic, and regressive.\textsuperscript{351} This trope updated these perceptions for the Cold War era. In the wake of Nazi genocide, it became less acceptable for American foreign policymakers to engage in racist rhetoric.\textsuperscript{352} During the Cold War, U.S. officials were keenly aware that the newly decolonized areas in Asia and Africa would be a key battleground, and realized that Soviet propaganda often highlighted the inequality and brutality of the Jim Crow system. The discourse of maturity maintained stereotypes of Africans as deviant, primitive, ineffectual, and degenerate, but ascribed these qualities to inferior cultural values instead of biological determinism. Ideologies of white supremacy did not completely disappear, however. American policymakers revised and updated old racist assumptions for the Cold War era by drawing on tropes of maturity and development.

The discourse of maturity predisposed the Kennedy administration to view African leaders and institutions as deficient, and they limited their options by imposing a Western model of liberal democratic capitalism and working against social revolution.


\textsuperscript{352} Gerald Horne, “Race from Power: U.S. Foreign Policy and the General Crisis of ‘White Supremacy,’” \textit{Diplomatic History} 23 (Summer 1999): 438, 441-442, 456-457. Horne notes the links between racial thinking and anticomunism in the Third World context. Anticolonial movements opposed, after all, a system of oppression based on race. Anticolonialists were often tarred with a “Red” brush.
The development of the discourse of maturity is closely linked to the rise of modernization theory in the late 1950s. Historian Michael Latham has documented the influence of modernization ideology on Kennedy’s development policies in the Alliance for Progress, the Peace Corps, and South Vietnam’s strategic hamlet program. This ideology, according to Latham, reflected a worldview that helped to formulate and justify policies and actions but also provided a “cognitive framework” that reflected a shared sense of national identity and purpose. This cognitive framework drew on older assumptions about American exceptionalism “by describing modernization as a benevolent, universally valid, scientifically and historically documented process.”

Social scientists like Walt W. Rostow and Lucien Pye believed that they held the models that would accelerate the transition from “traditional” to “modern” societies. The United States had reached the peak of development as a liberal, democratic, capitalist nation and was therefore in the best position to help “backward” nations reach the same status. Believing their model to be universally applicable, American policymakers viewed nationalist resistance as “xenophobic and irrational.” They never questioned the accuracy of the American models, attributing setbacks to inferior, immature, primitive indigenous conditions. Although American officials may have been well-intentioned, their inability to view cultures in the underdeveloped world on an equal plane with the United States invariably resulted in policy failures.

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353 Latham’s discussion of the Peace Corps includes an examination of volunteer work in Africa, but he does not focus on any specifically African case studies. Latham, Modernization as Ideology, 6-8, 12-16. See also Nick Cullather, “Development? It’s History,” Diplomatic History 24 (Fall 2000): 645-647.

354 Latham, Modernization as Ideology, 66.

Too short-sighted and perhaps prejudiced to recognize this, however, American policymakers remained devoted to the modernization model. Because they were convinced of the inherent superiority and applicability of their way of life, U.S. officials perceived their modernization policies as benevolent and just. In the Congo, rather than enact its policy goals unilaterally or by military force, the Kennedy administration worked through the United Nations, in keeping with its self-perception as a benevolent force.

Advocates of modernization within the Kennedy administration clearly perceived Africa and its problems in terms of the transition from a traditional to a modern society. Rostow understood that American strategies for accelerating this process might cause tensions with Western allies, but he also believed that the United States had to present newly decolonized nations with an alternative to Soviet communism. He advised JFK that working through the United Nations might “permit us to escape the dilemma of taking sides between our European friends and the new African states.” Rostow also instructed his staff to consider ways to “provide incentives to the new African leadership to involve itself constructively on the evolution of the free world community rather than either withdrawing into isolation or leaning too heavily on Communist bloc support.”  

Just as citizens of nation-states making the transition to a modern society had to feel as though they had a stake in their community, so too did the leaders of those nation-states have to feel as though they had a stake in the global, free world community. The

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356 Policy Toward Africa, ca. November 1960, POF: Staff Memoranda Series: Rostow, Walt W., 1960, box 64a, JFKL.
Kennedy administration hoped that with the assistance of the United Nations, the United States would be able to develop, stabilize, and protect the Congo from Soviet encroachment while maintaining friendly relations with allies and neutrals.

In working with the United Nations, American policymakers discovered a double-edged sword. They chose to work through the international body in part to curry favor with the Afro-Asian neutral nations, but once U.S. prestige was engaged in the UN Operation in the Congo (UNOC), the Kennedy administration could not abandon it. To demonstrate the viability of a non-Communist, multilateral alternative, the UNOC had to succeed. As Undersecretary of State George Ball noted, “the [Soviet] Bloc is already adroitly exploiting the contention that the UN is not effective in dealing with white colonial interests . . . it is using British, French and Belgian criticism of the UN Katangan venture as demonstrating the hypocritical nature of the Western position. With our support the UN can and must show that we mean what we say where colonial interests are involved.” If the UN operation failed, current and future former colonial nations would turn to the Soviet Union for assistance and protection.

The Kennedy administration used the UN to justify its Congo policy as benevolent and just rather than imperial and unilateral. In internal debates, discussions with allies, and meetings with Congolese leaders, Kennedy and his advisors paid lip service to the principle of non-interference in internal African affairs and affirmed the right of self-determination and sovereignty for newly decolonized nation-states. Undersecretary of State George Ball insightfully remarked that “what is wrong with the present constitution of the Congo is that it was written by white men and not negotiated.

357 Memorandum from George Ball to the President, September 23, 1961, NSF: Countries Series: Congo, General, 5/61-9/61, box 27, JFKL.
among the Congolese themselves to reflect their own conception of their interests.”

Rusk told JFK, “whether the Congo has a unitary form of government or some type of federation is, of course, a matter for the Congolese to decide.” But American economic, political, and cultural interests, goals, and priorities required Katangan reintegration. U.S. policy in the early 1960s worked publicly and behind the scenes to ensure a reunified Congo. The Kennedy administration achieved its goal, although ultimately the upheaval resulted in a decades-long military dictatorship and, in the late 1990s, renewed civil and regional warfare.

In the early days of his administration, Kennedy issued a directive calling for a reappraisal of Congo policy. Department of State officials divided into two broad camps of opinion. The first group focused on European problems and issues and gave advice based on the predicted reaction of NATO allies. The second group identified more with Africa and African nationalism, and pushed for strong action to protect the Congolese parliamentary government. The White House leaned toward the “Africa” group, at least initially. Kennedy’s advisors desired a stable, unified Congo, but differed on the appropriate means to achieve this goal.

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358 Memorandum from George Ball to the President, September 23, 1961, NSF: Countries Series: Congo, General, 5/61-9/61, box 27, JFKL.

359 Memorandum from Dean Rusk to the President, August 3, 1961, NSF: Countries Series: Congo, General, 5/61-9/61, box 27, JFKL.

360 Hilsman, To Move a Nation, 245-247.
Many American policymakers shared an image of Africans as foolish and irrational. During a staff meeting less than a week after Kennedy’s inauguration, State Department analysts from both camps expressed frustration about African support for Lumumba. They felt that this support was shortsighted and ill considered, and threatened to thwart U.S. goals for the Congo. Americans could make a realistic and intelligent assessment of the geostrategic threat, but Africans did not seem to understand that they could not prevent Soviet encroachment and control Communist factions within their governments. “African emotions” contributed to this “naïve and dangerous point of view.”

