

## Coming to Terms with John F. Kennedy

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Stephen F. Knott has spent his life grappling with the legacy of President John F. Kennedy: JFK was the first president Knott remembers, he worked for Ted Kennedy's Senate campaign in 1976, and later he worked at the John F. Kennedy Library in Boston. Moreover, Knott's scholarly work on the American presidency has wrestled with Kennedy's time in office and whether his presidency was ultimately a positive or negative one for the country. After initially being a strong Kennedy fan, Knott's views began to sour during his time at the library, eventually leading him to become a "Reagan Democrat." The Trump presidency led Knott to revisit JFK, leading him once more to reconsider his views. *Coming to Terms with John F. Kennedy* offers a nuanced assessment of the thirty-fifth president, whose legacy and impact people continue to debate to this day. Knott examines Kennedy through the lens of five critical issues: his interpretation of presidential power, his approach to civil rights, and his foreign policy toward Cuba, the Soviet Union, and Vietnam. Knott also explores JFK's assassination and the evolving interpretations of his presidency, both highly politicized subject matters. What emerges is a president as complex as the author's shifting views about him. The passage of sixty years, from working in the Kennedy Library to a career writing about the American presidency, has given Knott a broader view of Kennedy's presidency and allowed him to see how both the Left and the Right, and members of the Kennedy family, distorted JFK's record for their own purposes. Despite the existence of over forty thousand books dealing with the man and his era, *Coming to Terms with John F. Kennedy* offers something new to say about this brief but important presidency. Knott contends that Kennedy's presidency, for better or for worse, mattered deeply and that whatever his personal flaws, Kennedy's lofty rhetoric appealed to what is best in America, without invoking the snarling nativism of his least illustrious successor, Donald Trump.

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