Coffee, Tea, and John F. Kennedy

FEMALE INVOLVEMENT IN THE 1952 SENATE CAMPAIGN OF JOHN FITZGERALD KENNEDY

BY

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INTRODUCTION

John Fitzgerald Kennedy is remembered for many things, like his heroics during World War II in saving his men after his PT boat was sunk. He is remembered for his sympathy with the bourgeoning civil rights movement; for his missteps during the Bay of Pigs fiasco; for averting a nuclear war in the Cuban Missile Crisis; and for his womanizing throughout his career. Kennedy treated the women in his personal life as objects for his enjoyment and as trading cards, allegedly sharing his mistresses with others, including his brother, Robert. He came from wealth and privilege, the son of the ultimate housewife and a disgraced former Ambassador who had made his money in Hollywood and as a bootlegger during prohibition. In the 50 years since John F. Kennedy’s death in November 1963, the Kennedy family has been the face of countless scandals. There was David Kennedy’s death from a heroin overdose; then Michael Kennedy’s rumored affair with a fourteen year old, followed by his death during an overzealous football game on skis; Chappaquiddick; William Smith’s rape case and countless other scandals involving every branch of the family. This study is not about the salacious events in John Kennedy’s life, true or rumored, but it is about the women in his life, the women who served his political ambitions and helped to elect this man of privilege, recast as a man of the people, to the US Senate. A result of the accomplished and intelligent female family members of the Kennedy family, John Kennedy had an
enlightened attitude towards women’s usefulness in politics, which led him to create a
space for women in his political campaigns. This study explores the role women played
in John Kennedy’s 1952 Senatorial campaign that changed how women participated in
politics from that point forward. It addresses a transitional stage of women’s
empowerment, two decades prior to the second stage of women’s liberation.

Though History is the study of the past it is not immune to the influences of the
present. John Kennedy’s legacy is colored by all of the events listed above, and the way
the Kennedy family as a whole is viewed has an undeniable link to the way John
Kennedy is viewed as an individual. The majority of Kennedy biographies focus on the
dysfunctions of the Kennedy family and John Kennedy’s failings as a husband and as a
man, because salacious stories sell better than political ones. There has been a constant
stream of material written about John Kennedy’s affairs over the past 50 years, including
the release of Mimi Alford’s memoir of her affair with President Kennedy while a student
at Wheaton College. Kennedy’s shortcomings are substantial, and well worth bringing to
light. However, his entire political career should not be overshadowed by his personal
foibles. Yes, Kennedy treated many of the women in his life badly, but his relationship
with women did not begin and end with those with whom he was sexually involved.
Kennedy’s political relationship with women is just as complex as his personal
relationship with women, but is exponentially more important. At a time when women
were forced out of jobs they held during World War II and back into their homes,
Kennedy mobilized a work force of housewives, secretaries, stay at home mothers, and
political “trophy wives.” Kennedy made the conscious decision to use women volunteers
in his 1952 senatorial campaign, which at the time was a revolutionary tactic. His
motivation for doing so was deeply rooted in the environment in which he grew up. While his father’s womanizing had provided an example the son was quick to follow in his personal life, his mother and sisters provided him with a very clear view of what women were capable of, if given the chance.

In essence, John Kennedy had something surprisingly in common with women in the early 1950s. In the post-World War II, pre-women’s liberation era both John Kennedy and women in the 1950s were in transition. Though John was still inextricably tied to the gender roles and constructs that women were beginning to struggle against, he was also capable of seeing the potential these women represented, and was instrumental in revolutionizing the role of women in political campaigns.

This aspect of John’s political career has been neglected by almost every author who has written about him. John Kennedy’s willingness to utilize female volunteers has been discarded in favor of stories of his affairs, and by association the female volunteers who donated their time and tremendous effort to the Kennedy campaign have been relegated to the footnotes of Kennedy biographies. To allow this trend to continue is a disservice not only to John’s legacy, but to the women who left their husbands and children at home to work long hours on the Kennedy campaign, to host “Kennedy Teas” and “Coffee with the Kennedys”, who organized speaking engagements for Kennedy or his mother and sisters and who were brave enough to eschew the social pressures of the time and find work and fulfillment outside of the home. John Kennedy’s 1952 senatorial campaign is not only important because it highlights another side of John Kennedy, but it is important because it is one piece that helped pave the way for the women’s movement that gained momentum in the later 1960s and 1970s.
The Kennedy campaign’s female volunteers helped Kennedy beat the incumbent senator, Henry Cabot Lodge, and they also created a new niche for women in politics. John Kennedy mobilized students, mothers, housewives, and professional women and allowed them to play a massive role in his senatorial campaign. These women hosted the famed teas and coffees, and held receptions, knocked on doors and registered voters for the Kennedy campaign. Although in today’s terms this may seem small and insignificant, in reality, the Kennedy campaign was tapping into a resource that previous campaigns had ignored and that helped to unseat a sitting senator. In the female volunteers the Kennedy campaign found countless women who were willing and able to host functions, fill meeting halls, and garner attention for John Kennedy’s campaign that would not otherwise have existed. These women played an important role in John’s campaign and forged a new role for women in politics. In return, the Kennedy campaign introduced women who might otherwise have never become political, to the world of campaigning. Many of these women, such as Mary S. Colbert, Polly Fitzgerald, and Ruth M. Batson, went on to have careers in politics, either continuing on with John Kennedy’s campaigns, those of his brothers Robert or Ted, or with other political figures.

Though very little has been written about the women involved with John Kennedy’s 1952 senatorial campaign, much has been written about John Kennedy himself. Ted Sorensen’s *Kennedy: The Classic Biography* is essentially the definitive Kennedy biography, and comes from one of Kennedy’s closest advisors.\(^1\) Because it comes from one of John Kennedy’s confidants, a good deal of the book is biased in favor of John, in the end the objective of the text is clearly to present a favorable portrait of John Kennedy, and information that would do otherwise is neglected or ignored. *An*
Unfinished Life: John F. Kennedy, 1917-1963 by Robert Dallek uses previously unreleased archival sources, so Dallek is able to cover new ground in much of his book. John Kennedy’s illnesses and overall health is a focal point for the text, but Dallek’s chapters about decisions Kennedy would have made had he lived are not particularly useful.²

Several books focus on the Kennedy family, but the majority begin with Rose Fitzgerald Kennedy and Joseph Patrick Kennedy onwards. Doris Kearns Goodwin’s biography about the Fitzgerald and Kennedy families, The Fitzgeralds and the Kennedys: an American Saga provides information on the origins of the two dynasties. Little information is known about some of the older, newly immigrated, Fitzgeralds and Kennedys but Kearns provides the canon of the families’ history.³ The Patriarch: the Remarkable Life and Turbulent Times of Joseph P. Kennedy by David Nasaw is one book that focuses on Joseph P. Kennedy alone. Nasaw states that he believes Joseph P. Kennedy has been portrayed unfairly by most historians and is determined to explain away most of Joseph P. Kennedy’s failings, such as accusations of anti-Semitism, the mistreatment of his wife Rose, and how he made his fortune. As a result, Nasaw dismisses Joseph P. Kennedy’s unsavory actions with little reason to warrant doing so.⁴ Laurence Leamer’s book The Kennedy Women: the Saga of an American Family contains well researched facts on the members of the Kennedy family, especially John Kennedy’s siblings.⁵ Most of the book focuses more on anecdotes than actual facts, and the result is in depth a wading pool analysis of the people and events he is describing. Rose Fitzgerald Kennedy’s book, Times to Remember, unsurprisingly portrays the family in a flattering
light and steadfastly omits any information that would reflect negatively on the Kennedy family.\textsuperscript{6}

Though promising, \textit{Kennedy Versus Lodge: the 1952 Massachusetts Senate Race}, by Thomas J. Whalen has little new information to add to the subject. The majority of \textit{Kennedy Versus Lodge} is a restatement of the basic facts concerning the election, biographies of Kennedy and Lodge and some discussion about where each stood in their respective political parties. Despite the fact that the Kennedy Teas are explicitly mentioned in promotional material for the book, Whalen does not go much further than mentioning that there were Teas, women attended, and that Ethel Kennedy seemed to enjoy the ones she attended. Whalen also fails to go into any detail about the roles of the female volunteers on the campaign, other than that there happened to be some present.\textsuperscript{7}

Other books are far less valuable in terms of the actual information and analysis they provide. \textit{John F. Kennedy’s Women: the Story of Sexual Obsession} by Michael O’Brien is exactly as ridiculous as it sounds. There is little factual information in the text; it focuses on propagating the image of John F. Kennedy as a Ladies Man Extraordinaire.\textsuperscript{8} Books like Mimi Alford’s \textit{Once Upon a Secret: My Affair with President John F. Kennedy and its Aftermath} are interesting, but because of the memoir format, it is far more about Alford than John Kennedy, and almost everything in the book is impossible to verify. Still, when critically read in context of other, more fact-based biographies of John Kennedy it does provide an insight into John Kennedy, on a far more personal level.\textsuperscript{9}

Although there is an abject lack of secondary sources concerning the female volunteers in Kennedy’s 1952 Senatorial campaign, there is a limited amount of primary
source material available. Rose Fitzgerald Kennedy kept scrapbooks about her son’s senator campaign, which she filled with newspaper clippings about the campaign that were later donated to the Kennedy Library. These newspaper clippings range from articles recruiting women to volunteer for John Kennedy, advertising “Women for Kennedy” committees, promoting “Kennedy Teas” and “Coffee with the Kennedys,” and promoting speaking events with John Kennedy or Rose, Eunice, Patricia or Jean Kennedy, and articles about the Kennedy family in general. These provide amazing insight into how John Kennedy and the Kennedy family as a whole were promoted to the public and how they were received and perceived by the press. The descriptions of the “Women for Kennedy” committees and the portrayal of the Kennedy family, for example, are instrumental to understanding why women would be drawn to the Kennedy campaign, despite a previous lack of political work or interest.

Unfortunately, the majority of the press clippings come from scrapbooks that Rose Kennedy kept for her personal use, not for posterity. Though the scrapbooks were donated to the John F. Kennedy Library after Rose’s death, they were clearly kept for her personal records rather than for historical purposes. The majority of the citations were cut off of individual articles, and articles that were printed on more than one page were seldom preserved together. Rose had, however, circled the name “Kennedy” in many of the articles. The scrapbooks have been preserved as best they can be by the Kennedy Library, but several of the articles have become too yellowed and damaged to accurately read.

The most useful resource concerning the female volunteers in the 1952 senate campaign and the role of the Kennedy women is the Oral History Program at the
Kennedy Library. There are hundreds of oral history interviews, and a large number directly address and discuss the female volunteers, how they were recruited, why they wanted to volunteer, what work they did, and the impact volunteering for the senate campaign had on their lives. Among the interview subjects are Kennedy family and friends, male campaign workers, John Kennedy’s secretary and most importantly: women who volunteered in 1952, some of whom went on to work for Kennedy in 1960, while others went on to work for other politicians. Polly Fitzgerald, a distant Kennedy cousin, was one of the first people to begin volunteering on the Kennedy campaign and in her oral history she discusses the evolution of the “Kennedy Teas” and “Coffee with the Kennedys,” as well as the type of women she worked alongside and the lasting impact Kennedy’s use of female volunteers had on her life and the lives of others.

Articles from Rose Kennedy’s scrapbooks and oral histories from the John F. Kennedy Library’s Oral History program were the main primary sources used in this study. Though the articles were limited to what Rose Kennedy had selected for her scrapbook, the vast number of articles suggest that Rose collected all the articles she could find. The oral histories were by far the most interesting and informative source. The Kennedy Library has oral histories that cover essentially every facet of the Kennedy family members. These were helpful not only for information strictly regarding women in the 1952 campaign and the “Kennedy Teas,” but for descriptions and anecdotes about Kennedy family members and the environment in which John and his siblings were raised.

The primary sources are, unfortunately, limited to those listed above. Though many of John’s documents regarding the daily running of his office and campaigns
survive for his 1960 campaign, most of the documents relating to the specific logistics of the campaign have been either lost or destroyed. It is also entirely possible that most of the documents relating to female volunteers on the 1952 campaign were never even organized or kept. Given the gender constructs of the 1950s, it may never have occurred to people that documents about female volunteers would have important and historical value in future years.

Many of the secondary sources used in this study concern the role of women both before and after 1952. Linda Eisenmann’s book, Higher Education for Women in Postwar America, 1945-1965 provided valuable information regarding the attitudes towards women’s education and employment in the aftermath of World War II.10 Women's America: Refocusing the Past, a collection of essays from different historians, contains several essays used in this study for background information about women’s employment during and immediately following World War II, as well as about women’s role in politics prior to 1950.11

This study is comprised of seven chapters. The first chapter has biographies of John Kennedy’s immediate family members, as well as pertinent information concerning the Kennedy and Fitzgerald families’ attitudes towards women. The second chapter discusses the public image of the Kennedy family, the ways in which this image was crafted and the way the family was perceived by the general public and campaign volunteers. The third and fourth chapters detail the role Rose, Eunice, Patricia, and Jean played in John’s 1952 Senate campaign, the particulars of “Kennedy Teas,” and the committees that organized the “Kennedy Teas.” The fifth and sixth chapters explore the way in which the “Kennedy Teas,” and John Kennedy’s campaign in general, provided a
new opportunity for women to work outside the home but still avoid social repercussions of breaking the gender constructs of the era. The final chapter discusses the lasting legacy of female involvement in the 1952 and the ways in which the “Kennedy Teas” revolutionized a role for women in political campaigns.

The Kennedy family valued higher education for both genders, which was uncommon in the 1950s. As a result of his sisters’ and mother’s influence, John Kennedy grew up with the perspective that women were as intelligent and capable as men. This uncommon perspective, coupled with the changes in gender constructs that had begun during World War II and would continue on for decades, meant that John Kennedy saw and seized the potential help that women could give his campaign.
CHAPTER ONE:  
THE KENNEDY FAMILY  

Family members and historical background

In many ways, the 1952 Massachusetts senatorial race was history repeating itself. In 1916, Henry Cabot Lodge, Sr. (Henry Cabot Lodge Jr.’s grandfather) ran against John ‘Honey Fitz’ Fitzgerald (Kennedy’s grandfather) in the Massachusetts senatorial race. Lodge beat Fitzgerald, and 36 years later, the 1952 election was publicized as a rematch between two of Boston’s most prominent political families. Lodge was a Republican and had served as a senator from 1937-1944, reelected in 1947, and was a popular politician. In the early stages of the campaigns, Lodge was the strong favorite. Many in the political sphere doubted that John could unseat Lodge because the majority of Massachusetts was believed to be at least satisfied with the status quo.

