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Kennedy was no hypocrite nor did he
play politics as usual with civil rights.
(Wofford 175)

Kennedy's housing order, in short, was
[...] a necessary move in the complex
game he was playing on the civil rights
issue.
(Matusow 69)

Everyone critical of Mr Kennedy said
he was playing politics. Certainly this
was true. That he played politics is one
of his claims to greatness.
(Golden 161)

The administration is impressed by the
fact that the Negro masses are now
becoming involved in the civil rights
struggle.
(Lomax 235)

Kennedy was not much impressed by
the fact that thousands of black people
were, for the first time, acting to seize
their own freedom.
(Miroff 227)

Kennedy now responded to the Negro
revolution by seeking to assume its
leadership.
(Schlesinger 966)

Yet the President persisted in his effort
to obstruct the civil rights movement.
(O'Reilly 213)

His dream was theirs.
(Sorensen 505)

Their concerns were not his concerns.
(Niven 8)

We all see different pasts.
(Wallerstein 1)

1 Introduction

When writers and historians represent the past, they rely on a wealth of primary as well as secondary reference material available. The outcome of their research and judgement depends on what they select out of the ‘cultural tool kit’ (Wertsch 324). It is therefore evident that from the way authors select and choose their material, conflicting narratives develop, as becomes evident from the aforementioned quotations. We can approach the past only by means of texts or audiovisual material, hence historical research is an active process of the researcher at work, which may lead to contradicting narratives:

The different voices and perspectives involved may be woven together in a smooth and coherent way, but in many cases their simultaneous presence results in struggles, or conflicts, that reflect patterns of power and authority in the sociocultural setting (Wertsch 324).

This thesis aims at unravelling the various perspectives and discourses on the Kennedy brothers in connection with the Civil Rights Movement in the time span of President Kennedy’s term from 1960 to 1963. On the domestic front, issues of race and civil rights have always been topics of controversy, stirring up emotions among the people and their political leaders. The United States are characterised by a turbulent history of immigration and the mingling of ethnicities. A hundred years after President Lincoln issued the Emancipation Proclamation, which represented a major step in the abolishment of slavery, African Americans started to claim their legal rights in essential areas of living, such as education, housing or employment where discrimination was still predominant. The Civil Rights Movement had gradually gained support and strength over the 40s and 50s and ultimately reached its peak in the early 60s, expressing the discontent of African Americans by means of demonstrations, sit-ins and other non-violent ways of direct action in order to raise awareness for their needs. For any politician, it was

a demanding task to face the challenge of arbitrating between the opposing parties involved in the struggle. Especially the Southern states like Mississippi or Alabama proved to be extremely reluctant to introduce change because of their traditional politics and even more so because of the mindset of citizens who had lived and upheld racial segregation for decades.

The conflicting portrayal of civil rights related political action of Robert and John F. Kennedy will be compared and analysed in detail, whereby the image of the Kennedys as American heroes is either being supported or deconstructed by the authors. I have had the opportunity to conduct research at the renowned John F. Kennedy Library in Boston, Massachusetts, where I was confronted with plenty of excellent material ranging from primary sources in the form of correspondence, official documents and memoranda to secondary literature. For in-depth analysis, I have selected nine of the most substantial accounts which are concerned with the topic of racial segregation in the early 60s, some of them dealing with the Kennedys and civil rights at length, some only devoting one chapter on this issue in a broader account. By comparison, they cover a broad range of opinions about the Kennedys' civil rights achievements ranging from unlimited praise to harsh criticism. Moreover, the books were written at different stages in time, which is certainly a decisive aspect in the assessment of the impact of politics. In the preface to the second edition of his book *The Chief Executive*, Louis Koenig states that 'in the luxury of hindsight [I have] amended some of my earlier judgements', referring to the almost 'ridiculous' time span between 1964 and 1968. This shows that not only does our view of things change in the course of time, but also do results of policy-making evoke differing reactions depending on what happened after the observed events.

Harry Golden was the first author to cover the subject in depth in late 1964 in his book *Mr Kennedy and the Negroes*, reaching a thoroughly positive conclusion, as does Carl M. Brauer in *John F. Kennedy and the Second Reconstruction* (1977). Especially the latter bases his judgement on the impact of the Kennedy brothers' communicative power, which shall be discussed in a separate chapter.

The second group of authors includes former members of the administration, among them presidential advisors Theodore C. Sorensen and Arthur M. Schlesinger, two of the most significant writers of what is commonly referred to as the 'Camelot school' in the bulk of literature on President Kennedy. Both authors had published their first books on Kennedy only a few years after his tragic death, which is why their accounts are characterised by unlimited loyalty, resulting in a euphemistic narrative of their memories, which is accentuated with dramatic language. With Sorensen having formerly served as the President's counsellor, his book *Kennedy* (1964) is by far the least critical and appears like an extension of his duties as a speech writer: a fervent pro-Kennedy account. In hindsight, Sorensen had recognised his unbound idealisation of events, as becomes evident in his recently published book *Counselor* (2008), a somewhat more critical account of his time in the White House. Finally, in his theoretical discussion of *Decision-making in the White House* (1963), Sorensen debates the mechanisms behind the White House machinery of policy making, providing the reader with promising insights of power relations from differing perspectives. The latter book shall assist us in placing the civil rights issue in a broader context. In his Pulitzer-Prize winning account *A Thousand Days* (1965), Arthur M. Schlesinger makes an effort to adhere to a more neutral way of description. Although definitely a Kennedy supporter and in many ways coincident in opinion with Sorensen, he refrains at least language-wise from overstatement. Sorensen and Schlesinger's books undoubtedly represent the very essence of the Kennedy myth. The analysis of their lines of argument will be followed by a discussion of what is commonly called the politics of incrementalism, a central motive in the assessment of John F. Kennedy's political style.

Two other confidants of the Kennedy brothers have produced fundamentally different representations with distinct focal points. Harris Wofford's portrayal *Of Kennedys and Kings* (1980) is clearly a more balanced account in which the author critically reflects his time as Civil Rights advisor to the President without making a definitive judgement. While he does not always agree with Kennedy's moves, he generally seeks to create a basis for the reader's

understanding for President Kennedy's course of action, avoiding a one-sided portrayal. Finally, Burke Marshall, former Assistant to the Attorney General Robert Kennedy and Head of the Civil Rights Division in the Department of Justice, delivers his perspective on the issue from a predominantly legal point of view in his book *Federalism and Civil Rights* (1964), debating the possibilities and limitations of the President's and the Attorney General's power to intervene in critical situations.

As those were the men pursuing their profession in the eye of the storm of civil rights, it is adequate to classify them as experts. It is therefore not surprising that the reader usually tends to rely on the judgements and evaluations of subject matters related to the author's area of expertise. Yet in *The Uncertainties of Knowledge*, sociologist Immanuel Wallerstein makes the significant point that 'the process of investigation, the procedure through which the observations are made, transforms the object of investigation' (Wallerstein 11). While this transformation does provide the author with a unique perspective and a range of valuable insider knowledge within his reach of competence, it inevitably leads to a biased or even idealised account. This can be easily observed in the early books of Sorensen and Schlesinger, who not only aimed at justifying the administration's actions but also at erecting a monument in writing for the late President Kennedy. Thus, the question of objectivity is a crucial aspect and should be taken into consideration when approaching the accounts of the former circle of presidential advisors.

The critical books on the Kennedys and civil rights, although similar in their basic views, display significant differences in style and reasoning. In writing *The Politics of Injustice* (2003), David Niven has by far produced the most critical account as concerns both his language and his line of argument. His special focus centres on the question of political support from the Democratic Party and the South, as well as on the Freedom Riders, one of the major civil rights crises the administration had to handle during its term. Professor of Social Policy Mark Stern creates a neat black-and-white narrative of the Kennedys versus the Civil Rights Movement in his book *Calculating Visions* (1992). In the most recent and

probably most detailed account of the issue, journalist Nick Bryant openly speculates and reflects on the actions and motives of the Kennedys throughout his book. While acknowledging the arguments of Kennedy supporters, he makes an effort to prove his position, which is revealed already in his title *The Bystander* (2006).

After having discussed the primary lines of argumentation, it will be necessary to return to the thoughts of chapter two in order to contrast the two basic approaches which emerge in the discourse, whereby the role of morality and rationality as tools for approaching historical texts will be discussed. The distinction between legal and moral argumentation is an essential parting line and will shed light on the origin of the differing lines of argument.

Civil rights policy is a relatively neglected topic in the literary canon about the Kennedy administration. In his book *The New Frontier revisited*, Mark J. White remarks that ‘historians, in fact, have spent less time proportionately on Kennedy’s domestic agenda than Kennedy himself devoted to it’ (White 223). In the early 60s, John F. Kennedy’s administration had to deal with several arduous tasks, among them highly significant foreign policy issues such as the Cuban missile crisis, the Bay of Pigs invasion or the Cold War, which clearly dominate the literature on Kennedy’s policy.

A focus on civil rights, however, is of current social relevance, as delicate political matters such as race and the way politicians handle issues of this kind are of central interest in industrial societies around the world and a constant source of public debate. Robert Kennedy once claimed in a ‘Voice of America’ broadcast in 1961 that ‘in the foreseeable future a Negro can achieve the same position that my brother has’ (Niven 153). Almost fifty years later, the Attorney General’s prediction has indeed come true: African American Barack Obama who has been given the nickname ‘Black Kennedy’ because of his youthful enthusiasm will be the first African American President of the United States which undoubtedly stirs up the vivid memories of past historical events relating to race and ethnicity. This development forces the people of the United States to reflect upon the history of racial segregation in their country, an issue which is still a taboo in many ways.

Despite the importance of political correctness, race matters tremendously in American society, which raises questions whose answers can only be found by looking back at the roots of the problem. More importantly, other parts of the world will have to face problems of integration beyond national frontiers as well, from the crisis-ridden regions of the world and the European Union to Western capitalistic societies who fear the intrusion of radical Islamist groups. Around the globe, the topic of cultural, ethnical or religious difference is at present the greatest issue of public debate, and its significance is constantly growing. The analysis of historically relevant events in this area is thus considered fundamental and necessary in order to achieve a greater understanding for the issues society still faces up to this time.

Methodologically, I will analyse the different accounts on Kennedy from an American Studies perspective. On the one hand, I will offer close readings on the primary material and, on the other, I will focus on the socio-political dimension of these texts. In particular, I will debate the chosen primary texts in connection with Amitai Etzioni's approaches for the analysis of interaction between social entities. One of the most informative works in the historical context of civil rights in the early 60s is *The Active Society* (1968), which deals with questions of political strategy, decision-making and, most importantly, the implementation of social change and the role of society's leaders in evoking that change. As the active self in Etzioni's approach is not conceived as an individual, but as several people in a social grouping (cf. Etzioni, *Active* 5), it is essential to see John F. Kennedy as part of the administration and further government agencies, which is why the accounts of Burke Marshall and Harris Wofford are of vital importance.

A statesman has to earn his prestige by guiding a nation through the challenging issues of his time. The aforementioned quotations show that the assessment of the Kennedys' approach to civil rights in various historical narratives differs greatly. It is the aim of this thesis to compare the various lines of arguments and, moreover, to apply a cultural studies approach in order to explain the origin of the judgements which are represented in historical writing.

2 Defining the Civil Rights Theme within the Kennedy Discourse

Before concentrating on the historical representation of the time between 1960 and 1963 in selected books, it is necessary to shed light on the socio-cultural background of the African American struggle for civil rights. As the fight for racial equality had been a part of the United States centuries before Kennedy's term, it is essential to analyse why it ultimately emerged so forcefully in the early 60s. The oldest African American civil rights organisation NAACP (National Association for the Advancement of Colored People) was founded as early as 1909, followed by CORE (Congress of Racial Equality) in the early 40s. Yet despite significant successes such as the 'Brown vs. Board of Education' case in 1954, which abolished the so-called 'separate but equal' doctrine and ruled segregation in schools unconstitutional, the direct action approach of the Civil Rights Movement was not yet fully developed in the 50s (cf. Brauer 1 – 3).

There are various reasons why the Movement did not gain momentum until President Kennedy's term. Segregation had a shameful and long-standing tradition in the South and was deeply embedded in the collective mind; it had a political power of its own and divided both Republicans and Democrats along a North-South racial ideology. Kennedy's predecessor Dwight D. Eisenhower was able to avoid the issue except for the incident at Little Rock, Arkansas, where the 'Brown' ruling was fiercely opposed and led to violent riots. Although similar to what Kennedy would later experience, earlier events did not lead to lasting changes in racial policies and merely 'foreshadowed the social ferment of the 1960s' (Brauer 6).

Most significantly, African Americans could no longer be ignored because they constituted an influential group at last, not only because of the growing percentage of African Americans among United States citizens, but also because of the growing number of civil rights organisations. Influential groupings such as the SNCC (Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee) or Martin Luther King's SCLC (Southern Christian Leadership Conference) did not emerge until the late 50s and early 60s (cf. Lowery). Direct action strategies such as Sit-Ins and non-

violent demonstrations found numerous supporters who succeeded in drawing the new media's attention to their cause. These tools served the African American community to exert pressure on the government and to claim their rights as United States citizens, whereby Kennedy's 1960 campaign had certainly raised their hopes in a nation which would finally be ready for large-scale changes in race relations. His rhetorical abilities and the image of the New Frontier made it possible for the President to maintain his reputation as a civil rights advocate among the African American community for the first two years of his term. In 1963, however, he was forced to take a firm stand on the issue.

In order to comprehend the significance of the selected books, it is necessary to discuss the nature of the discourse on civil rights in separating it from the canon of literature on John F. Kennedy. The literary material about the 35th President of the United States ranges from books specialising in the representation of the Hollywood-like Kennedy myth to analyses of specific topical aspects of his Presidency to historical writings, the latter of which shall be discussed in this thesis. Considering the bulk of literature available, the material about Kennedy's civil rights agenda is comparably scarce. It has to be emphasised that the authors which have analysed the development of civil rights for African Americans under Kennedy do not fit in the dominant discourse, which has two basic tendencies. First, there exists a dominant category concerned with foreign policy issues such as the Cold War or the Cuban Missile Crisis, incidents which undoubtedly marked key events of his Presidency. Secondly, a significant part of literary material commonly has a strong focus on the Kennedy myth as such, merely debating the rumours which entwine around him and his family. Apart from the mesmerising effect his sudden death in 1963 had on the development and enhancement of his public image, Kennedy himself was extremely conscious of the influence of the new media with its powerful capacity to create lasting impressions in the public sphere. He knew how to operate the media machinery to his advantage, a successful strategy which is reflected in newspapers, photographs, movies and books to this very day.

The authors concerned with the area of civil rights predominantly refrain from a myth reinforcing discourse. Their accounts are characterised by substantial research and by an effort to concentrate on scholarly historical analysis. In the course of this thesis, I will show that the problem emerging from this specific discourse is not one of historical writing falling victim to the Kennedy myth but rather one of reason versus passion whose complex interrelation will provide the framework of this thesis and will be discussed in chapters two and nine. The fact that we are confronted with historical narratives requires a deeper preoccupation with historical writing as such. From a traditional viewpoint, the task of the historian is to render the facts in a way which will lead to an accurate reflection of historical reality. While this ideal still is a basic guideline, the attitude towards the category of historical writing has changed in that 'it is now necessary to consider the claim that historians [...] are as much in the business of fiction as novelists and poets, in other words that they too are producers of 'literary artifacts'' (Burke 126).

In her article 'The Truth of Historical Narratives', Behan McCullagh points out that although fiction and historical writing share certain characteristics, the nature of the latter is fundamentally different in that it follows a specific organising principle which aims at representing history in a fair way, whereas fiction has no element of a duty to truth. While the basic maxim for the historian must be a certain amount of this willingness to render a true, fact-based story, McCullagh observes that there exist influences which may lead to a distortion of the narrative. Therefore, the subsequent analysis in this case has nothing to do with assessing the truth of facts in the historical narratives, but with the aspects which lead to distortion and conflicting narratives in that the reader's conclusions will significantly differ from reading various accounts. The key to successful historical writing, McCullagh argues, lies in a fair representation of the observed entity. It becomes clear by comparing the scope an author grants to various issues that fairness is an elastic term. The appointment of segregationist judges in several Southern states by President Kennedy himself is one of many sensitive subjects. While journalist Nick Bryant critically discusses the issue on three full pages,

former Kennedy advisor Arthur M. Schlesinger in an attempt to avoid distorting the image of the President as a heroic figure mentions this matter in only one sentence and mildly terms the incident ‘unfortunate’. A significant part of the previously mentioned distortions are the subtle nuances the authors apply in their use of language which serve to create a specific image in the reader’s mind. As regards eloquence, Theodore C. Sorensen in living up to his former position as President Kennedy’s speech writer exploits his rhetorical capacities to the extreme by preserving the myth of Kennedy as the youthful leader the American public has kept in the collective mind. By contrast, in the line of traditional historical writing, other authors like Harris Wofford have decidedly worded their commitment to render a fair judgement in the true sense of the word, which, despite its vagueness, at least demonstrates the will to create a more balanced account.

The historian’s conception of his duty as an author does not only concern his use of language and style or his pledge to render accurate facts. Most commonly, there is a more specific objective behind the mere creation of a historical account. Professor of political science Peter H. Smith remarks on the categories of the historical narrative:

What constitutes political history is, partly, a matter of definition. It can be defined as the study of government; as the narration of laws and regulation passed by those in power. [...] It can unravel ideas and conceptions about justice, order, and the role of the state (McCullagh 36).

It is exactly this parting line which constitutes the basic difference in the accounts on the Kennedys and civil rights. Burke Marshall is undoubtedly the staunchest advocate of the legal aspect of historical writing. For him, the mechanisms of the administration and the often conflicting politics in Southern states constitute the very essence of adequate and fair judgement. Others like David Niven and Mark Stern have expressed a fundamentally different view by focusing on the moral dimension. Their books are characterised by massive

criticism of what they conceive as an unjust and overly political approach to the issue of African American civil rights. Governmental concerns acquire a position of lower priority while the rightfulness of the Movement is constantly emphasised. At first sight, this approach appears to be most human and fair, yet at second glance it seems to merely reflect the political correctness of the modern age without adequately considering the status quo at the time the crucial events took place. McCullagh remarks that any author's access to historical writing cannot be correct 'without also describing as accurately as possible what they [past events] meant to the people at the time' (McCullah 37). Especially in race relations, former attitudes which were present throughout the South are not to be neglected for all the inherent clarity of the moral question many authors seem to take for granted:

The first reason for doubting the possibility of providing a fair representation of the subject is the conviction that the historian's personal point of view, that is the historian's preconceived beliefs and values, play a very important part in the construction of historical narratives, so that the narratives are more likely to illustrate the historian's preconceptions than to represent the historical subject accurately (McCullagh 41).

This assumption proves to be especially accurate as regards the basic theory Stern derives from his analysis. The author portrays the civil rights struggle in a black and white manner with strict boundaries. He categorises President Kennedy and apparently everyone else in the political sphere as 'schemers' while the activists of the Movement represent 'idealists'. The good/bad division can hardly be stated more forcefully and is undoubtedly interrelated to the author's personal views which he seeks to demonstrate. It is therefore essential to keep in mind the distortions within the historical narrative which derive from differing conceptions of the historian's task.

While the scope of this thesis only allows for the analysis of a limited time span, it has to be borne in mind that the discussed events are the result of a long

tradition of successive historical episodes. Consequently, authors have chosen different key aspects according to what they considered significant knowledge for the interpretation of events. Harry Golden is one of the few writers who analyses the Movement's history in depth, while Carl M. Brauer and Nick Bryant have dedicated a large part of their books to the discussion of the development of John F. Kennedy's political career before he became President of the United States. David Niven, by contrast, has chosen the development of the Democratic Party as his foundation for analysis. As the authors have differing conceptions on what the fair judgement on Kennedy and civil rights comprises, the books which will be discussed in detail do distort the result of the historical discussion.

3 Reason and Passion

Most of the problems (...) that we now face are technical problems, are administrative problems. They are very sophisticated judgements which do not lend themselves to the great sort of 'passionate movements'.
- President John F. Kennedy -
(Niven 178)

Two key aspects exist in the discussions about Kennedy and civil rights which are fundamentally different in nature. While one group of authors follows a political, predominantly legislative line of argument, other writers focus on the moral dimension of the conflict. In order to comprehend why this basic parting line exists, it is essential to clarify the dynamics of the observed division. The force of morality in the area of civil rights had reached its boiling point in the early 60s. Meanwhile, the big civil rights organisations were far from being purely political. Suddenly, its leaders increasingly began to talk of community and love, mostly inspired by their religious background (cf. Miroff 232). The church was a significant meeting place for the African American community, and its rhetoric

was effectively used for the Movement's cause. Martin Luther King became one of the most famous advocates of peaceful change and one of the staunchest supporters of the Movement's key strategy of non-violent direct action. By contrast, the political sphere was perceived by many as a tool to inflict change by law and principles but not with emotions as the driving force.

This moral dilemma, which was dominant in the discourse of this time, is reflected in historical writing, as will be shown in the discussion of selected books. While historians basically attempted to mirror the unbalanced mood throughout the nation, the emotional aspect of the issue tempted many authors to render a judgement and a personal opinion about effective political action. Obviously, the fundamental legitimacy of the Movement's ideology of equal rights for every citizen of the United States is not debatable and should without doubt be included in a historical account. The point is that many writers in trying to assess the personal convictions and moral scope behind Kennedy's actions assume the right to twist the facts in a way which proves to be immensely misleading to the reader.

In order to make sense of the conflicting viewpoints in historical writing, the status and the role of morality have to be clarified in two respects: first, it will be discussed to what degree the politician has a moral obligation to fulfil in order to educate the citizens of the nation, as this question is fundamental in assessing the validity of arguments. In his book *The Golden New Rule* (1997), Amitai Etzioni is concerned with 'Community and Morality in a Democratic Society', as the subtitle states. The debate of those fundamental issues will provide us with a foundation which will make it possible to develop an adequate analysis of the authors' judgements on the basis of a sociological background. We are essentially dealing with a two-dimensional concept, namely morality in the political process as such, and moral judgement in historical writing.

