

Between the Court of King Hal and the New Frontier: A Comparative History of Henry V and John F. Kennedy

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The previous issue of this journal included an article comparing President John F. Kennedy to King Arthur. This article will seek to conduct a comparative history between America's kingly president and a far more real example of idealised medieval statesmanship, King Henry V of England. Compared to that of a chimeric Camelot, this is something far more real and far more powerful. Its inspiration comes from a journal article in which John Murphy observed that JFK is 'most often compared' with Henry V, thus lending credibility to metaphors of rightful heirs and usurpers.¹ In an email correspondence about this comparison, Murphy noted that it was a more general observation that came up across a variety of readings, arguing that one 'young, occasionally irresponsible leader maturing' could be easily mapped from one to the other.² This article will not only substantiate Murphy's cursory comparison, but flesh it out in detail. While more than five centuries separated these giants of history and memory, both engaged in power politics in similar ways, organising their inner circle of confidants and loyalists as a royal court, and faced threats to their authority from within and without. The presidency was a throne, and Lyndon Johnson and Bobby Kennedy clashed in a backroom brawl during Jack's lifetime and beyond to determine who had the right to inherit the Kennedy crown. But the contest only produced an ugly winner, a usurper in all but name who snatched the mantle of a man cut down before his time. Johnson was no boy king as Henry VI was, but for a time he enjoyed the loyalty JFK's New Frontiersmen had pledged to their president beyond the grave, just as Henry's brothers John and Humphrey swore their obedience to his ignoble successor. This comparison can really say something, not through anachronistically applying King Henry with the labels of a twentieth century politician, but through identifying the timeless pressures of leadership and its costs. Both Henry V and John Kennedy devoted themselves to ideas far larger than any one individual, whether the establishment of a dual monarchy over England and France in the fifteenth century, or the end of the Cold War and the launch of a joint space program in the twentieth. Both of these dignified men came tantalisingly close to realising their visions before they succumbed to very undignified ends.

Antiphon – The privileged and problematic beginnings of Prince Henry and Jack Kennedy

What then, if anything, links these two men's character? JFK and Henry V have never lacked defenders, but the intensity of some historians' admiration for them has also inspired passionate vitriol

¹ J.M. Murphy, 'Crafting the Kennedy Legacy', *Rhetoric and Public Affairs*, 3/4 (2000), p. 578.

² J.M. Murphy, 'Enquiry about Kennedy article' [email to J. Nevett], 02 February 2021, james.nevett@bnc.ox.ac.uk, (accessed 24 February 2021).

from others. Henry undeniably had an Old Testament quality about him. If he was charming and affable with his friends and closest companions, it masked an innate coldness. Dockray described him as autocratic – ‘inflexible, ruthless, vindictive,’.³ Ruthless, perhaps: he held no scruples in punishing anyone who questioned his authority; vindictive only in so far as punishing those who made attempts on his life; but as for inflexible, this is unsubstantiated by the actions of a king who styled his reign as a break with the past and reconciled his father’s enemies. Henry’s ascribed attributes appear more relevant to Bobby Kennedy than Jack, who was seen as ruthless and cold. But Bobby lacked what Jack had acquired, and which he shared with Henry V of England – a clear sense of his own destiny and an aura of leadership. Both of these men were hard-working and energetic, though while Henry could push his followers to exhaustion, Jack Kennedy was certainly willing to sit back. His White House rocking chair symbolised the division between his supporters and detractors; the former claiming that it showed a man who kept moving even when sat down, the latter retorting that it was someone kept busy while going nowhere.⁴ New Frontiersman Richard Goodwin wrote after JFK’s death that ‘No one ever really knew John Kennedy’, but we all think we do.⁵ Enigma similarly defined Henry V – nobody ever really knew him either. Their personalities and ideas stemmed from their experiences of becoming, from young boys fighting on their own to grown men seeking to make sense of an adult world.