As the campaign got underway it became clear that the candidates were running very different campaigns. While Lodge seemed content to let his senatorial record speak for him, John Kennedy started campaigning early and maintained an incredible amount of energy and momentum throughout the campaign. The strategy from the Kennedy camp was to fight as hard as possible from the very beginning, and to build a strong campaign platform and electorate following before Lodge even began his campaign.

The marriage of Joseph Patrick Kennedy and Rose Fitzgerald joined two prominent Massachusetts families. Both families were wealthy and had been long involved in politics. Mary Josephine Hannon Fitzgerald, Rose Fitzgerald Kennedy’s
mother and John Kennedy’s maternal grandmother, was born on October 31st, 1865, to Irish immigrant parents and died on August 8th, 1964. She was the sixth of nine children, and at the age of twenty-three married her second cousin, John Francis ‘Honey Fitz’ Fitzgerald. John Fitzgerald was born on February 11th, 1863. His parents were Irish immigrants who came from the same village as Mary Hannon Fitzgerald’s parents. John Fitzgerald graduated from Boston College and soon became heavily involved in Massachusetts politics. He spent a short period of time in the Massachusetts senate from 1892 until 1894, and was elected to Congress serving the 9th district in 1895, serving until 1901. He was Mayor of Boston from 1906 until 1908 and again from 1910 to 1914. Fitzgerald ran for senate against Henry Cabot Lodge, Sr. in 1916, but lost the election to Lodge. Fitzgerald spent time in Congress in 1919 until the election was contested, due to charges of illegal registration and ballot stuffing. After the allegations of ballot stuffing and illegal registration, Fitzgerald withdrew from Congress and the charges were dropped. Aside from his political reputation, Fitzgerald was a larger than life figure in Boston politics; known for singing ‘Sweet Adeline’ and dancing Irish jigs at political events. When Fitzgerald died on October 2nd, 1950, his funeral was the biggest in Boston’s history. When John F. Kennedy ran for senate in 1952, Fitzgerald was still affectionately remembered by many in Massachusetts as ‘Honey Fitz’.

Though John Fitzgerald was a public figure, there is not much known about his personal life, especially concerning his marriage to Mary Hannon Fitzgerald. However, John Fitzgerald did reportedly have at least one affair during their marriage, which was reported to Mary Hannon Fitzgerald by a political opponent. The Fitzgeralda had six children, three boys and three girls. Fitzgerald encouraged Rose to pursue an education,
however, when Rose was accepted to Wellesley College, her father refused to allow her to attend. Instead of Wellesley, Fitzgerald insisted that Rose attend Manhattanville College of the Sacred Heart, a Catholic college.\textsuperscript{21}

Rose Fitzgerald, the daughter of John Fitzgerald and Mary Hannon was born on July 22\textsuperscript{nd} 1890. She was a good student, and trained in piano at the New England Conservatory before attending college, ultimately graduating from Manhattanville College of the Sacred Heart in 1910.\textsuperscript{22} She worked with various charities (especially those that helped the physically and mentally disabled) and maintained a strong connection to the Church throughout her life. Rose married Joseph Patrick Kennedy in 1914.\textsuperscript{23}

Joseph Patrick Kennedy was born on September 6\textsuperscript{th}, 1888, to Mary Augusta Kennedy and P.J Kennedy. He was educated at the Boston Latin School and graduated from Harvard in 1912. Kennedy made his fortune in the stock market before the crash of 1929, in real estate investments, in Hollywood studios and in continuing his father’s liquor importation business.\textsuperscript{24} Serving as ambassador to England for two years, his political career came to an end when on the brink of World War II he commented that it was the “end of democracy in England”. Joseph did not believe that the allies would be able to win the war, which resulted in public criticisms of him both in England and in the United States. In later years, his reputation was greatly damaged by allegations of anti-Semitism and pro-Hitler leanings.\textsuperscript{25}

With the end of his political career, Kennedy transferred his political ambitions and aspirations onto his oldest son, Joseph P. Kennedy, Jr. However, when Joseph P. Kennedy, Jr., was killed in 1944 while serving in World War II, Joseph P. Kennedy, Sr.,
devoted his time to the next eldest son, John Fitzgerald Kennedy, and his political future. Kennedy was competitive in nature and encouraged his children to compete with others and amongst themselves. He ensured that all his children received the best higher education possible, including his daughters.\textsuperscript{26}

Rose Fitzgerald Kennedy and Joseph Patrick Kennedy had a quietly tumultuous marriage. Joseph Kennedy had many affairs, the most notable of which was with actress Gloria Swanson, which lasted around three years.\textsuperscript{27} Rose was very much the dutiful wife throughout Joseph Kennedy’s affairs; she took care of the children and the home while Joseph Kennedy made his fortune and entertained his mistresses. Many of Rose’s diaries and letters have survived and in them she repeatedly reaffirms her devotion to a traditional marriage; she believed that divorce was never an option, and that a woman’s duty was first and foremost to her husband and children.\textsuperscript{28} Though Rose Kennedy’s education and charity work differ from the norm for women in the 1950s there is no sign that she thought women should have a life outside their family and home. To Rose Kennedy, her charity work, her volunteering for her sons’ political campaigns, her work for the physically and mentally disabled, and her work with the Church were all extensions of her role as the perfect wife and mother.\textsuperscript{29} In many ways, Rose Kennedy was much the same as other well off women in America during the 1940s and 1950s. The key difference between Rose and other women was that due to her family’s political history and her husband’s role as Ambassador, her charity work and religion received more press than the average wealthy housewife.

On the surface, Joseph P. Kennedy came from a very similar background as his wife, Rose Kennedy. Joseph P. Kennedy’s father was Patrick Joseph Kennedy, who was
born on January 14, 1858, to Irish immigrant parents. He attended Boston College and soon after graduating started his own saloon business, which was very successful. As the saloons expanded Patrick Joseph Kennedy was able to turn the business into a lucrative whiskey importing business. Patrick served in the Massachusetts House of Representatives from 1884-1889 and in the Massachusetts State Senate from 1889-1895. He and his wife, Mary Augusta Hickey Kennedy had four children, three of whom lived to adulthood. Joseph Patrick Kennedy was the only male child, and as a result the majority of his father’s ambitions fell on his shoulders. Patrick Joseph Kennedy died on May 18th, 1929.

Very little is known about Mary Augusta Hickey Kennedy, the wife of Patrick Joseph Kennedy and mother of Joseph Patrick Kennedy. Mary Augusta Hickey was born on December 6th, 1857, to fairly wealthy Irish immigrant parents. She married Patrick Joseph Kennedy at the age of thirty and gave birth to her first child, Joseph Patrick Kennedy when she was thirty-one. The average age for women of Mary Augusta’s generation to wed was twenty-two, eight years younger than Mary Augusta was in 1887 when she married Patrick Joseph Kennedy. No reason has been given for this demographic discrepancy, but it has been suggested that since Mary Augusta was an ambitious women she may have been waiting to find a particularly successful husband. In this case, her decision to marry Patrick Joseph Kennedy, whose business was rapidly growing in the late 1880s, would make sense. The decision to name their son “Joseph Patrick” instead of following the traditional path and naming the child after his father, “Patrick Joseph,” has been attributed to Mary Augusta’s ambition for her son. In the 1880s and for decades afterwards, the Irish were not well considered in Massachusetts.
Giving her son the first name of “Patrick” would have marked him as Irish for life.

Patrick Joseph Kennedy himself had altered his name in order to escape the stigma being Irish carried at the time; he was almost exclusively referred to as P.J Kennedy from his youth onwards.\textsuperscript{36} Mary Augusta was ambitious and encouraged her son to work hard and get the best education possible. Mary Augusta and Patrick Kennedy had two daughters who were sent to Catholic school and were encouraged to become proper housewives.\textsuperscript{37} There is no concrete information concerning the marriage of Mary Augusta Hickey Kennedy and Patrick Joseph Kennedy, however, it is clear that the two were united in the desire to see their son do well in the world, despite his Irish ancestry.

Joseph Patrick Kennedy and Rose Fitzgerald Kennedy had nine children. Their oldest child, Joseph Patrick Kennedy, Jr., referred to as Joe Jr., was born on July 25, 1915. Joseph Patrick Kennedy, Sr., made it clear from his son’s birth that he expected the child to become president. Joe Jr. was the family’s golden child; he was smart, athletic and close to his parents and siblings. Joe attended Choate, Harvard and Harvard law school before enlisting in the U.S Navy during his final year of law school.\textsuperscript{38} Joe Jr. died on August 12, 1944 during a Navy mission that has been frequently referred to as almost suicidal.\textsuperscript{39} Joe Jr.’s death had a lasting impact on the family, and it was because of his death that John Kennedy was thrust into the familial spotlight and trained to take his brother’s place in politics.

Rose and Joseph’s second child was John Fitzgerald Kennedy, born May 29\textsuperscript{th}, 1917. John was a sickly child, he was in and out of hospitals frequently throughout his life and had the last rights administered several times. There is no concrete diagnosis for John’s frequent ailments, although Addison’s disease is the most widely accepted.\textsuperscript{40} John
attended Choate and Harvard, like his older brother, Joe. John was overshadowed by Joe while at Choate, and made a name for himself by becoming the class clown. It was not until his junior year at Harvard that John became serious about his studies, making Deans List and starting his thesis, which he would eventually turn into a book. After Harvard John enrolled at Stanford Business School.\textsuperscript{41}

In 1941, John was rejected from the Army because of a chronic back problem and joined the Navy instead. On August 2, 1943 John’s boat, PT-109 was rammed by a Japanese destroyer. John pulled several crewmembers to safety onto a small island, located in the Solomon Islands, despite badly injuring his back during the collision. He was awarded the Navy and Marine Corps Medal for the incident. John’s actions during the PT-109 collision cemented his reputation as a war hero, a reputation his future campaigns relied on heavily.\textsuperscript{42} After the war, John worked as a journalist before running for the House of Representatives in 1946. John became a member of the House of Representatives in 1946 when James Michael Curley vacated his seat after being elected mayor of Boston.\textsuperscript{43} It was during this campaign that John first introduced the “Kennedy Teas,” an event that would mature as a political strategy during his Senatorial campaign.

The eldest Kennedy daughter was Rosemary Kennedy. By all accounts Rosemary was a relatively average child, though seemingly a little slower and more temperamental than the rest of her siblings. By age 15, Rosemary was having trouble in school and had to be educated separately from the rest of the students. Rose and Joseph Kennedy hid Rosemary’s condition from friends, though she attended social events with the rest of the family but would only interact with her siblings.\textsuperscript{44} By her late teens and early twenties Rosemary had gotten more difficult and started sneaking off of school premises to
wander the streets alone at night. Though there is no proof of what exactly Rosemary did at night when she managed to escape from the Convent where she was educated, Rose and Joseph feared that men would take advantage of Rosemary and that she could become pregnant.\textsuperscript{45} Many biographers have suggested that Rosemary’s behavioral decline was the result of her parents’ pressure to keep up with her siblings, while others have stated that hormonal changes could have been responsible for her violent mood swings.\textsuperscript{46} In 1941, Joseph Patrick decided, without his wife’s knowledge, to have doctors perform a lobotomy on Rosemary. After the lobotomy, Rosemary was unable to care for herself and was institutionalized at a private psychiatric hospital in Wisconsin. Rosemary was the inspiration for the Kennedy family’s prolific work on behalf of people with mental disabilities. Rosemary died of natural causes in 2005.\textsuperscript{47}

Kathleen “Kick” Agnes Kennedy was the second oldest Kennedy daughter, born on February 20, 1920. John was closest to Kick out of all of his siblings, and John, Kick and Joe Jr. were referred to as “The Golden Trio” in the press while they were in London. In 1944, Kick married a protestant. Rose and Joseph were very much against the match, and Joe Jr. was the only family member to attend the wedding.\textsuperscript{48} In 1943, Kick began working with the Red Cross to help injured servicemen.\textsuperscript{49} When her husband was killed in action several months later Kick became a regular on the London social scene. Kick was killed on May 13, 1948 in a plane crash over France. Kick’s father, Joseph Patrick Kennedy, was the only member of the Kenned family to attend the funeral.\textsuperscript{50}

Eunice Kennedy was the most outspoken of the Kennedy sisters. Born on July 10\textsuperscript{th}, 1921, Eunice was only four years younger than her brother John, and the two were also very close.\textsuperscript{51} Like her mother, Eunice attended Manhattanville College, but in 1943
Eunice received a Bachelor of Science degree in sociology from Stanford University. Eunice worked in the Special War Problems department of the U.S State Department, she was an executive secretary in the U.S Justice Department and worked as a social worker at the Federal Institute for Women. Throughout her life Eunice was heavily involved in raising awareness for the well being of the mentally and physically disabled. Eunice married Sargent Shriver in 1953, and the two were married until her death in 2009. She founded Camp Shriver and was involved in the Special Olympics until her death in August of 2009. Eunice is credited with making great advancements for a better public understanding about those with mental or physical disabilities.

Growing up with Eunice Kennedy most likely had a strong influence on the way her brother John viewed women. By the time John was running for the Senate in 1952, Eunice had already held several impressive jobs, and was working in Chicago with the House of the Good Shepard and the Chicago Juvenile Court. The jobs Eunice chose to take were not the jobs young women in the early 1950s from wealthy families were supposed to want to take, let alone to actually take. From all accounts, Eunice’s perception of gender roles and norms was decades ahead of her time. In her mother’s eulogy, Maria Shriver describes Eunice, “I didn’t actually know how to process her appearance much at the time, because most of the mothers were dressed up and neatly coiffed. Mummy wore men’s pants, she smoked Cuban cigars, and she played tackle football.” Eunice believed she was capable of whatever boys or men were capable of doing, and she was not afraid to point that out to those around her.