3.1 Social Change and Morality

In his analysis of the mechanisms of democratic societies, Amitai Etzioni links the contrasting juxtaposition of the moral and the pragmatic dimension with the capacity of society to change of its own accord. His basic argument demonstrates that effective persuasion does not originate from a high level such as government, but rather from the basis of society: ‘whole societies [...] do engage in moral dialogues that lead to changes in the widely shared values’ (Etzioni, *Rule* 106). Those dialogues are referred to as ‘national megalogues’ (Etzioni, *Rule* 106) and are believed to be more sensible than top-down leadership. Especially with regard to the Civil Rights Movement, this argument seems to be an accurate observation, as it is a fact that the Movement was an active societal unit in every respect: ‘privileges [...] could be won, and often were won, without the intervention of Washington at all [...] the objectives were immediate and concrete’ (Sundquist 258). While progress was being made constantly, it proved to be immensely slow and was characterised by numerous setbacks in that the Movement sometimes failed to mobilise enough support from the African American community, a factor in the documentation of events that has scarcely been mentioned, presumably due to the strong focus on political procedures in the higher spheres of the nation. Apparently for authors like Niven and Stern, the fundamental legitimacy of the Movement’s cause was considered the most crucial aspect in analysing the obstacles of its course. Similarly, sociologist Alan Wolfe has argued that ‘there is a need in modern liberal societies, no matter how committed they may be to either the market or the state (or both) to develop a third way of thinking about moral obligation’ (Etzioni, *Rule* 141). He mentions a common feature in historical and contemporary discourse: the cry for moral leadership and credibility which has almost become routine criticism directed toward political leaders. This regrettable tendency is explicitly addressed by Wofford in the preface to his book. Carl Brauer is one of the few authors who have hinted at an issue which critics seem to avoid: the effect of the internal division of the Movement which did already begin to emerge in the early 60s. It

was not until after Kennedy's death that these struggles became visible for the observer in the form of radical Black Power organisations and public figures like Malcolm X. It is therefore essential to raise awareness for the fact that the Movement itself produced at least some of the obstacles which they were confronted with and that there were failures on both sides, an argument which is commonly rejected by authors who mostly draw upon the political and moral duties of the President.

Amitai Etzioni is convinced that society itself is the key aspect in the creation of its stability. He criticises that the citizens' impact is generally underestimated while there tends to be a focus on public politics and institutions for guidance. It is one of the inherent structural characteristics of democratic societies that throughout history, they have predominantly relied on legal forces much more than on the moral dimension (cf. Etzioni, *Rule* 139). This has always been the case, yet Etzioni claims that a moral approach could ultimately be more effective in conflict resolution: 'The best way to change the direction of a society is to have a megalogue' (Etzioni, *Rule* 140). While he does not deny the vital role of law and public policy, he decidedly argues that they are 'not the main factor' (Etzioni, *Rule* 140). He observes that analysts tend to focus on the nation in its conception as an institutional formation while they neglect the active potential of society:

Most suggestions that are made concern a change in public policies or law. The notion that parents, neighbourhoods, voluntary associations, and other elements of the community can introduce many of the needed remedies on their own is often overlooked, or it is suggested that to achieve such mobilization requires a new public policy or law (Etzioni, *Rule* 142).

While such an approach is essentially laudable, it is often neglected that the groupings Etzioni perceives as the stimulus behind of social change lack the necessary resources to become widely accepted. This is the reason why the Civil Rights Movement was constantly seeking the administration's support; they could

not effect substantial change on their own. The respective manoeuvring room of the Kennedy brothers and the Movement differed to a great extent:

The Government, with its resources and facilities, stockpiled more information on Negroes in America than Negro organisations ever had been able to gather, and the Department of Justice [...] attacked on more fronts than could Negro civil-rights operations (Booker 24).

The strategy of voluntary compliance was pursued both by Robert and John Kennedy who sought to create the basis for society to implement change by itself, yet the significant aspect is that they were aware of the need for a first impulse on part of the administration in order to empower the Movement. The citizens were in need of organisational tools which they could not operate by themselves due to a lack in monetary and human resources. The collection of information and reports on the racial situation across the nation was essential, if only to produce a greater awareness of how shocking the state of the African American community was. Critical authors like David Niven have argued that had Kennedy showed the same encouragement in the form of directly addressing the citizens of the United States both North and South, he could have exerted more far-reaching influence. However, in the case of civil rights the matter seems more complex than the arguments for a purely moral approach suggest. The scenario is easy to imagine: had Kennedy spoken out more forcefully, riots in the South would presumably have escalated. While there is, of course, no way to predict what would have happened, this outcome was certainly to be anticipated and realistic. Law enforcement in the form of sending troops into the states would have been the logical consequence, accompanied by a massive disruption in the social fabric throughout the nation which would by no means have been prepared for this crisis, and, needless to say, the South would have been even more alienated and appalled than it already had been before. Therefore, the historians' argument of Kennedy's duty to issue polarizing moral statements does not adequately consider the 'what ifs' of the situation, as opinions across the nation

were definitely deeply divided on this issue. Etzioni claims that in order to function appropriately, the nation is dependent on its citizens who will not only implement social change but also act according to their moral mindset, yet the question arises where this moral consensus derives from. Etzioni only vaguely explains its source, pointing out that

While fireside chats and other speeches from what is called the bully pulpit of the presidency play much less of this role than is often attributed to them, especially when one expects that a president could change the direction of a country with a well-honed speech, they do serve to trigger, focus, and nourish nationwide dialogues (Etzioni, *Rule* 107).

Apparently the subsequent dialogue leads to a climate of enhanced willingness to compromise on both sides. Nevertheless, the statement indicates that a large part of responsibility rests with the community to implement their goals with the support of those who guide the nation. Furthermore, it is essential to take into account that the masses or other influential public figures might choose to ignore the institutional voice of their leader, as had been the case numerous times throughout the civil rights struggle.

However, Etzioni fails to provide specific proposals for conflict resolution. Moreover, the morality he speaks of can hardly be defined and thus appears to be a vague sketch of an ideal conception. In contrast to individualistic theories, Etzioni conceives people of a community as embedded in the social structure with the ability to create the atmosphere for favourable changes themselves by use of own initiatives. Kennedy attached great value to politics as a tool to give direction to the many conflicting demands which occur in a society. Indeed, what constitutes a social structure other than its institutions and laws which have developed over millenniums of civilisation? Precisely those institutions have built communities in the first place; hence Etzioni does not adequately assign those aspects the significance they deserve in social life and as a tool for social change. Furthermore, the citizens of a democratic society rely on the legal tools and the pragmatic weighing of options by the nation's official leaders: 'There is

considerable evidence that public opinion outside the South now strongly supported black civil rights, although the public opposed demonstrations' (Stern 86). This statement supports the belief that US citizens entrusted the government and the President with the ability to handle the civil rights issue, while they were considerably more sceptic of the Movement's direct action strategy, despite the fact that they showed sympathy for its plight.

Brauer notes that 'the spirit Kennedy conveyed may well have made possible the eruption of social protest to which he in turn responded' (Brauer 318), implying that the office of the Presidency was not only the guiding force but in many ways the crucial aspect which led citizens to implement change. James Meredith, for example, stated that Kennedy's 1960 campaign was the decisive aspect for him to try to enter the University of Mississippi. This means that in democratic societies, in many cases the rhythm of initiation is thus that after a signal from political, legal and even moral authorities in the higher spheres, sub-societies will eventually react. Etzioni is right in his assumption that the implementation of action and its respective success fundamentally relies on the citizens. It is them who effect the change in society, yet the willingness to do so mostly depends on the nation's leaders who serve as an activator. The highest political decision-maker therefore is a person who bears significantly more responsibility than sub-societies: 'Being an elected politician demands more of a person than being an activist' (Cavanagh 127).

Etzioni's conception of a society guided by national megalogues does have its weak points. The moral approach clearly casts doubts on the efficiency of a legally guided democracy which has proved to be a very successful model. Ultimately, his reasoning constitutes a chicken or egg dilemma, in that the question is whether sub-societies and citizens or legal and political institutions are the first to initiate change. Does the law trigger social change or does it lag behind? Etzioni's ideal is that

the law in a good society is first and foremost the
continuation of morality by other means [...] unbacked
laws tend to harm the community more than serve it,

and tend either not to be enforced or else set aside
(Etzioni, *Rule* 143 – 144).

Legal implementation is therefore considered useless if the moral support is lacking. While the two aspects are often in a state of asynchronous development, the preferred sequence of events provides that ‘the law mops up after moral changes have carried out the main sweep’ (Etzioni, *Rule* 148). According to this view, Kennedy would have been right to grant the nation time to gradually build up the moral foundation previous to the introduction of legislation. On a public level, however, the President constantly emphasised the legal rights of the government and therefore adhered to the doctrine of pragmatic conflict resolution. Hence, the civil rights struggle shows that the moral and the pragmatic dimension are not necessarily mutually exclusive. In the following chapters, the primary texts and the authors’ approach to historical events will be analysed in detail.

4 Constructing Kennedy

American Jewish writer Harry Golden and historian Carl M. Brauer have produced two accounts which represent the efforts of the Kennedy brothers as the driving force behind the Second Reconstruction. Both authors portray them as the centre of effective civil rights action, depicting the machinery of the Department of Justice and the White House as complementary institutions which took on the task of fighting against segregation with devotion and in a realistic manner. In contrast to the common criticism of the Kennedys’ passiveness which will be discussed later in this thesis, Golden and Brauer attempt to emphasize the successes of the administration. As regards their style, their line of argument certainly appears to be more straightforward and therefore also more convincing than Sorensen’s or Schlesinger’s euphemistic writing. While both authors readily

give credit to the Kennedy brothers for the sole fact that they were willing to act, they attempt to investigate the more complex nature of the racial problem with Golden, focusing on the historical roots of the Civil Rights Movement, and Brauer, exploring the effects of the circle of segregation within Southern states. The inclusion of this background information certainly helps the reader to comprehend the events of the early 60s within a broader context. Notably, they portray the Kennedys as in charge of the situation, a claim which would only raise a wry smile among critics. Furthermore, their analysis comprises firm praise for other controversial issues, such as the Kennedys' strategy of voluntary compliance and their consistent initiation of symbolic gestures, topics which led to significantly differing assessment throughout literature. The obstacles and problems the President had to deal with are mainly attributed to external aspects outside his area of responsibility. While defensive of the administration's position, Golden and Brauer make an effort to state their point of view in a language which proves to be easily comprehensible and plausible to the reader, a stylistic feature not always as dominant in other seemingly biased accounts, such as Sorensen's or Niven's.

4.1 Harry Golden's *Mr Kennedy and the Negroes* (1964)

Harry Golden's *Mr Kennedy and the Negroes* was published shortly after President Kennedy's death, yet the book was written as early as 1962 around the time the March on Washington took place (cf. Golden 6). It was the first book to comprehensively explore the President's civil rights achievements in detail. Golden's depiction of Kennedy's civil rights actions is full of sympathy for the President and mindful of the obstacles and considerations he apparently had to deal with. Nevertheless, Golden has the advantage that in this instance the tragic murder of Kennedy in the fall of 1963 cannot be cited as the decisive factor for

the idealisation of his presidential abilities, as is apparently the case with Sorensen's *Kennedy* and Schlesinger's *A Thousand Days*. In analysing literature on civil rights in the early 60s, it has to be taken into account that the murders of John F. Kennedy, Robert F. Kennedy and Martin Luther King most likely had an effect on subsequent coverage of the issue, even on books which were produced well after the immediate tragedy (cf. Ashmore 363). While Golden sheds little light on Kennedy's civil rights record during his time as a Senator of Massachusetts, a subject that is thoroughly analysed by Brauer and Bryant, he focuses on the history of African Americans instead. In order to provide the reader with an understanding of the Civil Rights Movement's roots, he discusses its background and concludes that its force in the 60s developed out of the fact that the situation for African Americans at that time had substantially improved due to increasing educational work on part of the Movement's primary organisations (cf. Golden 80). Coupled with the atmosphere of departure in the early 60s and the youthful enthusiasm of the new President, African Americans felt that Civil Rights organisations had finally gained enough political significance to bring up their concerns. The author also sets out to explain the nature of segregation and the mechanisms behind its maintenance in Southern states, so that the reader is able to comprehend the mood which prevailed throughout the nation at that time in an authentic way.

Golden appreciates Kennedy's pragmatic approach and his logical way of searching for solutions without offending either of the involved groups too much. Considering the predicament President Kennedy was faced with, he claims that a purely morally guided approach would not have been the appropriate way to act as the problem was primarily of a legal nature. In this case, especially with an issue that causes passionate arguments, Golden claims that had the President insisted on the rightfulness of racial equality and processed with force, segregationists could have started a massive upheaval which by all means was to be anticipated, judging from the violent mobs that regularly attacked African American demonstrators and civil rights workers in the Southern states. The author points out that Kennedy had to think in many dimensions of foreign and

domestic policy and how its interconnections were entangled with each other. To Golden, gradualism represents the appropriate strategy to fight segregation, as he is aware that the situation would not have been abruptly better just because Congress would have approved of legislation, as there is no instant solution to a problem which has built up and lasted over centennials. Moderation did ultimately serve to save the nation from a racial war:

It has been said that John F. Kennedy tried to find an answer, not to force a solution. His aim was to find the ways and means of granting every American the same fundamental and basic rights without producing a national convulsion (Golden 156).

Golden views the actions of the administration and the Justice Department as effective measures to fight the battle against discrimination. He states that the Civil Rights Acts of 1957 and 1960 had provided the Attorney General with the ‘responsibility [...] to bring legal action’ (Golden 143) in cases of discrimination concerning the right to vote and that it was therefore the logical path to follow from a legal point of view. The author clearly sets out what steps the administration had taken to fight segregation, such as the number of cases in court on various issues and the preparation of comprehensive studies, particularly in the area of employment. Notably, he does not imply that those measures were introduced because the Kennedys were forced to do so, an argument frequently cited by critical writers. Furthermore, Golden gives credit to the strategy of private persuasion and voluntary compliance, as the President wanted the people of the United States to create the climate for change themselves (cf. Golden 163 – 166): ‘The Presidency was not enough, the courts were not enough’ (Golden 166).

It has to be emphasized that while Kennedy followed a course of action that was not acceptable for some, he was willing to discuss the matter and to explain his reasons for the decisions he made, as is evidenced in documentations of meetings with Movement Leaders, business men, lawyers and other key members of society who had the potential to evoke change. There is ample evidence to be found on the success of the White House meetings, with a vast

number of letters from attorneys and other officials responding with proposals and advice on further judicious proceedings (cf. Archival Source #1). After a meeting with lawyers in June 1963, Robert Kennedy sent letters to the participants thanking them and stating the main points of the meeting. He specifically mentioned what they could do themselves to help advance racial equality, encouraging them to take action, to use their professional contacts and, most importantly, to stay in touch and report on the problems and difficulties they experienced (cf. Archival Source #2).

Golden carefully examines the way in which public opinion was influenced in the assessment of civil rights progress, whereby he notes that a step by step processing may not seem as powerful in public perception as a more 'direct' approach which bears more risks. African Americans were desperate to see immediate progress being made without further delays, which they experienced as the excuses they had heard from the political sphere for hundreds of years. In sharp contrast to Niven, an advocate of the moral line of argument, Golden argues that being a moderate in such a delicate case was in many ways better than provoking a racial war (cf. Golden 154):

Not every Negro was aware of the way the President, the Attorney General and Burke Marshall were proceeding, for not every Negro voted nor was every colored school child free from segregation. But it is safe to say every segregationist knew (Golden 154).

According to Golden, the Kennedys' civil rights actions without doubt provoked intense hatred and resentment among Southerners, even if they were generally considered deficient by critics (cf. Golden 133). They would certainly have been responsible for any kind of racial turmoil if it could be retraced to the administration's course of action. Besides the avoidance of bloodshed, political considerations were of course a major argument for refraining from more virtuous intervention: 'The white supremacist hates John F. Kennedy absolutely' (Golden 226). As concerns the executive order strategy of the administration, Golden has no sympathy for critics who perceive the measure as a weak initiative to avoid a

legislative path: 'Why was this political prerogative on behalf of the Negro so bitterly contested? Who said 'playing Negro politics' is wrong? In itself bad?' (Golden 33).

Golden is of the opinion that instead of a moral approach, Kennedy's political strategy was the adequate way to deal with the problem, as a society which is political can only be changed by such considerations (cf. Golden 160). Yet despite the clear preference for a pragmatic over a moral approach as concerns the political sphere, Golden is nevertheless moved by the injustice which African Americans had to endure. Discussing the events of the early 60s, such as Governor Wallace blocking the schoolhouse door, he shows no appreciation for the ignorance of Southerners and their outrageous opinions. Moreover, he differentiates between political action and the understanding and appreciation of the moral implications. Golden is of the opinion that Kennedy did very well consider the moral dimension of the African American struggle and that 'for this reason the racial politics he initiated will eventually succeed, beyond any shadow of doubt' (Golden 36). While many authors have chosen to argue either in favour of a moral or a political approach, Golden adds that the moral and the pragmatic dimension do not necessarily contradict each other: 'It is not so strange that the one considered the *most* political, should have become the *most* personally involved' (Golden 33).

President Kennedy rarely commented on the civil rights issue, yet he was constantly pressed by Civil Rights Leaders as well as by his advisors to speak out. Civil Rights counsel Harris Wofford, Vice President Lyndon B. Johnson and even the relatively restrained Burke Marshall at various times urged him to release more forceful statements for the sake of moral guidance. There is broad consensus throughout literature that the civil rights rhetoric John F. Kennedy displayed was 'a regular tactic' (Glyne 322). While David Niven speaks of an 'occasional rhetorical flourish' (Niven 19), Lewis Paper argues that the President's statements were 'on principle, not empathy' (Paper 161), supported by Maldava E. Glyne's remark that the President tended to express himself 'mostly in high-minded platitudes' (Glyne 14). In view of the mounting racial crises across the nation,

Kennedy apparently ‘felt pressure to deliver some compensatory showmanship’ (Branch 822). Harold Fleming seems to be one of the few who perceived the public statements as ‘making plain his concern for the racial problem and his conviction that it was first and foremost a moral issue’ (Fleming, *Federal Executive* 392). Bearing in mind Harry Golden’s generally positive account, it comes as no surprise that Kennedy’s statements find his approval. He points out that in many ways, Kennedy was the first politician in such a high position to speak out for the civil rights cause and sets out to defend the President by advancing the argument that ‘Mr Kennedy did not resort to the hollow safety of sane but insipid phrases, even in the heat of a bitter campaign’ (Golden 172), thus stressing the frankness and firmness of the President. In a strange reversal of the afore-mentioned criticism, the author emphasizes the very fact that Kennedy dared to show rhetorical support, a move which had certainly not been targeted by any of his predecessors. Interestingly, Golden also states that Kennedy ‘actually applauded the March on Washington’ (Golden 175), leaving out the fact that the administration initially took great pains to persuade the Movement Leaders to call the March off because Kennedy’s Civil Rights Bill was under way in Congress. The President feared that senators would conclude that there was not enough public support for civil rights legislation if the March failed to attract a large enough crowd. As the Leaders could not be pressed to postpone or cancel the project, Kennedy made preparations of enormous scope to ensure that there would be no acts of violence.

Despite this misrepresentation, which is probably attributable to the lack in information material at the time the book was written, Golden is correct in assuming that John F. Kennedy, well-known for his rhetorical aptitude, was aware of the huge impact of his public statements and endorsements. Looking at his speech drafts, it becomes evident that he was concerned to create adequate nuances in language. A statement Kennedy made in the aftermath of the Freedom Rider events in Alabama reads ‘The Federal Government, under existing law, has an interest in the maintenance of a safe and adequate interstate transportation

system.’, whereby Kennedy replaced the words ‘an interest’ with ‘a clear responsibility’ (cf. Archival Source #3).

Assessing Kennedy’s role in the civil rights struggle, Golden finds that

Mr. Kennedy’s significance in the Negro’s advance was not so much that he helped him along as that he understood his revolution was important and that it must succeed [...] for the welfare of America. Some of the Negroes themselves have failed to see this (Golden 262).

4.2 Carl M. Brauer’s John F. Kennedy and the Second Reconstruction (1977)

Carl M. Brauer, Assistant Professor of history at the University of Virginia, has produced a favourable account on the Kennedy brothers and their civil rights efforts. While he is convinced that despite his cautious approach, John F. Kennedy would ultimately have decided to advocate change anyhow (cf. Brauer 60), he does not avoid debating the negative aspects of the path towards racial equality, admitting that John F. Kennedy ‘embodied the spirit of racial moderation’ (Brauer 11). Similar to Sorensen and Schlesinger, Brauer attempts to portray the President as a leader in charge of the situation rather than guided by the force of events he was confronted with (cf. Brauer 72).

