Pride in Our Progress: An Examination of the John F. Kennedy Administration's Record Concerning Civil Rights and Environmentalism

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Abstract

John F. Kennedy was president during a time of great social change and upheaval. Social issues that were once ignored by the federal government moved to the forefront of the presidential agenda. This essay seeks to evaluate John F. Kennedy’s record on two important social issues—civil rights and the environment. His successes and failures are analyzed through the lens of the presidential role theory. In the end, it is shown that Kennedy used his roles in a nontraditional way and, in doing so, achieved mixed results.

In the wake of John F. Kennedy’s assassination, President Lyndon B. Johnson pleaded with Congress, “No memorial oration or eulogy could more eloquently honor President Kennedy’s memory than the earliest possible passage of the civil rights bill for which he fought so long” (1963). The civil rights legislation eventually passed in the form of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, but Kennedy’s legacy with regards to civil rights and other social issues has not been afforded such closure. While some consider Kennedy a champion of civil rights and other social concerns, others depict him as a cautious moderate who was forced into action by increasing public pressure. The truth, however, exists somewhere in the middle. Kennedy found himself in the Oval Office during a time when social issues began to play a progressively more important role in the presidential agenda. In an attempt to find balance between traditional presidential concerns and increasingly important social issues, Kennedy moved in a measured and cautious manner. Though unsuccessful in bringing about numerous concrete changes in the areas of civil rights and environmental protection, Kennedy used a variety of presidential roles in nontraditional ways to promote racial equality and environmentalism. Kennedy’s successes, failures, and contributions to the future progress of these social issues are made more evident by examining his actions in the context of his different presidential roles.
Kennedy's stance on the issues of civil rights and the environment are most successfully understood when examined through the lens of presidential role theory. Byron Daynes, Raymond Tatalovich, and Dennis Soden define presidential roles as "the set of expectations by political elites and citizenry that define the scope of presidential responsibilities in a given policy area" (1998, 2). There are five major roles that are most often associated with the modern presidency: commander in chief, chief diplomat, chief executive, legislative leader, and opinion/party leader. According to Daynes, Tatalovich, and Soden, each role traditionally affords a different amount of power of influence for the president. For example, the Constitution and historical precedence offer much more power to a president in the role of commander in chief than in the role of legislative leader. This can be attributed to the clear stating of the commander in chief role in the U.S. Constitution. The role of legislative leader, however, has come into play only as an inferred power (and is in competition with Congress). Daynes, Tatalovich, and Soden use the following chart to rank the presidential roles in terms of traditional power (6).

Throughout his administration, Kennedy attempted to use each role to further the issues of civil rights and environmentalism. In some cases, Kennedy effectively used a certain role while at times other roles were ignored or ineffectual.

**COMMANDER IN CHIEF**

In their essay "The Changing Agenda of the Environment and the Commander in Chief," Ronald Ketter, Chris Bordick, and Michael Cabral explain, "Historically, the commander in chief role is considered to be the most powerful, meaning that presidents have more authority and resources available in this role compared to others" (1999, 228). This power comes directly from the Constitution, which states, "The President shall be Commander in Chief of the Army and Navy of the United States, when called into actual service of the United States" (art. 2, sec. 2). In short, the president has the final say in decisions directly related to the military services of the United States. During Kennedy's administration, President Kennedy used the role of commander in chief sparingly but effectively. In the few instances when he used this role, his actions spurred significant steps forward in the cause of civil rights.

Although the U.S. military was officially desegregated during the Truman Administration, segregation still existed in the armed forces when Kennedy came into office in 1961.
Most significantly, reserve units and the Coast Guard remained segregated. James C. Harvey details Kennedy's efforts to further desegregation in the military.

An indication of the president's interest was manifested by his anger over the fact that in his inaugural parade no Negro coast guardsmen took part. Kennedy found that the Coast Guard was virtually all white, and he immediately took steps to remedy that situation after he was sworn in as president of the United States.

