

## CAMELOT: Was JFK the USA's King Arthur?

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“For one brief shining moment...(there) was...Camelot- and it will never be that way again”.<sup>1</sup> Reflecting on her husband's presidency only seven days after his assassination, Jackie Kennedy conjured up an image of the Kennedy presidency (1961-63) that would transfix people for generations. John Fitzgerald Kennedy (JFK) had been President for only 1,000 days before his assassination, however that brief period of political history was elevated by his wife into something of glittering national mythology. Jackie Kennedy compared her husband's Presidency to “Camelot,” the mythical land that features in legends of King Arthur was recorded in Geoffrey of Monmouth's 12<sup>th</sup> century *The History of the Kings of the English*.<sup>2</sup> Since then ‘Camelot’ and ‘King Arthur’ have become signifiers of an idealised, mythical past of valour, honour and hope for many around the world. Within US political culture, arguably a similar phenomenon has occurred; since this so-called ‘Camelot interview,’ the national image of JFK has been a romantic one of a young and idealistic President tragically cut down far too soon. JFK remains one of the most popular Presidents to this day,<sup>3</sup> demonstrating the Arthurian image he continues to evoke.

Yet, like all great legends, the myth of John F. Kennedy as America's “once and future King” has been shaken, revisionist interpretations, challenging the glow afforded to the short administration. From the 1970's onwards, historians have increasingly cast doubt on the extent of Kennedy's greatness and comparisons to King Arthur and Camelot. A slow record on civil rights, questionable electoral success and a disastrous foreign policy legacy, form key areas of doubt when Kennedy's Arthurian comparisons are interrogated. On the other hand, his Presidential popularity, work on Civil Rights and his untouchable legacy are, it is argued, clear indications of the validity of King Arthur-JFK comparisons. In order to ascertain the extent to which JFK deserves the epitaph of ‘the USA's King Arthur’, *The History of Merlin and King Arthur* by Geoffrey of Monmouth will serve to facilitate a comparison between the life and administration of President Kennedy and the stories of the mythical King, as told by Monmouth. JFK's life, administration and legacy will be directly tested against that of King Arthur.

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<sup>1</sup> Boston, Massachusetts, US, John F. Kennedy Presidential Museum and Library, Theodore H. White Personal Papers, “For President Kennedy” by Theodore H. White, *Life*, 6 December 1963

<sup>2</sup> Geoffrey of Monmouth, Giles, J.A. (ed.) *The History of Merlin and King Arthur* (Omo Press, 2014)

<sup>3</sup> Dugan, A., Newport, F. ‘Americans Rate JFK as Top Modern President’, *Gallup* (15 November, 2013)

<https://news.gallup.com/poll/165902/americans-rate-jfk-top-modern-president.aspx>

The link and comparison between JFK and King Arthur appears to be a complicated one. President Kennedy cannot be said to align with King Arthur in terms of his actions and decisions as President during his lifetime, but this does not seem to make the comparison invalid. Rather, the elevation of his fleeting Presidency since his death and the romanticisation of his legacy, have placed JFK at the heart of national American mythology, akin to Arthurian mythology and its place in the British story and national conscience. Contrarily it therefore seems that in terms of the collective image and legacy of Kennedy, comparisons to King Arthur are deserved.

“Having settled the peace of the cities and countries there, he returned back...to Britain”-  
*‘The History of Merlin and King Arthur’* by Geoffrey of Monmouth<sup>4</sup>

JFK’s foreign policy was one of the most disastrous parts of his Presidency and in no way matched up to the image of King Arthur as a leader who created peace and stability. Arguably, the Kennedy Presidency was characterised by foreign policy failures and near-misses, which would have had disastrous consequences for both the USA and the world. A prime example of this is the 1962 Cuban Missile Crisis,<sup>5</sup> which brought the world the closest to nuclear war that it had ever been. This of course came only a short period after the disastrous Bay of Pigs invasion of 1961- a failed attempt to overthrow communist Cuban leader Fidel Castro<sup>6</sup>- one of the first major failures of the Kennedy Presidency. Far from “*having settled the peace*” of America’s neighbours, Kennedy seems to have led consecutive catastrophic attempts to subdue them, against the backdrop of the Cold War.