The Kennedy family certainly can be described on the surface as “traditional”, and there is no question that both Rose and Joseph Patrick Kennedy placed immense
value on their daughters’ abilities to act as respectable, young, upper class women.\textsuperscript{56} Despite this, they still encouraged all their daughters to get the best education possible, Joseph Patrick Kennedy still expected his daughters to win tackle football games, and both parents were well aware that daughters could be just as useful as sons when it came to fulfilling their familial political ambitions.\textsuperscript{57}

Patricia Kennedy was far more soft spoken than her trailblazer sister Eunice. Born on May 6\textsuperscript{th}, 1924, Patricia attended the Covenant of Sacred Heart in Manhattan but ultimately graduated from Rosemont College.\textsuperscript{58} Patricia published occasional columns on her world travels, but her ultimate ambition was to be a producer and director in Hollywood.\textsuperscript{59} Though Patricia’s plans never came to fruition, Joseph Patrick Kennedy encouraged his daughter, telling friends that he believed she had a head for business and could do well in Hollywood if she wished.\textsuperscript{60} Patricia married actor Peter Lawford in 1954, and the two had an unpleasant marriage fueled by their combined overindulgence in alcohol. Despite the fact that Patricia’s plans to become a director and producer in Hollywood were never realized, when John Kennedy was running for Senate in 1952, Patricia was still planning to follow their father into his very male dominated field of work, and she had his blessing and encouragement.\textsuperscript{61}

Robert Francis Kennedy was John Kennedy’s younger brother, and was his campaign advisor and Attorney General when John was elected to the presidency. Robert Kennedy was born on November 20, 1925, and attended the Milton Academy before enlisting in the Navy in March 1944, as his older brothers had done.\textsuperscript{62} After the war, Robert graduated from Harvard and worked as a correspondent for the \textit{Boston Post}. He attended the University of Virginia School of Law, and after graduation began working in
the International Security Section of the Criminal Division in the U.S Department of Justice. Robert was the first of the Kennedy siblings to get married, marrying Ethel Skakel in 1950. Both devout Catholics, Robert and Ethel had a very traditional marriage. They had ten children before Robert’s death in 1968, and Ethel gave birth to their eleventh child, Rory, six months after her husband’s death. Although Ethel was a housewife and stay at home mother during her husband’s lifetime (she became more politically minded several years after his death), Robert was the subservient spouse in their marriage. Multiple biographers have commented that Robert depended on his wife heavily, and allowed her to run the house as she pleased. It is evident from Robert and Ethel’s marriage that Robert admired Ethel and viewed her as his equal.

Jean Kennedy was the youngest of the Kennedy sisters, and was not as involved in John’s 1952 Senate campaign as her elder sisters. Jean Kennedy was born on February 20, 1928 and, as per family tradition, attended Manhattanville College. Jean worked on John Kennedy’s 1960 Presidential campaign and served as U.S Ambassador to Ireland from 1993 to 1998, when she retired. Immediately prior to her retirement, Jean was criticized for pressuring the embassy to approve substantial renovations to her home in Dublin. In 2000, Jean paid $5,000 to put an end to an investigation that alleged she had violated anti-conflict of interest laws while serving as Ambassador. She is the founder of Very Special Arts, an affiliate of the Kennedy Center that focuses on providing people with physical and mental disabilities access to art programs and art therapy. Jean married Stephen Smith in 1956, and has maintained a quiet public profile, especially in comparison to her siblings.
Ted Kennedy was the youngest Kennedy sibling, and the most scandal-prone. Born on February 22, 1932, Ted was twenty during the 1952 campaign, and played only a small role in the campaign. Ted attended the Milton Academy and graduated from Harvard in 1956. He enlisted in the Army in 1951, and was overseas serving in Paris during much of his brother’s Senate campaign. After his term in the Army, Ted attended the University of Virginia School of Law, and was the manager of John’s 1958 reelection campaign before graduating from law school in 1959. Ted was elected to the US Senate in 1962, and he served as the senior Senator for Massachusetts until his death in 2009.

In his later years, Ted became known as “The Lion of the Senate,” and was well respected by Democrats and Republicans alike. Many of John Kennedy’s personal flaws were apparent in Ted as well. Ted married Joan Bennett in 1958, and the two were married for twenty-four years. Like his brother John, Ted was a womanizer, and tended to discard women when he grew tired of them. It has been routinely suggested that John and Ted’s use of women in their personal lives was a reflection of the example set by their father.

Like any large family, the Kennedy family was made up of many different personalities. It cannot be denied that many of them seemed to place their interests above those of others, and that most of the Kennedys followed religious and moral codes only when it was convenient to do so. John Kennedy’s upbringing is responsible for many of his personal failures, particularly his sense of entitlement and his treatment of his wife and mistresses. John’s upbringing, and the influence of his mother and sisters, is also responsible for his perception of female capabilities. John was raised in a family where women were expected to attend college, participate in political and intellectual
conversations, and be the best in everything they attempted. John’s relationship with his sisters and his admiration of his mother allowed him to see the potential in women at a time others remained blind to the potential of women in American life.
CHAPTER TWO:
THE KENNEDY IMAGE

*The Beginning of Camelot*

Long before John Kennedy decided to run for the Senate, the Kennedy family had begun promoting a carefully crafted public image, both of the family as a whole and of the individual members. The Kennedy family certainly made for good gossip—wealthy, polite, good looking and well bred, they were the image of the ideal American family. All of the boys had served in the Navy or Army, something that was important in the aftermath of World War II. Rose Kennedy was relatable to hundreds of thousands of mothers across the country who had also lost children during the war. The family as a whole managed to walk the line between being role models for others to aspire to emulate while still being relatable enough to appeal to average people.

The majority of the press concerning the Kennedy family focused on the extraordinary attributes of the family members. Joseph Patrick Kennedy received far less press than did his wife, Rose, which is most likely a result of the remarks that ended his service as Ambassador to Great Britain. Rose Kennedy, in particular, was lauded as a national mother, her charity, faith and nine children gained her an almost saint-like reputation. One article about the family, from Rose’s scrapbook, states: “Charming to both Democrats and Republicans alike is Mrs. Joseph P. Kennedy… [her] role as the mother of nine children, has won the admiration of thousands of women all over the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, [and she] is making friends everywhere.”^72 The
Kennedy campaign was careful to present the family as universally appealing, thus Rose Kennedy’s appeal to “both Democrats and Republicans alike” was a recurring theme in many articles contained in her various scrapbooks and folders. Another article states that all who attended a talk by Rose “regardless of their political persuasion, will be richly rewarded.”73 In order to court both Democratic and Republican voters, John Kennedy needed to be strongly tied to an image that was separate from his politics. His sisters, and especially his mother, served the perfect models of personified respectability.

Women were not expected to be as political as men at this time, if they were expected to be politically minded at all. As a result of women’s virtual exclusion from politics, it was more normative to have several female family members who could socially appeal to Democrats, Republicans and Independents without jeopardizing John Kennedy’s stance as a Democrat. As a candidate, John was first and foremost a politician, which limited how much he could directly appeal to Republicans and Independents without being seen as less of a Democrat. Female family members, however, could interact with Republicans and Independents under the guise of being sociable. Since women were expected to prioritize social relations over politics, the Kennedy women were less restricted in their dealings with Independents and Republicans than their brother, because their political motivations were unexpected.

One of the Senate campaign’s greatest assets was Rose Kennedy’s seemingly effortless ability to raise nine respectable children. One profile on the Kennedy family, published in an unnamed Lynn, Massachusetts newspaper, describes Rose’s success as a parent and housekeeper. The profile begins by defining women’s work. A “woman attempts to instill into her family many virtues, including love of neighbor, a spirit of
charity and service towards others.” For the Kennedy family, “[t]hese virtues have been predominant in the Kennedy family from its forbears to the present generation.” In addition to Rose’s parenting feats, the Kennedy family had a long lineage of public service to display, and articles made sure to highlight this familial history. Articles about Rose and her daughters were almost always coded to appeal to traditional ideas about gender norms. The Kennedy women were described as the “lovely Mrs. Kennedy and her beautiful daughters present a spellbinding picture of intelligence, charm, and spirit.”

The use of “lovely”, “charm” and “spirit” are traditionally feminine attributes. Instead of making the Kennedy women sound accomplished and potentially intimidating, they are described pleasantly, like the ideal wife and daughter of the 1950s. Though all four of the Kennedy women had attended college and were remarkably well educated, they were referred to as “intelligent” rather than “educated,” which further serves to portray them in such a way as to preserve the gender constructs of the time.

Very few articles about Eunice Kennedy mentioned the fact that she was actually employed. By 1952, Eunice had an impressive resume, her work was always focused on helping others (social work, working in the prison system), but she also worked full time jobs that were not in the “feminine” realm. In 1947, fewer than thirty percent of women were enrolled in college or university, and fewer still women actually earned a degree beyond “Mrs.” The fact that all of the Kennedy daughters, except for Rosemary, attended college is a testament to the family’s emphasis on education for both genders. The majority of articles written about the Kennedy women discussed Eunice’s passion for helping others. “Eunice, best publically evidences the family spirit of service to others.” One article exclaimed. “For several years she has worked industrially in the fields of
social work and juvenile delinquency, providing able assistance to all who seek her advice.” Although this article does mention Eunice’s work in social work and juvenile delinquency, it still shies away from defining her work as employment. The way the article is phrased, especially in the context of “service to others,” Eunice’s work could just as easily be referring to volunteer work as to a job. Again, the press for the family had to walk a thin line between touting a female family member’s accomplishments whilst still making sure to avoid alienating the more conservative voter.

In contrast to the way the Kennedy daughters’ backgrounds were publicized, Rose Kennedy’s education was fairly frequently mentioned. Many articles refer to Rose’s education, while some others go into detail listing her educational background, for example, one article stated that she attended: “German Sacred Heart Convent abroad near Aix-la-Chapelle where she specialized in music, French, and German. While in Europe, she traveled extensively. Upon her return to the United States, she graduated from the Sacred Heart Convent at Manhattanville.” The reason for the difference in press treatment is clear; whereas Eunice received a bachelors of science in sociology, her mother had studied music and languages. The discrepancy between Eunice and Rose’s backgrounds makes sense in context of Eunice’s personality, and the burgeoning woman’s movement that was to explode in another decade. Rose was educated, but in traditionally female areas. She never worked for money, but was very involved in charity and was declared a papal countess by Pope Pious XII in 1951. The lack of information about papal countesses suggests that this was a rather empty title the Vatican decided to bestow on Rose and few others. Despite the hollowness of the title, it certainly sounded regal and attracted plenty of attention for Rose and her religious devotion. Eunice, in
contrast, received a bachelors of science from a secular university and went on to hold jobs that were generally viewed as more suited to males.

Few women were employed in the 1950s, and those who were generally worked out of necessity. Women comprised less than 29% of the workforce in 1950, and the women who did work were mainly employed in clerical jobs. A study conducted by Simmons College found that in 1950 70% of women who were employed worked in clerical positions, less than 15% worked in a professional capacity, and less than 6% of employed women were in management positions. Even when it was deemed acceptable for women to work, they did so in “industries that were considered traditionally female.” In this context, Eunice’s employment history is even more remarkable and groundbreaking.

It was well known throughout Massachusetts that the Kennedy family was massively wealthy. Though this gave the Kennedys innumerable advantages, it also had the potential to alienate them from the more working class voter who might view their wealth in a negative light. The Kennedy family was already very involved in charity work, but with the commencement of John’s Senate campaign it needed to be clear that their charity surpassed their wealth. The same article that profiled Rose’s parenting success discussed the members of the family, boasting that Rose and Joseph “have devoted themselves throughout their countless gifts to charity. They have given millions of dollars to provide shelter where the sick and orphaned the elderly and the impoverished might find refuge and peace. Their benevolence extends to all people, irrespective of race, color or religious creed.” The article is over the top in its praise for the family, but it contains many of the points that are emphasized in almost all other
articles. The specific mention of “all people, irrespective of race, color or religious creed” is important for several reasons, especially “religious creed.” The “Catholic Issue” was nowhere near as much of a problem during John’s 1952 Senate campaign as it was during his 1960 Presidential campaign, but it still needed to be addressed. In much the same vein as the articles promoting the Kennedy family (particularly Rose) to Republicans as well as Democrats, the campaign needed to make sure that the family did not get characterized as being charitable only to white Catholics. This is echoed in the many articles about “Kennedy Teas” and “Coffee with the Kennedys,” the campaign aggressively courted every group they could reach, even those that had been traditionally marginalized by other politicians.

Some articles went even farther in their descriptions of the Kennedy family’s generosity. At times Rose and Joseph Kennedy were depicted essentially as benefactors of Massachusetts, one article stated that Rose and Joseph “have never sought esteem or applause for these gifts which have always been made ostensibly, efficiently, gladly.” Though the Kennedy family was not as vocal as they could have been about the charity work they were all involved in, to say that they “have never sought esteem or applause” was an overstatement. Another article, for example, praised Rose Kennedy’s ability to teach her children about the importance of charity; “[Rose] has instilled in her children those qualities of sympathy and regard for others that is so essential in this world of conflict.” Statements such as this served a dual purpose, both praising Rose’s commitment to charity and her parenting skills, while also making it clear that John and his siblings had a “regard for others.”
Although John Kennedy’s 1952 Senate campaign thrust the family into a more visible role than they had played in the past few years, Joseph Patrick Kennedy had been crafting the Kennedy Family image for decades. One of the most important pieces of the Kennedy siblings’ upbringings was their father’s ambition. Since Joe Jr.’s birth in 1915, Joseph Kennedy had been vehemently convinced that Joe Jr. would become President of the United States. While many parents may harbor this ambition for their children, Joseph Kennedy raised his children with the understanding that one day Joe Jr. would be President. This ambition did not falter when Joe Jr. died; it was simply passed on to the next eldest son, John.

Though World War II had ended seven years previously, the country was still reeling from the loss of life during the War. Not only was John Kennedy a decorated war hero, but his brother Joe Jr. had lost his life on a dangerous mission, his sister Kick had worked for the Red Cross, Robert had served in the Navy and Ted was with the Army in Paris in 1952. For the many families that had been touched by the war, the Kennedy’s sacrifices during the war made the family infinitely more relatable. Yes, they were wealthy and came from immeasurable privilege, but they too had been seriously affected by the war. Joe Jr.’s death, in particular, was relatable for many families. An estimated 418,500 Americans were killed in World War II, over 10,000 of whom were from Massachusetts. The Kennedy family chose to honor Joe Jr.’s memory by building hospitals in his name. This was frequently brought up in articles about the family, “the hospitals which have been built … hospitals which bear the name of her eldest son, the late Joseph P Kennedy Jr., who made the supreme sacrifice in World War II.” The press was quick to mention that the Kennedy family had made the decision to honor Joe Jr.’s
death both in a way that would help others, but also in a way that would keep the Kennedy name highly visible. Rose Kennedy had taken a personal tragedy many people were acutely familiar with and turned it into something to benefit the public good as well as her family, something that was admirable to both.

Almost every article concerning John’s candidacy for the U.S Senate mentioned his outstanding service in the war. One article described his time during the war as making: “a war hero of him when in 1945…saving three of his crew, although he, himself, was critically wounded.” John’s status as a war hero endeared him to the men who had served in the armed forces, but it also struck a chord with women who had sons who fought in the war, who had boyfriends, brothers and friends serve and who had worked as nurses or volunteers during the war. The Kennedy family’s war record appealed to everyone, regardless of race, religion, gender, wealth or political affiliation.