As of 1961 there were still six Negro reserve units in the Army. On April 3, 1962, Roswell Gilpatrick, the deputy secretary of defense, ordered them integrated. In June 1963 the Pentagon announced that the integration of the services had been achieved. (1971, 31)

Because the president has final say in matters involving the military, Kennedy's efforts to desegregate the armed forces were effective. To ensure that the integration of the military continued, Kennedy created the Committee on Equal Opportunity in the Armed Forces. When the committee reported that discrimination was still present on military bases and among the troops, Kennedy ordered Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara to act on the issue. In a letter to McNamara, Kennedy wrote:

The recommendations regarding both off-base and on-base conditions merit your prompt attention and certainly are in the spirit that I believe should characterize our approach to the matter [of integration]. I would hope your review and report on the recommendations could be completed within 30 days. (1963d, 496)

The president's influence was immediately felt. Harvey explains,

On July 26, 1963, McNamara sent out a directive to all those under his department. In the document the secretary noted that it was the responsibility of each military commander to oppose discriminatory practices affecting his men and their dependents in order to foster equal opportunity for them not only in areas under his immediate command but also in nearby communities. (1971, 34)

Another directive followed, asking base commanders to help families of soldiers in their attempts to enter their children into formerly segregated schools; cancel contracts with segregationist morticians; and ban participation of base athletic teams or musical bands in any off-base events that would take place in front of a segregated audience (U.S. Department of Defense 1963, 14358–59).

From this example, Kennedy's commitment to desegregation and the power of the role of commander in chief is clearly seen. Because of the role's inherent power, no other interest group or institutional body could effectively oppose Kennedy's authority with regards to the desegregation of the military. The changes, as evidenced in the Pentagon's quick reply, took place according to the commander in chief's directives with little debate or controversy.

A much more controversial issue in which Kennedy used the commander in chief role to further civil rights was the use of the military to desegregate schools in the South. In 1962—in direct conflict to a federal court order—the University of Mississippi refused to enroll James Meredith, an African-American. Governor Ross Barnett declared that no
school in Mississippi would desegregate while he was governor and claimed that the federal government could not meddle in the internal affairs of Mississippi. Though reluctant to do so, Kennedy sent 541 federal marshals to Oxford, Mississippi to escort Meredith, force the school into cooperation, and maintain order in case of rioting. Kennedy federalized the Mississippi National Guard and alerted several thousand federal troops in case more support was needed (Barrett 1965, 93–94, 221–22).

The next year a similar situation occurred in Alabama. Governor George Wallace defied a court order to desegregate the University of Alabama. When Kennedy signed an order federalizing the Alabama National Guard, however, Wallace quickly stepped aside (Harvey 1971, 41). The threat of force was enough to change the governor’s mind.

These examples show Kennedy’s commitment to civil rights through school desegregation, as well as the effectiveness of the commander in chief role. While Congress can always vote against a piece of legislation or ignore a president’s opinion, very few choose to ignore or subvert the commander in chief. Southern politicians fought strongly against almost every attempt at desegregation. When the president used the role of commander in chief, however, things happened immediately. Clearly, the role of commander in chief is effective and powerful. Although Kennedy did not use it often, it was always effective.

In the case of the environment, Kennedy also used the commander in chief role in one instance. He saw the space program—usually considered a military or scientific program—as an opportunity to better understand the relationship between humankind and the planet. In an address given the day before his death, Kennedy spoke about the space program and its importance to the environment:

Space research may open up new understanding of man’s relation to his environment. Examination of the astronauts’ physical and mental and emotional reactions can teach us more about the differences between normal and abnormal, about the causes and effects of disorientation, in metabolism which could result in extending the life span. When you study effects on our astronauts of exhaust gases which can contaminate their environment, and seek ways to alter these gases so to reduce their toxicity, you are working on problems similar to those we face in our great urban centers which themselves are being corrupted by gases and which must be cleared. (1963a)

Kennedy clearly believed a major function of the space program was to better understand and, consequently, improve the environment.

CHIEF DIPLOMAT

Carolyn Long, Michael Cabral, and Brooks Vandivort explain the president’s role as chief diplomat; “The constitutional and legal authority empowering the president to act as chief diplomat is significant, enabling the president, under most circumstances, to carry out the role as the primary foreign policy representative of the United States, with only limited intrusions by other branches of government” (1999, 189). In short, the president has the ability to act as the chief foreign policy officer of the United States. While in recent years presidents have used this role repeatedly to negotiate international environmental agreements, Kennedy did so only on two occasions.
Civil rights was considered a domestic issue, so Kennedy did not use the role of chief diplomat in his attempts to promote equality. He did, however, see possible foreign policy implications stemming from the civil rights struggle. Russell Riley comments, “Kennedy was concerned about racial struggles as a potential foreign policy problem, one which could not be ignored at a time when possible hotspots such as Vietnam, Cuba, or Berlin threatened to boil over, undermining the nation’s security” (1999, 203).