King Henry V and Jack Kennedy came from troubled youths which profoundly affected their development and future decisions. As a young boy, with his father either absent or in exile, and his mother dying when he was just six, Henry of Monmouth became attached to King Richard II, to the point that he had to be ordered to leave the king’s side at Chester in 1399.⁶ Richard had been a substitute father for the young son of an earl and was also likely attached to young Henry himself with no children to call his own. Henry never appears to have forgiven his father for tearing him away from his substitute source of parental love, probably blaming him for Richard’s death. Jack Kennedy also came from a family without love, without warmth, where emotional display was scorned.⁷ As the second son, and the sick one at that, he suffered alone throughout a childhood of serious illness and close calls with death. This led to a passionate rebelliousness and a longing to overcome his stomach and back problems to join the military and escape his parents. When he was finally able to join the US Navy, it was not enough to become a PT-boat instructor; he wryly joked about sacrificing himself to further his older brother’s future (political) ambitions, and requested transfer to the Pacific.⁸ It could have been that he simply wanted to face combat as Joe Jr. was doing in Europe, but it seems more

³ K. Dockray, *Henry V* (Stroud, 2004), p. 214.

⁴ M.J. Heale, *The Sixties in America, History, Politics and Protest* (Edinburgh, 2001), p. 13.

⁵ H.S. Parmet, ‘The Kennedy Myth and American Politics’, *The History Teacher*, 24/1 (1990), p. 38.

⁶ K.B. McFarlane, *Lancastrian Kings and Lollard Knights* (Oxford, 1972), pp. 104-105.

⁷ R. Dallek, *John F. Kennedy, An Unfinished Life, 1917-1963* (London, 2004), p. 70.

⁸ *ibid.*, pp. 88-89

likely that there was an element in him that wanted to die gloriously, to achieve a sense of completion to his rebellious youthfulness and finally leave behind the chronic pain he now endured every day. Henry and JFK remembered how they had been left to grow up almost entirely on their own. It instilled in both of them an instinct for survival and an energetic streak sourced not from the strength of others but from wells within themselves.

Jack Kennedy and Henry of Monmouth enjoyed some of the best education available at the time which prepared them to assume the highest positions of authority and responsibility. Kennedy had attended Choate and then Harvard, where he wrote *Why England Slept* (1940) as his thesis on how Britain had ignored the warning signs of an impending clash with Germany and had failed to prepare. This education buttressed his later intellectualism, beginning with *Profiles in Courage* in 1955, which he was more a project manager of rather than a conventional author, followed in succession by *A Nation of Immigrants* (1958) and *The Strategy of Peace* (1960). Henry and his three brothers meanwhile also enjoyed a high calibre education; the Prince of Wales could read, write, and speak in English, French and Latin. Duke Humfrey's Library in the Bodleian at Oxford is the last surviving testament to that appreciation of learning, writing, and of books as repositories of wisdom, as the extensive royal library stocked by Henry IV and Henry V was redistributed by their successor.⁹ Undoubtedly though, for both young men their best preparation for statesmanship was experiencing the real world in all of its mysteries and lack of forgiveness. For Prince Henry, this came from being left to 'earn his spurs' in the Welsh Marches, bringing rebels there to heel in a six-year-long campaign in which he honed respectable military talents. Jack Kennedy on the other hand, after experiencing a harrowing baptism of fire in the South Pacific, used his father's money to tour the world during his time in Congress. His wary Vietnam policy articulated in *The Strategy of Peace*, which his successors in the Oval Office would have been prudent to have read, came from visiting Saigon in 1951 and realising it was unsafe, even then, to venture far outside of the city's protection.¹⁰ Education and real-world experience went hand-in-hand for these men, the former bestowing them with eloquence and gravitas, the latter confidence and grasp of the key issues affecting contemporary politics.