John and Joe Jr. were not the only Kennedys to serve during the war. Both Robert and Ted Kennedy enlisted as well, Robert in the Navy and Ted in the Army. Their service records were not as remarkable as John’s, but the press surrounding the family and John’s campaign still made sure to mention their work in the Navy and Army. One article, in particular, provided a detailed list of the services provided by various Kennedy children during the war, “the eldest son, was killed during World War II while flying a dangerous mission… [and was] awarded the Navy Cross posthumously. [John] was a PT boat commander in the South Pacific… [and] holds the Purple Heart and the Navy and Marine Corps Medal… [and Robert] served as seaman in the U.S. Navy during the war.” Nobody could fault the Kennedy family’s efforts during wartime. Even after the war had ended, Ted was still serving in the Army, “Edward, the youngest Kennedy boy, 18 year
of age, is now on active duty in Germany as a private in the U.S. Army." There were many aspects of John Kennedy’s family and background that voters could easily find fault with (his employment prior to becoming a Congressman was sparse, for example, and he was a womanizer and a prankster, his father was of dubious character at best, and he had far more money at his disposal than the average Senate hopeful), and he was fairly frequently accused of buying his way into politics, but the Kennedy family’s work during World War II was unquestioned.

One of John Kennedy’s biggest advantages during the Senate election was his family’s longstanding record of political service in Massachusetts. As stated above, both Patrick Joseph Kennedy (Joseph Patrick Kennedy’s father and John Kennedy’s grandfather) and John ‘Honey-Fitz’ Fitzgerald (Rose Kennedy’s father and John Kennedy’s grandfather) had held elected office in Massachusetts and Honey-Fitz in particular was still very well remembered throughout Massachusetts. Journalists were quick to promote the idea that elected office in Massachusetts was a natural inheritance for the eldest Kennedy son, who “has deep roots in Massachusetts. Its long established tradition of service to others is evidenced…[by] John F Fitzgerald… His paternal grandfather, [and] Patrick Kennedy, likewise established a noteworthy record in the Massachusetts House of Representatives and Senate.” The association with John Kennedy’s grandparents doubtless helped him win the votes of older voters who fondly remembered Honey-Fitz. It would have been easy for the general public to come to view John Kennedy as Massachusetts’s royalty, which could have either endeared him to voters, or not. One way this was counterbalanced in the press was to emphasize the
charitable work the Kennedy’s did, another was to promote the idea of the Kennedy family as a product of Massachusetts.

Rose Kennedy, in particular, was promoted as a “Daughter of Boston.” One article described her lineage thusly: “Mrs. Kennedy is a native of Boston, daughter of Mary Josephine Hannon and John F. Fitzgerald. Mr. Fitzgerald served six years as Congressman from John F. Kennedy’s 11th District and was later Mayor of Boston for six years.”93 Although Joseph Kennedy was also a native of Boston, he received far less press. As a result of his anti-Semitic remarks on the eve of World War II and his isolationist ideology during the war, he was frequently only mentioned briefly in articles, while Rose was the parent on which the press chose (or was told) to focus. In addition to being raised in Boston, Rose was also educated in Boston’s public school system. “She attended public schools in Concord,” one article stated, and “graduated from Dorchester High School. Later she studied at the Sacred Heart Covent in Boston.”94 The fact that Rose Kennedy was educated in public schools, instead of attending a private school as her children did made her more relatable to voters than she would have been otherwise.

The Kennedy family exemplified many of the ideal characteristics of the 1950s. Rose and Joseph were portrayed as the perfect parents (Joseph ensured that Rosemary’s condition and lobotomy were never mentioned in the press), the Kennedy sisters were described as polite, educated, feminine young ladies and the Kennedy sons were presented as brave and charismatic war heroes. These elements combined to create the perfect image, rather than voters resenting the Kennedys for their wealth and privilege, they were led to admire the family and sympathize with Rose for the loss of Joe Jr. in the war. The importance of the Kennedy family image to John’s Senate campaign cannot be
overemphasized. People’s admiration of the Kennedys drove their desire to meet the Kennedys, which packed lecture halls and ensured that there would always be a crowd if a Kennedy was advertised to be attending.
CHAPTER THREE:
KENNEDY WOMEN ON CAMPAIGN

John Kennedy’s greatest asset in his early political campaigns was not his money, his looks, or the opportunities his family background had afforded him. John Kennedy’s most powerful tool was his mother and sisters. Throughout his 1952 Senate campaign Rose, Eunice, Patricia and Jean Kennedy worked tirelessly to promote John in every way possible. They organized Teas, Coffee Hours, gave speeches and attended countless ceremonies and events on his behalf. The effectiveness of this strategy was complex, and inextricably linked to the changing gender norms and constructs of the 1950s. The Kennedy women were admirable, they encapsulated the ideal characteristics of women during this time- they were ladylike, polite, intelligent, well bred and family oriented. That they, as beacons of acceptable female behavior for the times, campaigned for their brother, inspired many women who had never felt they could be part of a political campaign to join the Kennedy campaign. Furthermore, the Kennedy women were not passive participants in the campaign, they spoke about topics that they were individually passionate about and they were also perfectly capable of filling in for their brother when he was absent. In fact, by 1952, the Kennedy sisters, and particularly Rose, were celebrities in their own rights. They drew an entirely different crowd to John’s Senate campaign events, women who did not have an active interest in politics were curious to meet Rose Kennedy, the Papal Countess, and her lovely daughters. The vital key to the importance of the Kennedy women in the campaign was simple- John Kennedy was well
aware that his mother and sisters were tremendous assets and he was willing to have them help however they could.

The entire Kennedy family was Catholic, but Rose Kennedy was particularly devout. Throughout her life she was devoted to Catholic charities, and during her husband’s time as Ambassador in London she had formed a relationship with the Vatican in Rome. In 1951, which was ideal timing for the Kennedy campaign, Rose was given the title of Papal Countess by Pope Pius XII. Rose Kennedy returned from Rome with her new title and immediately jumped into her son’s campaign. This served as useful marketing for the events she was scheduled to attend upon her return. Many articles mention some variation of: “Mrs. Kennedy returned from Italy last week where Pope Pius XII made her a Papal Countess.” The chance to meet someone devout and remarkable enough to earn a “royal” title from the Pope attracted many Catholics who may not have been otherwise particularly interested in the Senate election.

Many of the articles promoting Kennedy campaign events focused more on the Kennedy women, one of whom was almost always in attendance, than on John himself. Instead of promoting the appearances of Rose, Eunice, Patricia or Jean as simply the mother or sister of Senate candidate, John Kennedy, the newspapers were able to go into detail about the accomplishments and appeal of the individual Kennedy women. One event announcement for an event featuring speeches from both John and Rose advertises “the privilege of meeting and hearing Cong. John F. Kennedy and his renowned mother… a Papal countess, who is distinguished on two continents for her charities.” The article indicates that hearing Rose speak is worthwhile in and of itself. This was a
unique treatment of the women in a candidate’s family; it is clear that Rose had something to offer event attendees that was unrelated to the men in her family.

Eunice and Patricia both had solo speaking engagements on topics that were often only tangentially related to John. An article discussing an event where Patricia had spoken summarized her topic of choice, “The attractive Patricia Kennedy was the guest speaker at the weekly meeting… Discussing the underprivileged child campaigns, she commended the members for their service in this work and briefly referred to similar interests of the Kennedy family.” The purpose of Patricia’s attendance at the Kiwanis Club meeting was to promote her brother, but she was still perfectly capable of speaking on other topics and people appeared more than willing to listen to her. Because the Kennedy family was such an entity in and of itself, Patricia speaking at an event reflected well on her brother and his campaign, even when she was discussing the work of the Kiwanis Club and not his candidacy for the Senate. The article states that Patricia discussed “similar interests of the Kennedy family,” not “similar interests of her brother John.” To promote the Kennedy family as a whole was to promote John as an individual. Patricia did not act as her brother’s speaking piece, like her mother, Rose, it was accepted or even assumed that it was worth hearing her speak on her own merit.

Though the Kennedy women were not technically employed by John’s Senate campaign, they worked as much as any employee. They attended and spoke at different types of events, but would routinely incorporate a brief summary of John’s life and work in Congress, along with a short film, into their presentations. For example, “[m]ore than 1,000 persons attended…Miss Patricia Kennedy…outlined briefly her brother’s career and showed a film of him on a recent television interview.” This tactic was also useful
to educate members of the audience who were unfamiliar with John Kennedy and his campaign and who had chosen to attend the event for other reasons. Having Patricia speak about her brother in these types of venues also helped to make the event seem more social in nature, rather than overtly political. Although introducing John and his career in this way was very common at campaign events where he himself could not be present, his sister’s work on his campaign was by no means limited to this presentation.

The Kennedy campaign inundated supporters with potential ways to aid in the campaign effort. Rose, Eunice, Patricia and Jean presented several different ways that women could get involved with the campaign in a “feminine” way that would not be too time consuming. Rose, for example, attended “13 fashion shows for women [where]… Mrs. Joseph P. Kennedy… will be the honored.”100 While Patricia “displays the campaign skirt she wears in behalf of the Senatorial candidacy of her brother, Rep. John F. Kennedy.”101 The skirt in question was a massive 1950s felt poodle skirt with “John F. Kennedy” written in large letters across the bottom. Each of the Kennedy sisters owned a “John F. Kennedy” poodle skirt, and they were worn on “Coffee with the Kennedys.” Poodle skirts were not only very fashionable in the 1950s, they were also popular with the masses, rather than just the social elite. By choosing to wear a poodle skirt, and not just a high end skirt with John’s initials, the Kennedy sisters were normalizing themselves and putting their fashion on the same level as the average Massachusetts voter.

While these might seem like petty events, they were actually remarkably significant. Though John Kennedy’s campaign did use female volunteers very successfully and in great numbers, not all women would have been willing (or allowed by
husbands and fathers) to “work” as a volunteer on the campaign. By promoting fashion shows as a means to raise support for a Senatorial candidate, Rose was highlighting a very “female” way to aid the campaign that would have been looked upon favorably by more conservative voters. The Kennedy sisters wearing over the top poodle skirts emblazoned with their brother’s name was a calculated choice to attract people who might otherwise have been put off by the women’s active role in the campaign.

While the Kennedy women did frequently present themselves within the confines of 1950s gender roles, this was not always the case. Eunice, in particular, refused to allow herself to be limited by her gender and this was apparent in her dealings with others in the campaign. One of the fulltime campaign staff members on the Senate campaign recalled an occasions where he was “asked by… Eunice [Eunice Kennedy Shriver], to run the tea down in Springfield, Massachusetts.” \(^{102}\) Eunice was more than just a volunteer; she was in a position of authority amongst the male campaign staffers. From many accounts from different members of John Kennedy’s 1952 Senate campaign, and even his 1960 Presidential campaign, Eunice had a large behind the scenes role. The fact that Eunice was giving instructions to a fulltime campaign staff member is proof that she was an active participant in her brother’s campaign. She and her sisters were not brought out to smile and simper at guests during “Kennedy Teas,” the Kennedy sisters and Rose had made a calculated decision that by hosting “Teas” and promoting their brother in this way they would be aiding his campaign. Additionally, John Kennedy trusted his sister, Eunice, to run certain aspects of his campaign; that Eunice was able to allocate staff members to work on events of her choosing signifies the importance of her role within the campaign. This may seem of little importance, but in terms of unraveling why John
Kennedy was willing and able to mobilize a revolutionary task force of women for his campaign, understanding the roles his sisters and mother played during his campaign is key.

Eunice Kennedy was not just a force of nature behind the scenes in the campaign. Though the majority of articles written advertising speeches by the Kennedy women focused on “womanly” attributes (Rose’s religious devotion, how “lovely” and respectable the sisters were, etc.), occasionally an article would list Eunice’s full resume. This was generally only done when Eunice was giving a more political speech; such as one she gave in Reading, Massachusetts, where she was one of “three of the outstanding members of the democratic party [who] will speak to them on party objectives and other subjects of great interest.”

Eunice’s credentials were given as: “Miss Kennedy was executive secretary of the National Conference on Juvenile Delinquency…Miss Kennedy handled the operations of this agency from her office in the Dept. of Justice in Washington where for 2 years she had the opportunity to study the executive operations of our national government at the highest level.”

Eunice’s employment history was impressive for a man, let alone a woman of the times, and especially impressive for a thirty-year old woman. One of the men Eunice was speaking with was the “state democratic chairman” who spoke about “… organizational procedures” within the Democratic Party. The other speaker, also male, was “a recognized national authority on narcotics.” That Eunice was listed as a speaker alongside these two men is a testament not only to her own ambition and tenacity, but also to the high regard her brother held for her talents and efforts.
For a woman to be able to accomplish all that Eunice had at the age of thirty in 1952 was extremely unusual. In 1950, only one in three women was employed, and the majority of the jobs women held related to either the home or children.\(^{108}\) Clearly, Eunice had been raised with the knowledge that she could have an impressive career, and with only a four-year age difference between Eunice and John, John would have been raised with the same notion of a woman’s capabilities.

Rose, Patricia, Eunice and Jean were prominent figures in Massachusetts and were regarded by many as inspirational. One of the Kennedy women’s strongest components in their public images’ was their work ethic. Many people who worked on the campaign in 1952 remarked on how hard Rose, Patricia, Eunice and Jean worked during the campaign. One campaign staffer remarked that: “it was Mrs. Kennedy [Rose Fitzgerald Kennedy] and the lovely Kennedy sisters who went out and campaigned arduously. They were right in there pitching all the way. They did a terrific job.”\(^{109}\) The Kennedy women’s work in the campaign not only showed women that it was acceptable and even admirable for women to work on a political campaign, but it also drove the volunteers and employees who were already working on the campaign to work as hard as possible. Another volunteer stated that “[a]ll women, I think, in the campaign were inspired to work by the very hard work that [John’s]… mother and sisters …[accomplished] and all of them were so involved and really were an inspiration to the other women who were working hard.”\(^{110}\) The Kennedy women served as examples for other women either involved in the campaign or interested in becoming involved with John’s campaign. The fact that the Kennedy women were promoted in the press as ideal women and they chose to work incredibly hard on John’s campaign appeased worries that
working on a partisan political campaign might not be respectable for a woman, and it encouraged volunteers and employees to emulate the Kennedy work ethic.