The Congolese did not escape this assessment of African immaturity. The Armée Nationale Congolaise (ANC), commanded by Joseph Desire Mobutu, was a source of particular concern to American policymakers. The Congo Task Force strongly urged the UN to retrain the armed forces because stability would not return to the country “until rampaging, irresponsible, ‘juvenile ANC delinquents’ are rounded up and brought under control.” Unless strict discipline was instilled, the ANC would continue to behave in an “unpredictable and erratic” manner.

The Kennedy reappraisal of Congo policy called for three related initiatives, all based on the assumption that the Congolese were incapable of governing. The first step would expand the UN mandate, bringing all military forces in the Congo under the UN umbrella and cutting off Belgian and Soviet military interference. Secondly, the United States would try to persuade Kasavubu to install a “middle-of-the-road” cabinet.

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government under the leadership of Joseph Iléo, the Senate president. Ideally the new government would be free of Lumumbist elements, but even if this best case scenario were achieved, American policymakers had little faith that the new cabinet would succeed. Their third recommendation called for the establishment of an administrative role for the United Nations in the Congo so that “the United Nations itself would exercise all functions of government and administration.” The limitations of the native Congolese necessitated this turn to neocolonialism. According to the State Department report, it was an “open question as to whether Kasavubu can exercise the kind of leadership necessary” to reunify the country. The “ineptness of the Kasavubu” government forced the United States to assist the Belgians more than it would have liked, harming the U.S. reputation in Africa. As Rusk told JFK, “regardless of the government formed in the Congo, it will not be able effectively to govern and administer.” A UN administration would “function for a number of years” until such time as the Congolese were able to “govern themselves.”

Unable to envision an effective, competent Congolese government, the Kennedy administration relied even more heavily on the United Nations. This strategy had the advantage of appearing less overtly imperialist. A veneer of multilateralism masked American assumptions about Congolese cultural deficiencies.

The Kennedy administration drew on the trope of maturity and Congolese incompetence to try to persuade reluctant allies to agree to the new plan. Addressing British objections, for example, Rusk noted that “we see little chance that below the

Cabinet level the Congolese themselves can administer the country.” The Secretary argued that UN technicians would serve a similar function in the Congo as British advisers to maharajas in India did. African and Asian heads of state were not sheltered from this line of reasoning, either. Rusk told Indian Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru that “the ineptness of the Congolese” prevented a smoothly functioning UN operation.

The Kennedy administration did not use the theme of African irrationality and primitiveness to advocate unilateral military intervention in the Congo. In fact, caution marked the course of policy during this crisis. Some policymakers drew on the discourse of maturity to bolster their arguments in favor of a cautious approach. Charles Yost, representative to the UN Security Council, recommended in February 1961 that the American government discourage Mobutu from invading Orientale province to remove Gizenga from power. Such rash action, Yost argued, would only turn Afro-Asian neutral opinion against the United States, and very probably give rise to pro-Soviet sentiment in the Congo and elsewhere in Africa. He intimated that the Soviets themselves understood this, and were probably aiming to “exploit the passions” aroused by Lumumba’s death. Yost concluded that “Africa is much more emotional and unsophisticated than Europe and Asia and the game must be played there in a different way.” Passionate and irrational, Africans were not developed or mature enough to control their emotions.

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364 Memorandum of Conversation, February 4, 1961, FRUS vol. XX, 50. The British were unmoved by this analogy, and in fact opposed the general thrust of U.S. Congo policy for the duration of the crisis. Primarily, the British feared setting dangerous precedents that would threaten the stability of Welensky’s government in Rhodesia and British access to natural resources there.

365 Memorandum of Conversation, March 30, 1961, NSF: Countries Series: Congo, General, 1/61-4/61, box 27, JFKL.

366 Memorandum from Charles Yost to Dean Rusk, February 17, 1961, FRUS vol. XX, 68-69; Analytical Chronology of the Congo Crisis, Supplement, NSF: Countries Series: Congo, box 27, JFKL.
African deficiencies threatened U.S. policy goals. Some in the Kennedy administration concluded that Africa was too unpredictable to risk U.S. prestige, credibility, and resources.

The Kennedy administration supported the UNOC because it encouraged policymakers’ belief that they were enacting just policy in a multilateral effort, but this partnership was fraught with tension. Despite the Kennedy administration’s relative support for the UN operation, it often expressed frustration with the slow pace of UN policy in New York and in the Congo. Many UN personnel serving in Elisabethville came from the Afro-Asian countries, and they were subject to American assumptions about reason and maturity. Rusk once noted the difficulties in dealing with such personnel, instructing a U.S. embassy official to “do what you can to substitute statesmanship on their part for present emotions.” The State Department also noted that the UNOC was “greatly handicapped by the absence of any training of the national contingents” serving the Congo mission.

The administration’s opposition to Rajeshwar Dayal, the Secretary General’s Special Representative in the Congo, presented a key area of conflict between the United States and the United Nations. An Indian national, Dayal was an intellectual known for his anticolonial views. The White House and State Department expended significant time and energy trying to persuade Secretary General Dag Hammarskjöld to replace

367 Telegram from Department of State to Embassy in the Congo, September 15, 1961, FRUS vol. XX, 220.

Dayal, in part because he failed to conform to the ideology of moral masculinity. In the Kennedy worldview, the UN representative’s physical and cultural shortcomings prevented him from effectively carrying out policy in the Congo.

As with other areas of the debate over the Congo, policymakers framed their objections to Dayal in terms of maturity. Andrew Rotter has recently demonstrated how American perceptions of Indian immaturity often gave rise to negative stereotypes and misperceptions. India was simultaneously immature and undeveloped and old and decrepit, a young nation that rested on ancient foundations. These seemingly antagonistic views were not irreconcilable. As Rotter points out, both children and old people are perceived as emotional, naïve, inefficient, and disorderly, qualities that deviate from the cold, tough, rational sobriety of moral masculinity.369 Viewing Dayal through this lens, American policymakers concluded that he was not competent to head the UN mission in the Congo. Rusk complained to British Foreign Secretary Lord Home that Dayal lacked “statesmanship.”370 A Congo Task Force report asserted that Dayal’s removal was a precondition for bringing about a halt to the civil war, not to mention ensuring the long-term effectiveness of UN operations. Dayal was not “constitutionally able and willing to

369 Rotter has found that American perceptions of Indians, and vice-versa, were not always negative, but deeply ambivalent and often cognizant of commonalities between the two cultures. For example, Indians perceived Americans as immature, greedy and materialistic, but also valued their prudence, enterprise, and modernity. See Comrades at Odds, 77-115.

370 Memorandum of Conversation, April 4, 1961, Lot Files: Conference Files: CF 1833: Macmillan Visit, 4/4-4/9/61, RG 59, NA.
understand [the] Congolese mentality and work with it.”371 This remark highlights the American perception that Dayal was not fully developed, physically and mentally, and also that the Congolese possessed a deviant, perhaps undeveloped, “mentality.”