Perhaps, JFK’s most devastating foreign policy legacy was his actions in Vietnam. Following the withdrawal of French colonial powers and the rupture between the communist north and the capitalist south, a conflict began, which had the potential to tip the balance of power in the Cold War. Kennedy was reserved in the way he responded to events, initially only opting to send the Green berets and ‘military advisors’ (there were 16,000 of these advisors there when he died.)<sup>7</sup> Yet, Kennedy was gradually sucked further into the internal affairs of Vietnam, playing a part in the assassination of leader Ngo Dinh Diem- only shortly before his own assassination- again all in the name of fighting communism at home and abroad. Kennedy may have believed his actions would deliver the “*peace of the cities and countries*” at threat

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<sup>4</sup> Geoffrey of Monmouth, *‘The History of Merlin and King Arthur’* –p 99

<sup>5</sup> Greene, R.J. *‘America in the Sixties’* (Syracuse University Press, 2010) –p.35

<sup>6</sup> Greene, R.J. *‘America in the Sixties’* (Syracuse University Press, 2010) –p.32

<sup>7</sup> Neville, P. *‘J.F. Kennedy: A Beginner’s Guide’* (Hodder & Stoughton, 2002) –p.53

of or under Communist regimes, promising to help them “build a better life”,<sup>8</sup> but his decision to involve the US in Vietnam would have terrible consequences. Thus began American involvement in a long and controversial war that would stretch on until 1975. It saw 58,000 Americans killed; 7 million tons of bombs dropped and over 11 million gallons of the defoliant Agent Orange used by US forces in Vietnam.<sup>9</sup> American involvement, which resulted in so much devastation in Vietnam and in the US, can be traced back to Kennedy. As Farber and Bailey argue “his actions in Vietnam set the nation on a path to war”,<sup>10</sup> the direct opposite of the “*peace*” which King Arthur had “*settled*” abroad. American involvement in Vietnam would have dire consequences for years after Kennedy’s death, from loss of life to, a loss of, what Immerman calls, “innocence and ethos of exceptionalism”.<sup>11</sup> Consequently, it seems that Kennedy cannot be likened to King Arthur in terms of the foreign policy he pursued.

However, arguably the best testament to Kennedy being the US’ King Arthur is the way he has largely escaped blame and disapproval for such actions abroad. Indeed, though the Vietnam War originated with Kennedy, it is often his successor President Johnson who bears most of the blame for the military campaign there and whose legacy is most marred by the war. Johnson ultimately chose not to stand for a second term in 1968, on the basis of his unpopularity, derived from ongoing US involvement and tactics in the war.<sup>12</sup> Protesters and critics of the war blamed President Johnson for US actions and losses in Vietnam, even asking him in a chant “hey, hey, LBJ, how many kids did you kill today?”<sup>13</sup> thus holding President Johnson personally responsible. Johnson’s admittedly appalling failures in Vietnam appear to have negated the extent to which Kennedy is blamed for the war at all. Images of the war from the late 1960’s and 1970’s occupy collective memory, as opposed to Kennedy’s early actions in entering the conflict as President. Therefore, in spite of undeniably catastrophic foreign policy decisions, the consequences of such policies actually seem to further concur with the interpretation of Kennedy as the USA’s King Arthur, providing evidence for an almost untouchable reputation; his involvement at the root of US action in Vietnam has mostly not tarnished his legacy. Kennedy did not settle “*peace*” however the blame attached to his presidential successor and the sparse linkage often made between Kennedy and the long-term consequences of Vietnam are, in a sense, Arthurian.