Due to the number of events hosted by the 1952 Senate campaign and John Kennedy’s chronic ill health, there were many events where John himself could not attend. Frequently, one of John’s sisters would attend the event in his stead, and occasionally Rose would fill in. One article discussing an event where Patricia stood in for John stated that, “Patricia Kennedy… proved an able and charming spokesman for her brother, in meeting a group of 62 local area women.”\textsuperscript{111} For example, in a 1966 interview, a Kennedy family friend, Dorothy Tubridy, discussed her memories of Rose and her daughters representing John at events. She said that “they had so much personality and they were so attractive looking that this won a lot of people. But, you know, they never strayed from the point, just putting it across about the President, all the things he had done in Congress and his war record, things like that.”\textsuperscript{112} Ms. Tubridy’s recollection of the format for these events is correct. Whichever Kennedy woman was filling in for John would usually show a short film about John’s life, discuss his political record thus far and then give a short presentation about what John’s goals were if he were to be elected Senator. For other events, one of the family members would only need to fill in physically for John. One campaign staffer stated: “We did have his sister Eunice… one occasion she came here to represent the Senator where he couldn’t ride in the parade, and she came to take his place.”\textsuperscript{113} On the surface, it would be easy to assume that John Kennedy, the unmarried Congressman, would have a very male centric campaign. In reality, however, John’s campaign not only actively reached out to female voters and volunteers, but he also had women in the forefront of his campaign.
Occasionally, there were reactions to events that proved that the Kennedy mystique extended to any Kennedy, and not just John. One staff member during the 1952 campaign remembered an incident when Eunice attended a Kennedy campaign house party at his home, “She wore a big felt skirt with Kennedy written all over the bottom of the skirt... people still say that’s where I met Kennedy and some insist that they met Kennedy, the Kennedy there, when actually they had met Eunice Kennedy.” It is evident that for some people, the appeal of attending a function for John Kennedy’s campaign was not politically motivated, and not even John related. For many people, they simply wanted to see or meet one of the much-publicized Kennedys. This was far from an impediment for the Kennedy campaign. By pulling in voters who were not particularly in favor of John’s candidacy, those who ran the events essentially had an hour or two of speeches and presentations to convince any undecided voters who were in attendance that a vote for John Kennedy was the best decision they could make.

When Eunice was the one representing John, she would give the usual presentation and then add some of her own touches to it. One article announced: “Jack Kennedy has an enthusiastic and able committee in his immediate family” following a speech Eunice gave to a women’s group on behalf of her brother. The article details Eunice’s speech. “For the housewives she explained that price control was beyond party and that all have the responsibility of getting our rising prices down.” Eunice was able to approach the group of women in an entirely different way than her brother would have been able to, in this situation her gender was an asset that could be used to appeal to other women who might not see politics as something that really affected them. The same article proclaimed that “[t]he tremendous impact of women in politics was demonstrated
last evening when an enthusiastic group of women heard plans outlined by Miss Eunice Kennedy. \(^{117}\) Eunice did not simply present a “female version” of the presentation to this group of women, she gave approximately the same presentation that was given to male groups, and then elaborated with her comments about the responsibilities housewives had to get prices down. This is an important distinction, instead of treating women as though they would not be interested (or able to comprehend) the more political information about John’s campaign, they were given the same information but with an added feminine touch, which appealed to the sense of etiquette with which most women in the 1950s were raised.

Due to all the publicity that the Kennedy family as a whole received from the press, Rose and her daughters were Massachusetts celebrities in their own rights. Voters who were not invested in John’s campaign may have been interested in Rose’s charity work and religious devotion, or they may have been interested in Eunice’s career. Or, most commonly, they may have just been interested to see members of the family everyone was making such a fuss about. A staff member during the campaign remembers the attention Rose and her daughters received as “everybody wanted to meet Mrs. Kennedy [Rose Fitzgerald Kennedy] and the girls, and the whole family.”\(^{118}\) Another staff member stated that he thought “Coffee with the Kennedys” “proved very, very effective because the charm of the Kennedy girls was terrific.”\(^{119}\) When asked about the secret to the success of John’s 1952 Senate campaign, a third campaign employee said, “…the mother [Rose Fitzgerald Kennedy] is very much underplayed.”\(^{120}\) It is evident from the articles about John’s campaign that in a way, it was the entire Kennedy family that was up for election alongside him. By using his mother and sisters so much in his
campaign, John was not only able to benefit from their knowledge and personal skills, but he was able to attract an entire subset of voters who might not have been interested in his campaign had it not been for the reputations of his female family members. The appeal of Rose, Eunice, Patricia and Jean alone would not win John many votes on its own, but it would bring potential voters in the door to events, and it would attract other women who had been inspired or impressed by the Kennedy women and were interested in working on the campaign.

For many people who were either not Democrats, or were not interested in politics, the chance to meet members of the Kennedy family was enough to bring them to campaign events. The advantage to holding campaign events in social settings was that many people were more willing to attend a social gathering to meet politicians and their families than they were to attend a strictly political event. One of John’s 1952 campaign aides discussed this, stating that: “every woman and every Democratic person, and a lot of people who were not, too, whom you couldn’t ordinarily bring out to any political campaign… They had come to say hello to Mrs. Kennedy and the lovely Kennedy sisters all working as a team to help elect Jack- absolutely fabulous.”

Many employees and volunteers during John’s 1952 Senate campaign have stated how impressed they were by the loyalty the Kennedys had towards one and other, and their dedication to helping John succeed.

Today, the involvement of John Kennedy’s female family members seems an obvious campaign choice. In 1950 the fact that the unmarried Senatorial candidate brought female family members to political events was unremarkable. What was remarkable, however, was the level of participation of these female family members.
Rose, Eunice, Patricia, and Jean were not present at events to stand silently next to John, their feminine presence filling the empty position of candidate’s wife. They attended events as accomplished women who were qualified to represent their congressman son and brother, women who could draw crowds based on their names and lives rather than only because of John. The commitment of the Kennedy women, and the amount of control John gave them during their speeches and presentations, serves as a signifier that this campaign was breaking new ground.
CHAPTER FOUR:

KENNEDY TEAS

The most important role women played in Kennedy’s 1952 Senate campaign is clearly evidenced by the many “Kennedy Teas” and “Coffee with the Kennedys” events put on throughout the campaign. The “Kennedy Teas” were first organized in 1946, during John’s campaign for the House of Representatives. Little information exists regarding this tea, but from all accounts it was attended by Rose, Joseph and John and was successful. “Coffee with the Kennedys” was a program involving most of the family that was aired during the campaign. Immediately following the program, women who were active in John’s campaign hosted coffee hours of their own with groups of local women to discuss John’s candidacy. Eunice and Patricia Kennedy were particularly instrumental in the planning of the coffee hour, and they would give many lectures and offer advice to local Kennedy Committees giving instructions for throwing the ideal follow up to “Coffee with the Kennedys.” The concept of the “Kennedy Teas” was simple: women in towns all throughout Massachusetts formed committees, which were overseen by members of John’s Senate staff, and they would invite all the women in their town to a Tea which John or other Kennedy family members attended. The women on the committees would act as hostesses, organizing the event and greeting guests on the day of the event. Even after John Kennedy was elected to the Senate with 70,737 votes more than Henry Cabot Lodge, Lodge refused to admit the Teas had helped John win.
Lodge’s dismissal of the role the Teas played in the Kennedy campaign is undercut by the absolute explosion in popularity of Teas for women in political campaigns immediately following the 1952 Senate race. Multiple oral history interviews conducted with volunteers and employees of the 1952 campaign mention the soaring popularity of the political Tea following John’s campaign. In reality, the “Kennedy Teas” and “Coffee with the Kennedys” were genius, flawlessly timed and methodically executed.

Unsurprisingly, the publicity surrounding the “Kennedy Teas” was carefully planned to attract the most attention and elicit a positive response from the public. Women were recruited to join Women for Kennedy committees by newspaper advertisements that mentioned the head of the committee by name. Almost without fail, the women who headed these committees, such as Mrs. G Marie Wells, Mrs. Frederick J. Harkins, Mrs. James H. Mills and Mrs. Charles B. Lynch, were pillars of their communities, with respectable husbands, wealth, and social status. The elite status of the women running the committees added a layer of allure, not only did the women who joined the committee get positive attention and a chance to meet the famous Kennedys, they also had a chance to socialize with the hoi polloi of their town. While this was perhaps a cynical and calculated move by the Kennedy campaign, it was effective.

One of the main reasons the “Kennedy Teas” appeared so glamorous was because of the attention local papers paid to the individual volunteers. The main organizers were mentioned in local papers from the very beginning of the Tea planning process. For example, “Mrs. G Marie Wells, secretary of the Democratic town committee is chairman of this reception,” announced one newspaper prior to an event. The newspapers themselves were offering publicity not just for the Teas, but for the women involved. The
publicity was beneficial in two ways: presumably Mrs. G Marie Wells enjoyed being recognized for the work she was doing on the campaign, as well as the status boost that accompanied being mentioned in the paper. In addition, women who thought Mrs. G Marie Wells seemed like someone they might want to emulate or befriend might see this mention in the paper and perhaps become a little more interested in the Teas themselves. The chairwoman was always mentioned in the articles concerning the Teas, and there were many articles that accompanied each Tea. There were committee announcements, planning meetings, invitations, advertisements and then articles reporting on the Tea itself as well as assorted pieces thanking the women who organized the Tea and those who attended.

Organizing and executing the “Kennedy Teas” was a lengthy process, and the committees that did so were often fairly large. The Kennedy Campaign made an effort to ensure that every woman who wanted to be involved would have a purpose, whether it was greeting guests, pouring tea or helping with the receiving line. All the women who helped plan the Teas acted as hostesses throughout the event, and they were mentioned in the paper as well. One article, for example, mentioned many of those involved in the Tea: “The hostesses from Needham were Mrs. Frederick J. Harkins, Mrs. Charles B. Lynch, Mrs. Edward O’Brien, Mrs. Hugh R. Rooney and Mrs. Frederick Spang. From Needham also to assist in pouring were Mrs. Leo E. Buckley, Mrs. Thomas M. Devlin and Mrs. James H. Mills.” Although this is a long list of names without any real individualized description, for the women who organized the Teas for the attractive, wealthy and well-bred Senatorial candidate it was a nice bit of recognition to have their names listed in the paper for everyone to see. The social importance of the Teas cannot be ignored, though
women had many intellectual reasons for becoming active in John Kennedy’s campaign
the Teas were also an opportunity to connect with other women of various social classes
in the area.

After the Tea, articles recounted the number of people who attended, the women
who were responsible for the Tea, and anything else that happened to occur. One “Letter
to the Editor” in Hyde Park wrote a note to those involved with the Tea, thanking: “[the
women] who attended the reception and tea…. We would particularly like to express our
appreciation for the splendid cooperation of the women on the committee whose efforts
made our tea an outstanding success.”128 The amount of press the women involved in the
Teas received is a clear indicator of the importance of the attention. In small towns it is
not hard to imagine that being mentioned in the paper would be exciting for these
women. Another key element was that the opportunities for women (most of whom were
listed with their husband’s first and last names in articles) to have their names in the
paper for something that was not only a social event were minimal. The overwhelming
majority of volunteers for the “Kennedy Teas” were housewives, who did not have many
opportunities to be mentioned in a newspaper in the company of a political figure.

A basic factor of the Teas was the link to the Kennedy family. John attended as
many Teas as he could, and Rose and one or more of his sisters usually accompanied
him. The chance to meet John Kennedy and his illustrious family was a massive part of
the appeal of the “Kennedy Teas.” During her oral history, Polly Fitzgerald discussed one
of the reasons she believed women were drawn to Kennedy events. “[Y]ou had the
feeling always that this was such an opportunity to be identified with him and to help
him.”129 The opportunity to be “identified with” a Kennedy (especially one who was
good looking, young and unmarried) was tantalizing. Newspapers frequently played off this notion and reminded women in advertisements for the Teas that they would be able to “greet” the Kennedys and welcome them to town. The fact that John was still a bachelor was one of the reasons he was usually accompanied to events with a female family member. Most politicians brought their spouses to events and speeches, and in John’s case, bringing a family member with him was the most respectable thing to do. However, this issue of respectability does not account for the strong presence of his mother and sisters at so many events.

A common theme in articles promoting the “Kennedy Teas” is the notion that the women of the town should be there to “greet” the members of the Kennedy family who would be in attendance. For women who were mainly housewives, this appeal to hospitality would have been taken fairly seriously. One advertisement said that the committee “hoped voters and friends… will be present at the following places and times to greet [the Kennedy family].” The way many of these articles are worded suggests that it was the social responsibility of local women to greet the Kennedy family members and ensure that they felt welcomed to the town.

Along with encouraging women to attend Teas in order to welcome the Kennedys to a local community, newspapers also publicized the opportunity for local women to meet the Kennedys in a social setting. One article advertised: “The tea will provide an opportunity for the women to meet the Kennedy family socially and talk with Jhon [sic] Kennedy, the individual candidate” Understandably, the chances women in towns outside of Boston had to socialize with members of the Kennedy family were limited. This opportunity clearly appealed to many women, as evidenced by the attendance at
each Tea. “Women, six thousand in number,” according to one article, “stand patiently in
the receiving line…The ballroom of the New Ocean House is jammed with Kennedy
admirers.”132 John Kennedy’s aides during the campaign all recall him staying at events
for many hours in order to greet every single person in attendance. One campaign staffer,
Edward Berube, said that he remembered several occasions when John stayed until after
one in the morning in order to make sure he met everyone personally.133 The long
receiving lines were not limited to John. One photograph of Rose greeting women in a
long receiving line was captioned: “Mrs. Joseph P. Kennedy exchanges a friendly bit of
chatter with women in the receiving line at the big reception in her son’s honor. Some
had to wait three hours in line.”134 The opportunity to meet a Kennedy brought people to
an event, even if they had to wait hours in a receiving line for the chance to talk to Rose
or John for a few minutes.

John Kennedy made it clear to the women in charge of overseeing “Kennedy
Teas” that he wanted every woman in each town to feel invited and welcome. The
committee planning each Tea made sure that invitations were worded in such a way so as
to include every one. Invitations were sent to individuals, but if a woman wished to
attend the Tea, but did not receive an invitation, she could contact the local committee or
Kennedy’s campaign and she would be mailed a personalized invitation. One of
Kennedy’s campaign staffers, Edward Berube, recalled that John “wanted every
nationality there was. We even had Chinese people,”135 he stated. Obviously, Berube’s
remark is dated, but it does demonstrate John’s desire to reach every potential voter. In
one press article, for example, John is pictured with two young African American women
with the caption: “Congressman Kennedy poses in receiving line with two of his loyal
workers, Mattie Mitchell and Amy Barton, who served as hostesses during the afternoon.” In the 1950s, racism was prevalent and rarely questioned by most white people. John’s decision to have African American hostesses at the event is clear evidence that he did not allow his campaign to be limited by the traditional social norms of the time.