Problematic parental relationships cast long shadows for both of these men, showing that something as familiar as an unloving father or mother could haunt a revered king or a sanctified president. King Henry finally came to terms with an immensely troubled relationship with his late father Henry IV in his memory of Richard II. In exhuming and reburying the slain king a few months after his coronation in 1413, Henry not only drew a line under a chapter of English history wherein his father had usurped someone with whom he shared affection and trust, but provided himself with a sense of closure,

⁹ McFarlane, *Lancastrian Kings and Lollard Knights*, pp. 116, 119, and G. Harriss, *Shaping the Nation, England 1360-1461* (Oxford, 2005), p. 39.

¹⁰ C. Matthews, *Bobby Kennedy, A Raging Spirit* (New York, 2017), p. 88.

demonstrating to his contemporaries that he would not be another Henry IV by symbolically putting his own past to rest.¹¹ Jack Kennedy might have maintained a close and positive relationship with his domineering father, tapping his wisdom in almost daily phone calls when he was president, but he hated his mother.¹² If he ever truly became a family man, which was questionable given his chronic unfaithfulness to Jackie, it was on his own terms and not those set by his parents. Henry and Jack outgrew the constricted, almost visionless world views they had been socialised to respect, to each embrace and represent something new, proving in the process that they were far more than their fathers' sons.

Canticle – courts, courtiers and conspirators – the patterns and challenges of authority

These men symbolised the coming of a new generation, and they did so not only as young men themselves, but by being surrounded by vital, ambitious, driven individuals who could further their goals. The men they chose as advisers mattered. Henry picked from among his Lancastrian kinsman who had supported the Prince of Wales in his rivalry with the king – men such as Richard Beauchamp, the Earl of Arundel, and his closest friend, his uncle (although only ten years separated them) Thomas Beaufort the Earl of Dorset.¹³ Harriss called it a 'restricted circle of confidence'.¹⁴ It is incomplete, however, without studying the importance of his chaplains royal, who enjoyed the closest access to the King and his inner thoughts. Fore among these during the early part of the reign was Stephen Patrington, his confessor, but other key chaplains can be discerned from the will Henry left before his expedition to France. McHardy identifies Patrington as the likely author of the *Gesta Henrici Quinti*, a propaganda piece which celebrated Henry's achievements up to 1417 and legitimised his war with France.¹⁵ Arthur Schlesinger, Jr. fulfilled a similar role as the 'scholar-in-residence' at the Kennedy White House, and could be depended on to write a glowing account of his president in 1965 with the publishing of *A Thousand Days*. While Schlesinger did not enjoy the proximity to President Kennedy that Patrington had to Henry V, evident from JFK's denial of his illness to him, he was the same age as Jack and his appointment highlighted the premium the Kennedys placed on intellectualism at court.¹⁶ Just as Henry elevated the importance of Beaufort by giving him command over Harfleur, Rouen, and Paris, his three most important acquisitions, Kennedy made Ted Sorensen, his long-time travelling companion and speech writer, special counsel to the president and his key policy adviser on domestic

¹¹ C. Allmand, *Henry V* (New Haven, 1997), p. 436.

¹² M. White, 'Apparent Perfection: The Image of John F. Kennedy', *History*, 98/2 (2013), pp. 244-245.

¹³ McFarlane, *Lancastrian Kings and Lollard Knights*, p. 106.

¹⁴ G.L. Harriss, 'The King and his Magnates', in G.L. Harriss (ed), *Henry V, The Practice of Kingship* (Oxford, 1985), p. 43.

¹⁵ A.K. McHardy, 'Religion, Court and Propaganda: The Chapel Royal in the Reign of Henry V', in G. Dodd (ed), *Henry V: New Interpretations* (York, 2013), pp. 132, 147-148.