The strengthened focus on employment of African Americans within the government is perceived by Brauer as ‘the earliest sign that Kennedy would bring about genuine change’ (Brauer 67) and therefore represents the initial source of transformation rather than a purely symbolic gesture, as many critics would claim. Brauer rejects the common notion that Kennedy remained largely passive until mid-1963 and holds that significant changes which marked a definite contrast to Eisenhower’s term (cf. Brauer 68) took place already during his first year in

office. The author predominantly refers to the so-called token actions of the President, which signalled the Movement that the approach of the administration towards its plight had changed. Critical voices condemned this kind of action as merely geared towards the media, demonstratively showing off the President's good will in order to reassure African American communities of his support, whereas in fact no essential steps towards comprehensive legislation were taken. Nevertheless, Kennedy's strategy was somewhat successful in that it was immediately processed by the media and therefore served a useful tool to improve his public image (cf. Bryant 223). While political strategy certainly was part of such measures, it is a fact that the media subsequently aided the cause in that it considerably raised societal awareness by making segregation a subject of discussion. Those token actions were regularly introduced by the administration. That race relations within the United States could no longer be ignored showed in John and Robert Kennedy both resigning from prestigious clubs who would not desegregate their facilities, such as the Metropolitan and the Cosmos Club (cf. Brauer 70). Additionally, desegregated meetings at the White House, both concerning negotiations as well as social events, were suddenly on a regular occurrence (cf. Brauer 71). Symbolic actions of this kind as well as symbolic statements and rhetorical support find Brauer's approval, as many of those measures were the very first steps in the direction of a more forceful commitment to the cause. However, the author criticises the Democratic Party's tactical mistake of delivering vigorous civil rights promises in the course of the 1960 campaign which would influence the way Kennedy would be judged on domestic policy from the start. The democratic platform 'accidentally' contained the most sweeping civil rights pledges the Party had ever produced up to this point (cf. Brauer 36) and the overstatement would subsequently lead to the impression that regardless of other measures which were introduced, Kennedy had broken his promise. Yet this product of campaign strategy was a rather natural outcome, considering the nature of campaigning. Kennedy as the prime candidate of the Democratic Party obviously needed to take the activist stand on the basic questions of policy making in order to create an adequate contrast to Nixon as the

successor of Eisenhower's policy (cf. Wicker 85). In Malcolm E. Smith's book *John F. Kennedy's 13 Great Mistakes in the White House*, one of the chapters is entitled 'Betraying black voter's trust' and essentially states that Kennedy abused his rhetorical power for the sole purpose of gaining African American votes. The Democrats had lost a substantial amount of African American voters in the mid-50s and Kennedy succeeded in re-establishing their trust in the early 60s (cf. Brauer 58), largely due to promises that would unnecessarily raise the expectations of the African-American community to great but unrealistic heights. By contrast, it has also been argued that the Civil Rights Movement organisations did raise utopian claims that could simply not be fulfilled by any efforts. As the relation between Civil Rights Leaders' demands and politicians' efforts was continually tense, the Leaders partly ended up 'the victims of their own rhetoric' (Silberman 219). In the early 60s, the Movement had reached a point where their initially patient and only slowly progressing struggle against segregation had turned into a more vigorous fight which attracted considerable public attention. The African American community stood at a turning point; they were well organized and not willing to put up with the moderate approach to their cause which many politicians still displayed. Although from the activists' side the preferred course of action was a non-violent revolution, they demanded legal and social change to an extent which was unconvertible for many politicians. They tended to oppose moderates like Kennedy for what they perceived as half-hearted efforts. Yet it has been argued that the Movement profoundly misjudged which demands had a chance of succeeding and made the mistake of raising the hopes of their followers to unrealistic expectations (Silberman 220).

Brauer's position on the issue of symbolic politics reflects that it was Kennedy himself who created an atmosphere which made it possible for the Movement to perform forceful action in the first place (cf. Brauer 319), a claim that fits into the discourse of the Camelot myth¹. While Brauer admits that Kennedy was reluctant as regards legislation and that tangible results were scarce,

¹ Cf. Strober's definition: '[...] in reference to the legend of King Arthur, which was set in a magical period not likely soon to be repeated; characterised by grace, wit and intelligence.' (Strober 465)

he focuses on what he perceives as significantly constructive efforts which were persistently traced throughout Kennedy's term, centring on communication and symbolic gestures. Brauer observes that while the President himself was primarily occupied with what was widely perceived as tokenism, the Justice Department's actions revealed the strategy behind those efforts more clearly, not at least because most of the governmental civil rights initiatives originated from Attorney General Robert Kennedy and his associates. In the Department of Justice, a 'disproportionately large amount' (Brauer 94) of resources was invested in the field of civil rights. Especially the Civil Rights Division finds Brauer's approval: 'Its lawyers were litigators, investigators, and agents for change, not Washington bureaucrats' (Brauer 117). The author renders a portrayal of the Justice Department's associates depicting them as commendable lawyers, almost placing them on the same level with civil rights activists. It is well documented that Nicholas Katzenbach, who served as head of the Office of Legal Counsel (1961-1962) and as Deputy Attorney General (1962 to 1965) and Burke Marshall, head of the Civil Rights Division, were greatly respected by Civil Rights workers for their efforts (cf. Brauer 92 – 94). Indeed, the staff at the Department of Justice carried out their work in full activity which often involved considerable risk. Katzenbach had been the man who had been assigned the ungrateful task to confront Governor George Wallace of Alabama in front of TV cameras and to negotiate with him in order to prevent a national crisis². It had been one of the major civil rights crises the administration had to handle when Governor Wallace decided to defy a federal court order which ruled that two African American students were allowed to register at the University of Alabama in June 1963. The Governor famously declared he would physically block the schoolhouse door to prevent the students from entering the building. After many unsuccessful attempts to persuade Wallace to comply, President Kennedy ultimately was forced to

² For a detailed account of the incident, cf. Robert Drew's documentary movie *Crisis – Behind a Presidential Commitment* (1963) which captures both the events on-site in Alabama and the negotiations in the White House and the Justice Department. Drew has also produced documentaries about Kennedy's run for presidency (*Primary, 1960*) and the aftermath of the President's death (*Faces of November, 1964*).

federalise the Alabama National Guard. During this crisis, Katzenbach had been the key personality upon whose negotiating skills the success of this mission largely depended. Another of Robert Kennedy's associates, administrative assistant John Seigenthaler, was sent on site to report on the Freedom Riders' activities when they reached Montgomery, Alabama in 1961. He was beaten unconscious by rioting segregationists and left lying on the streets bleeding, an incident that presumably assisted in altering the Kennedy's perception of the procedures in the South. Hence, there is ample evidence that the lawyers of the Justice Department were busy arbitrating between the parties, often gaining an impression of what happened on site³. Several crises were managed by increased efforts to communicate with the responsible persons.

While Brauer readily cites President Kennedy's mistakes in the area of civil rights, he does not only represent the Justice Department as the shining star in the institutionalised fight for society's welfare, but also depicts its lawyers as deeply committed to the cause. Brauer avers that the plan of the Department of Justice was effective and well devised. The apparent reason it received only scarce coverage throughout literature is that although the background is nowadays well known, the success of the strategy relied to a large amount on discretion and behind-the-scenes efforts. One of the most effective actions was the attempt to convince the Interstate Commerce Commission to issue new regulations for interstate transportation, whereby the Justice Department succeeded in desegregating public transport in the South within the time span of a year (cf. Brauer 108). While it was considered unwise to try to approach the strongholds of segregation immediately, it was attempted to break them down from within by collaborating with local officials who were not opposed to moderate change as long as it did not provoke riots or too much public attention. According to Brauer's judgement, the Justice Department, followed by the President, was the primary source of action on the front of private persuasion and, more importantly, the leading force in evoking societal change.

³ cf. Bryant 269, Brauer 101, primary sources 17

While journalist Nick Bryant has repeatedly voiced his incomprehension for the fact that Kennedy, while rarely speaking out on critical civil rights issues, also refrained from advertising his achievements in the area, Brauer points out that this was part of a strategy. Interestingly, Kennedy's critics commonly observed that his 'actions did not match his words' (Dallek 590), yet in some instances his words apparently would not match his actions. According to Brauer, the timing for public statements had to be chosen carefully and the decision to keep successes largely unpublicised is easily explained. Extensive media coverage would have led to unnecessary debates in the South and would have made people aware of what would otherwise have been a quiet transition (cf. Brauer 109). Many of the largely unpublicised negotiations with influential local personalities constituted a silent 'triumph' (Brauer 147) and by setting a precedent, they constituted substantial groundwork for later steps to be taken on the legislative front on various levels of social life, as for example equal employment legislation in 1964. Brauer emphasizes the significance of the 'Plans for Progress' project⁴, a measure which has been generally reviewed as having failed (cf. Brauer 150).

In many instances, Brauer does not assign the failure of certain matters to the inadequacy of the Justice Department but to aspects outside of their reach or responsibility. The Voter Education Project, for example, was designed to give African Americans the franchise, and was based on the Civil Rights Acts of 1957 and 1960, which provided the Attorney General with the authorisation to intervene in cases of discrimination. However, the project failed to make an impact on a large scale. Brauer argues that the main reason for the scarce success was that segregationists could still resort to economic repression of the African American community. Segregation comprised too many areas of daily and political life that it was impossible for the Justice Department to control all of the loop holes. Therefore, the lawyers focused on programs that would inflict subtle change and were neither coercive nor measures specifically guided towards the South alone (cf. Brauer 144). The progress in the area of step-by-step initiation of voting rights suits was indeed questionable in that it often required a substantial

⁴ A project which served to improve employment practices among government contractors

amount of time and workforce and consequently led to frustrating delays. Moreover, the issue of voting was regulated slightly different in various states which involved enormous bureaucratic efforts to attack the problem across the whole nation (Bernstein 71). Brauer states that the area of voting rights nevertheless provided more chances of success than for example federal protection in cases of police brutality, a subject which has led to fundamentally different views among historians. The author expresses sympathy for Burke Marshall that 'he understandably continued to concentrate his limited manpower in the most promising area' (Brauer 159).

On the subject of federal protection, Brauer offers a refreshing perspective by refraining from a purely moral debate of the right to protection on part of African American demonstrators; instead, he attempts to clarify the nature of racial barriers as established traditions in the South. Discussing the 'substantial barriers in effective enforcement' (Brauer 157), he points out that the circle of segregationist techniques was not easy to break. If a case of police brutality was brought to court, Southern judges and all-white juries would impose only light penalties and act according to the long-standing segregationist traditions. Despite their best efforts, the Justice Department lawyers were bound to lose in such cases (cf. Brauer 158 – 159). It should also be mentioned that the notion of positivist law in modern liberal societies implies that legislation is a normative set of rules and does not include moral rightfulness as such. From a continental European viewpoint, it is equally significant to comprehend the circle of segregationist techniques as embedded in the Anglo-American legal system of Common Law. Due to the case law system, legal disputes are typically decided on precedence and provide judges with the possibility of overruling. They are therefore much less bound to a statutory basis. Not only was the administration faced with resistance in the courts; segregation continued to be upheld by policemen, governors and employers and was therefore deeply embedded in Southern custom. African Americans attempting to overcome those barriers were often confronted with refusal of credit, boycotts, physical violence, arrests or loss of employment (cf. Marshall 34). The creation of a federal police to intervene in cases of physical

violence, Brauer argues, was not recommendable as it would most likely have led to stronger opposition on part of local officials and further nurtured the climate for riots in the states (cf. Brauer 160 – 111). On a political dimension, such an action would have put a strain on congressional relations and would have proven destructive to a whole range of stable legal traditions. On this subject, Brauer's line of argument is similar to that of Burke Marshall in *Federalism and Civil Rights*. Yet while Marshall's focus is decidedly more legal, Brauer neither treads the legal nor the moral path but maintains the logical claim that Kennedy's constant attempt to avoid alienating the South either by controversial actions or by moral statements was beneficial to either party as it represented a measure to secure national stability throughout the civil rights crisis across the United States for both Movement activists and Southern whites (cf. Brauer 317). Despite his sympathy for the Kennedys' cautiousness, Brauer constantly emphasises that the Justice Department indeed wanted to act, yet encountered resistance in many cases which left them powerless to produce viable successes (cf. Brauer 160). The same applied to President Kennedy for reasons of him seeking to maintain public order: 'He shared the modern liberal's faith that the central government, led by an active President, could and should solve pressing social problems' (Brauer 317).

Brauer points out that at times, the Kennedys were the targets of unfounded criticism when the Movement suffered setbacks and resistance. Furthermore, he hints on the sometimes diffuse organisational problems that were surfacing among Movement branches and would later lead to the radicalisation of some parts. In contrast to other authors who would merely uphold the moral courageousness of the Movement and blame the government for failures of all kinds, Brauer dares to suggest that at times the African American community itself had trouble to act unified and effectively (cf. Brauer 177). Brauer is the only author to suggest that the reason why the literacy bill John F. Kennedy sent to Congress in 1962 failed was not least because there had been no support from Civil Rights groups, as they had set the wrong priorities and were preoccupied with other matters such as school desegregation (cf. Brauer 137).

As becomes evident, a substantial part of civil rights work rested with Attorney General Robert Kennedy, who was more passionate about the subject than his brother and had a deep sense of empathy for and interest in the lower classes (cf. Brauer 91). He also conceived the deep roots of segregation more clearly (cf. Brauer 126). The President, by contrast, was willing to offer reassurance to the African American community through the power of his office. Brauer is convinced that in comparison with all the Presidents which came before him, John F. Kennedy was the first to offer moral leadership from the very day he took office, and this support ‘took the form of exemplary conduct rather than ethical preachments’ (Brauer 74). Never before had it been possible for Civil Rights Leaders to have access of this extent to the administration and to the President himself (cf. Brauer 73). Moreover, the aforementioned behind-the-scenes action did not only take place in the Department of Justice. Throughout 1963, a series of unpublicised White House meetings were initiated to persuade religious leaders, business men, lawyers and other key members of society to take steps on their own to encourage desegregation. Kennedy made an effort not to overburden Southerners with a sweeping change in rules that had persisted throughout the South for hundreds of years. Instead, he placed an emphasis on voluntary compliance which was also a measure to win Southern Democrats for his legislative civil rights plans (cf. Brauer 87). Brauer expresses sympathy with the Kennedys in their claim that to act rigorously on moral grounds without an awareness of the possible outcome was not commendable: ‘Extremism might have had a greater popular appeal in the South in 1962 had the President crusaded for civil rights’ (Brauer 143). Yet Brauer does not conceal that political considerations were another aspect in Kennedy’s decision-making process. Lyndon B. Johnson’s appointment as vice president was part of the strategy to have an ally in the South (cf. Brauer 36) and did affirm Kennedy’s tendency toward moderation. Ironically, Johnson turned out to be considerably more pro-civil rights than Kennedy would ever be.

President Kennedy has been regularly criticised for appointing segregationist judges in Southern states⁵. While the opinion throughout the literature tends towards a political explanation, implying that Kennedy had a deliberate ‘deal’ with Southern Governors, Brauer argues that while the President was assured they were neutral, the judges ‘turned out to be’ segregationists unexpectedly (Brauer 87). He explains that while the decision theoretically rested with the President acting upon the suggestions of Senate members, the power of the Senators in their respective states was significantly larger than commonly assumed: ‘Kennedy was merely following tradition’ (Brauer 121) and would have suffered setbacks himself if he had opposed a Senator’s preferred choice. Brauer claims that African American lawyer Thurgood Marshall, who had won the famous *Brown vs. Board of Education* case, would have stood no chance to have been appointed to the United States Court of Appeals for the Second Circuit if Kennedy had not, although reluctantly, agreed to a deal with Southern senators. The President ‘had very little room in which to maneuver on judicial appointments [...] it was simply not feasible or even possible’ to appoint integrationists to those judicial posts (Brauer 124). However, Brauer avers that the better part of judges upheld the law and draws a comparison to the former state of inaction in American civil rights politics, a common line of argument in pro-Kennedy books. In stating that ‘Kennedy actually appointed more integrationists in the South than Eisenhower’ (Brauer 123), he seeks to mask the negative connotation of Kennedy’s self-made segregationist judges in the South. While Eisenhower in this context is often cited by authors as an easy way out to glorify Kennedy’s advancement in this area of domestic policy, Brauer has another persuasive argument in Kennedy’s defence. He is convinced that Kennedy only reluctantly conformed to the traditional policy, as it would have been a strategically unwise move to initiate such appointments deliberately. After all, the Kennedys’ intention was to seek a solution of the crisis primarily through court action and enforcement of existing laws rather than through new legislation. They would have set a trap for their own strategy (cf. Brauer 124). In a letter Robert

⁵ Cf. Stern 47, Bryant 286 – 288

Kennedy had written in his defence on the subject in 1964, he states that while the appointments were clearly wrong, he does not think that this mistake could have been avoided, as there had been no indication that the judges would turn out to be segregationists (cf. Archival Source #4).

For the most part, Brauer is able to defend his positive viewpoint excellently, yet at times he creates lines of argument which lead to entirely unexpected conclusions. To cite one example, the author suspects that African Americans did partly oppose Kennedy because of his Catholicism, which is intrinsically a legitimate assumption. Martin Luther King's father, an influential figure in the African American community, initially disapproved of Kennedy because of the President's religion and then suddenly endorsed him because of his telephone call to Coretta King while her husband was in prison. While this incident has largely been perceived as a purely strategic move shortly before the 1960 election to gain votes, Brauer twists this argument and states that King's public backup 'gave considerable space to a refutation of religious bigotry' (Brauer 51), a statement that sounds like a reversal of the crux of this action.

On the ultimate impact of Kennedy's civil rights achievements, the author concludes that 'the plus side of the ledger would be considerably longer' (Brauer 319). Interestingly, he avers that Kennedy through his actions did open the gates for the Movement to act and subsequently supported its ambitions, a claim which stresses the limits of credibility, especially when Brauer closes by stating that 'Kennedy was significant not only for what he did, but for what he started' (Brauer 320).

5 Power and Communication

Brauer's main argument for a positive judgement of the Kennedys' civil rights efforts is the effectiveness of their communicative, persuasive approach instead of the use of coercion. In order to form a deeper understanding of his argumentation and to assess the value of his opinion, it is useful to clarify my understanding of the background of power and communication in democratic societies. In *The Active Society*, Amitai Etzioni discusses whether or not control without power is possible.

Some theories in political science place a special emphasis on communication. They are 'in favour of a conception of societal guidance based on communication without the backing of power' (Etzioni, *Active* 333). According to this viewpoint, the government is perceived as a communication network more so than a power network. The control centres and performing units send messages in this network and therefore produce power structures automatically. The key for the actor in this model is information, for if it is accurately conveyed 'correct' action will follow. Etzioni depicts the essentials of this theory by comparing it to inserting the right key into the right keyhole, which means that even if there is not much power available, the door will open for implementation of the required action if the right communicative key is chosen. Advocates of the communicative approach would therefore claim that when Kennedy sent troops into the states, the power of the implementation depended on the message the President conveyed. The dynamics of action largely depend on communication, and while not much energy is used in those proceedings, the effects can be enormous. Etzioni, by contrast, argues that society *consists* of power relations which lead to natural situations of conflict (cf. Etzioni, *Active* 351). In power analysis, it is assumed that the way to action is mostly accompanied by an expansion of power in order to reduce resistance; the degree of action correlates with the degree of power (cf. Etzioni, *Active* 334). The Kennedys tried to avoid showing off their power to the South, let alone increase it, and rather relied on communication on a subtle level to implement the desired change in society. The confidential meetings with key

persons responsible for society's cohesion, for example in the areas of employment, religion, law and business, were to create the basis for change on a broad range.

For a thorough analysis, Etzioni suggests that to understand the different behaviours of various actors, we need to know the powers they command and to which degree their communication networks operate effectively. The analysis of such aspects has been a constant source of conflicting narratives in historical writing on Kennedy and civil rights. Often, communication alone will not be a sufficient tool of societal control. When messages or signals are being ignored, force has to be applied. In Alabama and Mississippi, the Governors of the states deliberately denied response and cooperation with the government and were confident that the President would ultimately not send troops to the state. On the other hand, too much power without adequate communication could probably have resulted in violence and confusion, as Brauer has argued. Ultimately, the actor's potential will be greatly enhanced if he knows how to handle both communication and power in complementary ways. For Brauer and Kennedy's supporters, the communicative approach represents the basis before any kind of power is used, even if legitimately applied.

According to Etzioni, there exist three basic types of power (cf. Etzioni, *Active* 357): coercive power (military power, physical), utilitarian power (economic sanctions, material) and persuasive power (propaganda, symbolic). Coercive power was used only as a last resort when President Kennedy was forced to mobilise troops into a state. Utilitarian power in the form of withdrawing funds from institutions which were unwilling to desegregate was often suggested to the administration as a course of action that would produce more results, yet it was rejected because it was considered too risky. The approach of persuasion, however, was applied by John F. Kennedy himself and in particular vehemence by the Department of Justice. It is essential to conceive the two not as separate entities but rather as unified in an attempt to follow a joint strategy. While the reader of civil rights literature gains the impression that the President and the Attorney General alternatively were in a state of complete stagnancy, the

unpublicised negotiations, even if sometimes ineffective, were progressing in the background all the time. It can be assumed that the communicative strategy was born out of a political plan on how to proceed, as the logic behind the White House meetings was in the same line as the Department of Justice's approach of giving priority to the art of persuasion instead of imposing their will on reluctant politicians and businessmen. Journalist Anthony Lewis has repeatedly pointed to this parallel, a thought few authors have pursued (cf. Lewis 117 – 124).

In order to comprehend why both Kennedys were so fiercely criticised for their lack of commitment on a public level, persuasive power in this case should feature a further subdivision in two dimensions. First and foremost, the President of the United States as a public educator undoubtedly has the duty to inform the citizens of the nation about certain deficiencies in the state of society. John F. Kennedy rarely spoke out for the Civil Rights Movement, and many would claim that he did not provide more than lukewarm set phrases until his TV address in 1963, despite the fact that he was the first President ever to address the issue at all and the first to provide cautious support at least. Etzioni remarks on persuasive power that it 'is exercised through the manipulation of symbols, such as appeals to the values and sentiments of the citizens, in order mobilize support and to penalize those who deviate' (Etzioni, *Active* 358). It was exactly this sort of moral leadership which critics claim was missing throughout the better part of Kennedy's term. Considerably less attention has been given to the second dimension of persuasive power, that of large-scale 'hidden' persuasion in unpublicised meetings which Brauer has so extensively discussed. This attempt to subtly change deadlocked thought patterns did have significant influence in that the strongholds of segregation were avoided while moderates were willing to support conversations and to accept constructive suggestions.