As mentioned previously, the Kennedy Administration negotiated two international treaties that, in one way or another, concerned the environment. In 1963, President Kennedy signed the Treaty Banning Nuclear Weapons Tests in the Atmosphere, also known as the Atomic Test Ban Treaty. Long, Cabral, and Vandivort explain, “[The treaty] represented a significant step toward limiting the environmental damage of nuclear weapons testing, both in the atmosphere and underground” (1999, 203). In an address to the nation, Kennedy explained that the Atomic Test Ban Treaty was environmentally significant because “over the years the number and the yield of weapons tested have rapidly increased and so have the radioactive hazards from such testing. Continued unrestricted testing by the nuclear powers joined in time by other nations which may be less adept in limiting pollution, will increasingly contaminate the air that all of us must breathe” (1963e). In this case, Kennedy effectively used the role of chief diplomat to promote environmental concerns.

Kennedy also used the role of chief diplomat to negotiate the 1963 Protocol on North Pacific Furs. Late in his administration, he sent a delegation to negotiate an international protocol concerning north pacific fisheries. Kennedy explained, “It is obvious that unless international conservation agreements are strictly enforced there is grave danger of permanent injury to our ocean resources” (1963j). Clearly, Kennedy saw the importance of international agreements concerning the environment, but, as evidenced, his initiation of such agreements was limited.

Attempting to explain Kennedy’s limited activism in regard to environmental diplomacy, Long, Cabral, and Vandivort hypothesize, “Several factors contributed to JFK’s limited diplomatic activity; his focus on trade and the United States’ growing role in Southeast Asia, his lack of personal interest in environmental matters, and his limited time in office” (1999, 189). It may also be noted that during the Kennedy Administration international environmentalism was still not an important political—or even scientific—concern. Although Kennedy did not use the role of environmental diplomat often, he was effective in the few issues in which he did involve himself. Most significantly, the Atomic Test Ban Treaty paved the way for future nuclear testing treaties and international environmental agreements.

**Chief Executive**

Daynes and Sussman define the role of chief executive as “involving a president’s relationship with the bureaucracy, his administrative staff, and domestic policymaking” (2001, 6). The extent to which Kennedy used this role to promote environmentalism and civil rights can be seen in his executive branch appointments, court appointments, executive orders, and creation of agencies and bureaus.
Kennedy first used his executive appointing power to increase diversity in the executive branch. He placed those who were sympathetic to the causes of civil rights and environmentalism in the administration. In regards to diversity, Kennedy appointed more African-Americans to positions in the federal government than any president before him. Robert C. Weaver was named to head the Housing and Home Finance Agency. George Weaver was made assistant secretary of labor. Carl T. Rowan was named assistant secretary of state for public affairs. Andrew Hatcher was appointed associate press secretary. Lisle Carter was named deputy assistant secretary in the Department of Health, Education and Welfare. Finally, Frank Reeves was named to the White House staff (Brauer 1977). Other important appointments were also made to increase diversity in the executive branch. Spottswood Robinson III was made a member of the Civil Rights Commission. John Duncan was appointed as commissioner for the District of Columbia. The naming of A. Leon Higginbotham to the Federal Trade Commission is particularly noteworthy. He was the first African-American to serve on a federal regulatory agency (Harvey 1971, 23).

Kennedy also appointed African-Americans to European ambassadorships. James C. Harvey writes, “For the first time blacks were named as ambassadors to European as well as African countries. Clifton Wharton was appointed as ambassador to Norway, and he was the first Negro to serve as ambassador to a predominantly white country and the first of his race to rise through the career service to become an ambassador” (Harvey 1971, 24).