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<sup>8</sup> Bailey, B., Farber, D. *The Columbia Guide to America in the 1960’s* (Columbia University Press, 2003) –p.389

<sup>9</sup> Bailey, B., Farber, D. *The Columbia Guide to America in the 1960’s* –p.386

<sup>10</sup> Bailey, B., Farber, D. *The Columbia Guide to America in the 1960’s* –p.218

<sup>11</sup> Bailey, B., Farber, D. *The Columbia Guide to America in the 1960’s* –p.118

<sup>12</sup> Bailey, B., Farber, D. *The Columbia Guide to America in the 1960’s* –p.45

<sup>13</sup> Bailey, B., Farber, D. *The Columbia Guide to America in the 1960’s* –p.44

“...Established the peace and just administration of laws in that kingdom”- ‘*The History of Merlin and King Arthur*’ by Geoffrey of Monmouth<sup>14</sup>

Though JFK has been seen as a hero of the Civil Rights movement, in practical, legislative terms he can be said to have failed to achieve significant “*just...laws*” on the issue of black American rights during the course of his Presidency. Critics of Kennedy’s Civil Rights record point to his failure to advance the cause first as Senator from Massachusetts and then in the early stages of his Presidency. In the Senate, Kennedy voted against the 1957 Civil Rights Act,<sup>15</sup> clearly demonstrating that his support for the cause was not as determined and staunch as is often perceived. In the early years of his Presidency, Kennedy still seems to have been somewhat ambivalent to the cause of Black American Civil Rights, doing little to advance the cause of “*just administration*” on the issue of race rights. Farber and Bailey argue that Kennedy was “hesitant” to support the movement in the early years of his presidency,<sup>16</sup> conscious of his need to maintain support from the segregationist Southern Democrats in Congress. Initially, Kennedy seems to have avoided acting decisively on this matter and where he did act, the measures he passed were undoubtedly diluted and hesitant. Executive Order 11063 (1962), for example, banned discrimination in the sale or rental of federal housing and federally funded housing.<sup>17</sup> However Civil Rights leaders were dissatisfied with this measure,<sup>18</sup> given that it only narrowly applied to particular housing and was not a universally applicable anti-discrimination measure. Such partial and incomplete Civil Rights measures were typical of the early Kennedy Presidency, thus showcasing a key difference from King Arthur, with Kennedy failing to establish total racial “*peace and just administration*” as President; his early commitment to Civil Rights being highly questionable.

This did change after the events at Birmingham in 1963, after which Kennedy embraced the fight for Civil Rights on national television and in an historic, landmark televised speech, asked Americans to do the same.<sup>19</sup> Only now was President Kennedy was fully committed to

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<sup>14</sup> Geoffrey of Monmouth, ‘*The History of Merlin and King Arthur*’ –p 99

<sup>15</sup> Flanagan, C. ‘Jackie and the Girls: Mrs. Kennedy’s Problem- And Ours’, *The Atlantic* (July/August 2012 issue)

<sup>16</sup> Bailey, B., Farber, D. ‘*The Columbia Guide to America in the 1960’s*’ –p.218

<sup>17</sup> Washington DC, National Archives of the USA, Federal Register: Executive Orders, The provisions of Executive Order 11063 of Nov. 20, 1962

<sup>18</sup> Cooper, C., Khan, A. ‘JFK: Civil Rights Leader or Bystander?’ *Aljazeera America* (25 November, 2013)

<http://america.aljazeera.com/watch/shows/america-tonight/america-tonight-blog/2013/11/25/jfk-civil-rightsleaderorbystander.html>

<sup>19</sup> Bailey, B., Farber, D. ‘*The Columbia Guide to America in the 1960’s*’ –p.218

achieving “*just*” civil rights laws, calling for a Civil Rights Bill in 1963.<sup>20</sup> Despite this late commitment, Kennedy was killed before any Civil Rights legislation was passed, the Bill still being in the Committee stage, at the time of his assassination.<sup>21</sup> Hence, ultimately unlike King Arthur he cannot be said to have “*established...just administration*” in terms of Civil Rights. President Kennedy’s commitment to this cause was first vacillating and then once absolute, he ran out of time before meaningful change could be achieved. The fact that the Kennedy administration never actually achieved legislative change is an important contrast from the justice of King Arthur.