While power is always forced and does not evoke a change in the minds of those subjected to it, influence does change citizens' attitudes, evoking a 'respecification of their commitments' and leaving a lasting impression in that people depart from their former views (Etzioni, *Active* 360). Persuasion is thus merely 'influence on the surface' as 'there is really an exercise of power beneath'

(Etzioni, *Active* 360). For Kennedy, the noble option of influence entailing the gradual ripening of the nation to a state of awareness where it would voluntarily drop the racial barriers did immensely appeal, which is why he chose to apply force in the least alienating way: by communication. He initiated a profitable strategy of initially approaching people who held key resorts in the social structure and who were not entirely opposed to the idea of racial equality. While it is impossible to know whether this resulted in persuasion or influence, it can be assumed that the outcome was successful and long-lasting. In the long run, people's attitudes were certainly altered. This means that guidance was sought not to be imposed from the elite downwards but that allies embedded in the social fabric were enabled to assist in subtly changing the climate in order to evoke change in US-American society as a whole (cf. Etzioni, *Active* 360). What connects the members of society on an equal level is termed 'social power' by Etzioni. It is non-hierarchical and 'rests in horizontal [...] relations' while normative control can be used 'for downward control purposes', as for example when the President asks citizens to follow his instructions (Etzioni, *Active* 367).

The Kennedys intentionally chose this indirect route, while at the same time delivering an executive action strategy along with rare public statements addressing the nation. If the education of society is the overall goal, commitment and communication serve to be the most effective weapons of successful action (cf. Etzioni, *Active* 370). Etzioni remarks that

The use of force is associated with such factors as the timing and pace of change [...] All other things being equal, the more overdue and the more rapid the transformation of a societal structure, the less need there is for order-enforcing organisation; the more premature *or* slow a transformation, the greater the need for such organisation (Etzioni, *Active* 379).

While this statement appears logical, it reveals the complex character of the Civil Rights Movement: the implementation of equal rights for all citizens of the United States regardless of ethnic background was long overdue, yet the

transformation was immensely slow and in many instances required federal intervention and regulation. The statement also reflects Niven's and Bryant's argument that Southern states would not have dared to show resistance in the way they did if Kennedy had initiated quick change from the very beginning he took office. However, there was no way to know whether or not social change of such scope was overdue in the Southern states; there is ample evidence which suggests the opposite and a forceful stand on civil rights could also have sparked off even more racial violence than was already present to a disturbing extent. Moreover, the statement contains John F. Kennedy's perspective of progress in the area of civil rights. He was of the opinion that the nation would automatically transform when the time had come, naturally progressing and continuing its process of maturation. It also becomes clear that the Kennedys and their staff 'believed that *they* should set the direction which the Civil Rights Movement should take' (Miroff 239). They not only tried to set the direction, but also the pace of progress. It is, however, inherent in the social structure of democratic and modern societies that an administration does not only have the responsibility to take action if the rights of the nation's citizens are endangered; its duty also includes the willingness 'to respect informal political procedures, effect compromises and preserve tranquility' (Burner 135).

The civil rights situation in the early 60s was a time of considerably heightened public awareness for the problem, yet not necessarily a time to expect the nation to collectively change the basics of the social fabric. The long-standing tradition of segregation had a political power of its own in the form of defiant Governors who had control over most of their state's resources and was prominently featured in Congress. As regards civil rights, both Republicans and Democrats were divided by a North-South ideology.

Discussing the nature of power in this political constellation, it has to be emphasised that Civil Rights organisations such as the NAACP, SCLC and SNCC had gained considerable influence in the public space by means of demonstrations and sit-ins. These direct action campaigns were an expression of alternative politics which were not part of the common application of power. The Movement

Leaders were proud of their doctrine of non-violence which proved to be strikingly effective. Taking advantage of the media, they were forcing United States citizens and people all over the world to be aware of the embarrassing policies of Southern states in their effort to counteract the activists. Furthermore, direct action strategies such as sit-ins and non-violent demonstrations were tools to press the administration to act in favour of civil rights more rigorously. The Freedom Rides in 1961 for example were specifically designed to gain President Kennedy's attention and support. As the Movement did not choose traditional politics and found ways of organising a powerful new social grouping, it did represent a threat to the Kennedys and to traditional politics as such (Miroff 239). Kenneth O'Reilly has even gone so far to claim that the Kennedys were 'harboring bitterness toward the civil rights activists' (O'Reilly 211) because they disturbed the common notion of power. Kennedy's slow reaction in the case of the Freedom Riders is taken as evidence that he repeatedly made an 'effort to obstruct the civil rights movement' (O'Reilly 213), an incredibly harsh judgement which manipulates the reader to conclude that Kennedy was an enemy of the Movement when in fact he received rather pointed responses from many Southern politicians for his alleged collaboration with civil rights activists.

It becomes clear that the complex interrelations of several sources of power could be found within the higher and lower social spheres and were sometimes even reversed. The President, governmental departments, the Congress, the states and the Movement were all in charge of different resources and were able to exert influence on various levels. Coercive power was used by the President in order to prevent riots, yet it also served as a tool of suppression to control the African American community in Southern states. The states could also go even further and apply utilitarian power by imposing economic sanctions; people often retreated to loopholes to continue discriminative practices. Finally, persuasive power, without doubt the most nuanced category, was used by all those groups in differing ways. The networks of power were therefore diverse and not easy to retrace. However while power is existent in all those spheres, the President of the United States is in a special position in that he has to consider *several* goals

and has to respond to the needs and demands of many sub-groups. In his article ‘Social Justice’, Louis Koenig reflects on the restrictions of the man who holds not only the most significant, but also the seemingly most influential office of the nation:

The Negro civil rights revolution throws a sharp, unflattering glare upon the limitations of Presidential power as an instrument of social change. It is one thing for the President to issue Executive Orders and proclaim high policy; it is quite another to transmute policy into action and orders into compliance. In the acid test of performance, the President depends upon a vast federal bureaucracy and far-flung field organisations staffed heavily with local personnel (Koenig, “Social Justice” 173).

Koenig correctly points out the basic considerations with this statement. Kennedy undoubtedly was restricted in his actions by the mechanics of the political process, yet many authors have advocated an argument of a completely different kind. They aver that if Kennedy was reluctant to introduce legislation or indeed any other kind of measure that would produce tangible results, it would at least have been his duty to speak out publicly for civil rights and to have sided with the Movement. The subject of this two-dimensional notion of morality in the realm of the politician and of the historian is one of the key aspects in the analysis of the discourse on Kennedy and civil rights.

6 Creating the Kennedy Myth

The myth surrounding John F. Kennedy is a phenomenon which emerged well before the President's tragic death⁶. The Kennedy clan was a tightly knit family network with an intuitive grasp for successful public relations. The new media which emerged in the 1960s made it possible for the first time that a president had the chance to effectively stage himself in the political scenery and it provided Kennedy with the means to create a lasting positive image in the mind of the public. In the collective imagination, he was a devoted family man, a skilled orator and a competent statesman and still, this reputation lingers on to this very day. The Kennedys have become figureheads of the American dream and a symbol of the essence of what it means to be American. The assassination of the President in November 1963 conserved this image. The two books of Arthur M. Schlesinger and Theodore C. Sorensen which will be discussed in detail have significantly contributed to the conservation of the Kennedy myth, enforcing the public image of a vigorous and charismatic leader. Without doubt, these portrayals reflect what Kennedy represents in the eyes of many Americans to this day: a President with youthful enthusiasm who by creating the conception of a New Frontier provided the United States with a touch of hope and patriotism in a time of political despair over both national and international issues. The Kennedy spirit of approaching problematic political issues in a juvenile pop-culture way 'dampened criticism by its very style' (Riches 65). This phenomenon partly explains why the public responds so favourably to pro-Kennedy books, even more so if a personal view of people close to the President is included. Sorensen and Schlesinger both published their books shortly after Kennedy's death, when the demand for information about the nation's assassinated leader had been particularly keen. Undoubtedly, Kennedy's violent death contributed to the conservation of his popular status, for the assassination in Dallas naturally

⁶ The most important writers who have produced favourable biographies of the President include Robert Dallek (*An Unfinished Life*), James N. Giglio (*The Presidency of John F. Kennedy*), Michael O'Brien (*John F. Kennedy: A Biography*), Herbert Parmet (*JFK: The Presidency of John F. Kennedy*) and David Burner (*John F. Kennedy and a New Generation*).

resulted in collective sympathy among a nation united in anguish. The fact that during his political career, ‘Kennedy had been able to deflect a tremendous amount of criticism by sheer force of his celebrity, charm and hospitality’ (Bryant 294) provided the basis for the enormous amount of literature which celebrates the Kennedy myth rather than his politics. While Sorensen and Schlesinger in their debate of civil rights have certainly idealised Kennedy’s actions, they nevertheless provide the reader with valuable background information of what they experienced first-hand. Moreover, both authors explicitly state that they do not specifically aim at a purely neutral rendering of facts. They recognise their bias from devotedly working for President Kennedy, yet they do not try to hide behind a mask of neutrality.

Two books which were produced decades later, namely Sorensen’s *Counselor* (2008) and Schlesinger’s *Robert Kennedy and His Times* (1978), clearly reveal that the authors’ viewpoints have changed in hindsight. They will be considered in the analysis of their writings, although not as thoroughly as the two main books *A Thousand Days* and *Kennedy*. While in the early 60s both authors dedicated their writing to the creation of the Kennedy mythology, their later books are characterised by a greater willingness to address the weaknesses of the administration, even though they expectably set out to defend the President’s course of action.

6.1 Theodore C. Sorensen’s *Kennedy* (1965)

In his 1964 book *Kennedy*, Theodore C. Sorensen defends the administration’s course of action with dramatic language and unlimited solidarity. His style is evidence of his established writing skills, and since he had been the President’s primary speech writer, it is not surprising that he knows how to argue persuasively in favour of Kennedy’s actions. Nevertheless, leaving his

exaggerated rhetoric aside, he provides the reader with valuable insights of a man who was one of Kennedy's closest aides. Sorensen does not shy away from stating that a neutral account is not his aim. In the preface, he explicitly points out that his portrait will be full of praise due to the pride and conviction the author feels about the President. The author criticises that Kennedy in his lifetime had been the subject of discussion not for what he did in the political sphere but rather for the image he represented which is quite an interesting observation considering that his account has become one of the basic sources of the Kennedy myth. His book is divided into five major chapters, the first three of which deal with Kennedy's way to the Presidency. The other two entitled 'Kennedy and the Nation' and 'Kennedy and the World' deal with the major issues of his time in office, whereby the latter is given twice as much coverage.

One of the main arguments in Sorensen's account is that the President was confronted with an immensely reluctant Congress, forcing him into a powerless situation which required him to postpone his plans to introduce new comprehensive civil rights legislation. Sorensen points out the obstacles in the Senate and the House of Representatives by giving detailed information about the mechanisms of political proceedings on this level of policy making. The chapter entitled 'The Congress' interestingly features another subsection 'Kennedy vs. The Congress', stressing the adversary relationship which apparently existed between them. The section on congressional issues is one of the few which burst with expert knowledge and which is characterised by the notable omission of the otherwise regular feature of excessively exaggerated rhetoric. Sorensen's argument is backed by the fact that the Civil Rights Act was finally passed in 1964 'after the longest congressional debate in American history' (Heale 167)⁷. The fact that civil rights legislation was not introduced until 1963 is explained by the lack of support in Congress and the threat of a possible filibuster. It is immediately sanctified by the comment that the executive 'whirlwind of activity' (Sorensen 474) was a commendable alternative. In contrast to the assumption that

⁷ For a detailed discussion of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, cf. Robert D. Loevy's *To End all Segregation*, an excellent reference framework containing information on the social background and on politicians involved.

there had been political deals or a lack of commitment, Sorensen decidedly states that

There was no 'deal' with Southern Congressmen. There was no disagreement with Negro leaders over the need for legislation. There was no indifference to campaign pledges. But success required selectivity. [...] He would take on civil rights at the right time on the right issue (Sorensen 476).

Sorensen claims that 'he [Kennedy] was not forced into this position by circumstances beyond his control, as many have written' (Sorensen 470) because the notion that every citizen should be equal had always been his personal and moral conviction. While he admits that the actions the Movement demanded were at times 'inconsistent with his political instincts', he affirms that Kennedy's 'academic judgement' was in truth 'a dedication of the heart even stronger than that of the mind' (Sorensen 471). Significantly, Sorensen ascribes Kennedy not only an immensely active civil rights orientation but also a strong moral conviction, an assumption which was commonly rejected by critical writers. Kennedy's television address in June 1963 represents the total commitment Sorensen pathetically calls 'The Kennedy Manifesto' (Sorensen 493). Hence, the author makes it seem as if Kennedy were vehemently trying to interfere in the civil rights conflict out of a personal conviction and sanctifies the President's hesitation to act more forcefully by stating that 'the reason was arithmetic' (Sorensen 475). Alan J. Matusow more decidedly attributes the delay in action to Kennedy's electoral concerns, arguing that his 'initial strategy derived [...] from the arithmetic of his victory' (Matusow 62) in the 1960 election. Moreover, Sorensen gives credit to President Kennedy for making an effort to appoint more African Americans to government positions. Tokenism is seen as a useful tool to help change the setting for far-ranging social change. The appointment of several segregationist judges in the South, a subject which led to substantial criticism throughout critical accounts, is revealingly only mentioned in brackets.

Despite the harsh criticism Kennedy regularly received from important Civil Rights leaders like Martin Luther King or Roy Wilkins, Sorensen emphasises that Kennedy and his advisors constantly kept in touch with them to discuss their proposals and ideas. Proof of the lively correspondence between Civil Rights workers and members of the administration can be found in the Kennedy Library. Among the numerous letters there are several telegrams by Martin Luther King requesting meetings with the President and the Attorney General to discuss civil rights matters. The Movement's faith in their President, even if only initially, is further evidenced by a proposal for the administration's Executive Action strategy of about 80 pages length, in which possible political moves in the most significant areas (military affairs, education, employment, housing, health services, agriculture) are discussed. The proposal was drafted by the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, one of the most significant civil rights organisations, and was submitted to the White House by its chairman Roy Wilkins as early as August 29, 1961 (cf. Archival Source #5). This evidence shows that the Movement organisations were willing to support the course of executive action which was all the administration was prepared to offer at this point (cf. Sorensen 67). By no means did the strategy change the close collaboration between the Movement and the administration for the worse. Ultimately, Sorensen argues that Kennedy's actions set the stage for later developments and paved the way for racial justice. Although he does mention the counterarguments that are advanced by Kennedy's critics, he succeeds in masking them by skilful use of virtuous rhetoric. In this manner, he creates an image of the President as an active purveyor of the civil rights cause: 'In the space of a few months President Kennedy had made the Negroes' troubles his troubles and their problems his priority' (Sorensen 503). In his epilogue, Sorensen mentions a thought worth considering by accurately remarking that in historical writing, heroic figures tend to be respected because of their ability to win a war more so than because of their ability to prevent a war. This reference to the nature of public judgement points to a basic problem in the discourse on Kennedy: the fact that in hindsight, authors tend to take the avoidance of a racial war for granted.

In his most recent book *Counselor* (2008), Sorensen is distinctly more critical of the President's handling of the civil rights issue. He admits that 'there was no Kennedy administration civil rights program in 1961' (Sorensen Counselor 272), yet he still clings to the notion that the passage of comprehensive legislation in that field was impossible. Despite the author's personal approval of the movement's cause, he thinks of himself of 'also sufficiently pragmatic' (Sorensen Counselor 272) to approach the issue with moderation. In the civil rights chapter of his book which seems like an expanded and revised version of his account in *Kennedy*, he has considerably held back with pathetic language. The high praise of former times has yielded to a more neutral and balanced account of events.

Among the nine books Sorensen has produced about his time in politics, *Decision-making in the White House* (1963) is one of the most revealing publications. Refreshingly scarce in dramatic and exaggerated rhetoric, a feature which was used to its full extent in *Kennedy*, it provides additional insights for a sociological analysis of decision-making. In the foreword, John F. Kennedy himself points out that while the President enjoys substantial power, there exist evenly great limitations (Sorensen Decision XII). Sorensen subsequently sets out to shed light on the mechanisms of decision-making rather than rendering a step-by-step guide. An essential notion is that while lower-ranking units are often preoccupied with only one goal, decision-makers in the higher ranks 'are concerned with balancing several goals' (Etzioni, *Active* 292). Having to keep in mind various and often conflicting goals, 'a President's authority is not as great as his responsibility' (Sorensen Decision 27). The Presidency is the only office that requires its holder to be an expert in all areas of society. The selection of priorities is a demanding task for any politician dealing with the everlasting problems society raises. Any decision will entail undesirable reactions on some level. Sorensen argues that 'the President's entire existence is a continuous process of decision' (Sorensen Decision 6). He then sets out to discuss several 'basic factors' (Sorensen Decision 7), which play a key role in White House decision-making. The office of the Presidency is integrated in the network of the political apparatus

which is not to be neglected in analysis, ‘nor, it should be added, is the amount of care and thought devoted to a particular decision necessarily proportionate to the formality and regularity of the decision-making process’ (Sorensen Decision 19). Sorensen shows awareness for the political process as a self-contained entity on its own which possesses specific dynamics and is, some might say regrettably, not amenable to moral arguments.

Among the limitations Sorensen perceives in the process of presidential decision-making, a constant source of influence is the immediate predecessor, in this case Eisenhower, and the examples and boundaries he has established during his term (Sorensen Decision 23). Etzioni notes that there exist contextualizing key symbols (cf. Etzioni, *Active* 166) which serve the purpose of orientation and are embedded in the shared collective experiences of a society: ‘It was argued that [...] new civil rights legislation would bring about another Little Rock’ (Etzioni, *Active* 167). This remark points to a key element in the civil rights struggle, as Kennedy’s course of action would be determined on the basis of former events. Moreover, the Eisenhower administration’s achievements, scarce as they were, would constantly function as a yardstick, upgrading the image of the Kennedy administration. Any critic of the Kennedys would have to admit that the comparison with Eisenhower could not be ignored (cf. Leuchtenburg 129). It would always prove helpful to mention, for example, that the Justice Department had initiated twice as many cases as the Eisenhower administration had in three years (cf. Koenig, *Chief Executive* 319). Civil rights advocates, while acknowledging these differences, would counter that by 1960, the dynamics of the Movement had drastically changed and that a comparison to former inaction would not justify the fact that there was no adequate responsiveness on part of political leaders of the nation (cf. Bryant 467). To eliminate the key symbols which signified the administration to hold back, the Civil Rights Movement tried to create what Etzioni has termed ‘pseudo-events’ (Etzioni, *Active* 167), events which would be the basis for a new attitude and become new key symbols to be inserted in peoples’ minds.

Almost every author agrees with the assumption that presidential timing is one of the key aspects in successful implementation of his program. Among scholars, opinions differ as to which approach proves most promising. In 1960, political scientist Richard Neustadt published his book *Presidential Power* and was promptly appointed an advisor to President Kennedy. Neustadt's ideas are clearly reflected in Kennedy's decision-making process. Hence he believed that the first two years of the Presidency should be used for learning and that forceful action was not to be introduced until the third year (cf. Light 40). By contrast, critics like Niven and Bryant would claim that action in the very first year was necessary and the only realistic approach to get legislation through the lengthy process of congressional debate (cf. Light 41).

Apart from key symbols and timing, another crucial aspect in decision-making is for the observer to comprehend that the process is much more complex and widespread in its implementation than commonly assumed. While decision-making is often attributed to individuals, law professor Alexander M. Bickel of Yale University notes that there exists a 'tendency to exaggerate what one man in the White House can possibly direct or even know' (Bickel qtd. in Donald 138). Indeed, for the public and less so for the historian, the apparatus behind policy making is hard to grasp in its complexity and is therefore in need of representatives and leaders who possess the skill of adequate rhetoric. Their task is to speak out for what at first sight seems to be a self-contained and harmonising unit. On closer inspection, however, most institutions are characterised by substantial inner tensions. In the same way Kennedy did not have the Congress under his command, and he was also confronted with a significant North-South division of the Democratic Party. The making of policy is often represented in written historical accounts as being the deed of only one man. In the same way, it is misleading to conceive public figures as allegories of the real conflict by creating exemplary figures such as the incrementalist John F. Kennedy versus the moral crusader Martin Luther King, which is a tempting conclusion since they were the men who carried the burden of public exposure to the media. It is therefore presumptuous and misleading to ascribe the failure or impossibility of a

measure merely to the ‘incompetence and indecision’ (Etzioni, *Active* 26 – 27) of one man. Etzioni emphasizes that societal units such as Congress play a vital part as well (cf. Etzioni, *Active* 264). The complexity arises from the fact that the members of Congress do not act in isolation from each other but depend on the properties of the social unit itself. One of the basic problems of the Movement was that numerous interest groups opposed to such measures as a civil rights bill were often significantly more organised and more effective because of their political connections (cf. Wicker 97). It was considerably easier to block a bill than to get it through Congress and its subcommittees. Therefore, the ‘deals’ in politics need to be comprehended as belonging to the dynamics of the political sphere as such, rather than as a man-to-man deal or a moral decision:

Societal decision-making is, therefore, not merely a thought-process that balances goals and means but also a political process that balances various power vectors. Each goals-and-means constellation has, in addition to its other relative merits, a different *political* weight (Etzioni, *Active* 301).

The facts support this view. Lyndon Johnson was able to secure passage of 60 percent of his legislative proposals in 1965, while Kennedy secured passage of only 27 percent of his in 1963 (cf. Light 26). According to Paul C. Light, this significant difference cannot be ascribed to the competence or personality of the actor but rather to an ‘increase in his political resources’ (Light 26), meaning better electoral results and increased congressional support for Johnson. Therefore, much what tends to be attributed to a single actor’s capabilities can in fact be traced back to external procedures.

Decision-making in the White House, despite its easy prose style and Sorensen’s typical elevation of John F. Kennedy to the Olympus of Presidential heroes, refrains from heavy and exaggerated rhetoric and almost strikes a scholarly tone by focusing on the political forces which influence a President’s decision. Sorensen does not aim at establishing an instruction manual for decision-making but rather provides the reader with a promising insight into the

mechanisms he has observed while working in the White House. Although at times his depiction of the subject sounds extremely vague, he succeeds in communicating the basic argument that ‘there are checks and balances within the departments and agencies’ (Sorensen Decision 26) and that numerous visible and invisible influences differing in scope and force exist: Congress, presidential advisors, experts in governmental positions and committees all have a voice in the decision-making process. Last but not least, the media plays a significant role in influencing the timing of politics and in shaping the nation’s awareness of issues. The President is the individual who will ultimately be judged on decisions which are to a large amount shaped by men in the background.