Kennedy also appointed many minorities as federal judges. The most important was the appointment of Thurgood Marshall, one of the lawyers who argued Brown v. Board of Education, to the Second Circuit Court of Appeals. Kennedy also named the first female minority federal judge. Marjorie Lawson was nominated as a federal judge in Washington, D.C., and became the first African-American woman to be appointed to the federal bench (Harvey 1971, 23).

With regards to his appointment of several African-Americans to executive and judicial branches, the Southern Regional Council reported,

The Negro vote had been of great importance in the president’s election. It was in harmony with American political tradition and practice that the role of the Negroes in the election would have established the Negro’s right to some of the spoils of victory. Kennedy paid off his political debt, and in doing so he brought into office blacks of recognized distinction and ability. (1962, 25)

While this view of the president’s appointments makes them seem politically motivated, it does highlight the extent to which he appointed minorities to federal positions and how his actions were perceived by the nation.

Kennedy made two significant appointments on which he relied for most of his environmental decisions. Dennis L. Soden and Brent S. Steel state, “It is noted that [Kennedy] knew little about agriculture or natural resource issues, but relied on strong Secretaries, Orville Freeman and Stewart Udall, respectively—at Agriculture and Interior, to direct policy making in these areas” (1999, 228). Kennedy’s commitment to the issue of conservationism can be seen in the trust he placed in his advisors.
Kennedy also issued several Executive Orders concerning civil rights and environmental concerns. With regards to integrating federal housing, Kennedy issued an order entitled Equal Opportunity in Housing. The order announced that discrimination and segregation was to end in all federally owned or subsidized housing:

Whereas the executive branch of the Government, in faithfully executing the laws of the United States which authorize Federal financial assistance, directly or indirectly, for the provision, rehabilitation, and operation of housing and related facilities, is charged with an obligation and duty to assure that those laws are fairly administered and that benefits thereunder are made available to all Americans without regard to their race, color, creed, or national origin. (1962a)

To enforce this order, Kennedy created the President's Committee on Equal Opportunity in Housing. He also attempted to end discrimination in the hiring practices of the federal government. On March 7, 1961, Kennedy announced,

I am today issuing an Executive Order combining the President's Committee on Government Contracts and the President's Committee on Government Employment Policy into a single President's Committee on Equal Employment Opportunity. Through this vastly strengthened machinery I intend to ensure that all Americans of all colors and beliefs will have equal access to employment within the government, and those who do business with the government. (1962c, 121)

Kennedy continued his assault of discrimination in the workplace with Executive Order 11114 on June 22, 1963. This order extended the authority of the Committee on Equal Employment Practices to cover any federally assisted construction project, whether by loan, grant contact, guaranty, or insurance. The committee was given the power to withhold funds from any project where discrimination was encountered (1963c). All in all, the president issued five executive orders that dealt with race and equal opportunity. Kennedy clearly saw the power of chief executive as a method to end discrimination and further the civil rights agenda. During the first meeting of the Committee on Equal Employment Opportunity, Kennedy spoke of executive power and its role in promoting equality:

I am hopeful and confident that from this time forward the Committee will exercise the great powers given to it by executive order to permanently remove from Government employment and work performed for the Government every trace of discrimination because of race, creed, color, or place of national origin. (1961a)

Kennedy also used executive orders to promote his environmental agenda. According to "John F. Kennedy's Executive Orders 1961–1963," Kennedy issued nineteen executive orders that had to do with environmental issues. These accounted for nine percent of all of the executive orders that he issued; nine dealt with parks and forests, three with radioactivity, four with land use, and three with general environmental issues. For example, Executive Order 11072 states, "Whereas it would be in the public interest to extend the exterior boundaries of the Superior National Forest in Minnesota and the Clark National Forest in Missouri to include certain lands acquired or which may be hereafter acquired for
national forest purposes; together with adjoining public lands" (1962b). Kennedy used this and other executive orders to extend national forests, protect parks and resources, and further other environmental concerns.