¹⁶ Matthews, *Bobby Kennedy*, pp. 200-201.

affairs.¹⁷ Henry was also fortunate to rule at a time when the baronage were, by and large, men of his generation – out of seventeen members of the upper nobility, eleven were aged 18-32 in 1413.¹⁸ And so he led his own ‘band of brothers’ into battle. As for the Kennedys, appointing men to key positions who were young and idealistic was more a matter of choice than convenience, but it similarly determined who would face the key issue of the sixties with them, whether in the battle to enforce civil rights or ultimately to get man to the Moon.

Ultimately, of course, brothers mattered more than anything else. Jack Kennedy and Henry both came from dynastic families with four sons apiece; in the Kennedy family, Jack’s greatest rivalry was with his eldest brother Joe Jr., who was killed on a secret mission in August 1944; while Henry, the eldest son of Lancaster, feuded with his younger brother Thomas to the point that as Prince of Wales he feared his father’s councillors plotted to elevate Thomas to the throne in his place. The rivalry worried Henry IV on his deathbed as he pleaded with Henry to reconcile with Thomas.¹⁹ The fiercely independent Kennedy brothers had not been brought up to count on each other, and so when Jack and Bobby forged an unbreakable bond, it not only took a great deal of time but was often motivated by the prompting of others. Bobby became Jack’s protector as he faced raging illness, which he needed to hide from the electorate, and despite the eight years age gap between the president and his youthful Attorney General, not to mention Bobby’s shyness and smaller physique, he stepped up as his brother’s keeper. Bobby fought dirty behind the scenes so that Jack could keep his hands clean; his younger brother was there to protect him from the skeletons building up in the closet.²⁰ While these forms of political wrangling were unnecessary for Henry, who disarmed any opposition through terror, his second brother John, Duke of Bedford was essential to the core of the Henrician vision. This was the man, after all, to whom Henry bestowed the regency of France in lieu of his infant son in his last will and testament.²¹ Only family could be truly trusted with the biggest matters of statecraft and the burden of leadership. For this, Henry V turned to his reliable brother-regent while Kennedy depended on the brother who worked alongside him in what could be called the only co-presidency in the history of the United States.

JFK and King Henry faced adversaries outside of their castle walls as well as within. Henry did so on at least two significant occasions, firstly in suppression of Lollardy. His erstwhile companion Sir John Oldcastle led the Lollard revolt and plotted to overthrow the government by kidnapping, or even

¹⁷ Harriss, ‘The King and his Magnates’, pp44-45, and R. Dallek, *Camelot’s Court, Inside the Kennedy White House* (New York, 2013), p. 80.

¹⁸ Harriss, ‘The King and his Magnates’, p. 40.

¹⁹ Harriss, ‘The King and his Magnates’, p. 33, and McFarlane, *Lancastrian Kings and Lollard Knights*, p. 112.

²⁰ L. Tye, *Bobby Kennedy, A Liberal Icon* (New York, 2016), p. 133.

²¹ Harriss, *Shaping the Nation*, p. 594.

assassinating, the king and his brothers.²² Had Henry been as vindictive as his critics claim, he surely would have pursued Oldcastle and his co-conspirators with greater tenacity, but he was content with waiting until Oldcastle was inevitably brought to justice. Even members of the court had to be suspect. In the Southampton plot of 1415, he was betrayed by Lord Henry Scrope, one of his closest allies as Prince of Wales, as well as by the man he had attempted to reconcile, a rival challenger for the throne, Edmund Earl of March.²³ Neither was spared from the king's wrath or the executioner's axe. Kennedy faced his own plotters in the form of the Bay of Pigs, as CIA advisers kept critical information from the president which meant the operation was always going to fail without direct US military action. It was all a CIA putsch to install a puppet government in an occupied Cuba, all of which was completely unconstitutional and attempted to usurp the powers vested in the chief executive. Henry V and JFK responded to these threats to their authority in very different ways – King Henry put men who had been his erstwhile friends to death because he could not bear doubting their loyalty to him, even when, as in the case of the Earl of March, he confessed the plot being hatched in his name to the king. Kennedy meanwhile was effectively powerless to remove the men responsible for embarrassing him; he could only question their judgement and bring his trusted confidants into even closer proximity for support. The Bay of Pigs was his Southampton, but instead of ridding himself of his enemies, he had to continue to accept their counsel. There were enemies of the king and president's visions everywhere who had their own kingdoms behind their eyes.