6.2 Arthur M. Schlesinger’s *A Thousand Days* (1965)

Arthur M. Schlesinger served President Kennedy as special assistant in the White House and has produced almost thirty books about American politics. His work *A Thousand Days* is a highly positive account of Kennedy’s time in office, yet he knows how to conceal his loyalty to Kennedy and appears more neutral than Sorensen, whose unlimited romanticism can hardly be excelled. Schlesinger’s volume comprises more than a thousand pages, and not even a tenth of it is dedicated to Kennedy’s civil rights policy. As the author was first and foremost occupied with foreign policy, it is not surprising that his focus is limited accordingly. Like Sorensen, he consistently defends the President’s course of action and seeks to list arguments for delays, such as the late issuance of the housing order (Schlesinger 939). He considers Kennedy’s waiting for the right time to act on civil rights a wise step, although he is aware that this approach led to ‘understandable frustration’ (Schlesinger 950) on part of the Movement. Nevertheless, Schlesinger praises Kennedy for his presidential qualities and his prospective approach to civil rights, stating that he was conscious of the far-

reaching consequences the issue had on foreign policy relations (cf. Schlesinger 976). Civil rights was certainly not a primary matter of concern for the President, yet he was well aware that the incidents which took place in the area of race relations on a domestic basis were of integral importance for the shaping of the nation as a whole, especially since the notion of the American dream violently conflicted with the way African American citizens were treated in public. While the independence movements in Africa were progressing, the public image of the United States, a nation renowned for its discourse on values like freedom and equal rights for all citizens, was in danger of provoking criticism from abroad. Schlesinger repeatedly points to these interrelations and to the fact that they were more closely entangled in Kennedy's mind than was commonly assumed.

Moreover, Schlesinger approves of the fact that Kennedy viewed potential profit for the civil rights cause in social and economic measures that were not directly related to the subject, such as the poll tax (cf. Schlesinger 976), an argument which points to the superficial analysis of certain critics who predominantly focus on the 'pure' civil rights measures. While Schlesinger claims that Kennedy was always conscious of the urgency and the fundamental moral rightfulness of the movement (cf. Schlesinger 931), there was still 'a terrible ambivalence about civil rights' (Schlesinger 930). Negative events are kept very short and are concealed in careful language. The appointment of several racist judges in Southern states, which received excessive debate throughout the more critical part of the literature on Kennedy and civil rights is simply termed 'unfortunate' (Schlesinger 934) and dealt with in only one sentence. Instead, the author focuses on the fact that 'for the first time in history' (Schlesinger 934), Kennedy did appoint African Americans to important governmental posts as lawyers. Schlesinger makes a particular effort to evoke the image of John F. Kennedy as an active President leading the nation: 'Kennedy was faced with a social revolution and had to act. That is was congenial to his own nature to act made his stand more consistent and more forceful' (Schlesinger 165).

A quote about Kennedy's view on moral leadership (Brauer 44) shows that he did understand the necessity for this kind of guidance, and in contrasting this

apparent consciousness with the commonly held notion that he did massively fail as a public educator it becomes apparent that what initially seems like a contradiction is merely a question of differing conception. While critics perceive the lack of public statements as stemming from the cautiousness and timidity which resulted from political and electoral considerations, Schlesinger takes a considerably distinct viewpoint. In a separate chapter, he debates the criticism that Kennedy had missed to take a strong stand as a public educator. Despite the President's prevailing image as a virtuosic public speaker, this ability is often associated with nothing more than a clever knowledge of how to operate rhetoric for its own sake. Especially as regards civil rights, there is a broad consensus that 'on no other subject did Kennedy prove so deficient as an educator' (Miroff 224). Schlesinger basically renders the President's own viewpoint first-hand which is based on the assumption that influential statements can only be made in times when the citizens of the nation are willing to listen, which commonly implies a crisis or a similar event to raise awareness and to create a sense of urgency. In the early 60s, the better part of Americans was content with the nation's prosperity and development. Hence, Schlesinger claims that society would not have been ready for social change because people were not concerned with a problem that only affected a minority (cf. Schlesinger 720 – 722). Therefore, if the President issued strong public statements on a constant basis, the use of his rhetorical power would be diminished as it would arrive at a point of exhausted capacity, rendering this tool of public education ineffective (Sorensen Decision 28). Schlesinger adds that 'Kennedy feared overexciting people about public issues' (Schlesinger 723) when the passion in some parts of the country was already at boiling point.

Further following President Kennedy's line, the author argues that timing was essential to consider and remarks in the direction of critics: 'Presidents had a better sense of 'public psychology' than most of their critics; that was one reason why they were Presidents and their critics were critics' (Schlesinger 721). Sorensen joins him in suggesting that a President has a natural talent to grasp the nation's mood, a quality which cannot be deduced from a heightened awareness of the results of opinion polls but rather an inherent quality to intuitively assess

the national climate (Sorensen Decision 50). It is this very quality that made Kennedy the monumental historical figure he became posthumously: despite the mistakes and misjudgements with which he has been charged, he knew how to respond to the public and how to handle the citizens of a nation in all their facets. While he definitely knew how to make use of the media and how to be an effective communicator, his outstanding talent is commonly, and according to Schlesinger wrongly, associated with his pop-culture image rather than with his presidential abilities (cf. Schlesinger 726).

Neither Sorensen nor Schlesinger doubt Kennedy's determination and principal ability to act on civil rights. The delays that regularly occurred on the civil rights front are mainly attributed to external factors. Kennedy's hesitation or his preference to choose a cautious path was always backed by justifiable considerations: 'If they [Presidents] wanted to act, as Kennedy clearly did, it was idle to suppose that only a misreading of the political situation or mere indolence was holding them back' (Schlesinger 721). Indeed, many authors appear to misinterpret the Kennedy brothers' actions to be a result of miscalculation and error of judgement when, in fact, they simply failed to recognise that precisely this course of action was part of the administration's political strategy. As regards the controversial subject of segregationist judges, Schlesinger only devotes a single sentence to the issue in *A Thousand Days*. It was not until his 1978 book *Robert Kennedy and His Times* that he would adequately comment on this disconcerting topic. He discusses segregationist judges in the South in much greater detail (cf. Schlesinger RFK 304) and even admits that there had been a deal between Southern governors and the President. Yet he defends the appointments, emphasizing that information had been inadequate and that the Kennedy brothers had acted in the firm belief that the judges would be trustworthy. Schlesinger softens the scandalous issue by classifying the episode as one of the many steps in a politician's learning process. Similar to Sorensen, the author in writing *Robert Kennedy and His Times* has produced a more critical account of the civil rights policies in the early 60s. This change in attitude becomes evident in his attempt to create a more balanced account by examining

the source of the Movement's discontent with the administration in the first two years of John F. Kennedy's term (cf. Schlesinger RFK 313).

Significantly, Schlesinger states in *A Thousand Days* that Kennedy's often criticised and pejoratively termed 'lack of ideology' was part of his self-perception, as he consciously 'perceived himself rather as a man who [...] generally saw reason on both sides of complex issues' (Schlesinger 724). Indeed, it is easy to perceive the merits of the pragmatic political approach: instead of rigidly adhering to a deadlocked line of thought, Kennedy set out to react to the respective situation he was faced with at the moment: 'He usually called himself a realist or an idealist without illusions' (White 222). Kennedy was always an advocate of dialogue, refraining from either-or solutions and from shutting a party off completely. When he held his celebrated civil rights speech in June 1963, he did it without a proper speech draft and against the recommendations of most of his advisors (cf. Dallek 603). He may not have had an ideology but he was true to his decisions which he weighed according to the respective situation: 'He prided himself on being pragmatic, tough-minded. Idealists and romantics annoyed him. Quixotic crusades interfered with his careful plans and cautious timetables' (Sitkoff 106). Therefore, it could be assumed that this approach in a way also presents an ideology, even though such an assumption appears rather far-fetched in a world where people tend to categorise politicians on the political spectrum.

Schlesinger emphasizes that President Kennedy constantly stayed in contact with Civil Rights Leaders and, although not digressing from his course of action, was ready for discussion and debate of civil rights proceedings (cf. Schlesinger 931 – 953). He also effectively highlights the fact that Kennedy, despite regular harsh criticism on part of Civil Rights Leaders, continued to be immensely popular among the African American community. While the President did not substantially press change in the area of civil rights once he was elected, it is astounding that he succeeded in sustaining strong support throughout the first two years of his term. The high hopes Frank Sinatra sang about during the 1960 campaign were kept high continually, presumably because Kennedy was a man who was fascinated by the mechanics of the political process and its tricks. As

Kenneth O'Reilly put it, 'Kennedy won the election because he straddled the racial fence and Richard Nixon lost because he did the same thing but less skilfully' (O'Reilly 197). Schlesinger cites a poll which shows that the African American community, on being asked who had done most for civil rights, ranked John Kennedy on place three, right after the famous Movement organisation NAACP (National Association for the Advancement of Coloured People) and Martin Luther King (cf. Schlesinger 949). Kennedy continued to keep the balance to his advantage for a long time, but in 1963 the time had come for him to take a firm stand and declare himself as supporter of the Civil Rights Movement.

As concerns the decision not to send up comprehensive civil rights legislation, Schlesinger shows understanding. He recalls the fact that the literacy test proposal in 1962 was killed by a filibuster and that 'this experience seemed to confirm beyond question the President's judgement' (Schlesinger 940). The legislative program of the Kennedy administration as a whole had experienced rather harsh treatment in Congress and each of the five main proposals had faced serious obstacles and changes (Wicker 86). When Kennedy finally did send up legislation, Schlesinger avoids the common view that pressure from outside forced Kennedy to do so and instead clings to the notion of an active leader by stating that 'the President [...] perceiving a need for new action [...] had decided to seek legislation himself' (Schlesinger 950). Thematically broaching a subject that Burke Marshall had dedicated a whole book to, Schlesinger in the chapter 'Federalism and freedom' discusses the deficient protection of demonstrators by the government. Similar to Marshall, he argues that while major crises required governmental regulations, harassments and smaller offences which would essentially require police functions could not be covered by the Department of Justice. He calls the efforts of the Kennedy administration 'impressive', yet, like Marshall, he seems to capitulate without a solution to the realisation that 'terrible facts remained' (Schlesinger 956).

Schlesinger points out that the famed civil rights speech the President gave in 1963 marked the culmination of his efforts: 'He had prepared the ground for that speech ever since he became President' (Schlesinger 965). In a chapter

revealingly entitled 'The President in command', Schlesinger praises the final dedication of Kennedy to take a leading role in the movement: 'He had quietly created an atmosphere where change, when it came, would seem no longer an upheaval but the inexorable unfolding of the promise of American life' (Schlesinger 966). The last chapter on civil rights titled 'The Revolution' deals with the Civil Rights Bill under way in Congress, with Lyndon B. Johnson successfully finalising what Kennedy had built up over the three preceding years. Overall, Schlesinger's account is characterised by great solidarity with the President and an admiration that is easy to decipher between the lines. Nevertheless, he has to be credited with his skill for rejecting and disproving criticism in a straightforward manner.

7 The Politics of Incrementalism

Bryant characterises Kennedy's political style with the observation that 'He was an incrementalist' (Bryant 468). Etzioni provides a definition of this style of leadership: 'They [decision-makers] do not investigate all alternative policies but only those which differ incrementally (i.e., to a limited degree) from the existing policies' (Etzioni, *Active* 270). The scope of realistic alternatives is therefore significantly narrowed down by the actor himself. While the opposite approach would require the actor to work with fixed aims and to search for the appropriate means, the incrementalist primarily considers the means that are disposable at the moment and on this basis chooses the goals accordingly. Kennedy's Civil Rights bill was perceived by the Movement's Leaders as an expression of this attitude, as they felt that Kennedy acted according to his means instead of according to what was needed at the time (cf. Schlesinger RFK 348). As the incrementalist's goals are by no means stable, there is also no solution in that sense, rather a process of constant adjustment to the political situation; the

course of action may be redefined with each step. Kennedy's supporters would claim that it was a flexible approach and that the President was ready to listen to both sides' arguments. Critics like Niven, Stern and Bryant, whose arguments will be discussed in chapter nine would call the same strategy myopic, overly cautious and unstable.

The one-dimensional view of the President as the major power wielder is abolished by the incrementalist approach. Power is wide-spread across various organisations and groups, each of which the President has to consider in his attempt to keep the balance for a stable society: 'He has to adjust to their demands just as they adjust to his' (Etzioni, *Active* 271). Decisions develop out of the negotiations between several actors, who are to a great degree 'affected by the structures' and circumstances they find themselves in (Etzioni, *Active* 292). It is a fact that democracies lean towards the incrementalist approach because the strategic implications of their actions require democratic leaders to seek the greatest possible support from sub-societies which are constantly in conflict with each other (cf. Etzioni, *Active* 294).

What civil rights advocates frequently criticise is the 'double standard' (Etzioni, *Active* 297) of political leaders, in that they must consider both societal and elite needs. An incremental strategy is therefore often favoured, as it tends toward the path of least resistance and thus avoids political damage (cf. Etzioni, *Active* 298). The chosen way of action is therefore also the least alienating for the decision-maker because he evidently stays within the boundaries of the 'familiar path' (Etzioni, *Active* 299) naturally imposed on him: 'An incrementalist actor responds and adjusts: he does not even try to transcend and transform' (Etzioni, *Active* 305). Although he had done more than any of his predecessors, President Kennedy was frequently accused of having been passive. Rather than helping to advance the cause, critics argued that 'one cannot help but gain the impression that Kennedy was always reacting to crises' (Fischer 84). In view of the harsh judgement often displayed by scholars, Maldava E. Glyne rhetorically asks: 'But of a moderate, must one not conclude his actions took on a radical form?' (Glyne 115). She puts the moral line of argument into perspective by arguing that

Kennedy's failure in certain respects 'only reveals that JFK does not resemble a modern-day Moses' (Glyne 120).

Interestingly, the merits of the incrementalist approach did not divide administration members and Movement activists along a clear cut line, as the literary evidence discussed here might suggest. The public justification and appreciation of Kennedy's course of action did by no means exclusively originate in the isolated surroundings of government-affiliated associates. The African American community as such built their hopes on their President. African American author and journalist Louis Lomax was one of the spokesmen for their concerns and clearly expressed the approval his community felt despite constant public criticism on part of Movement Leaders. In his book entitled *The Negro Revolt* (1962), he staunchly defends President Kennedy and argues that the administration's efforts in the area of voting rights were essentially reasonable because they rather served as preparation for the social change that was to come and was thus part of a well-conceptualised strategy (cf. Lomax 232). Kennedy was apparently leaning towards 'testing his power to gain his course before choosing which alternative he favors' (Etzioni, *Active* 304). The alternatives in this case did not consist of the basic decision whether racial equality was right or wrong. In Kennedy's view, the notion of segregation was an absurd concept which considerably harmed the economy and had a negative effect on the international reputation of the United States. His alternatives lay in the course of action he chose to advance the cause of the Civil Rights Movement: by executive action or by legislation; by public statements or by remaining silent; by intervening in the states or by placing emphasis on voluntary compliance. These choices were not made out of moral obligation; they rather represented the step-by-step processing of a President who had to consider his limitations of power. Etzioni states that 'control is not just a process of information-collection [...] and the expression of commitments, but also a process of the mobilisation and use of assets' (Etzioni, *Active* 304), which reflects the quintessence of incrementalism. Lomax remarked in 1962 that he was 'convinced that the President's civil rights critics – including myself – were wrong' (Lomax 231 – 232). Convinced that

voting rights was the most promising area for civil rights activists to tackle with the support of the administration, Lomax argues that Kennedy ‘is not naïve’ (Lomax 231) and that he deliberately chose a controversial course of action which would, however, grant him more freedom to act. Moreover, the author shows awareness for the internal struggles of Movement organisations and emphasizes the fact that Civil Rights Leaders must mobilise the African American community to act on their own, as the government can only provide assistance for the people (cf. Lomax 239): ‘The stage is set for John F. Kennedy to fight the civil rights battle of his preference on grounds of his own choosing’ (Lomax 235).

As is evident from the literature, it can safely be said that Kennedy was in fact an incrementalist, yet while the term clearly has a pejorative connotation, the merits and the reasons behind this form of leadership are easy to comprehend. The incrementalist ideology is grounded in realism and in a profound understanding of the political process. Considering that President Kennedy had always been ‘a purely political man’ (Lomax 231), it was not surprising that he deliberately chose to avoid being guided by emotional concerns and instead advocated a politics of compromise which would allow him to respect the differing demands throughout the nation.

8 Off the beaten path

Among the close advisors of both President Kennedy and Attorney General Robert Kennedy, there are two former associates who have produced accounts which reflect unique viewpoints in the otherwise rather sharply diverging books. Their writing lies in between the high praise and the adverse criticism of other authors and displays specific features unique to the discourse on the Kennedys and civil rights. Both authors are known to be vigorous defenders of civil rights with strong connections to the Movement and its leaders, yet they

prove to be fundamentally different in their area of expertise and interest. Harris Wofford's *Of Kennedys and Kings* is characterised by deep devotion to the civil rights cause with a relatively unexpected sympathy for President Kennedy's course of action. The author's profound understanding of the political mechanisms in the early 60s and his own contributions to the political sphere lead to a profound, yet critical examination of the administration's civil rights achievements. While he finds fault with Kennedy's tendencies toward incrementalism, he clearly understands John Kennedy's motives. Burke Marshall, by contrast, focuses on legal proceedings, whereby he deliberately distances himself from the commonly mentioned and obvious arguments for moral righteousness. His account is even more outstanding in the discourse about the Kennedy brothers and civil rights as it covers an area whose mechanisms are difficult to comprehend for the layman. He touches upon the very essence of the civil rights problem, namely the discrepancy between the law as it is written and the law as it is enacted. Of course, the law is widely perceived as an expression of justice, yet the inevitable blank gaps tend to be overlooked for the sake of categorisation efforts on part of those who seek to explain certain phenomena. Wofford and Marshall do not attempt to mask those grey areas which commonly lead to feelings of helplessness and impotence. While it is easy to accuse them of lack of originality because they both refuse to provide definite solutions, they show the courage to leave some questions unanswered. This sense of reality proves to be more persuasive than a complaint about a lack of morality in the political sphere. Both authors, although inevitably biased, provide the reader with a unique and indispensable insight into the activities of the civil rights specialists' work for the administration.

8.1 Harris Wofford's *Of Kennedys and Kings* (1980)

In analysing Harris Wofford's book *Of Kennedys and Kings*, the author's background is of integral importance to understand his role and judgement. In 1960, Harris Wofford had been one of President Kennedy's campaign workers. One year later, he was appointed Special Civil Rights advisor to the President, a position which he readily embraced. Subsequently, he proved to be a staunch and emotional advocate of civil rights, establishing close bonds with civil rights activists. After merely one year in this position, Wofford resigned to spend time on the Peace Corps project in Africa. It should also be mentioned that Wofford would have been the ideal candidate to head the Justice Department's Civil Rights Division, a position which was ultimately occupied by Burke Marshall. Robert Kennedy remarked that he 'didn't want to have someone [...] who was not dealing with facts but was dealing from emotion' (O'Reilly 203).

After contrasting the Kennedy admirers with their critics, Wofford explicitly states that he hopes to contribute to a more nuanced view of Kennedy's civil rights approach. He finds that there are valid arguments on both sides and thus seeks to produce 'not a compromise between extremes, but a significantly different conclusion about Kennedy's character and approach, and about the political process' (Wofford 130). The title of the chapter 'Kennedy action and inaction' clearly reveals the balanced nature of the book. The afore mentioned biographical details have led many authors to believe that Wofford had always been immensely frustrated with Kennedy's handling of civil rights and was therefore equally critical. In his book, however, Wofford dissipates such claims by arguing that while he was at times disappointed with the progress, he mostly understood the President's motivation behind his actions and inactions. Reflecting the image of Kennedy as regards civil rights, he criticises that

[...] revisionist historians and ideologues have deflated and distorted that period on American politics almost beyond recognition. In doing so, they contributed to

the cynicism about all government that has paralysed our politics (Wofford 4).

Wofford is typically associated with two key civil rights incidents. Shortly before John F. Kennedy was elected President, Martin Luther King was arrested in Birmingham, Alabama, which prompted Wofford to advise Kennedy that he should make a telephone call to King's wife to reassure her of his assistance. The call was widely unpublicised, yet it entailed forceful public responses from Martin Luther King's father and Coretta herself. Merely a few days before the election, campaign workers distributed two million copies of a pamphlet with those favourable statements in the African American communities (cf. Lewis 116). With regard to Kennedy's narrow victory in the election, the phone call to Coretta King was identified by many as the decisive factor in winning black votes. However, Bryant cites poll results which show that Kennedy had won a large number of the black vote well in advance (cf. Bryant 188). Bayard Rustin, an African American civil rights activist and member of the SCLC, writes in his book *Strategies for freedom* that he was well aware of the political risk John F. Kennedy's call to Coretta King entailed (cf. Rustin 47), as it could have alienated Southerners and might therefore have even had a reverse effect. Robert Kennedy was said to have been furious about this move, as he was convinced it would make them lose several states (Wofford 19). The fact that Kennedy did make the call, even if it was purely out of political calculation, shows that politicians could not simply ignore the status of African Americans anymore (cf. Rustin 48). Rustin considers the call as a gesture 'of enormous symbolic importance' (Rustin 47). Coretta King herself approved of Kennedy's call because she was convinced that it helped the Movement, even though she was aware of the political implications (cf. King 228). Wofford does not shy at correcting various accounts of events he witnessed written by other historians or former members of the administration. He draws upon Sorensen's *Kennedy* and claims that Sorensen's account of the call to Coretta King is incorrect, as there had been no advice concerning the call in advance, simply because no-one knew of it (cf. Wofford 27). Furthermore, he accuses Journalist Theodore White of drawing inappropriate conclusions about

the President's phone call and Robert Kennedy's subsequent call to a judge in Alabama who would arrange King's release from prison: 'His view of a centralized super-efficient Kennedy operation would not let him write otherwise, but that is not how it happened' (Wofford 27).