In April 1961, Rusk instructed U.S. Ambassador to the UN Adlai Stevenson to seek out the Secretary General and inform him that Washington was “most disappointed” with his stalling and advised that “so much should not be sacrificed in the interests of one man.” Furthermore, the Secretary of State agreed that the “Congolese can be difficult [to] deal with, but [the] UN should be able [to] demonstrate more maturity and more tolerance.”372 This attempt to use the discourse of maturity against both sides initially failed to move Hammarskjöld or Nehru, Dayal’s primary champion.

Eventually, however, the Secretary General was persuaded that opposition to Dayal hindered the UN operation’s effectiveness. In May 1961, the Kennedy administration brokered a deal whereby Hammarskjöld would replace Dayal, and Kennedy would recall Ambassador to Léopoldville Clare Timberlake.373 Kennedy had wanted to replace Timberlake, an Eisenhower holdover, as part of a plan to streamline and professionalize American missions abroad. Furthermore, Timberlake did not fit in with the values of moral masculinity. He was a throwback to older and now less-acceptable expressions of racism. While proponents of modernization ascribed American superiority to cultural values that could be learned by other peoples, Timberlake viewed most Africans as hopelessly and inherently backward. Kennedy-era development


372 Telegram from Department of State to UN Mission, April 6, 1961, FRUS vol. XX, 122.

theorists believed they could accelerate the modernization process, but Timberlake argued that “the Congo is years away from more than a façade of democracy. I do not believe there is one single Congolese who has more than a theoretical idea of even the most elementary principles of democracy.” The ambassador described Congolese Minister of the Interior Christophe Gbenye as “a potentially dangerous vindictive stupid racist.” He advocated replacing Dayal with a white official because the Congolese “are more apt to accept white[s] in view [of] their experience showing [whites are] generally more qualified than themselves. They extrapolate this concept to include native people [in] other Afro-Asian areas where they know whites ruled and taught.” Kennedy replaced Timberlake with Edmund Gullion, a career foreign service officer who had advised him since his 1954 speech to the Senate on Indochina.

Throughout the summer of 1961, the UN tried to convince the major players in the Congo to re-convene Parliament and unify the country. The factions finally met at Louvanium University, with the exception of Tshombe, who was completely intransigent and threatened to seek aid and protection from the Soviet Union. The Louvanium Conference reunified the Stanleyville and Léopoldville governments under Kasavubu’s presidency and elected Cyrille Adoula the new prime minister, replacing Iléo. Gizenga

374 Analytical Chronology of the Congo Crisis, p. 48, NSF: Countries Series: Congo, Analytical Chronology, 3/9/61, box 27, JFKL.

375 Timberlake further noted, apparently without irony, that “I personally like and admire Indians and we have many close friends in India.” Telegram from Timberlake to Rusk, March 13, 1961, POF: Countries Series: Congo – Security, 1961, box 114, JFKL; Telegram from Embassy in the Congo to Department of State, March 12, 1961, FRUS vol. XX, 102.

376 Sorensen, Kennedy, 74; Schlesinger, A Thousand Days, 299-300, 513.
became a deputy prime minister. Adoula had been Minister of Interior in the Iléo
government and was the Kennedy administration’s clear choice as new leader of the
Congo. Kennedy backed Adoula in part because he believed that he adhered to many of
the characteristics of moral masculinity, including maturity. Policymakers hoped that
following the proper period of American tutelage, Adoula would be able to develop
leadership abilities and achieve his nation’s potential, bringing the Congo fully into the
modern era.

The Department of State expressed its preference for Adoula as early as April
1961. Unlike Iléo, “a weak Prime Minister . . . most unlikely to develop political
muscle,” Adoula exhibited a “stronger personality.” Rusk advised JFK that Adoula
was “the strongest and most attractive of the moderate Congolese leaders.” A
biographical sketch in the president’s files described the former trade union leader as
“one of the most intelligent of the Congolese leaders” who was also “practical” and
“able.” Philip Klutznick, member of the U.S. delegation to the UN, paid an official
visit to Adoula in the summer of 1961. His follow-up report to the White House
described Adoula as “the most impressive of all native Congolese we met . . . sincere . . .
thoughtful . . . mature.” If Kennedy was not already convinced that Adoula was the
best candidate to support, it is likely that this use of the rhetoric of moral masculinity

377 FRUS vol. XX, 130n.

378 Telegram from Embassy in the Congo to Department of State, April 28, 1961, FRUS vol. XX, 130.

379 Memorandum from Rusk to the President with enclosure, August 3, 1961, NSF: Countries Series:
Congo, General, 5/61-9/61, box 27, JFKL.

380 Report of Philip M. Klutznick on Visit to the Congo, August 6-11, 1961, NSF: Countries Series: Congo,
General, 5/61-9/61, box 27, JFKL.
helped to convince him. The White House also hoped that this discourse would drum up public support for Adoula. A biography distributed to the press described him as “an intelligent and well-balanced moderate” who would be a “forceful and articulate spokesman” for anti-Communist non-alignment.381 The Kennedy administration cast Adoula in terms of the prized characteristics of a New Frontiersman to justify its choice of prime minister. Policymakers argued that Adoula was mature, strong, rational, and effective.

Although the United States installed its candidate in power in Léopoldville through diplomatic maneuvering, the Kennedy administration considered taking more forceful action to prevent a Gizengist majority in the new Parliament. The UN and the CIA bribed delegates to vote for Adoula, while Washington planned for a Mobutu military takeover should Gizenga win the election.382 Some American policymakers feared that Washington would go too far and betray its benevolent, altruistic values. G. McMurtrie Godley, counselor at the Embassy in the Congo, advised against strong-arm tactics during the Louvanium meeting. Godley, certainly aware of CIA machinations at the conference, advocated caution and patience lest U.S. policy backfire. He reminded his superiors in Washington that Congolese leaders were in the midst of the transition from traditional society and thus could not always be relied upon to appreciate


international dangers. Godley tied together the anti-Communist and modernization strands of U.S. Congo policy and gently cautioned against taking an outwardly imperialist stance:

[R]ecently independent states certainly resent our telling them how to run their own internal affairs. They do not understand [the] danger of Soviet penetration and are puzzled when we tell them [the] Soviets will interfere in their internal affairs and yet at [the] same time tell their Chiefs [of] State when to call Parliament . . . and what their foreign policy should be. Although well disposed to US, pressure from US to take positions they are reluctant to assume irritates them immensely and their irrational reactions frequently are against their best interests.383

Godley reminded the Kennedy administration of its modernizing mission in the Congo, a tutelage that was necessary because Congolese leaders, institutions, and forms of governance were too undeveloped, naïve, and immature to progress without assistance.

After ending the Stanleyville secession and preventing Communist ascendancy to power in Léopoldville, the Kennedy administration worked to bolster the Adoula government and drum up public support for it among the Congolese. American policymakers continued to formulate Congo policy within the framework of maturity and modernization. They recognized that political and military support could only carry Adoula so far, and believed that bringing the Congo into the “modern” world would help it attain a stable, non-Communist future. They worked through the United Nations to minimize the impression that the United States was acting as a unilateral, imperial power. In November 1961 the State Department reported to Kennedy that “we are preparing a program to intensify UN activity to buttress Adoula’s government in the economic and

383 Telegram from Embassy in the Congo to Department of State, July 18, 1961, FRUS vol. XX, 175.
technical assistance fields. He has recently decided to work out, with UN help, an
economic stabilization and development plan for each of the provinces. We will
encourage and assist the project in order that his government will begin to appear to the
Congolese as one that will successfully tackle their economic problems.”