Elegy – the power of the vision and the memory of unfulfilled potential

The importance of destiny ties the grand ideas of these two visionaries together. Both won popularity because they made people feel good about themselves; Henry encouraged the English to be proud of their Englishness, while JFK conveyed a sense of pride in Americanness. Henry V called the English nation into being by anointing them as God's chosen people, a new Israel, with a divine mission to secure what rightly belonged to Christ's deputy on Earth, the French crown.²⁴ Kennedy's moon shot meanwhile worked because it was integrated into the fabric of American identity, culture, and history. He offered his audience a piece of their pioneering heritage, holding it out to them so that they might seize the opportunity to become New Frontiersmen. He urged Americans to transcend ephemeral political realities to join him in the ultimate goal of landing a man on the Moon, which was expected to become a spiritual endeavour.²⁵ By decreasing the metaphorical distance between Americans and the Moon, he made it an attainable goal; by equating it with past achievements, such as climbing Everest and the decision to fly across the Atlantic, he made it an act of destiny – the exploration of the

²² E. Powell, 'The Restoration of Law and Order', in G.L. Harriss (ed), *Henry V, The Practice of Kingship*, p. 61.

²³ Harriss, 'The King and his Magnates', p. 32.

²⁴ Allmand, *Henry V*, pp. 409-410, 419.

²⁵ J.W. Jordan, 'Kennedy's Romantic Moon and Its Rhetorical Legacy for Space Exploration', *Rhetoric and Public Affairs*, 6/2 (2003), p. 211.

Moon was the next step forward.²⁶ Henry V and John Kennedy inspired their people to take up a challenge far greater than anything in their immediate realities. By any account successfully merging the kingdoms of France and England under one crown in the fifteenth century was as ambitious a task as going to the Moon in the twentieth. But they succeeded in mobilising support for these momentous schemes by couching them as familiar and within grasp.

Memory was also integral to the success and legitimating of their visions. Henry V did this by establishing himself as the legitimate successor to Edward III not just as king of England but to his claim on the crown of France. The fact that his father had been a usurper was an ugly hindrance to his claim to seek justice and having someone in the form of Edmund Mortimer with a stronger claim to the English throne than his own could have scuttled the ambitions of lesser men without the drive and energy to confront these challenges. Henry's clean break with the past required an element of forgetting England's previous two rulers to establish a direct link between him and the last truly popular king, Edward III.²⁷ JFK made a similar move to establish himself as the 'new Roosevelt', relying on the memory of the New Deal and the consensus it created. In his acceptance of the Democratic nomination, he said: 'Franklin Roosevelt's New Deal promised security and succor to those in need. But the New Frontier of which I speak is not a set of promises – it is a set of challenges.'²⁸ A reminder of the past was the key to unlocking the future he sought to create – a future which was new but rooted in the frontier legacy of the American people. The New Frontier, like Henry's claim to France, was not just one challenge but multiple, and required many battles to be fought to accomplish it.

Where, then, was Kennedy's Agincourt? It is difficult to pinpoint a moment so transformative as Henry's was on the field of battle, but the Cuban Missile Crisis has been regarded as Kennedy's greatest triumph. Agincourt and the missile crisis both required immense stamina on the part of their commanders to instil discipline in the ranks. Both were battles of nerve and wit. At Agincourt, Henry's army was outnumbered at least two to one; historians have often been tempted to inflate French numbers in line with the contemporary accounts of miracle; Allmand for example estimated the French numbered 20,000.²⁹ But the royal army at Rouen had totalled around 14,000, and historians have coalesced around a figure of 6,000 men combined for the English, of which 5,000 were archers, while most of the French army was heavily armoured and a third of it composed of cavalry. Henry himself engaged in combat, coming as close as to have the crown on his basinet struck and broken. By

²⁶ *ibid.*, pp. 214-216.

