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**Presidential Humor - John Fitzgerald
Kennedy II**

Lead: After gaining the White House, Jack Kennedy's wit helped win over a deeply divided electorate still skeptical about his qualifications for high office.

Intro.: *A Moment in Time* with Dan Roberts.

Content: Kennedy used humor as a weapon against his opponents and as a means of diffusing uncomfortable issues about himself. One of the most important aspects of this campaign was his calculated seduction of the

press, not newspaper or television management, but working reporters whom he cultivated diligently. As a former reporter himself, he knew the habits and needs of journalists, their ever-present deadlines and their habit of using humor to deal with the often seamy and depressing reality of the world they had to cover. Kennedy's use of the press was nowhere better demonstrated than at regular live Presidential press conferences. There, in a rehearsed, orchestrated fashion, the elegant Kennedy was on display to his best advantage.

When he was criticized for appointing brother Bobby as Attorney General, he handled the charges of nepotism and inexperience with a joke.

He said, "I see nothing wrong with giving him a little legal experience before he goes out into private practice." A reporter once said, "The Republican National Committee recently adopted a resolution saying you were pretty much of a failure. How do you feel about that?" The President said, "I assume it passed unanimously."

At one of the annual Gridiron Dinners given by the Washington Press Corps, he singled out Sarah McClendon, a reporter who was always something of an irritant, "I saw my wife's picture watching a snake charmer in India. As soon as I learn Sarah McClendon's favorite tune, I'm going to playing it." Even the sainted

Dwight Eisenhower was not immune to the occasional Kennedy jab. Once he made fun of Ike's often intentionally confusing explanations. At one of the Gridiron Dinners in the 1950s Kennedy referred to Ike's explanation of the current recession, "As I interpret the President, we're now at the end of the beginning of the upturn of the downturn. Every bright spot the White House finds in the economy is like the policeman bending over the body in the alley who says cheerfully, 'Two of his wounds are fatal -- but this other one's not so bad.'

At the University of Richmond, this is Dan Roberts.

Resources

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