The “Kennedy Teas” were often one of the main social events of the season in the towns where they took place. The balance between social and political was one that Kennedy campaigns navigated successfully, beginning with John’s first election in 1946 and continuing on through the presidential election of 1960. One Kennedy campaign staff member from the 1952 Senate campaign stated that “the campaign … took on something other than just what one might say was just a political aspect… [the campaign] took on a very pleasant social aspect.” This social aspect served the clear purpose of attracting different types of people and reaching out to women. By keeping the social aspect in the Teas, the Kennedy campaign ensured the participation of women. Not only were Teas and social parties such as these thought of as “woman’s work,” they provided women an acceptable outlet for their participation. It would not have been seemly for married housewives to suddenly take off and travel across Massachusetts with the Senator attending rallies and debates, but it was perfectly fine for women to throw parties for their friends and peers. These parties just happened to be organized and controlled by a Senatorial campaign, with the election of John Kennedy to U.S Senate as the end goal.

The Teas did not just give women an excuse for a social function. They gave women a chance to become involved in politics in a small but important way. By attending Teas or even hosting the Teas, women did not have to risk being judged for
doing something that was unfitting for a housewife. The “Kennedy Teas” brought politics into the woman’s sphere. Polly Fitzgerald clearly remembered the importance of the Teas to the women who hosted and attended them. She stated that “in many of the communities the tea was such a social occasion that it was almost a stimulation to the economy of the community. Women went out and bought dresses and went to the beauty parlor and fixed themselves at their best so that they would look lovely when they would attend.” Clearly the “Kennedy Teas” were filling a void that had been ignored until then. Given the opportunity, women jumped at the chance to volunteer for the campaign or attend an event. The Kennedy appeal was considerable, but it was not the only reason for the quadruple digit attendance at many Teas. “Kennedy Teas” created a situation where women did not have to choose between the social and the political. Women could attend Teas and have no real interest in John’s political beliefs and goals, and women could attend Teas because they were interested in politics and did not have an otherwise socially approved outlet.

The Kennedy campaign worked especially hard to ensure that all those who attended “Kennedy Teas” felt welcome and included. John Kennedy was very strict with his staff about the Teas being completely free, there was an account set up to fund the Teas, and John was adamant that no woman should have to pay any sort of cover fee. In addition to making the Teas free of cost to attend, the majority of the smaller committees that organized Teas provided transportation to the Tea for people who were unable to drive there themselves. By taking these steps, the Kennedy campaign made sure that John would not lose any votes or support because of a woman’s financial situation.

Before each Tea, invitations were sent out to as many women as possible, and any
woman who did not receive an invitation could obtain one easily by contacting the Kennedy campaign offices. The invitations themselves were “beautiful invitations. Of course, he supplied them. And they went out. We must have sent out, oh, I guess about three thousand, thirty-five hundred invitations.”\(^{141}\) Sending out beautiful invitations was a calculated decision. Not only would it make women feel welcome, but it was a keepsake that would make them feel special and part of an elite society. The majority of the “Kennedy Teas” were organized by wealthy women, however, the campaign attempted to bring members of all economic classes to the Teas. Sending out invitations leveled the different social and class groups, they all received the same invitations and they were all warmly welcomed to the Teas.

One of the most remembered aspects of the “Kennedy Teas” is the attention John Kennedy paid to every person in attendance. Not only would he stay as long as he needed in order to reach each individual, but he also went out of his way to talk with each woman for at least a minute. The women who threw the Teas had a large role in this practice; they were all responsible for making sure that everyone had a moment with the Senatorial candidate. By paying individual attention to each person in attendance, John Kennedy made them feel included and important. This was not only an advantage when it came to votes; it was also one of the driving forces that helped bring in more volunteers for the campaign. The women who attended and organized the Teas were mainly housewives, and feeling that they were appreciated and could make a difference in a larger capacity helped many of them to make the decision to invest their time and energy in the Kennedy campaign.\(^{142}\)

Many of the women who ended up volunteering for the Kennedy campaign have
discussed how they felt they were able to make a difference in the campaign. In order to understand what drove women to volunteer for John Kennedy, one of the central aspects of the role of women in the campaign is that they did make a difference. They were not given “busy work,” they put on “Kennedy Teas,” all of which brought out massive crowds, and the importance of their work was underlined by the fact that the candidate himself would show up to their events and spend hours greeting people. If the Kennedy campaign had not allowed women to play such a large part in the campaign and had instead relegated female volunteers to small tasks, many women would not have continued devoting so much of their time to the campaign. During an Oral History interview, Polly Fitzgerald discussed what she and many of the other volunteers believed was their role. She stated that “we were so sure that if they just came and heard him speak and met him, they’d be so impressed with the impact of his personality and his intellect that they just would go out and vote for him.”

This was a fully attainable goal for the female volunteers, they could easily gather a crowd, and the Kennedy campaign had enough faith in their skills to have John Kennedy travel to wherever the Tea was being held and give a speech to the women in attendance. This seems like a very small gesture, but considering the lack of meaningful roles for women in politics at the time, the Kennedy campaign’s belief in the importance and ability of women was an innovative strategy.

It cannot be denied that John Kennedy’s charm, looks, wealth, and prominent family did not play a role in attracting women to “Kennedy Teas.” Of course, the fact that John was attractive, personable and from a good family caught the attention of many voters and potential volunteers. Those qualities alone may have won John some votes,
but it does not explain the vast number of women who were willing to take time out of their own lives to organize events for his campaign. Many of the women who worked on committees to organize Teas would only meet the candidate on the day of the Tea, after they had worked hard to plan and execute the entire event. One Kennedy aide remembers the devotion of the women who worked on John’s Senate campaign. He stated that “they [the volunteers] weren’t politicians; they just were dedicated people to him. And every time they heard him or talked to him they became more solidified. They just couldn’t think of anybody but Jack Kennedy.”

John was able to charm women and make them believe in him, but his true genius was then giving those women an outlet for their participation. He was not just looking for voters; he was looking for people who would work for and with him.

Given the prominent roles that John’s mother and sisters played in the campaign, incorporating other women into the campaign was a natural progression. Because he was open to having his female family members be strongly and visibly involved with his campaign, John was able to use their presence to attract and empower other women who were willing and perfectly capable to contribute to the campaign. The “Kennedy Teas” were a new political event, but given John Kennedy’s background and the women he had grown up with and around, the introduction of the “Kennedy Teas” makes perfect sense.
In 2013, the Kennedy campaign’s use of female volunteers seems routine, if not quaint and limited. In 1952, however, the Kennedy campaign was breaking new ground. Not only was John Kennedy relentlessly and actively courting the female vote, he was mobilizing groups of women to campaign on his behalf. John’s 1952 campaign was groundbreaking for several reasons, one being his use of television as a campaign medium. The value the Kennedy campaign placed on female voters and volunteers was evident in their use of television, one article announced: “Something new in politics will be inaugurated with “Coffee with the Kennedy’s.”” Along with the television program “Coffee with the Kennedys” the Kennedy campaign suggested that women hold their own “Coffee with the Kennedys” hours. The idea was that immediately after the broadcast women could have a coffee hour with friends and discuss the program and John’s candidacy for Senate, and how they could aid his campaign.

The majority of the women who volunteered or worked on John Kennedy’s Senate campaign had never before been involved in politics. The number of women who were new to politics when they joined the campaign can be explained two ways, both of which are well documented: John’s campaign tended to attract people who had not previously been interested in politics, and the campaign was more open to employing women in a broader selection of roles. Grace Burke, John Kennedy’s long-term secretary,
had previously been a secretary before she began working for John. In an Oral History interview she gave she stated she had been a secretary to lawyers. But after working on the campaign she became John’s secretary. Women like Grace were typical for the Kennedy campaign. Most of the women volunteers were housewives, and those who worked, did so in areas outside of politics. A number of the women who began their political careers working or volunteering for the 1952 Senate campaign went on to work professionally in politics for the rest of their lives. Grace Burke, for example, continued to work for John Kennedy after his election to the Senate, and Polly Fitzgerald went on to work on John Kennedy’s Presidential campaign, and the campaigns of his brothers Robert and Ted, among others.

Many people who worked on the 1952 Senate campaign have attributed the number of female volunteers willing to work for John to the fact that the Kennedy campaign was providing a much-needed opportunity for women. Polly Fitzgerald recalled how she first became involved with John Kennedy’s campaign and with politics in general. “And he asked me to setup a tea for women,” she recalled. “This was a completely new idea in politics.” The fact that the opportunity the Kennedy campaign was providing for women was a “completely new idea in politics” meant that the campaign could not be accused of using women in place of men, which could easily have led to unfavorable comparisons. Instead, the campaign created a niche that catered to women. One Kennedy acquaintance describes the new role for women as something that “really caught the enthusiasm of [the] young, and I think young women felt that they would have a place to serve. And it was one of the electrifying issues in the campaign.”

The phrase “place to serve” is significant. Prior to the “Kennedy Teas” and the 1952
Senate Campaign, there were few ways for women to be involved in shaping the country in public ways. Women who wanted to “serve” the country were secretaries or other traditionally female occupations, but they wielded little power. With the introduction of “Kennedy Teas,” women were given a chance to not only make a choice to stand by a political candidate who wanted their votes, but to actively work for this candidate, and to work for their political ideals.

In her oral history interview recorded for the John F. Kennedy Library, Polly Fitzgerald discussed her involvement in the 1952 campaign in depth. Amongst the topics covered in the interview, Polly described the type of women John Kennedy attracted to work for him. She stated that “for the first time in political history you had a different type of woman working in politics than you would ever had before. John Kennedy inspired just a different breed of woman to be interested in him.”152 As one of the first people to become involved with the “Kennedy Teas,” Polly’s insight into the role of women in the campaign is invaluable. According to Polly, the difference between the women who worked for John Kennedy and the women who had been involved in politics in the past was that “up until this time there were women who had worked in politics but they were women who would go out and work for every candidate in the party. They were identified with politics. This time it was different.”153 Many of the women who volunteered for John’s Senate campaign did not identify with politics, instead they identified with John Kennedy’s politics and plans. Polly described the female volunteers as “a high type of woman. People who were just, never thought that they would ever become involved in working for a candidate.”154 The Kennedy campaign did not pick female volunteers from a preexisting pool of “political women;” they found volunteers in
what was a previously untapped pool of women.

The creation of a new role for women in politics had a profound effect on Kennedy’s campaign. The opportunity for female volunteers attracted women who were interested in politics but who never had a chance to have a voice or make an impact before 1952. Other women, who had not been previously interested in politics, became interested in John Kennedy’s individual candidacy. With the invention of “Kennedy Teas,” these women were offered a new role in American politics. With no real public roles for women in politics, many women did not take an active interest in political campaigns. Why should they if a candidate did not have any use for them?

John Kennedy did not ask female volunteers to organize events for their husbands and husbands’ friends; he gave them a chance to do something independently of the men in their lives. This opportunity has had a resounding effect on politics and on the lives of women. Although asking housewives to have tea parties may seem like a small step forward, it was hugely progressive for the times. The “Kennedy Teas” had a very clear political motive: to get as many women as possible in the same space, give them a chance to meet John Kennedy and then listen to him discuss his plans for the Senate. By revolutionizing an old fashioned political event and turning it into something that appealed directly to women, that was socially acceptable and was organized mainly by women, John Kennedy was able to assemble crowds of thousands for thirty-three “Kennedy Teas”.

Social conditions in 1952 America were particularly tilted in favor of John Kennedy. John represented the ideal young man of the 1950s. He had served in World War II and emerged as a war hero who was credited with saving the lives of several of his
crewmembers. He came from a strong, charitable and civic-minded family, many of whom had also served in the war in various capacities. Furthermore, John was charming, polite, good-looking, and single. Essentially, he was both the son mothers wanted and the husband of which young women dreamed. The Kennedy campaign made certain that John’s war record was given an extensive amount of press. Several of his speaking engagements described him as being “[w]ell known in Navy circles as a former PT boat commander, he holds the rank of lieutenant commander in the Naval Reserve.” The emphasis the campaign chose to place on John’s war record speaks not only to his accomplishments during the war, but also to the significance his service held for many in America after World War II.

One article about John’s war service was particularly well circulated. “Survival” was first published as an article in a newspaper and then reprinted in Reader’s Digest before 1952. During the 1952 campaign John made it a point to seek out the advice of Polly Fitzgerald, and gave her a copy of the article for her feedback. Polly told John that she thought the article “was wonderful, and that I thought people would be very interested in reading about it.” John Kennedy did indeed use “Survival” during the campaign, as Polly proudly recalled: “Survival” was used during the ’52 campaign. It was printed up in little pamphlet forms, and we gave them out at all the teas. So every woman who went home took a copy of it.”

John’s opponent, Henry Cabot Lodge, Jr., had also served during World War II, achieving the rank of lieutenant colonel. Lodge served in Egypt, Libya, Italy and France, and was awarded the Legion of Merit and the Bronze Star Medal. Lodge was forty when the war broke out, while John was only twenty-five. Lodge’s campaign did not publicize his war record the same way John’s
campaign publicized PT-109, and as a result Lodge received far less attention for his
heroism during the war.

The end of World War II had brought about dramatic social changes in America.
During the war, many women who had previously been housewives and stay at home
mothers had taken jobs in order to help replenish the work force. Once the war ended, the
nation attempted to return to prewar normalcy. For example, women were encouraged to
leave the workforce they had entered during the war to make room for returning
veterans.159 Some of the women who had taken jobs to aid the war effort had discovered
that they enjoyed working outside the home, but “women who had held industrial and
other jobs during wartime,” writes Linda Eisenmann in Higher Education for Women in
Postwar America, 1945-1956, “were often asked to step aside to ease men’s labor force
reentry.”160 In her essay “Gender at Work: The Sexual Division of Labor During World
War II”, Ruth Milkman states that after the war, women were expected to “happily
exchange industrial tools for the broom and mop or new vacuum cleaner and the baby
bottle.”161 The fact that many women had experienced working life during the war likely
had a significant influence on the minds of those who decided to volunteer for John
Kennedy in 1952. Even if the women who volunteered for John Kennedy had not been
working during the war, the country had seen that women were not only capable of
working, but were successful in working in what were considered male jobs. The idea of
women being able to take over jobs while men were at war was at once both empowering
for many women and intimidating and potentially emasculating for many men.