It seems quite Arthurian, though, that Kennedy’s greatness and legacy on this subject has been exaggerated, turning him from a hesitant President to a Civil Rights hero. The Civil Rights Act of 1964, passed by President Johnson, was done in Kennedy’s name, further elevating him to a hero for the Civil Rights movement. Johnson said of Kennedy and the Civil Rights Bill: “no memorial...could more eloquently honour President Kennedy’s memory than the earliest passage of the Civil Rights Bill for which he fought so long”.<sup>22</sup> Once again, this is another example of Kennedy being elevated to a heroic status, with “*just administration*” though not being “*established*” by him, being done in his name and thus forming part of his legacy. Kennedy has since been widely credited posthumously with the passage of the Civil Rights Act, with the end of his Presidency arguably being the driving force behind its passage. Chafe writes that pictures of JFK still adorn the walls in the homes of some Black Americans,<sup>23</sup> evidence of the gratitude and recognition Kennedy gets for the Civil Rights legislation that came after his death and after the end of his Presidency. Unlike King Arthur he failed to oversee the passage of “*just*” laws on Civil Rights, yet the credit he still receives for the legislation of the 1960’s strongly aligns him with the legendary king.

From the legislation being carried forth in his name, to the praise many still afford him, the creation of the ‘JFK myth’ of an idealistic, righteous young President can nowhere better be seen in the area of civil rights. His half-hearted early support has been obscured by the moralistic drive to pass the legislation to “honour” the slain President, clouding many widely held notions about Kennedy’s contribution to this issue. Crucially, though, this legacy does seem comparable to King Arthur, with the obviously exaggerated credit and respect he gets on this matter, consistent with the exaggerated heroic and idealistic image of King Arthur.

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<sup>20</sup> Greene, R.J. ‘*America in the Sixties*’ –p.55

<sup>21</sup> Greene, R.J. ‘*America in the Sixties*’ –p.55

<sup>22</sup> Fisher, A., Gittinger, T. ‘LBJ Champions the Civil Rights Act of 1964’, *Prologue Magazine* Vol. 36, No. 2 (Summer 2004)

<sup>23</sup> Chafe, W.H. ‘*The Unfinished Journey*’ - 2edn. (Oxford University Press, 1991) –p.219

Thus, whilst Kennedy did not himself establish all that King Arthur did, in terms of Civil Rights, this represents a significant similarity in the two leaders.

“A youth of such unparalleled courage and generosity...gained him universal love”- *The History of Merlin and King Arthur*’ by Geoffrey of Monmouth<sup>24</sup>

Kennedy’s personal and presidential popularity and unshakeable place in the hearts of many Americans have formed a convincing basis for comparisons to King Arthur. Ironically, Kennedy’s popularity peaked after his assassination, captured in the international outpouring of heartbreak, which followed the events in Dallas. Some 250,000 went to see Kennedy’s body as it lay in state in Washington D.C.,<sup>25</sup> a clear expression of domestic grief and the immediate elevation of the young President, within his own country. In the UK, a memorial service was held at St. Paul’s Cathedral,<sup>26</sup> whilst Football League players also wore black armbands in memory of the dead (foreign) President.<sup>27</sup> Kennedy was also grieved in Liberia, which held 30 days of national mourning.<sup>28</sup> This indicates “*universal love*”, thus matching King Arthur, with Kennedy earning international “*love*” from both governments and citizens across the world. In the decades following his assassination, this love and popularity has shown no sign of diminishing, again in keeping with King Arthur. Despite links to organised crime, stories of infidelities and the long-term impacts of some of his policies, Kennedy has evidently remained one of the most popular Presidents of all time. Over 40,000 books have been written about Kennedy and his Presidency,<sup>29</sup> which did not even span 3 years, showing the continuing global fascination with JFK.