The Kennedy administration would continue to supply economic aid to the Congo. Initially,
the UN would administer aid funds, but ultimately Kennedy hoped to phase out a direct
UN role by creating effective Congolese institutions, although policymakers retained
doubts about Congolese abilities. As with the Alliance for Progress in Latin America,
policymakers believed that a period of American tutelage would ensure the creation of
stable governing machinery coordinated by trained, effective personnel in the Congo.

The Kennedy administration also recognized that Adoula’s success hinged on
reintegrating Katanga, and as the autumn of 1961 wore on, American policymakers grew
impatient with the lack of progress in the Katanga negotiations. They considered
Katanga crucial to the long-term future of the Congo. Public support for Adoula would
wane if progress were not made soon. But more importantly, from the Kennedy
administration’s point of view, the Katangan secession had to end for the Congo to make
the transition to a modern society and full maturity in the community of free world
nations. Economically, it was the most “developed” province, and politically, they hoped
Tshombe would provide a moderate counterweight to Gizengist and Lumumbist elements

384 Status Report on the Congo, November 2, 1961, NSF: Countries Series: Congo, General, 10/1/61-
11/2/61, box 27a, JFKL.

385 See Telegram from Department of State to Embassy in the Congo, September 29, 1961, FRUS vol. XX,
244-45. On the Alliance for Progress, see Latham, Modernization as Ideology, 100-107.
still active in the Léopoldville government.\textsuperscript{386} Ending the Katangan secession was an important U.S. policy goal, and the Kennedy administration hoped to achieve it peacefully, through negotiations that would incorporate Tshombe into the Léopoldville regime.

The notion of an independent Katanga, according to the Kennedy administration, was a vestige of “traditional” society that the Congolese had to discard. As the State Department argued, “the whole impact of Katanga separatism is in fact retrograde in Africa where the leaders of newly independent states . . . are attempting to move closer together and where fragmentation can only contribute to political weakness and inefficient use of economic resources. These are the conditions receptive to external subversion and loss of true independence.”\textsuperscript{387} The path to maturity, therefore, did not lay in separatism, particularly along “tribal” lines, but in a dynamic, economically viable, integrated nation-state. The reintegration of Katanga was “inevitable,” natural, part of the progressive journey to modernity.\textsuperscript{388}

The Kennedy administration hoped that Tshombe would be open to these reasoned arguments. They noted that he was “emotional rather than practical in approaching political problems.”\textsuperscript{389} Upon his first meeting with Tshombe, Gullion

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item See, for example, Telegram from UN Mission to Department of State, September 6, 1961, \textit{FRUS vol. XX}, 204; Telegram from Department of State to Embassy in the United Kingdom, October 27, 1961, ibid., 257.
\item Telegram from Department of State to Embassy in Belgium, January 17, 1962, \textit{FRUS vol. XX}, 365.
\item Telegram from Consulate General in Geneva to the Department of State, November 5, 1961, \textit{FRUS vol. XX}, 265.
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
thought that perhaps the Katangan leader was a “manic depressive” because he “first irrationally attacked” the Kennedy administration but then “shift[ed] unexpectedly to an extremely friendly attitude.” Some American policymakers suggested that Godefroid Munongo, the Katangan Minister of the Interior, was the real force behind separatism and exercised undue influence on Tshombe. State Department officials nudged Tshombe to approach Adoula “in a reasonable frame of mind and avoid accepting advice from persons who want to press him into extreme positions without regard to his best interests.” Munongo, they implied, was unreasonable and extreme, hardly the mature statesman Tshombe needed to advise him. He was too “emotional” and made “false accusations.” Gullion’s description of Munongo as a “man without a future” reveals the association national security officials made between the U.S. policy goal of a reintegrated Katanga and modernity.

The discourse of modernity and maturity influenced the Kennedy administration’s program for the future of the Congo. It also affected U.S. relations with its western allies. American policymakers believed that they possessed superior skills and values and that

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390 Telegram from Embassy in the Congo to Department of State, December 19, 1961, *FRUS vol. XX*, 330.

391 Telegram from Department of State to Consulate in Elisabethville, September 23, 1961, *FRUS vol. XX*, 238.

392 Telegram from Consulate in Elisabethville to the Department of State, February 9, 1962, *FRUS vol. XX*, 387.

393 Telegram from Consulate in Elisabethville to the Department of State, September 13, 1961, *FRUS vol. XX*, 212.
their models were the only choice for societies attempting to make the transition to modernity. Vestiges of imperial misrule lingered in central Africa, and Americans believed that Europeans were little more qualified than Africans to guide the Congo.

The Kennedy administration had to struggle with France, Britain, and Belgium over every major policy decision in the Congo. In the Kennedy administration’s worldview, these allies shared certain values and characteristics with the United States, but only the United States stood at the peak of modernization. In many ways, these former colonial empires had moved past the stage of maturity and into a decrepit old age, thwarting American goals and policies with their pathetic pleas to maintain control of their imperial possessions and regain some of their lost vitality. This intransigence frustrated the Kennedy administration, especially early in the administration. In April 1961, Paul-Henri Spaak became Belgian Foreign Minister, and Kennedy found in the Socialist and former NATO Secretary-General someone he could work with. The Kennedy administration was satisfied that Spaak had “recognized the importance of disengaging Belgium from shortsighted colonial nostalgia.”394 He seemed to be a modernist like the New Frontiersmen.

An outbreak of fighting between UN forces and Tshombe’s gendarmes in Katanga in September 1961, however, damaged the implicit understanding that was developing between Washington and Brussels. It had an even more chilling effect on American and Belgian representatives on the ground in Elisabethville, where the American consul noted that Europeans were “emotional” and “adopting threatening tones

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394 Memorandum from George Ball to the President, September 23, 1961, NSF: Countries: Congo, General, 5/61-9/61, box 27, JFKL.
against all who do not accept their viewpoint." The Kennedy administration was exasperated, both at the UN for launching an ill-advised military action for which they were unprepared, and at European reaction, which threatened the stability of the Western alliance. Once again, Europeans seemed unwilling to accept their weakened status and loss of empire, and reacted emotionally and irrationally to the detriment of U.S. policy goals. The Kennedy administration did not completely abandon hope of reaching accommodation with Belgium. As Undersecretary of State Chester Bowles noted, the State Department recognized that Spaak and the Belgian government “share our basic objectives” in the Congo, although they were “subject to political pressure and emotional reactions.” The Department also commended Spaak himself for “his restrained and statesmanlike position in [the] face [of] aroused Belgian parliamentary and public feelings.” According to the Kennedy administration, both Africans and Europeans were emotional and immature.

By December 1961, it was clear that events in Katanga were coming to a head. Hammarskjöld had died in a plane crash on September 17 while en route to Rhodesia to negotiate a cease-fire with Tshombe. Sporadic fighting continued throughout the autumn, resulting in high civilian casualties. The Kennedy administration despaired of achieving its goals in central Africa. A CIA intelligence estimate succinctly expressed

395 Telegram from Consulate in Elisabethville to the Department of State, September 14, 1961, FRUS vol. XX, 213.

396 Telegram from the Department of State to the Embassy in Belgium, September 27, 1961, FRUS vol. XX, 242.

397 Telegram from the Department of State to the Embassy in Belgium, December 21, 1961, FRUS vol. XX, 340.
the administration’s growing exasperation with the situation in the Congo. Even if somehow the Katanga secession ended and the UN withdrew from the Congo, the traditionalism, immaturity, and backwardness of the new nation and its people would continue to hamper U.S. policy. The Congo would continue to face “lack of army discipline, massive unemployment, lack of national consciousness, tribal rivalries, and lack of leadership and training at all levels of government and in the economy as a whole.”