Furthermore, Wofford is known as the man who drafted the administration's executive action strategy, recommending a minimum of legislation and a maximum of executive action, something Kennedy would subsequently be harshly criticised for. In his book, the author attempts to clarify the President's and his own motives for the delay of legislative progress:

Since Kennedy has been blamed by so many critics for not seeking legislation during his first year, and in some writings I have been exonerated as a civil rights activist who was outflanked and overruled, the record should be set straight (Wofford 136).

Wofford's recommendation not to impose legislation from the start was triggered by the fact that the Democrats had lost seats both in the Senate and the House of Representatives, whereby they were more likely to face a filibuster evoked by adversarial forces. He knew that without the power to break a filibuster, the failure of a Civil Rights Bill would put other crucial parts of the administration's program at risk as well. Moreover, Kennedy needed to appeal both to Northern and Southern democrats in order to pass legislation later on and to be re-elected (Wofford 136 – 138). Thus, Wofford essentially cites the very same reasons that have often been perceived as unconvincing excuses as the issue of congressional obstacles tends to be raised frequently by Kennedy's most loyal and idealising supporters, such as Sorensen and Schlesinger. The enforcement of existing laws and the path of executive action were often perceived as 'the only realistic ways' (O'Brien 378) to act. Hearing those arguments from someone who was personally involved in the civil rights cause and who actually advised the President to delay legislation adds significantly more credibility to the scope of power the administration had at its disposal. Etzioni emphasizes that besides knowledge and normative commitment, power is a major influence on decision-

making because it is much more direct. While the other two aspects can be disregarded, power is a variable that is better not underestimated:

A President might ignore the information that Congress will not pass a bill he favors, but this will not alter the fact that when the vote comes, the bill will not be approved; the decision will be shaped directly by power (Etzioni, *Active* 303).

As the degree of power ultimately determines the success of a measure, the President did not only have to acquire knowledge about the demands and the urgency of the Movement but also about what he could safely dare to do on a political level. Reflecting such considerations, Wofford expresses his sympathy by remembering that

Coming into the Oval Office with a focus on civil rights, I recognized how many pressing problems were on the President's periphery, and how difficult it must be to deal with them all equitably, if not always equally or equably (Wofford 132).

Power analysis is an essential prerequisite for the exploration of the decision-making process and it has to be taken into consideration that actors need at least minimal power to be able to implement the required strategy. Whether Kennedy had enough authority in Congress remains a matter of dispute and has been proven and refuted by various writers. It can however be argued that he definitely held another kind of power in the form of public statements, which would eventually lead to a successful implementation of persuasion and influence.

That Wofford himself was often torn between the political considerations which had to be borne in mind and his emotional devotion to civil rights becomes clear in several passages of his book. While he understood for example why Kennedy postponed the long-awaited executive order on federal housing, he regrets 'the way he made the decision' (Wofford 124) which was always a last-minute back off, while Wofford urged him constantly to live up to his promise. These frequent setbacks, coupled with the fact that his recommendations were

often simply dismissed by the President, were a constant source of frustration for Wofford. In other text passages, however, he concedes that this did not stop the administration from introducing other relevant measures: ‘On fronts other than Congress and housing, the first hundred days were full of action for equal rights’ (Wofford 141). Although he does not doubt Kennedy’s moral attitude, he criticises that there was never a long-term strategy on civil rights. Moreover, he regrets the lack of sufficient debate on the issue among White House staff (cf. Wofford 133). Realising the fact that the civil rights issue was constantly competing with other political considerations, Wofford was aware that the setting of priorities ‘would sometimes be painful’ (Wofford 140). While the author argues that it is wrong to think that nothing more could have been done by Kennedy, he finds the assumption that moral persuasion could have caused a turn in the nation’s collective mind ‘even further from the truth [...] the confusion was too deep’ (Wofford 176). Despite the fact that Wofford himself was an advocate of enhanced public statements on civil rights, he seemed to be aware of its limited impact even of someone as rhetorically apt as Kennedy.

Wofford’s book differs significantly from other accounts of former White House staff members discussed in this thesis. He makes an effort not to omit the basic arguments, be they positive or negative, and succeeds in creating a balanced view of the issue that neither seeks to idealise nor to condemn. The author does not shy away from voicing serious criticism, yet also does not hide his apparent deep respect for John Kennedy:

What is truth about John Kennedy and civil rights
[...]? This much seems clear to me: Kennedy was no
hypocrite nor did he play politics as usual with civil
rights [...] and learned through politics (Wofford 175).

Wofford himself is unsure about how the civil rights issue would have been approached best and how social change could be ideally advanced. Etzioni notes that social change proves to be a slow process, and that ‘bit reforms are much more likely to be “carried” than fundamental changes’ (Etzioni, *Active* 242). The climate for change is naturally more ideal if the environment is changing as

well (cf. Etzioni, *Active* 243), and while the Northern states were relatively more progressive, segregation had a long and deeply rooted tradition in the South which constituted a lasting influence on the politics of the nation as a whole. Throughout the United States, progress was by no means on the same level which made it even more difficult for the President to find an all-encompassing solution. These considerations probably were on Wofford's mind when he wrote the pensive sentence: 'It may well be that the President was right, in the long run, to let things ripen as they did' (Wofford 176).

8.2 Burke Marshall's Federalism and Civil Rights (1964)

During John F. Kennedy's presidency, Burke Marshall was Assistant to the Attorney General and Head of the Civil Rights Division in the Department of Justice. In 1964, he produced a book called *Federalism and Civil Rights* in which he focuses on the legal dimensions of the African American struggle. The book is based on the Gino Speranza lectures which were held by Marshall at Columbia University in the same year.

In the foreword, Robert Kennedy states that Marshall sets out to explain the 'apparent anomalies' (Marshall VII) in the Kennedys' approach to civil rights, lining out the possibilities and restrictions of governmental action. Marshall point out that the legal system of the United States gives great authority to the states while the federal government can only intervene under certain circumstances and therefore deems it 'necessary to be realistic' (Marshall 3) about what can be achieved by presidential powers. Sorensen supports him in this argument by stating that in many cases, 'there was no clear-cut Federal solution' (Marshall 478). Critics however perceived the lacking efforts in the area of federal protection as a deliberate action of 'throwing another bone to segregationists' (O'Reilly 209). Yet when the government had the right to intervene, it could

nonetheless not make sure that discrimination was fully repealed because the states often resorted to a range of other tactics to refuse the ballot and other basic rights to African Americans. Within the circle of civil rights activists, Marshall was a well-respected man, described by Ralph Abernathy of the South Christian Leadership Conference as an ‘honest and even-tempered man with whom we would be working over the years’ (Abernathy 260).

Marshall’s account clearly aims at eliminating some of the misunderstandings between civil rights advocates and opponents by focusing on the crucial tool that necessarily has to be the guideline for the actors on both sides: political facts and the rules of the political system. It is evident from the beginning that this is not a book which fits into the conventional literary discourse on civil rights⁸. It is not only the fact that Marshall is a biased observer of events on the front line like Wofford, Sorensen and Schlesinger. He makes an effort to give his account a distinctly more scholarly note by focusing on the legal dimension, whereby he attempts to explain the mechanisms behind the proceedings of the Department of Justice in a style whose function is to convey the complex contents in lucid language. Apart from Marshall’s attempt to clarify the Justice Department’s working methods, there exists a special symposium of the North Carolina Law Review which was issued in 1963 and is composed of articles by Robert Kennedy and his associates who attempt to shed light on the legislative facts concerning civil rights. With a focus on issues such as employment, housing and school desegregation, the lawyers go back in history and reflect upon ‘concepts of liberty and equality’ (Law Review 87) to strengthen their positions. Martin E. Sloane, for example, defends the Executive Order on housing by stating that ‘its true significance lies not so much in its coverage (...) but in the splendid fact that it was issued’ (Law Review 134). Moreover, they admit that the judicial process is an often tedious ‘process of education’ (Law Review 134), something which Marshall more than once experienced first-hand.

⁸ In the area of civil rights, books tend to focus either on the Movement (cf. Branch, Brooks, Riches), on civil rights policy (cf. Ashmore, Light, Loevy) or on the interrelations between the two (cf. Brauer, Bryant, Wofford), whereas accounts with a distinctly legal focus essentially require profound legal knowledge by the reader.

Marshall's book is divided in two sections which focus on the right to vote and on what he terms 'The Administration of Justice' (Marshall 42). As do most of the former members of the administration, he stresses the importance of the right to vote and explains the working methods of the Department of Justice and their successes by citing various exemplary cases, whereby he points out that the process of litigation requires much time and effort, thus being a tedious process and not a tool to inflict change quickly. The legislative documents which can be found in the archives of the Kennedy convey an idea of the workload behind such drafts and proposals. The issue of voting was considered the most significant area in civil rights, as the Kennedy brothers 'believed, and correctly so, that blacks could not enter the mainstream unless they could vote' (Brooks 170). Although Marshall conceives the urgency of the racial problem in its complexity, he defends the political system because it represents 'notions which have worked, and worked well, in other contexts' (Marshall 50). He furthermore claims that the members of the Civil Rights Movement often have often misinterpreted the legal and political background to their problem: 'Apparently their schools and universities have not taught them much about the working of the federal system' (Marshall 49).

The basic question Marshall is concerned with is whether there exists a need for altering the area of responsibility of the state and the federal courts, a matter which is made even more difficult by the fact that the discriminative situation in the United States in the early 60s did not have the same scope across the states and was definitely more urgent in the South (cf. Marshall 59). While the approach of the Department of Justice of filing suits in discriminatory instances turned out to be a promising starting point, Marshall points out that once it becomes possible to 'retest basic constitutional decisions, no one obeys the law' (Marshall 80). This would also lead to a fundamental loss of authority in local institutions, disturbing the balance of the federal system established by the Constitution. The states, by not complying with the law, were forcing the government to intervene under certain circumstances and subsequently felt betrayed. They accused the Kennedy brothers of dictatorship and denounced

Civil Rights organisations as having communist tendencies. They created an atmosphere of hate in the Southern states by claiming that the government was imposing its will upon the American people, as the President had the power to sanction the states if they did not comply. The hatred which arose from the South is evidenced not only in public statements of local officials, but also in efforts to publicly denounce the Kennedy administration. John C. Satterfield, a Mississippi lawyer and former President of the American Bar Association, wrote a lengthy article complaining about the way the Kennedys practiced 'government by intimidation' (cf. Archival Source #6). In 1963, the 'Mississippi General Legislative Investigating Committee' with the backing of Mississippi Governor Ross Barnett issued a report in which they accused US marshals of having used physical violence on demonstrators during the effort of desegregating Ole Miss. The ludicrous reproaches are without foundation of any kind, as numerous journalists did cover the event, with no-one reporting anything close to it. This evidence supports the view that Kennedy's actions were deeply despised in the South and were violently fought (cf. Archival Source #7).

The roots of the problem thus seem to be the fundamental misunderstandings between civil rights workers and members of the government and the Department of Justice, which is more actively involved in the actual process of eliminating discrimination on a broad scale. A letter written by the Attorney General in 1964 after a meeting with Movement Leaders points to this problem:

The difficulty in my judgement, was that I was seeking recommendations as to what could be done to make things better, while the group present was interested only in expressing the depth of their feelings on how bad things were. I think my record in this area should be looked at as a whole. I am frankly proud of it (Archival Source #4).

It is not surprising that the struggle of African Americans for equality is an emotionally charged issue, yet in estimating the realistic scopes of their goals Marshall doubts whether moral rightfulness can be a useful argument in the

settings given at the time. In fact, he dismisses this way of arguing, a common technique among Civil Rights Leaders, by stating that sometimes ‘arrests might be wrong, but that is not the question’ (Marshall 73). The only question that ultimately matters is whether actions of any kind are legally justified or unjustified and how they are regulated by the law. However, Marshall’s book is not a vehement defence of governmental actions seeking to conceal other points of view; on the contrary, he obviously advocates an understanding of how decisions are being made in the highest spheres of policy-making. Although the author concludes that there is a need for new legislation on the civil rights front, he has no definite solution to propose for implementing it. He understands the frustration in the civil rights camp as concerns governmental actions, yet claims that the Department of Justice did undertake piecemeal, but nevertheless significant first-time changes in many instances such as voter registration.

It is essential to note that the book was generally well received in its year of publication and got favourable reviews for Marshall’s efforts to openly discuss the matter, although some critics found reason to doubt his line of argument. In a review of December 1964, critic Howard N. Meyer finds it regrettable that Marshall’s book instead of giving constructive advice does merely defend the working methods of the Department of Justice, pigeonholing critics as drawn by ignorance for the workings of the federal system (Archival Source #8). By contrast, Alexander M. Bickel in ‘The New Republic’ finds that Marshall’s approach is ‘modest, even self-effacing’ (Archival Source #9) and ultimately concludes that ‘the Kennedy administration made a great record on civil rights. Much of the credit is Mr Marshall’s, and the quality of this book indicates why’ (Archival Source #9). William W. Van Alstyne writes in the Fall edition of the ‘Villanueva Law Review’ that Marshall does not merely number the administration’s great deeds to produce a favourable account but emerges in an honest discussion of the legal problems at hand. Alstyne agrees with most of Marshall’s views, yet he criticises that while it is true that there is ‘a large measure of good faith in the integrity of state governments’ (Archival Source #10), Marshall apparently states several things as facts which are more matters of

policy. This applies, for example, to the appointment of segregationist judges in Southern states (cf. Archival Source #10), an issue that has caused conflicting views among authors concerning the question whether the Kennedys did have a voice in the matter. While Marshall makes it seem as if the rule required that Southern senators determined whom to appoint, it was rather the case that they proposed a suggestion on the basis of which the President made his decision. It was rather a political tradition that the proposals of Southern senators were usually accepted. Thus, power was at best an indirect consideration in this case. Of course, this slight difference in perception remains unnoticed by the legally unskilled reader, who relies on Marshall's expertise to accurately present the facts. Ultimately, Alstyne argues that it is possible to achieve greater successes for racial equality even within the limits of the federal system. Furthermore, the painful experience of ineffectiveness should make it clear that something has to be done even if this would mean leaving the comforting zone of existing legal boundaries (cf. Archival Source #10). John M. Pratt is convinced that Marshall, known to be a civil rights advocate, was troubled by the minimal results the Department of Justice achieved: 'As I read his book [...] I kept waiting for him to explode, "Damn the federal system – it's time for justice."' (Archival Source #11). Yet Marshall fails to defend the federal system enough to make up for the outrageous failures and gaps it produced in the civil rights area, to the extent that there is an 'almost macabre quality about it' (Archival Source #11). Pratt nevertheless shows understanding for Marshall refraining from a harsh attack concerning the failures of Southern officials, as this would apparently not have been wise in his position.

Arthur Schlesinger, who conceives the book as 'packed with perplexity and near-despair' (Schlesinger RFK 305), is of the very same opinion as Marshall. Noting that the complex segregationist system of judges, juries and state police cannot be wholly overcome by federal intervention, he points to the dangers of political manipulation of public opinion in the South. Enhanced control on part of the administration was often interpreted as a totalitarian tendency, yet while such apprehensions were clearly overstated the reactions to such claims certainly had to

be considered by the President. In any case, disturbing the federal balance ‘was not to be lightly discarded’ (Schlesinger RFK 306). Schlesinger distinctly contrasts the two alternative and equally unsatisfying viewpoints: either Kennedy could have accepted violence while upholding the system, or he could have protected the activists while risking a rupture in federal-state relations. He did not choose the latter, for there was no way to predict the possibly extremist consequences of this move. Furthermore, the author points out that even the famous African American civil rights lawyer Thurgood Marshall agreed with the administration’s conception of federalism. The root of the problem was that while lawyers could at least understand their way of thinking, the average citizen could not comprehend the seemingly inhumane reaction to the death of innocent citizens (Schlesinger RFK 305).

Marshall undoubtedly deserves credit for his attempt to line out the motives behind the actions of the Department of Justice. *Federalism and Civil Rights* apparently has its weaknesses, yet they remain invisible for the average reader and require detailed legal knowledge to be detected. Simon Lazarus III, a distinguished Chicago lawyer, has produced a fervent attack on some of Marshall’s interpretations in his article “Theories of Federalism and Civil Rights” which was published in *The Yale Law Journal* in 1966 (cf. Archival Source #12). However, while a thorough analysis can only be based on legal expertise in the area of civil rights, it can be said that the law is often a matter of interpretation. Marshall was certainly not in the position to present legal aspects wrong on purpose, but his layout of some issues has led to some critics challenging his views. The debates lead to contradictions and obscurity, making the reader realise that even the legal system of which we tend to think in either/or and right/wrong dimensions, is not immune from containing grey areas; and this is essentially what Marshall sought to demonstrate in writing this book. In the scarce length of eighty-five pages, he has succeeded in delivering a concise statement on civil rights of tremendous informative value.

9 Reconstructing Kennedy

Professor of History Harvard Sitkoff has observed that ‘scholars hold Kennedy’s presidency in considerably lower esteem than does the American public’ (Sitkoff 25), a fact which is easily observable in literature. While Sorensen and Schlesinger satisfied the need for the books suitable for the mass, there exists a wealth of critical books which are not as well-known or even slightly as popular.

The last group of authors includes three of the harshest critics of the Kennedy administration’s civil rights policy. Despite similar views and arguments, each writer focuses on specific features worth analysing in depth. The titles alone suggest their critical attitudes: *The Politics of Injustice* bears a strong moral connotation, *Calculating Visions* conveys the discrepancy between pragmatic and morally guided policy making, and *The Bystander* relates to the President’s apparent passivity and inaction. All three imply dissatisfaction with the course of action that was chosen by the Kennedy brothers in regard to civil rights. In none of the other books discussed in this thesis have authors stated their point already thus explicitly in the title, with the exception of Carl M. Brauer, who hints at Kennedy as the leader of the ‘Second Reconstruction’. The President’s critics find fault with his exaggerated caution, his passivity and his tendency toward incrementalist decision-making, all of which are characteristics which Kennedy’s supporters did not avoid but interestingly interpreted as strengths in view of the unstable situation on the domestic front.

David Niven’s account *The Politics of Injustice* could certainly be referred to as the very antithesis to Theodore C. Sorensen’s excessive praise of the Kennedy Presidency. While Niven makes an effort to emphasize the political benefits which would have resulted for the Democratic Party had Kennedy decided to support civil rights from the beginning of his term, his harsh and at times even offensive language suggests an even stronger emotional involvement and moral conviction. By contrast, Mark Stern, in his book *Calculating Visions*, delivers a rigorously categorised classification of ‘good versus bad’ which leads to a neat black-and-white depiction. For the sake of clarity, Stern attempts to

illustrate the complexity of the issue in a way which is accessible for the reader, yet he also conveys the impression of oversimplification. Finally, the 2006 book *The Bystander* by Nick Bryant is probably the most detailed account to date. The author formulates his criticism clearly, and while he makes an effort to represent both sides of the conflict, his negative conclusion seems plausible to the reader.

In analysing the critical viewpoints, the diverse scope of the discourse on the Kennedys and civil rights becomes visible. It is the last piece of the puzzle which will allow for a differentiated understanding of how historical writing constructs what we conceive as reality.

9.1 David Niven's *The Politics of Injustice* (2003)

Political scientist David Niven has without doubt produced the most critical account of the Kennedys and civil rights. Both his harsh judgements and the aggressive tone of his language portray the Kennedys as inactive and overcautious. His conclusion of what Kennedy has or has not achieved is presented already in the preface and does not spare personal opinions of the author or derogative phrases such as the statement that his book deals with Kennedy's 'near-political schizophrenia on civil rights' (Niven XV). The author points out that

while historians have overwhelmingly accepted Kennedy's assumption that moderation on civil rights was politically prudent, *The Politics of Injustice* advances the notion that Kennedy should have committed to civil rights upon taking office, not just because it was morally right, but because it was politically right (Niven XIV).

Niven argues that Kennedy would have taken political advantage from a strong commitment to the African American Civil Rights Movement even more

than from his ambivalent course of trying to gain Southerners' approval. The realistic political danger for Kennedy thus did not lie in the obstructionist South or Congress, but in the constant postponement of comprehensive civil rights action. Kennedy could have supported the movement unconditionally because the South was in a process of estrangement from the Democratic Party anyway (cf. Niven XVI), which had been indicated already years before (cf. Niven 128). Kennedy needed the support of groupings like the African American community, as they significantly contributed to his electoral success (cf. Niven 38). By analysing electoral results and public opinion queries, Niven tries to show that the Democratic Party could have tremendously benefited in the future from a strong stance on civil rights. Instead, the Kennedys fell victim to 'a political miscalculation' (Niven XVI), a conclusion which is also cited by Bryant, who calls the failure to intervene in the early stages of the Movement 'a political miscalculation of immense scale' (Bryant 12). Niven furthermore accuses President Kennedy not to have personally known any African Americans, an argument without sufficient justification, especially when Niven mentions Kennedy's 'lack of exposure to African Americans as a young person' (Niven 8). It is inappropriate to accuse someone, even a politician, not to be personally acquainted with members of a special group. After all, Kennedy did not shy away from admitting that he had much to learn about the African American struggle, and he did so constantly throughout the course of his administration. Hence the claim that Kennedy only had theoretical knowledge of the African American cause does not necessarily imply that he was not equipped to handle the issue adequately (cf. Niven 8).