Indeed, the perfect image of President Kennedy- the one that gained him “*universal love*”- has held despite consistent knocks to this image. Biographer M. Hogan writes that Americans simply “don’t hear” about Kennedy’s scandalous behaviour, including the “wild...parties” he held “on the second floor of the White House”.<sup>30</sup> Indeed, despite the emergence of allegations and concerns, they have done little to dent the collective image of President Kennedy,

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<sup>24</sup> Geoffrey of Monmouth, *The History of Merlin and King Arthur* –pp.82-83

<sup>25</sup> Brown, D.L. ‘The Day John F. Kennedy was Killed: How America Mourned a Fallen President’, *The Washington Post* (22 November, 2017)  
<https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/retropolis/wp/2017/10/26/how-america-mourned-john-f-kennedy-images-of-grief-for-a-fallen-president/>

<sup>26</sup> Powley, A. *JFK’s Camelot: The Unfolding of a President* (J H Haynes & Co. Ltd., 2013) –p.142

<sup>27</sup> Powley, A. *JFK’s Camelot: The Unfolding of a President* –p.140

<sup>28</sup> Powley, A. *JFK’s Camelot: The Unfolding of a President* –p.143

<sup>29</sup> Boeri, D. ‘Contemplating Camelot: Thousands of Biographies Reveal an Ever-Changing Image of JFK’, *WBUR News* (26 May, 2017)

<https://www.wbur.org/news/2017/05/26/evolution-kennedy-biographies>

<sup>30</sup> Boeri, D. ‘Contemplating Camelot: Thousands of Biographies Reveal an Ever-Changing Image of JFK’

expressed in the days following his assassination and clearly maintained thereafter. Flanagan argues that JFK is “more important” to Americans than any allegation or accusation.<sup>31</sup> She goes on to write, “the hope still lives. And the dream will never die”<sup>32</sup>, perfectly encapsulating the seemingly immovable and unwavering popularity of President Kennedy. Quite alike King Arthur, general notions of romance and positivity attached to his name never seem to die, in spite of any subsequent revelation. In this sense it seems valid to label Kennedy as America’s King Arthur, with him having gained “*universal love*”, expressed on a global scale following his death and lasting to this very day, with Kennedy forming a lasting part of American history and political identity.

The claim of “*universal love*” in Kennedy’s actual lifetime is however doubtful. Whilst Kennedy’s popularity amongst many groups is beyond doubt, it must be noted that he failed to win over the majority of Americans at election, The 1960 Presidential election was one of the closest in history, with JFK only narrowly beating his predecessor President Eisenhower’s Vice President, Richard M. Nixon. Kennedy won the Presidency by just over 112,000 votes out of a total of 68 million cast,<sup>33</sup> winning less than 50% of the vote.<sup>34</sup> A majority of the American electorate can be said to therefore have not held “*universal love*” for Kennedy, but in fact did not like him enough to even vote for him at election. Kennedy’s Catholicism, youth and inexperience, as well as credible opposition from Vice President Nixon all proved significant hindrances for his candidacy, resulting in a close race and the narrowest of victories in 1960, with Kennedy also anticipating a tough re-election campaign in 1964. Recordings from Kennedy’s meetings with his political advisors only shortly before his death, reveal that the President was genuinely concerned about his chances of being re-elected, lamenting the lot of the “average guy” who he felt the party was failing to connect with.<sup>35</sup> Electorally then, it is clear that Kennedy did not have “*universal love*” and even shortly before his death- before that outpouring of international “*universal love*”- Kennedy was still doubtful of his prospects at election, following his election by the narrowest of margins and slimmest of victories. This would therefore cast doubt over the comparisons of Kennedy’s popularity to King Arthur’s, with Kennedy seeming to be far from universally popular in life.