Hoping to force an end to the Katanga secession, the Kennedy administration agreed to joint U.S.-UN mediation between Adoula and Tshombe. The parties met at Kitona, a former Belgian air base. The American mediation effort was tinged with the discourse of maturity. Although the Kennedy administration again reiterated its belief that the “solution [to] these problems must be worked out by the Congolese themselves,” it urged Gullion to do everything he could to persuade Adoula to reach an agreement at Kitona. The administration noted the “special relationship” that had developed between the United States and the Congo and the “responsibility” it felt toward the new country, but it did not regard its interference as unilateralism or its policy to be tinged with imperialism. Rusk instructed Gullion to use the carrot and the stick with Adoula. He should hint that if Kitona failed, the United States would have to re-evaluate the cost and extent of its support for the Central Government. Gullion should also exercise his gifts of

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398 SNIE 65-2-61, December 7, 1961, FRUS vol. XX, 299.

399 Telegram from Department of State to Embassy in the Congo, December 19, 1961, FRUS vol. XX, 328n.
persuasion, appealing to the values of maturity and responsibility that the Kennedy administration believed Adoula possessed. “Stress to Adoula,” Rusk wrote to Gullion, that the “US expects him to demonstrate his statesmanship and leadership.”

In the early morning hours of December 21, the negotiations at Kitona drew to a close. Tshombe informed UN Undersecretary Ralph Bunche that he would accept the Loi Fondamentale, recognize the authority of the Central Government and Kasavubu as the head of state, and place the Katangan armed forces under the authority of the Central Government. This arrangement, however, would not last long. Tshombe failed to adhere to the agreement, and the UN faced mounting financial difficulties. The Kitona accord failed, and the Kennedy administration was “back to square one” by 1962.

Cracks began to appear in the Kennedy administration’s relationship with Adoula during this period as policymakers hesitantly expressed doubts about his viability. Gullion continued to support Adoula as the best choice to lead the Congo, especially relative to other Congolese politicians, who were even more immature, irrational, and ill equipped to lead. In Gullion’s estimation, Adoula was “basically [a] man of good sense and good will,” but although he was cooperating with the U.S. at the present moment, “past experience teaches us how volatile and sometimes elusive even the most stable Congolese politicians can be.” Furthermore, Gullion noted, Adoula had to face the task of governing a backward, traditional country with little developed infrastructure. He feared that “stubborn and courageous as he has been, [Adoula] may simply give up.

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400 Telegram from Department of State to Embassy in the Congo, December 19, 1961, FRUS vol. XX, 328.
401 Editorial Note, FRUS vol. XX, 334.
Without mass or tribal support or even truly operative governmental structure he has prevailed up to now, essentially by moral ascendency." The U.S. ambassador was not the only policymaker to wonder if Adoula truly shared the qualities of moral masculinity. After the Kitona accord, Rusk noted that he was “greatly impressed by Adoula’s statesmanship.” At the same time, he cautioned that Adoula had not yet reached full maturity. Rusk suggested that Adoula needed American help to achieve his full potential, warning, “it is of utmost importance that Adoula not be tempted to overreach himself . . . he is not in [the] driver’s seat to [the] extent he supposes.”

These doubts were evident when Adoula visited the United States in February 1962. Department of State and White House documents preparing policymakers for this visit underscored the idea that the United States still had much to teach the Congolese, including Adoula. Although the new nation had made progress on the path to modernity, it had not yet achieved full maturity. Policymakers eschewed ascribing material or even ideological motives to this tutelage. American interest in furthering this progress was benevolent, part of sharing its unique abilities and gifts. The Kennedy administration emphasized that “our goal is a truly independent Congo” and that the United States had “no national desires in the Congo or Africa in general.” Policymakers couched advice to

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403 Telegram from Léopoldville to State, January 30, 1962, NSF: Countries Series: Congo, General, 1/24/62-1/31/62, box 28, JFKL; Telegram from Embassy in the Congo to the Department of State, October 13, 1961, FRUS vol. XX, 253; Telegram from Department of State to the Embassy in the Congo, December 26, 1961, FRUS vol. XX, 347n.

404 Telegram from Department of State to Embassy in the Congo, December 26, 1961, FRUS vol. XX, 347.
Adoula in terms of altruistic assistance or sharing expertise. During his visit, representatives of the two governments should “explore together how we [the U.S.] can help.”

After installing Adoula in the seat of power in Léopoldville, policymakers noticed his lack of experience and other shortcomings. They began to wonder whether he was the mature, capable, responsible leader the Congo needed to reach its full potential. Perhaps Adoula was more childlike or his development more stunted than they had realized. The State Department suggested that Adoula “may not fully understand the dangers of runaway inflation,” and questioned whether he “fully grasped” the dangers of a ballooning deficit. The White House noted that “Adoula has not had the experience to enable him to understand fully the many complex problems” in the Congolese economy. Adoula asked for increasing amounts of aid, but “the facts are that the Congo also needs . . . government control over expenditures – budget and plans.” One concrete proposal the Kennedy administration offered to Adoula was to cease barter deals and instead demand full value for Congolese exports. Barter deals were presumably too traditional and primitive a form of economic exchange. In a conversation with Spaak about fiscal responsibility, President Kennedy agreed that “the Congolese government often did not act in a mature manner.” Adoula’s accounts of his attempts to negotiate

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405 United States Policy Toward the Congo, 2/5/62, POF: Countries Series: Congo, General, 1962, box 114, JFKL.


407 United States Policy Toward the Congo, 2/5/62, POF: Countries Series: Congo, General, 1962, box 114, JFKL.
with Tshombe began to seem “willfully imprecise” and “feeble.”

During his tour of Africa in late April and early May, Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs G. Mennen Williams reported that Adoula seemed to be suffering from “nervous exhaustion,” although a brief vacation seemed to give him a “somewhat better grip on himself.” Adoula probably did not help his own case when he threatened to resign, writing Kennedy that “I am becoming pessimistic, if not desperate. . . . I struggle . . . to keep courage and my nerve.”

Despite their growing doubts, cast in the discourse of moral masculinity, the Kennedy administration still considered Adoula the best choice available to them. Throughout the spring and summer of 1962, American policymakers grew increasingly worried about Adoula’s political survival. They recognized that if he failed to bring Katanga back into the fold, he would face a strong challenge from the left. The Soviets might also pressure the United Nations to reintegrate Katanga by military force, endangering the UNOC as well as U.S. relations with its allies and with the UN. The best American option was to achieve the peaceful reintegration of Katanga as soon as possible, by prodding both Adoula and Tshombe, and convincing allies, especially Belgium, to lean on Tshombe as well.

408 Memorandum of Conversation, June 9, 1962, Lot Files: Executive Secretariat: Presidential Memoranda of Conversation January-July 1962, box 2, RG 59, NA.