Even during World War II, when women’s labor was needed to keep the nation
functioning, there was an effort to maintain gender constructs in the workforce. A survey
conducted in 1943 found that in one automobile factory where a large percentage of the workers were women, “more than one-half of the women workers clustered in only five of seventy-two job classifications. Only 11 percent of the men were employed in these five occupations.” Despite the advancements that had been made since women’s suffrage, society remained reluctant to allow women to work in fields that were considered “men’s work,” even when it would benefit the country for them to do so. On the occasion that women were allowed to do “men’s work” during the war, it was assumed that they “were in heavy industry 'for the duration.' This theme would become much more prominent after the war, but it was a constant undercurrent from the outset.” The temporary nature of women’s involvement in particularly male fields of work during the war was emphasized throughout the war, heightening the expectation that women would return to their homes once the war ended, and society would revert to women and men existing in separate spheres.

The creation of the “Kennedy Teas” was an important step towards changing the roles of women and attitudes concerning women working. One of the smartest components of the “Kennedy Teas” was how difficult the Teas were to categorize. The Teas were undeniably social- they were presented as social events in the local newspapers, the invitations indicated it was a social event, and the fact that they were attended and organized by women meant that the Teas were viewed as social events rather than anything else. The fact that the Teas were organized by women volunteering for a political candidate, in order to help said candidate get elected, was negated by the mere fact that there were women in charge. The dual nature of the Teas meant that they were socially acceptable for women to be involved in, but women could still have a
substantial impact and their work was still valued by John Kennedy and the rest of the male campaign workers.
CHAPTER SIX

A MIDDLE GROUND BETWEEN POLITICS AND RESPECTABILITY

The work of the female volunteers of the 1952 Senate campaign was both groundbreaking and socially acceptable. The balance of the two was difficult to achieve, especially in a society that was still adjusting from the change in female employment during World War II. On the surface, “Kennedy Teas” were large tea parties where women of a particular town got together to socialize and meet members of a Massachusetts dynasty. “Coffee with the Kennedys” was groups of women watching a television program and then discussing it together in a private home. Realistically, many of the people who disagreed with women having an active role in politics probably would not have looked much further into these gatherings because it would not have occurred to them that these women were doing something remarkable.

The reality of these campaign programs was more than what it appeared to the casual onlooker. The women who organized “Kennedy Teas” worked closely with the Kennedy campaign, they distributed copies of “Survivor” and other Kennedy campaign literature, they came up with ways to encourage the women in attendance to sign up to help with other aspects of the campaign, and they listened to and discussed John’s political speeches. The women who participated in “Coffee with the Kennedys” program organized groups of friends, acquaintances or neighbors, to listen to the television program and then discuss John Kennedy’s candidacy for Senate and what they could do to help his campaign. These were important aspects to the Kennedy campaign, and to
ignore their importance both to the campaign and to the burgeoning women’s movement is foolish at best.

The press largely underplayed the value of the “Kennedy Teas.” Although the Teas were widely covered in local papers, most articles were purely factual; they contained dates, times, people involved and then after the Tea the articles would describe John’s speech in brief and again list the women involved. Despite the amount of print space the Teas received, what was missing was any real mention of the fact that the events were making any substantial impact on the Kennedy campaign. Even after the 1952 election, when many other politicians had adopted the idea of campaign Teas, the press shied away from analyzing the role women and the Teas were playing in the political world. Even the more flattering articles minimized the importance of what the women were accomplishing. Headlines such as: “You certainly can leave it to the girls,”164 were as close as the press got to commenting on the new political trend of the Kennedy campaign. The fact that the Tea mentioned in the article “drew 2,000, second only in Berkshire political rally attendance to the visit back in 1927 of Franklin D. Roosevelt when he was stumping for Al Smith,”165 is undercut by the cheery headline about “girls.” Not women, not young women but condescendingly “girls.” Though referring to grown women as “girls” was not unusual in the 1950s, given the context of what these women were accomplishing, the use of “girls” is particularly patronizing. Never mind that the majority of these women were housewives and well past the age of girlhood. That was of little consequence.

With the introduction of the “Kennedy Teas” to the political arena, women who had never had the opportunity to become involved in politics were suddenly presented
with the chance to do so. One volunteer who worked on many “Kennedy Teas” described the new opportunity. “I mean I think before this time, you’d think, ‘Well what could I possibly do?’ [T]his was a new concept.”¹⁶⁶ In the early 1950s, many people either assumed that women had no interest in politics, or that women were not “suited” for the political world. The many women who worked tirelessly on John Kennedy’s 1952 campaign were proof that women certainly were interested in politics, but the lack of opportunities for women in the political sphere left many thinking that getting involved in politics was not an option open to them. The success of the “Kennedy Teas” in 1952 and the trend of political Teas that quickly followed among other politicians make it clear that women were absolutely capable of working effectively in politics.

The female volunteers on the Kennedy campaign were grateful for the new opportunity John and his campaign provided, which made them even more dedicated to John’s cause. In her oral history, Polly Fitzgerald stated that “I think the fact that I left my husband and children and went to work for him was a thing I never would have done for anybody else.”¹⁶⁷ This is echoed in the interviews and oral histories from many other volunteers on the 1952 campaign. The fact that John Kennedy saw potential in women who had no political experience, many of whom had no work experience, and was willing to put money and his time into events they planned made many of these volunteers even more steadfast in their confidence in John Kennedy’s candidacy. Polly Fitzgerald also discussed the women she worked alongside, saying “I think maybe the only reason that it’s important that, to say anything about myself is that I always felt that I represented all the women who worked for him… And so many women did the same kind of thing. They may have only left their houses by the day, but they went out every single day and put
everything else aside to work for him.” The women who volunteered for John Kennedy in 1952 made the decision to do so knowing that in many cases their involvement in the campaign would have a considerable effect on their husbands and children.

Many women in the 1950s, especially the middle class women who populated John Kennedy’s female volunteer base, were housewives. By becoming involved in John Kennedy’s campaign, whether as a volunteer or an employee, they were no longer solely working at home or for their husbands. These women “became so excited and enthused that they didn’t do their housework. And they didn’t, you know, cook the same kind of meals. I’m sure that they weren’t baking cakes and making good lunches and so forth.” This change is a testament to the faith many of the volunteers had in John Kennedy, they disrupted their family lives because they were “so inspired and excited about working for him.” It is impossible to tell how much of an impact the simple fact that John Kennedy was willing to have these women volunteer on his campaign had on their enthusiasm for his campaign. The most likely interpretation is that the women were both excited to have a candidate that they believed in and wanted to see elected, and were also excited to be able to actually do work on behalf of this candidate.

As the country as a whole struggled between social progress and attempting to return to the status quo that existed before World War II, the role of women was a major point of contention. Men, many of whom had served in the war and some of whom had been physically injured or suffered from what we now call post traumatic stress disorder, were particularly reluctant to accept the crumbling boundaries of the separate spheres. Traditionalists still believed that women belonged in the home, tending to their husbands
and children, while the growing women’s movement dreamt of higher education for women and jobs that were not “traditionally female”.\textsuperscript{171}

Women had been struggling to find fulfillment outside the home without jeopardizing their social respectability for decades prior to 1952. In an essay on Eleanor Roosevelt’s role in politics during and after the 1920s, Blanche Wiesen Cook discusses the difficulty Roosevelt had finding a balance between her political ambitions and ideals, and her need to continue to be perceived as respectable by others. Cook states that Roosevelt’s "need to minimize her efforts and to reassure her husband that she was in fact no threat, and no competition to his primary place in the political arena, is a sturdy testimony of the proverbial double standard that was and remains the burden of political women."\textsuperscript{172} Even in letters to her husband, Franklin Delano Roosevelt, Eleanor Roosevelt needed to emphasize her role as wife over her political career. In one letter dated in 1924, "she concluded by reminding her husband that she was merely his temporary stand-in."\textsuperscript{173} In another letter, Eleanor Roosevelt stated that she felt the only way women would be able to create a place for themselves in the political world would be to “work systematically and earnestly within the power structure.”\textsuperscript{174} Roosevelt took her own advice, despite her political ambitions and the political power she was able to obtain, she was careful to label herself first as a wife and mother, rather than a politician. Though Eleanor Roosevelt sent these letters long before John Kennedy’s 1952 campaign, the confines Eleanor Roosevelt worked under were still a reality for women.

Understandably, not all women tended towards one extreme or another. Plenty of women wanted to work, or spend time doing something that did not involve looking after children and husbands, but they did not want to be faced with the social ramifications of
openly challenging the gender constructs of the time. These women were faced with the fact that, according to Linda Eisenmann, “in a postwar milieu focused on women’s domesticity, such activism [higher education, blatant feminism] was distasteful…”¹⁷⁵ Society dictated that “…women were encouraged to adjust themselves to arrangements already in place rather than to question or change the social structure.”¹⁷⁶ As a result, women who wanted to work but were not “radical” enough to outwardly push the boundaries of the strict gender constructs of the 1950s were left to attempt to find something that would fulfill their desire to work outside of the house, while not upsetting the society around them.

In 1952, it was permissible for women to volunteer for various causes. It can be assumed that one of the main reasons that volunteering was acceptable while working was still often frowned upon was the fact that volunteers were not paid. Thus, a housewife working many hours a day for John Kennedy’s Senate campaign was still abiding by the social norm because she was not making money, that was still her husband’s job. Women turned to volunteering because it was one of the few options open to them, and because it gave them an opportunity to get involved in issues that had an impact on their family. A study done on The League of Women Voters revealed, “that 82 percent of members were married women using the organization as an outlet for their civic concerns.”¹⁷⁷ This coincides with the general demographic of John Kennedy’s “Kennedy Tea” volunteers, though no official list was kept; it appears that most of the women who volunteered were middle class or upper class, married and predominantly white. For many women, volunteering “became a way to address social concerns while keeping family duties foremost.”¹⁷⁸ The notion of “keeping family duties foremost” was
certainly appealing to the more traditional members of society who believed that a woman’s place was in the home.

For many women, and certainly a large number of those who worked on John Kennedy’s campaign, volunteering was a way to do something new without upsetting the social gender role balance. Linda Eisenmann describes one woman who “spent fifteen hours weekly on the League of Women Voters, the PTA, and the Kennedy presidential campaign.” This woman was not unique during the social upheaval of the 1950s that would continue on for several decades, although she did have a husband who fully supported her time outside the home, which many others most likely did not. This woman is a perfect example of a “non-employed mother of three who appeared stereotypically traditional on the surface [but] was, in fact, finding ways to exercise her choices and interests.” This certainly applies to women like Polly Fitzgerald, who, while still appearing to be a regular housewife, was able to work on the Kennedy campaign and discover a passion for politics that led her to join many other campaigns after 1952.

Women who were employed in paying jobs during and after World War II were expected to place their jobs below their more traditional gender-based responsibilities. During the war, the government and the press promoted the notion that “employed women would continue to view themselves as women first, workers second.” The emphasis on women remaining tied to the role of wife and mother underscores one of the main arguments for keeping women in the home and out of the workforce, the idea that women were better suited for “feminine work,” such as housekeeping, raising children, and taking care of their husbands. The “Kennedy Teas” provided a way for women to work outside the home, while still remaining within the gender confines of the time.
Volunteering was further promoted due to America’s worsening relations with the Soviet Union. Eisenmann writes: “Showcasing American women’s political involvement became a particularly common way to deprecate Soviet life…. American women could reverse a ‘socialist, dictatorial trend’ through strengthening their political commitments.” Though this was stated by Margaret Chase Smith, who was known for being fairly radical, volunteering was regarded as an acceptable pastime for middle and upper class women. Margaret Chase Smith’s words may seem like a straightforward endorsement of women becoming involved in politics, however there were still many who objected to the idea of women “strengthening their political commitments” if those political commitments involved paid jobs rather than volunteer work. Still, women were encouraged to, “make politics your business. Voting, office holding, raising your voice for new and better laws are just as important to your home and your family as the evening meal or spring housecleaning.” Although these directives do not directly relate to John Kennedy’s 1952 Senate campaign, the two are connected. This encouragement conveys similar thinking as the “Kennedy Teas;” the thinking that women could have a voice and play a quiet, though active role in politics while still remaining firmly entrenched in their gender construct roles. In fact, these thoughts were echoed specifically in a speech Eunice Kennedy gave, where she told a group of housewives that getting rising prices down was the responsibility of wives and mothers.

John Kennedy’s 1952 campaign coincided with the beginning of the women’s movement, which would continue to grow for the next two decades. Eleven years after John’s Senate election, Betty Friedan published *The Feminine Mystique*, which highlighted the unhappiness and lack of fulfillment that housewives were facing.
1950s, many of the issues that were brought to light in *The Feminine Mystique* were still affecting women, and society as a whole, but had not yet been brought into public consciousness. Women were still concerned about social approval, gender constructs, and perceived respectability, but these apprehensions were beginning to lessen in importance, a trend that continued far into the future.

The creation of the “Kennedy Teas” had an impact on politics and society that continued long after John Kennedy was elected to the Senate. Other political figures had witnessed the tremendous triumph of the “Kennedy Teas” and were eager to capitalize on the idea for their own campaigns. Women who had attended the Teas had seen the large, successful, political events that women were perfectly capable of organizing and executing. Most importantly, the women who had volunteered their time and energy to the campaign had seen what they themselves were able to accomplish when given the opportunity. Following the “Kennedy Teas” and 1952 campaign, John Kennedy continued to support women’s rights when he could, although he was never willing to make too big of a break with gender norms as to damage his career.
CHAPTER SEVEN:
LASTING LEGACY

The “Kennedy Teas” had a lasting impact on American politics and society, not just on those who worked on the Teas but on the role of women in political campaigns in general. The idea of hosting large-scale receptions for women hosted by women was revolutionary when John Kennedy had the first Tea to support his 1946 run for Congress. The progression of the Teas by the time he ran for Senate in 1952 was remarkable, and it touched the lives of many of the women who worked on or attended “Kennedy Teas” or “Coffee with the Kennedys.” When Edward Berube, head of John’s Senate campaign, was interviewed fifteen years after the 1952 election he highlighted the groundbreaking nature of the Kennedy Teas. He stated that John Kennedy “wanted coffee hours and tea hours and arranging coffee hours in homes. And this was the first time that this ever done in Fall River by any candidate… But he ran these big teas, he called them, and this was the big thing.”

All those who worked on the 1952 campaign are clear that these Teas and Coffee Hours were John’s idea, and that it was John who insisted that they be hosted to his specifications.