Nevertheless, it seems that the link remains valid, given the evident “*love*” following Kennedy’s death, which has almost completely overshadowed any electoral and political

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<sup>31</sup> Flanagan, C. ‘Jackie and the Girls: Mrs. Kennedy’s Problem- And Ours’

<sup>32</sup> Flanagan, C. ‘Jackie and the Girls: Mrs. Kennedy’s Problem- And Ours’

<sup>33</sup> Bailey, B., Farber, D. ‘*The Columbia Guide to America in the 1960’s*’ –p.7

<sup>34</sup> Greene, R.J. ‘*America in the Sixties*’ –p.27

<sup>35</sup> Kennedy, C., Widmer, T. ‘*Listening In: The Secret White House Recordings of John F. Kennedy*’ (Grand Central Publishing, 2012) –p.283

struggles he had during the White House. After all, the image of Kennedy as the American hero is what occupies the national conscience, not the specifics of the 1960 Presidential election. After all, the name ‘JFK’ rarely evokes details of the Electoral College result and the popular vote. Since his death Kennedy has consistently been ranked amongst the greatest Presidents.<sup>36</sup> The memory of Kennedy, is of a man who gained “*universal love*,” even if he did not do so within his lifetime, as King Arthur did. Comparisons of the love afforded to Kennedy (admittedly mainly after his death) and to King Arthur thus remain valid and compelling.

“The renowned King Arthur himself was mortally wounded”- *The History of Merlin and King Arthur*’ by Geoffrey of Monmouth<sup>37</sup>

The impact of Kennedy’s premature death is the strongest and most significant argument that he was the USA’s King Arthur. The shocking assassination was greeted with such a sense of loss and despair that it proved key in creating the Kennedy legacy, which has since helped elevate him into the USA’s King Arthur. Even in the days following his assassination, JFK was immediately elevated to a heroic status, the iconic Arthurian legacy being crafted only a matter of hours after the assassination. Brinkley claims that Kennedy woke up on November 22<sup>nd</sup>, 1963 as a President, but “by the evening of the day he had become a legend”.<sup>38</sup> Indeed, the shocking death of such a young President can be said to have done the most to turn Kennedy into the US’ King Arthur, with the sense of unfulfilled potential and a waste of that potential being key. To this day, Americans have wondered what Kennedy, their idealistic, romantic hero may have achieved, very similar to the enduring wonder around King Arthur and what he may have achieved had he too lived. As Retson writes, “he never reached his meridian: we saw him only as a rising sun.”<sup>39</sup> It is that sense of what Kennedy could have given and accomplished had he been allowed to reach his “meridian” which has been key to making him the USA’s King Arthur. Akin to King Arthur, Kennedy was killed prematurely and the mythology and dream of him since has grown and spiraled.

Of course, had Kennedy lived he may have continued to struggle with Civil Rights, or the burgeoning conflict in Vietnam may have brought down his administration entirely, as it did

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<sup>36</sup> Boeri, D. ‘Contemplating Camelot: Thousands of Biographies Reveal an Ever-Changing Image of JFK’

<sup>37</sup> Geoffrey of Monmouth, *The History of Merlin and King Arthur* –p.141

<sup>38</sup> Boeri, D. ‘Contemplating Camelot: Thousands of Biographies Reveal an Ever-Changing Image of JFK’