²⁷ Allmand, *Henry V*, p. 405.

²⁸ 'ACCEPTANCE OF DEMOCRATIC NOMINATION FOR PRESIDENT, 15 July 1960', John F. Kennedy Presidential Library and Museum, <https://www.jfklibrary.org/learn/about-jfk/historic-speeches/acceptance-of-democratic-nomination-for-president> (15 October 2020).

²⁹ Allmand, *Henry V*, p. 88.

all accounts his victory was total, tumbling two of the three French divisions to ruin, crippling French military leadership by the loss of over 600 knights and nobles as well as taking Duke Charles of Orléans and perhaps 2,000 others prisoner.³⁰ Kennedy's triumph from the missile crisis was similarly hard-won but ended compromise. He agreed to withdraw redundant missiles from Turkey in exchange for the withdrawal of all Soviet offensive arms from Cuba. But the outcome could have been very different. On at least two occasions during the crisis, the 24th and 27th October, the US and Soviets came to the brink of war and it was only Kennedy's caution and insistence on micro-management which prevented a spiralling escalation. Both men could look upon their victories as the way to peace. While Agincourt sanctified Henry's quest, it was a triumph paved by slaughter. Kennedy, on the other hand, had been stoic to prevent one. France was to be won with blood and treasure, whereas Kennedy took from the Cuban Missile Crisis a renewed determination to end the Cold War in a lasting peace. For both of these men, there were hard battles ahead, whether in Henry's conquest of Normandy, or Kennedy's fight for civil rights and a nuclear Test Ban treaty in the summer of 1963.

McFarlane said of Henry V that 'he died with nothing finished'.³¹ The same was certainly true of Kennedy. Henry had begun his conquest of France; he had secured most of Normandy and held Paris in conjunction with the Burgundians. If he had lived just six weeks longer, and not been cut down at the age of thirty-five, he would have been crowned King of France upon Charles VI's death. The Treaty of Troyes in 1420 was imperfect and riddled with contradictions but considering how his infant son became monarch over two kingdoms, Henry V certainly had the energy and talent to make it work. Kennedy meanwhile had secured his Test Ban treaty and towards the end of his life made sizeable progress towards a joint space program with the Soviets. On 1st November 1963, Khrushchev signalled his intention of sending astronauts and cosmonauts to the Moon together for the first time in public, and less than two weeks later, Kennedy signed NSAM 271, a process of officially beginning inter-governmental collaboration in outer space.³² He was forty-six when he was gunned down by a nobody in Dallas, eagerly beginning his campaign for a second term. Had he not been wearing the back brace in the car, he probably would have dodged the final bullet which finally killed him.³³ The great irony was that it was the chronic illness, which he had spent so long concealing even from members of his inner circle, which finally brought about his grisly end. While Henry V finally succumbed to the dysentery he contracted at Meaux, it was, in reality, exhaustion which killed him. He became a victim of his own relentlessness. Both JFK and Henry V could have seen themselves as unstoppable, as dynamic and constantly moving forwards to meet their goals, but while King Henry matched the enormity of his vision with ceaseless energy, Kennedy could have moved faster on making the New Frontier a reality, whether in pushing to implement his domestic agenda or enacting a

³⁰ *ibid.*, pp. 96, 100.

³¹ McFarlane, *Lancastrian Kings and Lollard Knights*, pp. 124-125.

³² J.M. Logsdon, *John F. Kennedy and the Race to the Moon* (New York, 2013), pp. 192-193.

³³ Dallek, *John F. Kennedy*, p. 694.

Civil Rights bill sooner. Both so dearly wanted to carry on and so much left to do. But when unstoppable forces met immovable objects, death took these beloved leaders from the world too soon.