From these examples, Kennedy's use of the chief executive role in the cases of civil rights and environmental protection is better understood. Obviously, Kennedy used the role of chief executive frequently; however, its effectiveness, at least in the case of civil rights, is questionable. James Harvey explains why Kennedy's executive orders concerning discrimination in the workplace were ineffective:

Harold Fleming in 1965 pointed out that the attempt to deal with discrimination in jobs [with executive orders] had had little impact. He gave the following reasons: there was little jurisdiction over labor unions; automation had caused a decline in less skilled jobs, leaving Negroes at a disadvantage . . . and enforcement provisions were practically never used. In fact, "the ultimate sanction"—contract termination—has never been applied, no hearings have been held, and only a few companies have been put on the list of ineligibles for future contracts. (1971, 48)

Clearly, the implementation and enforcement of these executive orders proved difficult. For this reason, though used more frequently than other presidential roles, the role of chief executive was still less effective than other presidential roles in bringing about consequential change in regards to civil rights and environmental protection.

**LEGISLATIVE LEADER**

Traditionally, the role of legislative leader has been considered less powerful than most other presidential roles, because of the powerful position of Congress in creating legislation. Although the president may recommend legislation and use his influence to get things passed, he cannot vote. And in the end, it is the vote that matters. This is not to say, however, that the role cannot be important or used effectively. Daynes and Sussman explain, "While [legislative leader] is one of the president's weaker roles, lacking in both authority and resources, it is, nevertheless, a role of lasting consequence to most presidents—and a role that can build the social agenda." They continue, "The President may veto important acts of Congress, refuse to appoint persons with legislative support to administrative positions, or neglect to consult with representatives or senators on policy issues" (2001, 63).

Though Kennedy served in Congress for over a decade before his presidency, he rarely used the role of legislative leader to further civil rights or the environment. In 1961, Kennedy sent "A Special Message to the Congress on Natural Resources." This message showed great foresight in stating that "problems of immediacy always have the advantage of attracting notice—those that lie in the future fare poorly in the competition for attention and money. . . . We cannot, however, delude ourselves—we must understand our resources problems, and we must face up to them now. The task is large but it will be done" (1961b). It called for legislative action regarding water resources, electric power, forests, public lands, and ocean resources. The administration, however, did nothing following the
release of this message to push for the legislation. Only one piece of significant environmental legislation was passed during the Kennedy Administration. The Clean Air Act of 1963 set restrictions on pollution and contamination. Kennedy supported the bill, but was not an original proponent of it. Why Kennedy ignored the opportunity to use the role of legislative leader to preserve the environment as he initially proposed is unknown, but his failure is clear.

The reason for his legislative inaction on civil rights, on the other hand, is clearer. As a Democratic president, Kennedy found himself in a precarious position with Congress. While a majority of his party supported progressive civil rights legislation, a good portion of the party belonged to the southern “Dixiecrat” coalition. The Dixiecrats were southern segregationists who distrusted the federal government and vehemently opposed any civil rights legislation. The Dixiecrats held several important committee chairmanships in both the House and Senate and vowed to stop any civil rights legislation from getting to the floor. Alexander Bickel explains:

A first and obvious generalization is that the [civil rights] performance through 1962 was almost wholly executive. The administration broke no lances with Congress. As to this, one need perhaps say no more than President Kennedy was a realist, and he had troubles enough in what was in all intents and purposes a three-party legislature, with a species of [southern] Democrats holding the balance of power. (1962, 1877)

By 1963, however, Kennedy decided to push for a strong piece of civil rights legislation in the Congress. On February 28, 1963, Kennedy sent a special message to Congress concerning civil rights. It stated:

In the last two years, more progress has been made in securing the civil rights of all Americans than in any comparable period in our history. Progress has been made—through executive action, litigation, persuasion and private initiative—in achieving and protecting equality of opportunity in education, voting, transportation, employment, housing, government, and the enjoyment of public accommodations.

But pride in our progress must not give way to relaxation of our effort. Nor does progress in the Executive Branch enable the Legislative Branch to escape its own obligations. On the contrary, it is in the light of this nationwide progress, and in the belief that Congress will wish once again to meet its responsibilities in this matter, that I stress in the following agenda of existing and prospective action important legislative as well as administrative measures. (1963h)

Kennedy sent a clear message to Congress that the time for meaningful civil rights legislation had arrived. Unlike his message on natural resources, however, Kennedy followed up on this message and devoted great time and energy to the success of civil rights legislation.