The “Kennedy Teas” were such a success that they were soon adopted by other politicians. Polly Fitzgerald recalled the wave of Teas immediately following the 1952 campaign. Fitzgerald states that “every candidate who ran for any office after that time…. Used the teas. To such an extent that when he [John Kennedy] ran for the second time in 1958, it just seemed ridiculous to have the teas again, as such, because they had, everyone had been teaed to death in the meantime.” Other political campaigns’ appropriation of the Teas proves how effective they were during John’s campaign,
although Henry Cabot Lodge, Jr., Kennedy’s opponent in 1952, believed otherwise. Lodge stated that he attributed his loss to Republican’s anger towards him due to Robert A. Taft’s loss at the Republican convention. Lodge had been Dwight Eisenhower’s campaign manager, and helped Eisenhower win the Republican nomination, defeating Robert A. Taft. Eisenhower’s victory alienated the more conservative Republicans, who had been in favor of Taft. Lodge was very insistent that his loss actually had little to do with John Kennedy or his campaign, “He worked hard; he had a fine war record; he had plenty of money and all that. But I don’t think it was the tea parties, I don’t think it was all that.” The fact that Lodge essentially stands as the sole detractor of the “Kennedy Teas” is telling, and not at all surprising considering Lodge’s protestations that the he could have done little differently in his campaign and Lodge’s inability to imagine that women could be instrumental in any election.

Many of the female volunteers who worked on the “Kennedy Teas” and “Coffee with the Kennedys” had their lives forever altered by the experience. For some women, who worked on one or two local Teas, the campaign gave them a chance to work outside the home and to meet other women they would not have otherwise met. For women like Polly Fitzgerald who worked as the liaison between the Kennedy campaign and the local committees of women, it gave them political experience on a larger level. All of the women who worked on the campaign gained one specific thing from their work: the knowledge that if given the chance, they could make a difference. This group of women was able to plan Teas that saw thousands of attendees, were attended by a Congressman from a political dynasty and played a large part in a competitive Senate race. In a time when most women were encouraged to stay home, be wives and mothers and maybe be
involved in their local Church or a charity or two, this was an incredibly valuable experience. Volunteering on the Kennedy campaign prepared them for the world that was to become. These mothers would also serve as role models for their daughters and sons, the baby boomers who would forever alter American society.

The campaign had other, more unexpected, results on the women who volunteered. One volunteer, for example, stated that: “Through …having the experiences that I had, I think, too, all my values fell into the right places. I used to say- when I was away in the campaign- that if all the frustrated housewives could go away in campaigns, they’d learn what comes first in life.”\(^\text{190}\) It is understandable that the introduction to politics and a very different world than most women were used to would precipitate a shift in priorities. The volunteer continued, “It might seem like a strange thing to say, but going away and leaving your family makes you realize that your family is the most important thing there is.”\(^\text{191}\) For a good number of women who stayed home to care for their families because that was what was expected of them, the chance to spend time away from their families could have been beneficial. This particular volunteer went on to work on several other political campaigns, but credited John Kennedy’s 1952 Senate campaign with allowing her to make the choice to balance her work and her family. The majority of the women who attended and volunteered for Kennedy Teas did not go much further into politics, but because of their experience with the campaign in 1952 many of them were shown that they had a choice, they could chose to stay at home and focus on their families, or they could chose to work outside the home. Their final decision is not as important as the simple fact that they had the agency to make a choice.

John Kennedy continued to aid women’s rights until his assassination in 1963.
Some have gone so far as to call Kennedy a feminist, which is an exaggeration given what little he was able to accomplish during his 1,000 days as President. While John Kennedy was not entirely concentrated on women’s rights, he did take substantial steps to advance women’s rights when it came to work. On December 14th, 1961, John Kennedy created the Presidential Commission on the Status of Women. The Commission was the culmination of the relationship between John Kennedy and Eleanor Roosevelt, who assisted John during his 1960 Presidential election. Roosevelt chaired the Commission, which was made up of twenty-six members, until her death in 1962.  

The mission of the Presidential Commission on the Status of Women was very much in keeping with John Kennedy’s decision to enlist female volunteers on his Senate campaign. In a speech given on December 14th, 1961, regarding the creation of the Commission, John stated: “But a mere statement supporting equality of opportunity must be implemented by affirmative steps to see that the doors are really open…” In fact, the Kennedy campaign had taken “affirmative steps” to have women work on the 1952 campaign. John did not have to court the female vote as aggressively as he did. Money was of no concern in this election, the Kennedys were wealthy and Joseph Patrick Kennedy was going to do whatever he needed to, and pay whatever he needed to pay, to see his son advance to the Senate and then the presidency. Had John chosen to, he certainly could have hired men to organize and oversee the Teas, he could have made many of the female-centric events appeal to both men and women. Instead, he chose to have female volunteers, to have women in control of these Teas, and to put a great amount of trust in these women in exchange for their time and energy.
Unfortunately, the Presidential Commission on the Status of Women had something else in common with the 1952 Kennedy Senate campaign. John Kennedy and the Commission again balanced supporting women and still appeasing the more conservative members of the country. The Equal Rights Amendment was left out of the Commission’s report in 1962, and the Amendment was never mentioned as a solution to the problem of the discrimination of women in American society. While it has been suggested that had John Kennedy lived and served another term he would have taken a more aggressive stance in favor of women’s rights, this view may be overly idealistic. Given John Kennedy’s patterns throughout his political campaign it is unlikely he would have been willing to alienate potential constituents by taking a more “controversial” approach to women’s rights. The fact is, had John Kennedy been much more vocal about supporting issues pertinent to female employment, he would have jeopardized his political career. His decision not to do so, though unfortunate for many reasons, was the better political decision at the time. Yet, had John Kennedy lived, and been elected to the presidency for a second term, he may have been able to do more for women’s rights without another election to consider. Unfortunately, because of his death, we’ll never know for sure
John Kennedy remains a controversial political figure, particularly where women are concerned. With less than three years as President, many have idealized the President he would have become, which is a disservice to the politician he actually was. John’s public image is particularly wrought with drama, presented as the ideal husband and family man, the legend of the Kennedy Camelot era has been shattered in past decades by scandalous revelations concerning Kennedy’s many affairs, prolific womanizing and loose personal morals. It is difficult to understand John Kennedy’s relationship with and attitude towards women, given the dichotomy that exists between his political and personal behavior. John Kennedy was an adulterer. He (and many other Kennedys) used women for his own means relentlessly. John Kennedy’s dysfunctional relationship with many of the women in his life is well documented. However, it is important to allow John Kennedy’s political decisions concerning women to stand on their own. These decisions are inextricably tied to John Kennedy’s personality, his family, the example set by his father and the social and familial environment in which he lived.

From the start, John Kennedy had a unique upbringing. His father was a domineering philanderer, who was determined to have his children, male and female, be the best they could possibly be. His mother’s religiosity prevented her from considering divorcing her cheating husband; she was educated but not particularly progressive and
was tightly attached to social perceptions and gender roles. Rose was intelligent and capable, but was tied to the female ideals of the late 1800s and early 1900s. John’s sisters were vivacious, educated, and expected by Joseph Patrick Kennedy to keep up with the boys. John’s sister Kick broke with social norms whenever she could, first by marrying an English Protestant and then openly dating a divorcée. Patricia and Jean were both bright, willing and able to help with John’s campaigns. Patricia led a tumultuous life but was involved with the National Center for Addiction as well as a founder for the National Committee for the Literary Arts. Jean was instrumental in the founding of Very Special Arts, which provides disabled children the opportunity to participate in a variety of art programs, and served as Ambassador to Ireland for five years. Growing up in the Kennedy family most likely contributed to John Kennedy’s philandering, but he could not have grown up surrounded by his female relatives and thought that women were incapable or unable to work hard with great success. John understood women’s transitioning worth as both objects of desire and capable workers. He straddled both eras, one that saw little use for women outside of the bedroom, and a new era that recognized women’s worth and agency.

In terms of the Kennedy family, Eunice Kennedy was the most progressive of the family members, and was highly influential regarding her brother’s views. John was closest to Eunice out of all his sisters, and Eunice exemplified the progressive, vivacious women who would go on to spearhead the women’s movement. Eunice held real jobs, she received a degree in Sociology instead of Music, English or other “feminine” subjects. She wore pants, smoked Cuban cigars, was outspoken and tackled her brother’s Senate campaign with the same unwavering self-assurance she had when playing football
in Hyannis Port. By the time John ran for Senate in 1952, Eunice already had impressive work experience, of which her brother was well aware. The family environment John grew up in was responsible for the way he conducted himself with regards to gender issues. He hired many female volunteers but was not a “feminist,” he had high expectations concerning the potential of women, but he continued to objectify women’s bodies.

Women were attracted to the Kennedy campaign for many reasons. The Kennedys were promoted as the perfect family, wealthy, religious, charitable, and good-looking. The family was appealing to the masses. The press portrayed the family as “special,” people wanted to meet and interact with these accomplished, attractive, and well thought of individuals. John Kennedy also directly sold himself to female voters; he attended female-only meetings, had his sisters and mother stand in for him, and from the very beginning welcomed female contribution on his campaign. The fact that Kennedy was willing to open his campaign to women, to give them a chance to actually contribute to a campaign, attracted even more women. Volunteering for a political campaign was a new opportunity, and it was an opportunity that was sorely needed by the women of America.

The John F. Kennedy Senate campaign of 1952 could not have had better timing. Not only was the Kennedy image perfect for post-World War II America, but John managed to employ female voters at exactly the right moment in time. Women had been able to work during the war, but were now expected to step aside and go back to being housewives. John Kennedy managed to catch this wave of dissatisfied women who wanted to work, who wanted to contribute to something larger but who had few options at the time. He had all the right personal and familial attributes to attract women to Teas,
and social norms were exactly at the right point for women who sought an outlet that was both fulfilling and socially acceptable outside of the home.

The 1950s was a transitional period, both for women in America and for John Kennedy. Women who had worked during World War II were forced out of the workforce and encouraged to become housewives and mothers, which led to women facing a growing dissatisfaction regarding their lives. The women of the 1950s, and the women who worked on John Kennedy’s campaign, were the mothers of the women who would lead the women’s movement of the early 1970s. John Kennedy’s conscious or unconscious understanding of the gender confines allowed him to exploit women’s discontent with gender constructs and offer women a transition to a public life that did not immediately threaten their social respectability and status as respectable women.

The “Kennedy Teas” were a balancing act of politics and feminine society. There was enough work and political maneuvering in the Teas to make the women feel that they were aiding the campaign, and the idea of “Teas” and “Coffee Hours” was feminine enough not to incur backlash from traditionalists. Like most elements of Kennedy campaigns, the female involvement was flawlessly planned and executed. Perhaps the most surprising part of the female involvement in the campaign was the extent of John Kennedy’s interest in it. From all accounts, John Kennedy was the one who insisted on starting “Kennedy Teas,” he was responsible for having women organize each Tea, and he genuinely wanted input from the women who organized the Teas. It can be suggested that John was more interested in being surrounded by women than he was in the Teas themselves, but this is absurd and simplistic. John Kennedy never seemed to have a
problem finding women to sleep with, and it is doubtful that he built a large part of his campaign around making sure women would be available for his every need.

John Kennedy and the women who worked on his campaign benefited tremendously from each other. The “Kennedy Teas” certainly helped John publicize his campaign and gain female voters, and the creation of “Kennedy Teas” and “Coffee with the Kennedys” introduced women to a role in politics that had not previously existed. Female involvement in the campaign created an opportunity for women that certainly would not otherwise have existed. John Kennedy’s decision to have female volunteers play a meaningful role in his campaign not only changed the way political campaigns were run, it changed the lives of the women who were a part of his campaign. Kennedy should be remembered for many things, both positive and negative, but especially for creating a political role for women within social and gender confines.

16 Ibid., page 89
18 Doris Kearns Goodwin, The Fitzgeralds and the Kennedys, page 305
19 Ibid., page 196
20 Ibid., page 247
21 Ibid., page 131
22 Ibid., page 188
25 Doris Kearns Goodwin, The Fitzgeralds and the Kennedys, page 473
26 Ibid., page 485
27 Ibid., page 381
28 Ibid., page 185
29 Rose Kennedy, Times to Remember. (New York: Doubleday, 1995)
30 Doris Kearns Goodwin, The Fitzgeralds and the Kennedys, page 366
31 Doris Kearns Goodwin, The Fitzgeralds and the Kennedys, page 231
32 Ibid., page 409
33 Ibid., page 226
34 Laurence Leamer, The Kennedy Women: the Saga of an American Family. page 94
35 Ibid.
36 Doris Kearns Goodwin, The Fitzgeralds and the Kennedys, page 228
Doris Kearns Goodwin, *The Fitzgeralds and the Kennedys*, page 692


Ibid.

Laurence Leamer, *The Kennedy Women: the Saga of an American Family*, page 204


Doris Kearns Goodwin, *The Fitzgeralds and the Kennedys*, page 498


Doris Kearns Goodwin, *The Fitzgeralds and the Kennedys*, page 362

Ibid., page 665


Doris Kearns Goodwin, *The Fitzgeralds and the Kennedys*, page 678

Ibid., page 457


Ibid., page 392


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Ibid.

Ibid.

Laurence Leamer, *The Kennedy Women: the Saga of an American Family*

“Mrs. Kennedy is Admired by Both Parties.” John F. Kennedy Library: The Personal Papers of Rose Fitzgerald Kennedy, Series Four, 1952 Senate Campaign, Box 100

“A Sterling Family.” (Lynn, Mass), September 21, 1952. John F. Kennedy Library: The Papers of President Kennedy, Campaign Files, ’52 Campaign, Newspaper Clippings, Kennedy Socials

Ibid.

Ibid.


“500 Expected at Event for Mrs. Kennedy.” (Springfield, Mass). John F. Kennedy Library: The Papers of President Kennedy, Campaign Files, ’52 Campaign, Newspaper Clippings, Kennedy Socials

Jean Kennedy studied English, and it is unclear what Patricia Kennedy studied while at Rosemont College


“Opportunities for Women in the 1950s” *Simmons College.*


Ibid.

“Mrs. Kennedy is Admired by Both Parties.” John F. Kennedy Library, Kennedy Socials

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Rose Kennedy, *Times to Remember*

“Norwood Women Invited to Tea for Kennedys.” John F. Kennedy Library: The Papers of President Kennedy, Campaign Files, ’52 Campaign, Newspaper Clippings, Kennedy Socials

“Mrs. Kennedy Here Sunday.” John F. Kennedy Library: The Personal Papers of Rose Fitzgerald Kennedy, Series Four, 1952 Senate Campaign, Box 100


“Patricia Kennedy Addresses Democratic Group in Braintree.” *Patriot Ledger*, (Quincy Mass). John F. Kennedy Library: The Papers of President Kennedy, Campaign Files, ’52 Campaign, Newspaper Clippings, Kennedy Socials


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Ibid.

Ibid.

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Ibid.

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