Interestingly, Niven quotes President Kennedy stating 'There is no sense in putting the office of the presidency on the line on an issue, and then being defeated' (Stern 17), a quote obviously referring to the political circumstances at the time, especially legal obstructions in Congress, and subsequently interprets it merely as an expression of Kennedy's personal desire to be a winner which, according to the author, was a result of the education in the Kennedy family. Furthermore, Niven argues that Kennedy, although a 'master political technician'

(Niven 4), did not have a comprehensive political ideology and was mainly guided by the desire to gain the greatest possible approval of both sides. The three basic arguments Niven cites to explain Kennedy's actions are his desire to win, his lack of ideology and his deficient knowledge of civil rights issues. His explanation therefore primarily focuses to a great extent on aspects of personality, disregarding the political circumstances of the time which undoubtedly constituted an essential part of an analysis of this historical area. While other authors have debated the influence of Kennedy's personality as well, Niven's pseudo-psychologist arguments convey the impression that Kennedy decided the administration's civil rights course alone and solely on the basis of his personal views and opinions, a gravely misleading implication for the reader. Although the author does debate the political background at length later in the book, he first indulges into the debate on Kennedy's personality which he apparently blames, at least partly, for the cautious political course. The reader therefore absorbs the rest of the book against the background of President Kennedy as a cold-hearted politician who is obsessed with power and does not have any ideology, let alone any knowledge about civil rights. In much the same way as Sorensen is constantly showering high praise on Kennedy, Niven proves to be highly manipulative to the other extreme.

As concerns the moral aspect of the African American struggle, Niven suggests that a moral compromise as such does not exist because there is only right or wrong. This argument has also been stated by Henry Fairlie who believes that this specific situation required that the President to take a stand rather than manufacture an artificial solution designed to suit both sides (Fairlie 255). Referring to Anthony Down's book *An Economic Theory of Democracy* (1957), Niven claims that both sides will necessarily be disappointed with the results and will probably, as it is a passionate discussion, persist in their viewpoints even more. Niven concludes that this had been an instance where the President had better taken a firm stand: 'Compromise is not always politically preferable' (Niven 199).

Etzioni finds that the reluctance to alienate certain societal units ‘is the key problem in the *societal* application of power’ (Etzioni, *Active* 353). In the higher political spheres, exchange prevails as a tool for navigating around obstacles in the desired course of action because ‘market relations prevail’ (Etzioni, *Active* 357). Judging by Niven’s strongly manipulative and partly aggressive tone, he makes the mistake – as do many of Kennedy’s critics – of sometimes losing himself in an emotional discussion of the subject, not making an effort to consistently analyse the political implications of Kennedy’s decisions as a whole, despite the author’s efforts to portray the situation in Congress and Kennedy’s dealings with fellow party members below the Mason-Dixie line. His moral undertone becomes clear when he says that ‘there was no way to escape the reality that the South was wrong’ (Niven 8), though it is hardly point in this discussion whether racism is right or wrong. A striking characteristic about Niven’s style is that he tends to strongly emphasize his point by making use of typical rhetorical figures such as repetition and anaphora (cf. Niven XIV). His eloquence is undoubtedly remarkable, yet in the same way as Sorensen the author exaggerates and obscures historical facts by deliberately implying speculative conclusions. This controversial attitude, although accurate in the rendering of facts, strains the neutrality of the concept of ‘the truth’ as such.

9.2 Mark Stern’s *Calculating Visions* (1992)

Political scientist Mark Stern has written a book on both John F. Kennedy’s and Lyndon B. Johnson’s civil rights achievements. While he only subtly includes his personal judgement in the text, his opinion about the nature of the relationship between the Movement and the administration is explicitly stated in the prologue. That Stern stands in the tradition of the more critical authors is evidenced most clearly in the chapter headings, titled ‘An intimidated President’,

‘A reluctant Participant’ and ‘A reluctant Commitment’. Johnson, by contrast, is identified as the ‘coincident Hero of the Second Black Reconstruction’. The title of Stern’s book precisely sums up his main argument that Kennedy’s approach represented a pragmatic and diplomatic way of reaching a decision, dominated by an urge to control the ways of political power. The author’s style significantly differs from that of other critical writers discussed in this thesis, as he uses direct quotes almost excessively to form a picture in the reader’s mind while compared with Bryant or Niven, he himself rarely comments explicitly on the events.

Stern represents the Kennedy brothers as political strategists not equipped to deal with the civil rights crisis. In the prologue, he makes a distinction between ‘idealists’ and ‘political schemers’, contrasting the passionate nature of Civil Rights Leaders with what he considers the strategic weighing of choices which serves the calculation of the best political outcome. Stern decidedly states that the schemer is solely dedicated to the accumulation of power, which is the driving force behind his efforts. While the representation of idealists and schemers is extremely one-sided and one might even say too simple for an accurate historical account, it serves to illustrate one of the most crucial interrelations between Movement Leaders and the Kennedys. One of the main problems in the struggle for civil rights were the fundamentally differing concepts of the Movement on the one and the government on the other hand. Stern describes the essence of their relationship in the following paragraph:

The former perceives the latter as often weak compromisers or temporizers at best and at worst sellouts or betrayers of the cause in a world that needs truth and justice. The latter perceives the former as often unrealistic and unreasonable, if not irrational, in a world that moves by bargains and compromises (Stern II).

Interestingly, Stern does not see a development or education on part of the Kennedys, and while he creates the black and white picture of the moral crusaders versus the impassionate politician, he also does not differentiate between the Kennedy brothers’ dedication to civil rights. Commonly, even the critical writers

speak of a development towards more commitment to civil rights by 1963, yet Stern observes that even after the President had decided to take legislative action in 1963, he still refused to take the lead in this cause (Stern 79). The author does not even raise the question of personal commitment and deeper understanding and instead moves within his self-constituted categories of schemers and idealists.

His main point of criticism is the administration's strict avoidance of alienating Southerners which they feared would lead to considerable political disadvantage. He claims that President Kennedy's behaviour was constantly ambivalent (cf. Stern 44), citing many instances of political deals and negotiations to illustrate his point. On the issue of racist judges in the South, Stern does not only criticise this move but also explicitly states that 'the administration was determined to use court appointments as a bargaining chip with the South' (Stern 47), something no other author has worded as strongly. This conclusion, however, lacks adequate argumentation because it is well known that the Kennedys invested a big part of their civil rights strategy on court proceedings in Southern states and would certainly not have been 'determined' to 'wilfully' obstruct their own plans. Stern does not even mention other key figures like African American lawyer Thurgood Marshall and Senator James Eastland of Mississippi, who apparently had quite a big role in the 'deal' (Bryant 288), if there ever was such a thing.

Stern's view of Kennedy is that of a politician who only took action if forced to do so and who was constantly walking between the lines (cf. Stern 52). Even Kennedy's symbolic gestures which have also found approval among his critics are sceptically eyed. Stern argues that in the area of employment, good measures were introduced, but they comprised so many exceptions that they did not really gain ground on a broad scale (cf. Stern 50). Furthermore, he claims that the Kennedys, despite their urge to stabilize their influence, did not have control over many critical situations (cf. Stern 58 – 67). On the issue of sending troops into the states because of racial equality matters, Stern compares the first such case in history, Eisenhower's Little Rock crisis, with Kennedy's crisis at the University of Mississippi:

Both presidents viewed the abrogation of black rights as a sidelight to the main issue at hand: federal government rights. Neither the presidential position nor the southern white position had change since 1957 (Stern 73).

Stern apparently misconceives the point that the constant emphasis on federal rights and duties was part of Kennedy's strategy. While Kennedy felt that there was little sense in starting a debate on principle about the rightfulness of the African American Civil Rights Movement, he knew that he had the promising chance to embarrass the defiant Governors by appealing to their political consciousness and responsibility to uphold the Constitution. Etzioni remarks that

While commitment to a new value can be developed and then used to support a line of action, this is a much more costly process than appealing to a value that has already been internalised (Etzioni, *Active* 359).

Therefore, attempting to impose moral ideas on Southern politicians was much more likely to fail than an appeal in the direction of the states to fulfil their legal and political duties, values which had been longstanding traditions of democratic societies.

Even the Department of Justice which is generally perceived as an institution of brisk and vigorous purposefulness is blamed for passivity. According to Stern, several court proceedings were sometimes 'delayed at the insistence of the AG' and 'repeatedly postponed' (Stern 49). By stating that 'the Attorney General was not adequately prepared for the hearings' (Stern 102) in court, he also makes it seem as if Robert Kennedy had not done his homework.

Stern claims that 'Marshall and the administration missed the point' (Stern 82) as concerns the civil rights demands of African Americans. As he dramatically states, 'King was not demanding a new law here or a change there. He was demanding that the soul of the nation be inflamed' (Stern 82). By contrast, he writes of the lawyers in the Department of Justice as being 'imbued with the idea of dispassionate justice' (Stern 55) as if this were a hindrance in the

administration of the judicial process. This form of reasoning once again represents the problem of the passionate and emotional line of argument that the civil rights issue entailed.

The reader receives an impression from Stern's account which is characterised by a black and white conception of what seem to be almost adversary forces. The title *Calculating Visions* captures this paradox which has a true core yet is completely exaggerated. Sorensen noted on the office of the Presidency that 'it requires, not calculation, but judgement' (Sorensen Decision 10), an accurate observation which draws a distinct line between Stern's conception of the schemer and a political leader who has to consider differing forces within the nation's social fabric.

9.3 Nick Bryant's *The Bystander* (2006)

Journalist Nick Bryant has written a recent and highly critical account of Kennedy and civil rights which is pejoratively titled *The Bystander*. His chapter on legislative issues, 'Executive Inaction', clearly reveals his point of view. He claims that Kennedy could have done more for civil rights already in the early years of the administration, had he only seized the chances. By deciding to 'adopt a policy of inaction' (Bryant 11) due to his fear of negative reactions from the South and the Democratic Party, the President failed to calm down the racial chaos in its early stages. With regard to the president publicly announcing that he would not seek civil rights legislation straight away, Bryant speaks of a 'monumental tactical blunder' (Bryant 206) and argues that Kennedy would at least have had the opportunity to bargain for the southern senators' approval of other parts of his legislative program. Instead, his behaviour gave Southern democrats the victory they needed to further cling to their political views (cf. Bryant 206 – 207). Because Southerners sensed that Kennedy was not entirely

opposing them and was not using enough force to contradict them, they were encouraged to adhere to their usual policies. According to Bryant, they would not have had the courage to openly revolt against the administration if there had been a clear commitment and more forceful stand on part of the President (cf. Bryant 467).

As regards the fears over a loss of voters on both sides, which was one of the most substantial concerns about a strong civil rights stand, Bryant claims that such an assumption was ungrounded. While Kennedy lost many voters in the South, he won more than twice as much from the African American community (cf. Bryant 454), who held him in high esteem until his violent death in 1963 and thereafter: at Kennedy's funeral, a third of the mourners were African Americans (cf. Bryant 458). In 1964, a booklet entitled *The Kennedy Years and the Negro: A Photographic Record* (cf. Archival Source #13) was published, a celebration of the President's and the Attorney General's work in the area of civil rights through the tool which the Kennedys had made use of excessively to create their image: photography. The Kennedy fascination did not cease, nor did it decline among the African American community after the President's death. Furthermore, Bryant dismisses the common notion that a cautious approach was politically necessary because of congressional matters: 'The subsequent justifications put forward on Kennedy's behalf do not stand up in the face of historical evidence' (Bryant 194). According to Bryant, the situation was by no means as obstructionist as it is generally portrayed; neither in Congress nor in the Southern states. The author cites numerous instances where Kennedy apparently tried to negotiate with Southern politicians to make deals to his advantage and points out that most of these measures failed. As Kennedy's legislative program had been blocked by Congress in several other areas, these fruitless efforts indicated that the strategy of trying to appeal to Southerners politically was bound to fail and not rewarding in any way, at any time (cf. Bryant 295).

By contrast, despite the fact that there had always been criticism from Civil Rights Leaders during Kennedy's term, the majority of the African American population approved of his policies, which is documented in several

opinion polls. Therefore, Bryant argues, Kennedy was ‘sincerely proud of his administration’s progress in the area of civil rights’ (Bryant 291), as his popularity did not suffer and he knew how to pull the public relation strings to his advantage. Subsequently, there was no urgent reason for the President to introduce legislation or undertake other bold action of any kind (cf. Bryant 291 – 294). Kennedy proved successful in maintaining this stable position for the first two years of his term, and being a skilled orator with the ability to plan strategic moves to bring people into his camp, he naturally tried to avoid confrontation (cf. Bryant 467). Bryant attributes this success to President Kennedy’s ‘reliance on opinion polls’ which ultimately ‘proved to be myopic’ (Bryant 467).

Interestingly, although he is aware of the token nature of symbolism, Bryant gives credit to President Kennedy for appointing African Americans to important positions within the government, as well as for including them in White House events. By creating a previously denied atmosphere of ‘access and status’ (Bryant 293) for African Americans, the President was able to implement a very successful strategy of publicity work. A few months after the new administration took office, pollster Lou Harris stated that ‘there are strong hints that the public is judging the President for his style, manner and approach rather than on the specifics he is proposing or acting upon’ (Bryant 223). Yet even for Bryant, the efforts of the President were ‘laudable’ (Bryant 219) and although he criticises that there had been little personal contact, he essentially is of the same opinion as Harris Wofford who claims that such measures were necessary ‘to shock and reshape the thought patterns’ (Wofford 138). Many little step-by-step efforts may have appeared ‘trivial’ at first, but ‘they marked an unmistakable break with the past’ (Bryant 240). The White House meetings with labor leaders, business men and representatives of other key areas in public life find Bryant’s approval as well: ‘they were not mere exercises in public relations; rather, they were carefully considered efforts at long-term social and economic reengineering’ (Bryant 416). Furthermore, Bryant credits the President’s for his famous TV address in June 1963 for the ‘rare passion’ and ‘stark language’ (Bryant 423) he used. The most significant aspect about the speech for Bryant is the fact that there was no

apparent political reason for this sudden move, as it is documented that the President very abruptly decided to go on air on this very day, against the recommendations of most of his advisors:

Perhaps he felt emboldened by the fact that his administration had finally *managed* a crisis rather than merely reacted to it [...] Notably, he made the decision under no duress – the immediate crisis had been averted (Bryant 421).

As concerns personality, Bryant finds that there exist great differences in character between the Kennedy brothers. Bryant accuses Kennedy of being a ‘cynical political operator’ (Bryant 311) guided by ‘political considerations’ (Bryant 332) such as gaining the votes of specific target groups by tactical moves. Nevertheless, he acknowledges that the President did undergo a process of education in the field of civil rights, especially in view of growing crises across the nation. The aftermath of the Mississippi crisis for example represented ‘an important intellectual step for President Kennedy’ (Bryant 379), as he apparently began to reflect his understanding of history and was willing to change his views. More importantly, his reaction to the crisis in Birmingham is evidence of ‘growing attentiveness’ and ‘mounting concern’ (Bryant 385). Throughout his political career, Kennedy had always been sympathetic to the cause of racial equality, ‘but he constantly made excuses for failing to push for it politically’ (Bryant 469). However Bryant perceives a clear development in that Kennedy ‘had grown in office’ (Bryant 468) and greatly improved his knowledge on the issue. He nevertheless claims that despite this constant learning process, the civil rights issue in Kennedy’s mind was always embedded in international structures and the nation’s reputation abroad (Bryant 472). Bryant also puts the common assumption straight that Kennedy tended to ignore civil rights on the whole because he did not seek legislation. The author points out that in Kennedy’s judgement other measures such as a tax cut were ‘inextricably linked’ (Bryant 413) to civil rights and would therefore be beneficial to the cause in almost the same manner. What Bryant criticises most harshly is Kennedy’s tendency to back

off at the slightest sign of controversy which he perceives as an indication of his 'strong preference for short-term fixes' (Bryant 222). While the President did clearly grasp the issue and personally was a supporter of equal rights, his focus lay on strategically logical moves. This pragmatism made him reluctant in taking to heart the advice of more passionate civil rights fighters such as Harris Wofford because he had always had the tendency to act 'in accordance with the politics of a particular moment' (Bryant 226).

Bryant not only assumes that Robert Kennedy had 'a fiery core that his brother lacked' (Bryant 244), a view commonly held by many authors, he even argues that this understanding for the civil rights issue had been present from a very early stage in Kennedy's life. While Kennedy's sentence 'I wouldn't say I stayed awake nights worrying about civil rights before I became Attorney General' is commonly quoted to illustrate his learning process and lack of involvement in the early stages, Bryant interestingly is of the opinion that he only 'downplayed his early commitment to civil rights' (Bryant 244). He describes him as 'a man of much firmer conviction and sterner resolve than his brother' (Bryant 428) and ultimately someone who was much more emotionally committed to the cause of civil rights: 'Ultimately, RFK outstripped his brother in his dedication to the cause of black equality' (Bryant 470). An interesting characteristic Bryant observes about Robert Kennedy's handling of civil rights is that although the Department of Justice had taken brave and courageous action on many fronts such as voting rights suits, school desegregation or access to public facilities, the Attorney General avoided making equally forceful statements on the issues and instead 'was determined to downplay its significance' (Bryant 253), adhering to a policy of purely judicious explanations with only timid moral implications. This he derives from the fact that the Attorney General was an 'extremely disciplined politician' (Bryant 471) who was very loyal to his brother and therefore stuck to a united course of action. This is why, in many cases, Robert Kennedy 'had ultimately done little more than set out – and justify – the administration's minimalist doctrine' (Bryant 260). Those contradicting forces at work presumably

lead to what Bryant terms the ‘bewildering ambivalence’ (Bryant 282) in Robert Kennedy’s behaviour.

The difference in character between the Kennedy brothers has predominantly been conceived in the way Bryant describes it: the Attorney General is portrayed as a passionate and active lawyer who had the Department of Justice under his command, while his brother was predominantly cautious and indifferent to civil rights. Interestingly, this categorisation which mainly reflects a scholarly view has been challenged by another interpretation which demonstrates that Movement Leaders perceived Robert Kennedy as ‘arrogant and dismissive’ while they had the impression that the President ‘listened attentively’ and ‘absolutely charmed’ them (Hilty 293). Therefore, it is by no means clear where showmanship ended and true commitment began.

More than once, Kennedy’s advisors requested that he make more forceful public statements on civil rights, yet he repeatedly turned them down. Hence Bryant claims that ‘he wholly failed to appreciate the incalculable power of presidential persuasion, especially in the television age’ (Bryant 410) which sounds somewhat ironic considering that John F. Kennedy was the first ‘media’ President who made extensive use of the new tools of journalism in other respects. When addressing the nation on civil rights, Kennedy took care to focus on ‘procedural questions: the law, negotiation’ (Bryant 323). Yet even after sending legislation to Congress, Kennedy’s behaviour remained ‘manifestly inconsistent’ (Bryant 442). Bryant’s opinion on public statements reflects Lyndon B. Johnson’s attitude in that he claims that a moral issue had better been addressed because his courage to speak out against segregation would have consolidated the President’s authority and would have earned him respect in the Southern states (cf. Archival Source #14).

As concerns civil rights legislation, Bryant states that ‘there was strong likelihood it would become law before the 1964 election [...]’ (Bryant 458) and that ‘had Kennedy lived, he would almost certainly have secured passage of the 1964 Civil Rights Act’ (Bryant 462). Bryant cites Lyndon Johnson’s ‘landslide victory’ in the following election as proof that a strong civil rights stand did not

mean a loss of votes. This argument, however, is hardly convincing, as Johnson's victory has to be seen in context with Kennedy's death; Bryant himself notes that Johnson was more successful on the civil rights front because he knew how to make use of President Kennedy's tragic death to the advantage of the cause (cf. Bryant 463). Thus, it could be argued that the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Voting Rights Act of 1965 were clearly Kennedy's achievements, with Johnson serving as the man who was forced to accept their inheritance:

One hundred years after President Lincoln's
Emancipation Proclamation, President Kennedy
submitted the most comprehensive civil rights
legislation since 1875 (...) the progress made, even if
only measured in words and attitudes, cannot fail to
astound (Glyne 120).

Regardless of whether the promises were in fact implemented or not, his rhetorical abilities alone caused considerable enthusiasm among his supporters. As no politician before him had dared to publicly promote racial equality in this way, it was a new development. On part of the Movement, however, there were considerably more concerns about whether legislation of this kind would have passed had Kennedy lived. Ralph Abernathy, a civil rights activist and close friend of Martin Luther King, wrote in 1989 that 'It may be unpopular to say so, but I don't believe under President Kennedy we would have gotten either' (Abernathy 322).

Bryant has to be given credit for pointing out that the critical situations did by no means stop with the introduction of civil rights legislation. While other authors have made it seem as if Johnson had been the hero who had led the nation to a triumphant termination of racial tumults, Bryant notes that 'in the years after Kennedy's death, there was an explosion of racial violence in the streets of the country's worst black slums' (Bryant 466). Furthermore, even the praised Civil Rights Act of 1964 still found its critics, as was to be expected (Matusow 95). Nevertheless, Lyndon B. Johnson's achievements in this area are commonly viewed with greater approval than Kennedy's (Matusow 180). Kenneth O'Reilly

in a discussion about the civil rights endeavours of American Presidents from Washington to Clinton claims that the only Presidents who had fundamentally stimulated the progress of African Americans were Lincoln and Johnson. The subchapter headings are self-explanatory, with Kennedy as the ‘Tough Guy’ followed by the ‘Brave Knight’ Johnson. By contrast, Sorensen loyally refers to the Civil Rights Act as ‘The Kennedy Civil Rights Bill’ (Sorensen 496).

Bryant’s paramount argument for his negative judgement of the administration’s civil rights course is that Kennedy could have moved faster without great turbulence or adjustment on any sides in fields of school integration, employment, housing and stronger moral leadership. Significantly, Bryant fundamentally differs from the other critical authors in that his conclusion contains several specific suggestions on how Kennedy could have improved his civil rights programme. He suggests that the housing order could have been issued earlier, the CEEO could have acted more active and that even more voting rights suits could have been initiated by the Justice Department. One of the greatest problems he conceives is the ‘failure to design a thought-out legislative strategy’ (Bryant 305). With Kennedy’s support on these levels, Bryant argues, the Movement would have stayed more peaceful and would not have looked for ways to deliberately provoke violence. Crises such as Birmingham, Ole Miss or the Freedom Riders⁹ could have been avoided. While this would of course not have provided an instant solution, it would certainly have had a ‘calming effect’ and would have led to ‘sincere collaboration’ between the administration and the Movement (Bryant 465).