Epilogue

All this will not be finished in the first 100 days. Nor will it be finished in the first 1,000 days, nor in the life of this Administration, nor even perhaps in our lifetime on this planet. But let us begin.³⁴

Historians have enjoyed the allusion to Camelot because they have not had to substantiate it. What integrity does there have to be to link the Kennedy White House to a myth? Nonetheless, Garcha moved in a highly commendable direction when she attempted to do just this and determine whether Kennedy's achievements matched up to those written by Geoffrey of Monmouth.³⁵ Her conclusion was a moderated one, in keeping with the late counter-Camelotian scholarship, and reached a verdict which placed her as a disciple of the contemporary Mark White. But taken from the perspective of vision, Kennedy's legacy appears very different. Was he thus America's Henry V?

Both were products of their troubled childhoods and learnt how to grow up on their own, but in terms of personality they were somewhat different. Henry appears to have been chaste from the moment of his accession to his marriage to Katharine of Valois in June 1421, while Jack's cardinal sin was an addiction to sex and extramarital affairs, a product of his chronic illness and a desire to pack as much fun into his fleeting life as possible. Both articulated a clear vision meant to mobilise the whole people in its pursuit. Henry could not have secured France if he had not carried all of England with him, nor could an American have ever landed on the Moon without not only the huge financial resources of the federal budget, but the determination of the American people to endure hardship and sacrifice. Just like an English king, Kennedy held a court royal, with courtiers seeking favour while others were side-lined. The measure of the loyalty Henry engendered in his 'merry few' was their allegiance to his infant son, with Henry's brother John acting as the child's guardian and England's regent. Certainly, Duke Humfrey challenged Henry VI's authority in the following twenty-five years, but did so out of concern to protect Henry V's memory, not to desecrate it. By contrast, the loyalty of Kennedy's New Frontiersmen, his 'band of brothers', by necessity had to take a fluid course, first demonstrating their dedication to the cause by serving his successor, but then a willingness to fall on their swords to uphold what Kennedy had stood for, as through the wave of resignations from the White House in

³⁴ 'Inaugural Address of John F. Kennedy, Friday, January 20, 1961', The Avalon Project, https://avalon.law.yale.edu/20th_century/kennedy.asp (14 February 2021).

³⁵ See C. Garcha, 'CAMELOT: Was JFK the USA's King Arthur?', *The Journal of the Oxford University History Society*, XIII (2020).

1964. Few men can be said to have inspired such personal loyalty as Kennedy and Henry V have, and perhaps on that basis alone, Jack Kennedy was America's own King Hal.

McFarlane said of his idolised Henry V, 'Take him all round and he was, I think, the greatest man that ever ruled England.'³⁶ John F. Kennedy is not the greatest president to have ever governed the United States; that is a mantle which more adequately suits those who, in death, Jackie tried to connect him to – either Franklin Roosevelt or Abraham Lincoln. JFK was not defined by his achievements, as Garcha and others have tried to measure him, but by his capacity for greatness. It is what could have been, not what was, that intrigues a generation of historians fascinated with Kennedy and his ideas. Similarly, Henry's reputation is probably saved by his untimely death, because he did not live long enough to see the French venture collapse, leaving historians to speculate on how this talented king could have saved it. Kennedy died before his vision bore fruit – the Civil Rights Act in the summer of 1964, the 'War on Poverty', immigration reform, and ultimately Apollo 11. It took until 2014 to achieve what Kennedy was planning for 1965 – normalisation of relations with Cuba. In the final analysis, then, both of these men had to overcome great personal challenges to claim or create their thrones, projecting grand visions meant to promote the interests of their nation and secure their place in history. It is now for other historians to concur or condemn John F. Kennedy meriting the grace of a medieval king and whether he ever presided over a royalised presidency.

³⁶ McFarlane, *Lancastrian Kings and Lollard Knights*, p. 133.

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