409 Telegram from Embassy in the Congo to Department of State, April 29, 1962, FRUS vol. XX, 432-33.

410 Telegram from Embassy in the Congo to Department of State, May 5, 1962, FRUS vol. XX, 441.

411 Undated letter from Prime Minister Adoula to President Kennedy (ca. July 24, 1962), FRUS vol. XX, 517-18.

412 See, for example, Telegram from Department of State to the UN Mission, March 24, 1962, FRUS vol. XX, 413-14.
In the summer of 1962, the Kennedy administration re-committed itself to finding a settlement in the Congo. Kennedy shifted responsibility for Congo policy to Undersecretary of State George Ball. Impatient with the slow pace of progress in Katanga negotiations, Ball shared in the beliefs and values of moral masculinity, including the immaturity of nonwhite peoples and the necessity of propelling “traditional” societies into the “modern” era. He informed Kennedy that “our plans for the Congo are slowly sinking in the African ooze.” If the Adoula government fell, civil war would surely erupt in the Congo, bringing about “a reversion to tribalism.” The UNOC was in a precarious state, and if progress were not made in reintegrating Katanga, the UN would pull out of the Congo, driving the Afro-Asian bloc “to new heights of irresponsibility; they will strike out at Western powers on the ground they have deserted the UN.” This would cause problems in Africa for Great Britain. Ball regretted that the Congo crisis limited American freedom of action, caused tensions with the allies, and harmed the image of the U.S. abroad. “The appearance of disarray and dissension of the Western side is hurting our entire position and giving an impression of impotence.” Ball hoped to bring about a solution to the Congo problem as quickly and peacefully as possible.

Ball objected to the views of the State Department’s African Bureau in general and the drift of Congo policy in particular. The more liberal views on Africa held by Bowles and Williams “expected too much of the new African leaders.” He suspected that Gullion was becoming “hysterical” and that the problem was that the State

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413 Memorandum for the President from George Ball and Talking Points for President in Luncheon with Lord Home, September 29, 1962, POF: Countries Series: Congo, Security, 1962, box 114, JFKL.

Department “hasn’t a single tough-minded fellow” working on the Congo. Both Ball and Bundy suggested that the African Bureau was full of “a lot of mush” and was too influenced by the soft liberalism of the now-departed Chester Bowles. Soon after taking de facto control of Kennedy’s Congo policy, Ball fired off a telegram reminding Gullion that Congo policy was made in Washington, not the embassy in Léopoldville. The White House copy contains Bundy’s handwritten notation, “Mr. President: Ball begins to take charge.”

Ball’s proposal for the Congo drew on the tropes of modernization and maturity. It advocated changing the Loi Fondamentale to adopt a federalist model along the lines of the U.S. Constitution. This would afford a reintegrated Katanga a degree of autonomy, while keeping taxation authority and control of the armed forces and diplomacy in Léopoldville. By emphasizing the American Constitution as the model for the Congolese government, Ball reflected policymakers’ belief that the United States had a unique role to play in the modernizing process. Re-making their government along American lines would accelerate the Congolese people’s journey to modernity and full maturity in the community of nations.

As noted in chapter 2 of this dissertation, Chester Bowles publicly objected to the Bay of Pigs operation, and soon after Kennedy demoted him to ambassador-at-large and later appointed him Ambassador to India. Ralph Dungan confirmed that the White House’s “analysis of the difficulty is identical with Ball’s.” Editorial Note, FRUS vol. XX, 551-52. On August 21, Kennedy told Stevenson that “George Ball’s becoming more active in the Congo thing now. I don’t think it’s been handled particularly well [up to this point].” Timothy Naftali, ed., The Presidential Recordings: John F. Kennedy: The Great Crises, vol. I, July 30-August 1962 (New York, 2001), 565.

Telegram from State to Léopoldville, August 19, 1962, POF: Countries Series: Congo, Security, 1962, box 114, JFKL.

Memorandum for the President from George Ball, August 3, 1962, POF: Countries Series: Congo, Security, 1962, box 114, JFKL.

See Latham, Modernization as Ideology, 4-5, 33, 59, 66-70.
Ball saw an effective, tightly controlled fighting force as a precondition for achieving modernity. He expressed concern about the UN’s proposal to withdraw gradually from the Congo, transferring military authority to the Congolese army. The Kennedy administration maintained serious questions about the efficacy of the Congolese military, which was not currently “a responsible force.” “Building a responsible Congo army as rapidly as possible,” he suggested, “will result in the development of a Congolese capability to maintain law and order. This is essential to the launching of a much needed comprehensive effort at national economic rehabilitation.”

Again, the Congolese would need the United States to assist this effort, including Department of Defense military aid and training expertise.

Ball’s “Proposal for National Reconciliation,” drafted in August 1962, called for Katangan reintegration under a federalist model. Once the State Department had secured Adoula’s agreement to this plan, it hoped that together, UN, U.S., and Belgian officials would be able to convince Tshombe to capitulate. If diplomacy failed, the Kennedy administration recommended launching a boycott of Katangan copper, to be followed by even more stringent measures, including cutting off access to petroleum and railroad traffic. These threats failed to move Tshombe.

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419 Memorandum for the President from George Ball, August 3, 1962, POF: Countries Series: Congo, Security, 1962, box 114, JFKL.

420 U Thant’s Proposal for National Reconciliation in the Congo closely followed Ball’s program. Later, at Belgian urging, the proposed boycott was extended to include cobalt, as a way to get the U.S., which imported 75% of Katangan cobalt, more closely involved with economic sanctions against Tshombe. See Memorandum from Brubeck to Bundy, August 11, 1962, FRUS vol. XX, 541. The U.S., however, had a six-year supply of cobalt. Naftali, ed., The Presidential Recordings: John F. Kennedy, vol. I, 644.
In the fall of 1962, George McGhee and Wayne Fredericks of the State Department visited the Congo in the hopes of persuading Tshombe to agree to the Plan for National Reconciliation.\textsuperscript{421} When they returned to Washington short of success, Kennedy concluded that his alternatives were the use of military force or total disengagement, and he considered providing the UN with an American air squadron.\textsuperscript{422} Adoula faced intense pressure from the left, the UN was running short of funds, and India, which provided the bulk of UN troops in the Congo, needed its military forces to fight Chinese aggression at home. While Kennedy did not wish to alienate his West European allies by providing military support to the UNOC, he feared that disengagement would exacerbate the Congo crisis. In his worldview, only the United States possessed the skills and characteristics to bring about a reasonable settlement and lead the Congo into the modern era. As the State Department informed the president, “we do not believe that the African states can handle the problem by themselves.”\textsuperscript{423} If the U.S. and then the UN withdrew, “leaving the Congolese to their own devices,” the resulting chaos would surely invite Soviet encroachment.\textsuperscript{424} As the situation grew increasingly fragile, Ball even contemplated supporting a rightist military coup against Adoula.\textsuperscript{425}

\textsuperscript{421} See Memorandum for the President from George McGhee, October 22, 1962, POF: Countries Series: Congo, Security, 1962, box 114, JFKL.

\textsuperscript{422} Weissman, \textit{American Foreign Policy in the Congo}, 181-184; Memorandum from Carl Kaysen to Dean Rusk, November 1, 1962, \textit{FRUS vol. XX}, 646-47.