He claims that Kennedy by his approach of a strictly judicious line made it clear to the South that segregation could go on as long as ‘public order was maintained’ (Bryant 276). Thus, influential politicians like Governor George Wallace, Governor Ross Barnett and police chief Bull Connor did perceive that

⁹ Cf. Lowery’s *Encyclopedia of African American Civil Rights* for details on these key events of the Movement. In Birmingham, demonstrators were faced with fierce police violence. Ole Miss refers to the troublesome enrolment of the first African American student James Meredith at the University of Mississippi. The Freedom Riders attempted to desegregate the public transportation system in the South. All of these events attracted worldwide attention, as they involved violence and riots to an extent which forced President Kennedy to intervene with military force.

Kennedy was torn between two sides and sensed that they could oppose him openly. James Meredith, the first African American to study at the University of Mississippi, made three attempts to enter before Kennedy took more forceful action (cf. Bryant 355). This behaviour consequently led to some of the most violent racial crises in the United States in the early 60s. Bryant is convinced that they could all have been prevented, had the Kennedy brother taken a firmer stand. Especially at the first sign of a violation of presidential orders, stricter punishment would have been appropriate, as it 'would have sent an unmistakable signal to diehard segregationists' (Bryant 355). He views the step-by-step negotiations of Kennedy in those crises, something which has commonly been approved and viewed as an effort to avoid unpleasant clashes with the South as something which ultimately constituted a set-back for the administration's civil rights handling (cf. Bryant 356). Bryant claims that national support throughout the population would have backed more vigorous action on part of Kennedy and cites numerous polls to prove his stance. Another bitter side effect was the mounting radical development on part of the movement, a frustrated reaction to constant delays and unfulfilled promises (cf. Bryant 283).

Bryant's portrayal of the administration's civil rights handling clearly uncovers John F. Kennedy's weaknesses, yet despite the author opposing the President's approach he depicts Kennedy's character in a way which includes both sides' standpoints and makes it easy for the reader to retrace the motives for his behaviour. Furthermore, while Bryant voices substantial criticism, he also makes an effort to suggest alternative courses of action. He concludes that the civil rights issue revealed both Kennedy's strengths as well as his weaker points (cf. Bryant 469). While he had been given a 'unique opportunity' to indulge into forceful civil rights action, he did not accept this position and ultimately intervened too late: 'For far too long, Kennedy had remained a bystander' (Bryant 473).

10 Historical Writing and Morality

After having discussed the critical books about the Kennedys' civil rights policy, the circle ultimately closes. Pursuing the thoughts on reason and passion which have been discussed in chapter three, the role of historical writing and morality will be analysed. In the books discussed in previous chapters, an astounding range of criticism that is commonly cited throughout historical writings concerns moral and often very personal aspects with regard to Kennedy's inner life. Critical writers have regularly accused him of lacking thorough historical knowledge on the subject, of not being personally committed and of not having socialised with African Americans. Especially the last example which has been cited by Niven is completely unfounded in the assessment of Kennedy's achievements.

In an attempt to disprove this criticism, Maldava E. Glyne has set out to reveal President Kennedy's true intentions and feelings about the Movement by analysing his speeches, telephone conversations and statements at press conferences in depth, concluding that Kennedy was in fact highly committed to civil rights. She quotes various messages, comments on them and in this way tries to reveal the meaning behind his words, which is a bold yet questionable approach. In fact, mere description bears the risk of getting stuck on the surface of events instead of tackling the task of a deeper analysis. Furthermore, one cannot help but think that the material Glyne chose as the foundation of her research is probably the least representative. Presidential speeches and press conferences are commonly bursting with empty phrases and stereotypical expressions which have always been an essential part of the political stage. Glyne must surely have been aware that especially John F. Kennedy knew how to operate the rhetorical machinery to his advantage. While speeches of this kind represent an immensely unreliable basis for analysis, the historian would rather do well to rely on evidence such as legislation and official hard-fact documents. Again, research in the way Glyne has conducted is a matter of interpretation and an attempt to take on the impossible task of evaluating Kennedy's intentions. In the same way as

unnecessary assumptions about Kennedy's personal opinion about the issue, it does not contribute anything meaningful to the discussion of facts. Samuel Lubell correctly observes that 'he [Kennedy] acted now because of principles in which he believed, now to pursue political advantage, now because events pushed him; ordinarily on all of those accounts' (Lubell 102).

Historians also criticise that there often were reprehensible party political motives behind both President Kennedy's endeavours and the delays, when he should have acted on the basis of a moral foundation. Interestingly, this point is often cited even in view of actions which undoubtedly had a positive impact on the advancement of African Americans, thus leading to the redundant question whether or not those measures came 'from the heart'. To cite one of those arguments, it has often been said that the voter registration efforts of the administration, which were supposed to empower African Americans and led to desegregation in other areas, were not 'sincere' in that the President only wanted to prevent further tumultuous riots on the streets. Apart from the fact that such a motivation would certainly not be the worst reason to act, Kennedy did in fact take care to avert upheavals that would lead to international embarrassment. In view of this criticism, Wofford avers that 'the strategy was not suddenly discovered or imposed by the Kennedys' and that it was a concept that had always appealed to many Civil Rights Leaders. In fact, Martin Luther King expressed his sympathy for such a course of action and explicitly asked the administration for support in the voting rights campaigns of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, as they lacked sufficient funds to organise and educate their followers (cf. Archival Source #15). In the same line as Wofford, acknowledging the positive aspect of Kennedy's harshly criticised actions, Harold Fleming remarks that

Any dispassionate analysis must credit the Kennedy and Johnson administrations with an impressive performance in the enforcement of federal court orders. But the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s is not inclined toward dispassionate analysis (Fleming 387).

It is presumptuous to speak of a lack of emotional or moral involvement on Kennedy's part; Civil Rights Leaders may do so to advertise their cause, but the historian's task, however informal his account may be, is first and foremost to focus on actions and facts and not on personal attitudes. Political psychologist James H. Kuklinski remarks on the nature of moral versus pragmatic judgement:

In a democratic society, reasonable decisions are preferable to unreasonable ones; considered thought leads to the former, emotions to the latter [...] citizens are to approach the subject of politics with temperate consideration and objective analysis, that is, to use their heads when making judgements about public affairs (Etzioni, *Rule* 98).

If this applies to the citizens of a nation, it surely must be the task of the historian to render an equally objective discussion of political events. He has to consider that every politician is the victim of the contemporary social situation surrounding him and that he has to act according to the manoeuvring room he has been provided with. Indeed, there is ample evidence that Kennedy tried to select alternative ways which would provide him with the opportunity to reduce his dependence on Congress and other political institutions. When the President met with Civil Rights Leaders in the White House, there was a strong willingness on both sides to produce a viable outcome. Nevertheless, the negotiations were often characterised by massive misunderstandings which derived neither from indifference on part of Kennedy nor from reluctance to cooperate on part of the Movement. One must credit Kennedy with the fact that he did not flatter the Movement and directly confronted civil rights workers with the 'political realities they faced' (Koenig, "Social Justice" 171). Ralph Abernathy recalls that at one meeting the leaders were informed by the President that their proposals 'just didn't fit into his agenda. He told us so quite frankly' (Abernathy 236). Ultimately, many of those meetings left both sides in a state of confusion and frustration about the lines of argument they had to face. It was exactly this basic difference in approach which led many authors to categorise workers on the civil

rights front as downright moral crusaders, whereas Kennedy is commonly perceived as overly cautious, pragmatic and insensitive (cf. Parmet 268).

While the political correctness of the modern age fools us into thinking that there exist the same priorities on some levels for everyone, reality proves to be a constant struggle of differing opinions, as goes to show even in the case of civil rights. Therefore, the morality of an issue does not necessarily heighten its place in the ranking of the issues a nation faces. As the central demand of the Civil Rights Movement was social change and in view of the fact that there was as violent opposition in Southern states, as evidenced in numerous crises in Alabama and Mississippi, it can be assumed that executive action and law enforcement were an adequate strategy to evoke social change, for reason apparently was not enough to change a custom in the South which had developed for centuries. The Civil Rights Movement in its attempt to change the overall social structure by itself would probably not have succeeded if Kennedy had been like Eisenhower on the civil rights front. Evidently, guidance in the form of legal and political stability is an indispensable tool of democratic societies to master such crises. Furthermore, what were the White House meetings with business men, lawyers and other groups other than a moral approach? The memoranda that President Kennedy was given for preparation for those meetings by special counsel Lee C. White clearly demonstrate sensitivity for the moral dimension. Apart from a section entitled 'what can these people do', offering suggestions for the participants' own initiatives for helping to advance equal rights, the issues discussed in these meetings constituted realistic proposals for implementing change (cf. Archival Source #16).

As concerns the reproach that the President did fail to speak out for civil rights more forcefully, John F. Kennedy's civil rights actions as a whole clearly indicate that the lack of public statements and 'verbal enforcement' were part of a deliberate decision not to risk even more racial wars in the Southern states than there already were. Brauer gives credit to the President in view of the fact that 'to the end, he neither abandoned nor excoriated the white South' (Brauer 317). While critics claim that this approach was wrong in the case of a moral issue, it has to be

noted, as Brauer correctly implies, that in neither situation would it be advisable to shut out one side of a conflict, however one may personally think about it. As demonstrations had already led to violent deaths and injuries, one can hardly be resentful of an attempt to calm down those riots while at the same time conducting largely unpublicised conversations which would bring about social change in a more moderate manner. Moreover, as the President of the United States, he would have had to take the blame for eventual failure if a public statement had eventually backfired.

The moral line of argument, while it mostly represents the historians' personal assumptions, is immensely misleading for the reader if he takes the written evidence as a fact. In studying the wealth of secondary literature on the subject, the above mentioned diverging opinions surface in ludicrous extremes, with only few authors such as Wofford resisting the temptation to present a fairly one-sided point of view. Depending on which accounts are being read, the reader will conclude whatever is imposed on him by the author's selection of facts and accordingly form an image of the President either as an active moral leader of the nation or as a cautious and passive political schemer. It seems immensely inappropriate to accuse Kennedy of a lack of personal commitment; he apparently *chose* not to include a public display of emotional involvement in his strategy. Apart from the questionable validity of such claims, they have produced confusing distortions in this field of study, failing to contribute to the production of historical evidence. Pierre Bourdieu remarks on the analysis of political action:

[...] political reform strategies and their analyses
always have to consider both levels of affect: for one
thing, the internal power structure of the political field,
for another thing, the over-all status hierarchy
embedded in society (my transl., Bourdieu qtd. in
Bonacker 352 – 353).

With this statement, Bourdieu provides an explanation as to why representation is contradictory, namely the often limited perspectives that authors use to support their contention. Civil rights defenders tend to speak of the conflict

as a moral issue, as did President Kennedy in his speeches out of the need for verbal conciliation. White House staff members, on the contrary, have argued on the basis of the political field and its power structure, pointing out legislative limitations such as the unwillingness of Congress or problems in federal protection. Considering the status hierarchy of society, it is a fact that democratic societies rely on the established rules of law and order and that the citizens of a nation tend to approve of this system and its policies. It certainly sounds philosophical to assume that 'law is fetter, right is freedom; and they differ like contraries' (Cairns 254). Yet in an age where political institutions are a dominant feature of social life, such reflections appear purely theoretical and bear little relation to the actual situation. It is indisputable that in modern societies, there exists a social contract upon which people have agreed; a contract which provides for an authority that will regulate social life.

A crucial problem of the moral line of argument is the assumption that people will chose the 'right' path automatically and independently from governmental and political institutions. Burke Marshall has repeatedly pointed to the danger of potential abuse which could result from modifications of existing laws. While the participation of societal sub-units can assist those in power to effect change, it may also lead to an overload of the political system which would inevitably lead to a redefinition of the power structure and hence to an impairment of 'notions which have worked, and worked well, in other contexts' (Marshall 50).

In historical writing, the moral dimension of any dispute or war mostly contains a deeper meaning we seek to make sense of. Historical events teach us a lesson and deserve in-depth analysis, yet the task of the historian is first and foremost to render the facts in an exhaustive and objective manner in order to leave an interpretation of the incident to the reader. Indeed, for many authors, 'history is the open bible [...] our function is to teach people to read it and to reflect upon it for themselves.' (Walsh 108). The books which have been discussed in this thesis clearly reveal the weakness of moral judgement in historical writing, as it has the effect of a distorting mirror, subsequently

conveying obscured representations. Maldava E. Glyne is one of the few critics who has correctly observed that especially in the area of civil rights ‘there is a need for a dispassionate study’ (Glyne 24).

11 Conclusion

Former Kennedy counselor Theodore C. Sorensen once remarked about the President's understanding of the reconstruction era that he arrived at the conclusion that 'history depends on who writes it' (Sorensen 204). It is precisely this realisation which characterises the discourse on the administration's civil rights achievements as well. The aim of this thesis was to uncover the differing representations of this episode of American history.

The nine books chosen for analysis have served as puzzle pieces in establishing clarity about the nature of the whole picture. As most of the literature on which this thesis builds is not available in Austria, a research trip to the renowned John F. Kennedy Library in Boston, Massachusetts, proved to be of utmost significance for the realisation of the project. The comprehensive archives of the library harbour excellent primary sources such as memoranda, letters and official documents which greatly assisted in the development of arguments. While the critical discussion of secondary literature is certainly the cornerstone of this project, the access to primary documents created a deeper understanding of the issue. In addition, the Mugar Library, a branch of the Boston University Libraries, provided rare texts on historical background and a broad range of sociological books. This research trip proved to be highly relevant, yet it also confirmed the expectation that while large amounts of literature on either the Kennedys *or* the Civil Rights Movement were available, literature devoted exclusively to both aspects was indeed scarce, especially if compared to the wealth of material available on foreign policy issues during Kennedy's term.

In analysing the discourse on the Kennedy brothers and civil rights, several tendencies can be observed. Harry Golden and Carl M. Brauer have produced thorough pro-Kennedy accounts. Within the category of former associates of the administration, Theodore C. Sorensen and Arthur M. Schlesinger have contributed to, or indeed triggered the writings on the Kennedy myth in order to create a thoroughly positive image of the President. Both praise Kennedy for his readiness to engage in dialogue both with civil rights activists and with the public through

skilful use of the media. Sorensen's most extensive use of dramatic language bears witness to his abilities as a speech writer who is well capable of creating mythological elements in his narrative. Other authors who were more specifically involved in the area of civil rights through their profession chose a more distinct focus. Harris Wofford as a staunch civil rights advocate and at the same time a loyal Kennedy advisor created a rather balanced account and a critical reflection of what he experienced first-hand during his days in the White House. By contrast, Burke Marshall attempted to represent the Justice Department's position. Both authors decidedly attempt to raise awareness for the grey areas of the conflict, not only in the legal sphere but also in the 'right' way to proceed and to act. Wofford, along with Bryant, makes an effort to represent all the arguments of both sides in their totality, thus creating a more nuanced account. Finally, critical authors predominantly construct their narrative around inflexible categories. David Niven argues that a moral compromise does not exist and clings to the notion of clear boundaries between right and wrong. In the same way, Stern delivers a black-and-white portrayal in drawing the line between idealists and schemers. Their historical accounts reflect the very essence of a characteristic of fictional writing in that they create a world without nuances which provides the reader with a predefined categorisation of good and bad. Evidently, historical writing does bear certain similarities to fiction. Ultimately, those classifications culminate in the division between moral and pragmatic argumentation which has been analysed in detail.

An interesting aspect in the discourse about Kennedy and civil rights is that a legal and factual approach such as Marshall's can rarely be found, whereas the moral aspect and the fundamental rightfulness of the Movement are dominating elements in the reconstruction of past events. Another essential aspect in historical writing about the Kennedy brothers is the distinction between politics and personality. The cultivation of their image made the Kennedys more famous for the gossip than for policy making, whereby it is almost impossible to separate the two aspects. The Kennedy family has become a brand and a figure of popular culture, which is reflected in many so-called 'historical' books that focus on the myth rather than political achievements. When approaching the past through texts, it is

therefore significant to keep in mind the influence of reputation, morality and a depiction of what we think of as reality. American journalist Harry S. Ashmore remarks on Kennedy's commitment to civil rights: 'I think Jack Kennedy has been unfairly criticised in that regard by many of the revisionists [...] Hindsight doesn't alter the reality he faced' (Ashmore 370). Reality is obscured by the author's priorities and his selection of source material; consequently, what he produces in writing is characterised not only by his style and wording but also by what these elements reflect about the author's inevitable interpretation of an objective truth which is unknown. In this way, the reader who is not aware of such nuances is forced to accept rather one-sided viewpoints. In order to make sense of the past, historical narratives must be read carefully and need to be balanced against other accounts. This approach of close reading will not only encourage a discussion on relevant questions of classification and assessment which characterise the insight into present procedures, it also confirms the incontrovertible truth that 'we all see different pasts' (Wallerstein 1).

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13 Appendix: Chronology of events 1960 – 1963

Information taken from www.jfklibrary.org

Jan 2, 1960	JFK announces his candidacy for President
May 6, 1960	President Eisenhower signs Civil Rights Act of 1960
Oct 19, 1960	Martin Luther King arrested in Atlanta during demonstrations, JFK calls Coretta King
Nov 8, 1960	JFK elected 35 th President of the United States
Dec 5, 1960	Supreme Court bans discrimination in interstate bus terminals
May 14, 1961	Freedom Riders attacked and bus burned in Anniston, Alabama
May 29, 1961	RFK succeeds in desegregating interstate travel
Jun 1961	Justice Department's Voter Education Project starts
Nov 29 – Dec 2, 1961	Freedom Riders attacked in McComb, Mississippi
Jan 25, 1962	Voting rights legislation is introduced in Congress
May 15, 1962	Administration's first civil rights bill defeated in Senate
Aug 28, 1962	Justice Department files voting rights suits
Sep 30 – Oct 1, 1962	JFK sends federal troops to support James Meredith's effort to be admitted as the first African American student at the University of Mississippi
Nov 20, 1962	JFK bars discrimination in federally financed housing
Feb 28, 1963	JFK sends his first special message on civil rights to Congress
May 3, 1963	Birmingham police chief Bull Connor uses police dogs and fire hoses to break up civil rights demonstrations
Jun 11, 1963	Governor George Wallace attempts to block the schoolhouse door to prevent two African American students from enrolment at the University of Alabama. JFK delivers his most famous civil rights speech.
Jun 19, 1963	JFK sends his proposed Civil Rights Act to Congress
Aug 28, 1963	March on Washington takes place
Jul 2, 1964	President Johnson signs Civil Rights Act of 1964

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15 Abstract

Diese Diplomarbeit beschäftigt sich mit der Erörterung des Diskurses über John und Robert F. Kennedy und die Bürgerrechtsbewegung im Zeitraum von 1960 bis 1963. Die widersprüchlichen Darstellungen dieses Kapitels in der Geschichte der Vereinigten Staaten werden ausführlich analysiert, wobei das Image der Kennedys als amerikanische Helden von den gewählten Autoren entweder unterstützt oder verworfen wird. Aus diesem Diskurs eröffnen sich dem Leser grundsätzlich unterschiedliche und oft verzerrte Perspektiven der Geschichte, die im Detail untersucht werden. Als kulturwissenschaftlicher Rahmen der Arbeit fungiert ein „close reading“ einer Reihe repräsentativer Texte, was in Folge zu einer Analyse der Dimensionen von moralischer und pragmatisch-logischer Argumentation in diesen historischen Berichten führt. Weiters spielen vor allem sozialer Wandel, der Ansatz des „incrementalism“ sowie Konzepte von Macht und Kommunikation eine Schlüsselrolle im Zugang zu den ausgewählten Primärtexten. Hierbei sind vor allem die Ansätze des Soziologen Amitai Etzioni vorrangig, dessen Konzepte zu genannten Begriffen eine detaillierte Besprechung der Literatur ermöglichen.

Im Laufe der Arbeit werden vier spezifische Gruppierungen von Autoren diskutiert, die ein breites Spektrum an Ansichten von großem Lob bis hin zu scharfer Kritik verkörpern. Harry Golden (*Mr Kennedy and the Negroes*, 1964) und Carl M. Brauer (*John F. Kennedy and the Second Reconstruction*, 1977) vertreten einen eindeutig positiven Standpunkt. In der Kategorie von entschiedenen Verfechtern der Bürgerrechtspolitik der Kennedys ranken sich die Bücher der ehemaligen Berater Theodore C. Sorensen (*Kennedy*, 1964) und Arthur M. Schlesinger (*A Thousand Days*, 1965) um den Kennedy-Mythos. Zwei andere Mitarbeiter der Kennedy Brüder wiederum wählen einen grundsätzlich anderen Zugang. Harris Woffords *Of Kennedys and Kings* (1980) liefert einen ausgewogenen Bericht seiner Zeit als Berater im Weißen Haus ohne ein eindeutiges Urteil zu fällen. Burke Marshall, der am Justizministerium tätig war, beschreibt seine Ansichten von einem vorrangig juristischen Blickpunkt in seinem

Buch *Federalism and Civil Rights* (1964), in dem er die Möglichkeiten und Einschränkungen des Handlungsspielraumes des Präsidenten und des Generalstaatsanwaltes in Krisensituationen erörtert. Die letzte Kategorie von Büchern widmet sich einer dezidiert kritischen Auseinandersetzung mit dem Thema. David Nivens *The Politics of Injustice* (2003) ist aufgrund der verwendeten Sprache und der Argumentationsweise sicherlich die negativste Darstellung. Mark Stern schafft in *Calculating Visions* (1992) eine deutliche Kategorisierung von den Kennedys versus der Bürgerrechtsbewegung als einander entgegen gesetzte Kontrastpunkte. In dem aktuellsten Buch *The Bystander* (2006) spekuliert Nick Bryant offen über die Hintergründe der Ereignisse und fällt letztlich ein skeptisches Urteil.

Die kulturwissenschaftliche Analyse der Meinungsvielfalt in den genannten Texten wirft Fragen über die Natur von historischen Schilderungen auf und führt zu einer Debatte über Moral und Logik als schriftstellerische Zugänge, wobei neben der Erörterung des soziokulturellen Hintergrunds eine American Studies Perspektive angewendet wird, welche den widersprüchlichen Diskurs über die Bürgerrechtspolitik der Kennedys zu entwirren und zu erklären versucht.

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