When Congress did not propose any meaningful legislation after the delivery of his special message, the Kennedy Administration decided to take matters into its own hands. Harvey writes, “The president decided to go ahead with a sweeping new bill on May 31, over the objection of some of his political advisors who foresaw both congressional and electoral defeat” (1971, 56). On June 19, 1963, Kennedy sent another special message to
Congress entitled “Civil Rights and Job Opportunities.” In the message, Kennedy proposed that Congress stay in session until meaningful legislation was passed. He also asked for the following provisions: an extension of the Civil Rights Commission, an increase in voting rights, equal accommodations in public facilities, equal opportunity in employment, more federally assisted programs for minorities, and broader efforts in the desegregation of schools (1963i).

Kennedy also attempted to get civil rights legislation through Congress. He actively lobbied congressional leaders from both the Republican and Democratic parties and held daily meetings in regards to the legislation’s progress. Unfortunately, Kennedy was assassinated before the legislation was enacted. However, as President Johnson later stated, the eventual passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 can partially be attributed to “President Kennedy’s memory” (1963).

As evidenced in this section, Kennedy did not use his role as legislative leader as frequently as other roles, but in the one case in which he did, he eventually found great success—though posthumously—despite strong opposition from Congress. This demonstrates that the role of legislative leader is not necessarily as powerful or influential as other presidential roles in bringing about social change, but can be significantly effective when it is used properly. For example, the Civil Rights Act, though slow in its incubation, was significantly more influential than any of Kennedy’s other executive orders on civil rights.

**OPINION/PARTY LEADER**

Opinion/party leader is generally considered the weakest of the presidential roles. Daynes and Sussman define the role: “The opinion/party leader attempts to mobilize public support for the policies and programs of the administration and party on one hand and respond to constituent interests on the other.” They continue, “At the same time, the president must decide which issues to address and then present a case for them to the public” (2001, 32). In the case of both the environment and civil rights, Kennedy progressively dedicated more time to each issue in his role as an opinion leader.

The Democratic Party Platform of 1960 contained small sections on both the environment and civil rights. An entire section on natural resources stated, “Sound public policy must assure that these essential resources will be available to provide the good life for our children and future generations” (Democratic National Committee, 45). The same platform contained two sections on civil rights issues. One is entitled “Discrimination in Employment” and the other “Civil Rights.” This section came to be known as the “Rights of Man” document. It states, “We shall also seek to create an affirmative new atmosphere in which to deal with racial divisions and inequalities which threaten both the integrity of our democratic faith and the proposition on which our nation was founded—that all men are created equal” (Democratic National Committee, 47). In his acceptance speech, at the Democratic Convention, Kennedy accepted the party platform and dedicated himself to fulfilling the “Rights of Man.”
During the early years of his administration, however, Kennedy did not use his role as opinion leader frequently in the cases of civil rights and environmentalism. He mentioned both briefly in his first State of the Union Address but provided no specifics on how he planned to deal with the issues. Concerning Kennedy's early rhetoric on civil rights, Carl Brauer writes, "Evidently fearing an adverse reaction from Southern Democrats, Kennedy avoided the 'bully pulpit.' He did not devote a major address to the issue" (1977, 74).

This trend continued until Kennedy decided to fully push the civil rights legislation mentioned earlier. The day following his standoff with George Wallace over the admission of African-Americans into the University of Alabama, Kennedy delivered a nationally broadcast speech concerning the topic of civil rights. Kennedy not only explained his reasoning for federalizing the Alabama National Guard, he redefined the entire civil rights struggle as a moral issue facing the country. Kennedy stated, "We are confronted primarily with a moral issue. It is as old as the scriptures and is as clear as the American Constitution. The heart of the question is whether all Americans are to be afforded equal rights and equal opportunities, whether we are going to treat our fellow Americans as we want to be treated" (1963f). For the first time, an American president spoke to the entire nation about civil rights and the nation's moral obligation to make necessary changes. From the time of this speech, Kennedy spoke frequently and passionately about the issue of civil rights.