\textsuperscript{423} Memorandum for George Ball from Roger Hilsman, December 11, 1962, Roger Hilsman Papers: Countries Series, box 1, JFKL.

\textsuperscript{424} Memorandum for George Ball from Harlan Cleveland, December 16, 1962, Lot Files: Conference Files: CF 2212: Kennedy-Macmillan Nassau Meeting, box 307, RG 59, NA.
By December 1962, a State-Defense-CIA consensus approved swift American military intervention in the Congo. Advisors informed JFK that the combination of persuasion, diplomacy, and economic sanctions was clearly not working. Tshombe would not give up unless forced, and even if Katanga rejoined the Congo, the U.S. modernizing mission was endangered. American advice and expertise had not yet produced effective, mature rule in the Congo. This was not a failure of U.S. leadership and vision, policymakers argued, but the result of Adoula’s personal and cultural shortcomings. One policy paper noted that “we are not building an effective Central Government in Léopoldville. A largely irresponsible Parliament and a flabby administration are not good enough as a political framework; Adoula is the best leader on the horizon, but we should be helping to develop other political leadership.” The Kennedy administration did not question the assumptions that informed its policy; rather, it blamed Congolese inferiority.

The Kennedy administration decided to make a final, forceful push for the UN reconciliation plan. Kennedy agreed to provide U Thant with military equipment and funds and dispatched a military advisory mission to Léopoldville. Rusk cabled Ball, who was attending the Kennedy-Macmillan talks in the Bahamas, that the “Congo crisis is finally approaching climax, with prize in struggle to go to side with toughest will in

425 Telegram from Department of State to Embassy in the Congo, December 12, 1962, FRUS vol. XX, 721.
426 Memorandum for President Kennedy, December 13, 1962, FRUS vol. XX, 730.
427 Telegram from Department of State to the UN Mission, December 18, 1962, FRUS vol. XX, 753-754. The prospect of direct U.S. military intervention in the Congo was not viewed favorably by all members of the Kennedy administration, some of whom questioned the wisdom of the president’s decision. See Memorandum for the Record, December 20, 1962, FRUS vol. XX, 768-69.
In late December and early January, UN forces successfully ousted Tshombe and forcibly reunified the Congo. On January 21, 1963, the White House announced the end of the Katangan secession.

The immediate crisis had been resolved, but the ideas of maturity and modernity continued to influence U.S. policy in the Congo. Rusk informed Kennedy that the country urgently needed “‘nation-building’ programs” to ensure that it “develops rapidly the ability to manage its own government and put its own economy to work.” The Kennedy administration also continued to focus on retraining and “modernizing” the Congolese army. American policymakers took credit for the Congo’s successful steps on the path to modernity, and attributed persistent problems to Congolese immaturity and backwardness rather than a faulty model. In August, for example, the State Department explained that “the degree of success which had been achieved to date [in the Congo] can be very largely ascribed to the great effort the U.S. has made to restore the unity and stability of that troubled land. The Congo continues to be plagued with serious difficulties. Rampant tribalism . . . a costly defense establishment which contributes little to law and order, a central government with little authority . . . an incompetent bureaucracy – all contribute to a situation which can again easily become a matter of profound international concern.”

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428 Telegram for Ball from Rusk, December 21, 1962, Lot Files: Conference Files: CF 2213: Kennedy-Macmillan Nassau Meeting, box 307, RG 59, NA.

429 Memorandum from the Secretary of State to the President, January 24, 1963, FRUS vol. XX, 833.

430 See for example, Memorandum from McKesson to Bundy, August 6, 1963, FRUS vol. XX, 862-64.

431 Memorandum from G. Mennen Williams to Dean Rusk, August 13, 1963, FRUS vol. XX, 865.
Washington’s opinion of Adoula continued to fall. The prime minister’s threat to
break relations with Britain over British assistance to Tshombe seemed to prove, in the
eyes of American policymakers, his inability to live up to the ideals of moral masculinity.
Rusk angrily cabled Gullion to dissuade Adoula from taking this “petulant and
irresponsible” step. It was not in Adoula’s “interest to force us to choose between
himself and Britain over a senseless gesture on his part . . . such a step would seriously
affect attitude of [U.S. government] toward maturity of [government of Congo] and its
ability to carry out its responsibilities for governing the Congo.”\textsuperscript{432} Although Adoula
maintained a shaky grip on power in Léopoldville, the Kennedy administration’s
estimation of him did not improve over the next eleven months. Three weeks before
Kennedy’s death, Gullion wired Washington that “nervousness and insecurity” beset
Adoula.\textsuperscript{433}

Internal problems continued to plague the Congo during Lyndon Johnson’s
administration. The economy languished. Tshombe fomented rebellion from his self-
imposed exile in Europe, prompting Adoula to enact increasingly repressive policies. By
mid-1964, two separate leftist rebel groups controlled most of the northeastern Congo,
including Stanleyville, and rural areas west of Léopoldville. In July, Tshombe returned
from exile to replace Adoula as prime minister. When Tshombe failed to halt the
rebellion, the United States, Belgium, and South Africa led a foreign military

\textsuperscript{432} Telegram from Department of State to Embassy in the Congo, January 4, 1963, \textit{FRUS vol. XX}, 810.

\textsuperscript{433} Telegram from Embassy in the Congo to the Department of State, November 4, 1963, \textit{FRUS vol. XX}, 884.
intervention, manned by white mercenaries, which defeated the insurgency at Stanleyville. This broke the back of the rebellion, although sporadic fighting continued at least until 1970.\footnote{Weissman, \textit{American Foreign Policy in the Congo}, 230, 233, 246-264; Gibbs, \textit{The Political Economy of Third World Intervention}, 146-153, 156-158; Gleijeses, \textit{Conflicting Missions}, 62-76.}

Kasavubu forced Tshombe out of office in October 1965. Less than two months later, Mobutu staged a military coup and seized the reins of power in Léopoldville, probably with CIA assistance.\footnote{Gibbs, \textit{The Political Economy of Third World Intervention}, 161-163.} Mobutu established a corrupt dictatorship, eventually abolishing parliament. He ruled until a rebellion in 1997 forced him into exile in Morocco, where he died several months later. Laurent Kabila, a long-time rebel leader, became president, but regional warfare marked his brief tenure. Kabila was assassinated in January 2001 and replaced by his son, Joseph. Today the Democratic Republic of the Congo remains impoverished and wracked by war.

In the Cold War context, central Africa posed ideological, economic, and strategic problems for American policymakers. Access to the vast mineral resources of Katanga, for example, would have been a tremendous asset in the Soviet-American struggle. Yet as the documentary record bears out, the Kennedy administration, especially at the highest levels, did not emphasize access to minerals and other economic resources as a chief concern in the Congo crisis. Fear of Soviet encroachment in central Africa clearly played a role in policymaking, but this anti-Communism was linked to cultural concerns. National security officials feared that chaos in the Congo would invite Soviet penetration. Their presumption that a leftist, anticolonial regime would produce a state of disorder
indicates the influence of moral masculinity on policymaking. The Kennedy administration believed that Congolese leaders were not yet capable of ruling effectively and required a period of American tutelage to reach their full potential. This belief, moreover, was not completely divorced from racialist thinking and stereotypes of Africans as primitive, childlike, and intellectually undeveloped. American policymakers allowed these values and assumptions to influence the course of Congo policy.