<sup>39</sup> Geoffrey of Monmouth, *The History of Merlin and King Arthur* –p.220

to that of his successor, Lyndon B. Johnson<sup>40</sup>. However his death almost saved the short administration from any failure or mistake from which it could not recover from, creating an unsoiled image of a White House and Presidency of idealism and hope, which was ended too soon. Chafe described “the sense of unrealised possibility”,<sup>41</sup> which left generations to wonder ‘what if?’, allowing for the proliferation of exaggerated, romantic notions of what might have been. This is evidenced in the interesting data collected on American public opinion of Kennedy since his death. As recently as 2010, 85% of Americans approved of Kennedy;<sup>42</sup> marking a clear increase in his popularity and the greatness he was afforded within his lifetime, (when less than 50% of the electorate approved of him enough to vote for him.) His posthumous elevation saw him reach legendary, mythological heights of a period of hope and possibility long since faded. Hence, the fact that Kennedy was himself “*mortally wounded*” has proved of absolute significance in qualifying him to be the USA’s “*renowned King Arthur*”. The premature death allowed for Kennedy’s legacy to be so exaggerated and inflamed; fantasies and notions took hold, as consistent with King Arthur.

On a cold, bright January day in 1961, the newly-inaugurated President John F. Kennedy told Americans to “ask what you can do for your country” and his “fellow citizens of the world” to “ask not what America will do for you, but what together we can do for the freedom of man”<sup>43</sup>. It was an inaugural address full of hope and inspirational optimism that hinted of a future, in no way foreshadowing the turbulence that the next three years would hold. In that moment, as he spoke to the US and the world, Kennedy represented promise and potential, yet debates around whether he lived up to that rage on today.

In practical and legislative terms Kennedy’s achievements cannot be labelled as equal to King Arthur’s, however the romanticisation and elevation of his Presidency has lined him up perfectly with the mythological King, who too is subject to romanticisation and exaggeration. Admittedly, during the lifetime of his administration Kennedy achieved very little that would qualify him to be the USA’s King Arthur, with failures both at home and abroad, distancing him from the mythical King. Nonetheless, in both of these areas, Kennedy has been elevated, exempted from blame and idealised, lining him up with the idealised mythological King. Further, Kennedy’s popularity and place in American history was arguably not evident and apparent during his lifetime, but his death changed this, entrenching

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<sup>40</sup> Mitchell, R. ‘A “Pearl Harbour in politics”: LBJ’s stunning decision not to seek reelection’, *The Washington Post* (31 March, 2018)

<sup>41</sup> Geoffrey of Monmouth, ‘*The History of Merlin and King Arthur*’ –p.220

<sup>42</sup> Dugan, A., Newport, F. ‘Americans Rate JFK as Top Modern President’

<sup>43</sup> Boston, Massachusetts, US, John F. Kennedy Presidential Museum and Library, Historical Speeches, Inaugural Address (20<sup>th</sup> January, 1961)

the young President in American history, by giving way to fantasies and hopes. Given the legislative and policy failures of the Kennedy Presidency, it is unlikely that he ever would have been likened to King Arthur, without his early death. The assassination of the young President has proved to be of vital importance in quite literally transforming him into the USA's King Arthur, with Jackie Kennedy first drawing the comparison that would spiral, before becoming embedded in the American national psyche.

Most alike King Arthur, Kennedy has been romanticised and exaggerated, representing an era of goodness- greatness- and of ideals. The myth of Kennedy as America's King Arthur has overridden and negated the failings of his administration, leaving behind a perfect and glittering image of the Kennedy Presidency and all it stood for. This too is Arthurian, in the sense that the image has overridden the detail and has become something of mythology. Schlesinger Jr. called the Kennedy Presidency a "golden interlude"<sup>44</sup> and this notion now seems completely unshakeable, more important than Kennedy's actual record and personality. Ultimately, it seems that the comparison between King Arthur and JFK is in reality a comparison between two national myths, both elevated symbols of pride, providing a sense of national strength, greatness and reassurance of this. Thus, due to the spiraling and all-eclipsing image of the Kennedy Presidency, arising only after his unexpected death, Kennedy can be said to be the USA's King Arthur, with the fantastical mythology and wonder of his Presidency forming his major legacy and lasting, unshakeable image.

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<sup>44</sup> Chafe, W.H. *The Unfinished Journey* –p.189

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