As with civil rights, Kennedy did not use the "bully pulpit" to discuss environmental issues early on in his administration. A few months before his death, however, he embarked on a "Conservation Tour of America" during which he spoke about conservation and natural resources all over the country. At the first stop on the tour, Grey Towers, Kennedy expressed his views on conservationism, "The riches of this continent should be used for all the people to provide a more abundant life, and . . . that the waste of these resources, or the exploitation by a few, [is] a threat to our national democratic way of life" (1963b). Kennedy continued his tour throughout the United States over the next week and, in his final stop in Las Vegas, expressed his ultimate goal concerning environmental protection:

Our task, the task of propelling a third wave of conservation in the United States, following that of Theodore Roosevelt and of Franklin Roosevelt, is to make science the servant of conservation, and to devise new programs of land stewardship that will enable us to preserve this green environment, which means so much to all of us. . . . We must mount a new campaign to preserve our natural environment in order that those who come after us will find a green and rich country. (1963g)

As with civil rights, Kennedy made a more concerted effort to affect public opinion concerning the issue of the environment as his presidency drew to a close. Had Kennedy not been assassinated, it is possible that he would have used the role of opinion/party leader to a much greater extent.

While opinion/party leader is not considered a powerful role, Kennedy used it increasingly more often and more effectively as his administration progressed. Because of the strong opposition he faced in Congress, Kennedy found it necessary to appeal to the public, especially in the case of civil rights. By appealing to the moral conscience of America, Kennedy increased the chances for his legislative and executive policies to succeed.
CONCLUSION

In his attempt to promote civil rights and conservationism, John F. Kennedy used with varying levels of success all of the different roles available to him. As commander in chief, Kennedy successfully continued the integration of the military that began during the Truman Administration and successfully desegregated universities in the South. He also used this role to promote the continuance of the space program to research the environment and its relation to man. Whenever Kennedy used this role to address these issues, the results were positive. Because conservationism and civil rights were considered domestic political issues, however, Kennedy used the role of commander in chief infrequently. Kennedy’s use of the chief diplomat role mirrored his role as commander in chief. The times he used diplomacy for environmental issues, though infrequent, were successful.

Kennedy used the chief executive role more frequently than any other role. Kennedy appointed more African-Americans to positions in the federal government than any president before him. He appointed the first minority ambassador to a European nation and appointed many minorities as federal judges—including Marjorie Lawson, the first female minority federal judge, and Thurgood Marshall, an eventual Supreme Court Justice. Kennedy also appointed strong environmentalists to positions and relied on their judgment when faced with related issues.

Through the use of executive power, Kennedy created the Equal Opportunity Employment Commission and bolstered the power of the Civil Rights Commission. Kennedy also used this role to further integrate schools and the military. Kennedy also issued several executive orders concerning national parks and forests. Clearly, the role of chief executive was Kennedy’s most frequently used role and, in most cases, was quite effective.

The role of legislative leader was not used often by Kennedy. In the one case that he pushed Congress to enact the Civil Rights Act, however, the legislation eventually passed (though after his assassination). Clearly, the role of legislative leader can be used to promote the social agenda, but it faces strong opposition and requires a great deal of effort. In many cases, however, its effects can carry greater influence nationwide than military actions and executive orders.

The role of opinion/party leader is the least effective of all of the presidential roles, but by the end of his administration Kennedy found it important to discuss the social issues with the public. He gave more and more speeches on the issues of civil rights and conservation as his presidency progressed. While it is difficult to measure the effectiveness of his effort, the frequency with which he used speeches to influence social policy reflects the role’s importance.

This diagram was presented earlier to show the relative power of presidential roles.
As evidenced, the relative power of each role was consistent during the Kennedy Administration. For example, his infrequent uses of commander in chief and chief diplomat were always successful. His frequent use of chief executive, however, produced mixed results. It is interesting that John F. Kennedy, though probably cognizant of the differing powers of each role, used less powerful roles more frequently than more powerful roles. The following diagram shows the frequency with which Kennedy used different roles to promote his civil rights and environmental agenda.

**CIVIL RIGHTS**

![Diagram of Civil Rights Roles]

**ENVIRONMENT**

![Diagram of Environmental Roles]

In terms of the social agenda, Kennedy found the roles of chief executive and opinion/party leader to be most suited to his policy concerns. While these roles are not always the most effective or powerful, they fit with the attributes of social issues during the Kennedy Administration.

Although Kennedy was not entirely successful in bringing about monumental changes in civil rights and environmental issues, he did use almost every role at his disposal in attempts to further both issues. Following his assassination, a great deal of progress was made in relation to both issues. Clearly, he planted the seeds for future change.

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