Few policymakers in the Kennedy administration expressed overtly racist beliefs, at least publicly. However, the discourse of maturity and modernity recast older assumptions about American cultural superiority for the post-World War II era. In this revised worldview, Americans were not biologically superior, but as the home of liberal democratic capitalism, the United States possessed superior knowledge and expertise. At the peak of maturity and modernity, only the United States knew what was best for the new nations of Africa. The rotting European empires had faded from glory and vitality. American policymakers never had much confidence in any Congolese leader, but they backed Cyrille Adoula because they believed he adhered to the characteristics of moral masculinity. When he failed to live up to their impossible expectations, they abandoned him. The U.S. government then turned to a colonialist collaborator and later relied on a military strongman to fulfill its goals in central Africa. Moral masculinity did not simply affect superpower relations. American policy in the Congo endangered its relations with its allies, threatened the viability of the United Nations, and had long-lasting negative consequences for the Congolese people.
Two months before his death, Kennedy addressed the United Nations General Assembly for the first time since the fall of 1961. Much had happened in the intervening two years. The Berlin crisis had abated. The president had faced the possibility of nuclear war in the Cuban missile crisis and, together with Khrushchev, stepped back. The Congo, for the moment, was stable, and the Limited Nuclear Test Ban Treaty was about to pass in the U.S. Senate. The president’s speech was cautiously optimistic. He acknowledged that great gulfs continued to separate the United States and the Soviet Union and that the danger of war was ever-present. Addressing world and domestic political opinion, especially opponents of the Test Ban Treaty, Kennedy asserted that “the badge of responsibility in the modern world is a willingness to seek peaceful solutions.” He continued,

The fact remains that the United States, as a major nuclear power, does have a special responsibility in the world. It is, in fact, a threefold responsibility – a responsibility to our own citizens; a responsibility to the people of the whole world who are affected by our decisions; and a responsibility to the next generation of humanity. We believe the Soviet Union also has these special responsibilities – and that those responsibilities require our two nations to concentrate less on our differences and more on the means of resolving them peacefully.\(^\text{436}\)

The UN speech demonstrates that the Kennedy administration retained a patriarchal worldview. The president focused again on the value of responsibility. In this case, he used a discourse of responsibility to work for peace and emphasized the “moral” aspect of moral masculinity. Kennedy’s remarks indicate the lasting impact of moral masculinity on foreign relations during his administration.

During the Kennedy administration, policymakers at the top levels of the national security staff shared a common worldview. Influenced by personal challenges and beliefs as well as concerns about gender upheaval and the loss of masculine privilege and power in American society more broadly, these men adhered to a set of values best defined as moral masculinity. Believing that a crisis of masculinity threatened and weakened American society, they felt that moral masculinity was the best way to preserve white middle-class male privilege, and that they were best equipped to do this. This shared outlook shaped the course of foreign policy from 1961 to 1963 in several ways.

Moral masculinity influenced internal dynamics and decisionmaking in the Kennedy administration. In the case of relations with Cuba, for example, Kennedy rejected the advice of Adlai Stevenson during both the Bay of Pigs and the missile crises. Because Stevenson did not adhere to moral masculinity, the president did not value his input. This limited policy options for the Kennedy administration.

Crisis management was also shaped by moral masculinity. Kennedy and his advisors perceived and managed foreign policy crises through this cultural framework. One of the earliest decisions Kennedy faced in office, whether to continue with the
planned Bay of Pigs operation, was determined by moral masculinity. Influenced by a discourse of heroism, Kennedy permitted the operation to continue. Its failure deepened his sense of crisis and insecurity, leading to the creation of a covert program against Fidel Castro to reassert American leadership in the western hemisphere. This program encouraged Khrushchev to secretly deploy offensive nuclear weapons to the Caribbean. Although they did not change the strategic balance of power, Kennedy defined the discovery of the Soviet missiles in Cuba as a crisis because it challenged his power and he viewed it as a betrayal. Moral masculinity, specifically a discourse of deviance, defined the terms of debate during the missile crisis and prolonged it. In the Congo, moral masculinity shaped the Kennedy administration’s perceptions of Congolese abilities and its decision to work with the United Nations to resolve conflict in central Africa.

Often, moral masculinity contributed to tensions between the United States and its Western allies. In the cases of the Berlin crisis and the Cuban missile crisis especially, the cultural prism yields new insights about the complex diplomatic interactions between the United States and Western Europe. The Kennedy administration was repelled by its allies because they did not adhere to moral masculinity, but also felt required to maintain an image of strength for them. On one hand, for example, Kennedy’s frustration with the Adenauer government enabled him to justify dismissing the West German Chancellor’s concerns about his Central European policy. A perception of Western Europe as degenerate, aged, and unable to govern their former colonial possessions contributed to the Kennedy administration’s belief that only the United States and its model of modernization was suitable for nation-building in Africa. On the other hand, during the
Cuban missile crisis, Kennedy’s concern that Western European allies might view the United States as pathological or “obsessed” with Castro discouraged him from unilaterally and immediately invading Cuba.

Although it shaped policy throughout his administration, the cultural framework of moral masculinity did not always push Kennedy and his advisors into an aggressive or militaristic stance. Masculinity is a contested, shifting notion and it is dependent on context. The foreign policy consequences of moral masculinity were not uniformly negative. In the case of the Berlin crisis, it helped Kennedy decide to stand back from the brink and to rationalize that decision. During the Cuban missile crisis, the discourse of deviance and danger ultimately helped mitigate the crisis and helped propel Kennedy’s shift to a more political, rather than military, solution. Policy results in the Congo were more ambiguous. Moral masculinity discouraged unilateral U.S. action in the Congo, which would have alienated the neutralist countries. Antoine Gizenga’s failure to live up to the ideals of moral masculinity in the eyes of American policymakers, however, prompted them to abandon him.

Analyzing the relationship between gender and power can reveal much about the history of foreign relations, as scholars in the field have been recognizing. Studies exploring the Spanish-American War, the origins of the Cold War, and U.S. policy toward India in the 1950s and 1960s, for example, together demonstrate an important new framework for viewing American foreign policy and the salience of culture, especially gender. The concept of moral masculinity applies this framework to the Kennedy administration.
The historical record on John F. Kennedy demonstrates that he was a more complex policymaker than previously appreciated. For years, Kennedy historiography was polarized into Camelot and counter-Camelot camps. Gradually a more balanced view of the Kennedy administration emerged. Kennedy scholar Mark White has called for a new synthesis, one that is both critical and sympathetic. This synthesis would contextualize Kennedy’s presidency in its domestic and international settings and compare it with other administrations from that era. It would focus on the presidency as an educational experience for John Kennedy and the distinction between his management of short-term crises and his lack of success at shaping long-term policy. Culture, especially gender, should be a part of this synthesis. Utilizing cultural analysis can help pinpoint policymakers’ worldview. Gender influenced internal dynamics in the Kennedy administration and limited policy options. Moral masculinity illuminates policy outcomes in the Kennedy administration, the larger social context of the Kennedy administration, and the culture of the Cold War. The discourse of moral masculinity was not a matter of textuality alone. Policy decisions made on the basis of moral masculinity had often negative, violent consequences for the people of Cuba, Berlin, and the Congo. Incorporating a gender-based analysis helps to uncover the complex ways that policy is made and the cultural roots of foreign relations.

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