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Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Reeves, Thomas C.
A question of character : a life of John F. Kennedy / by Thomas C. Reeves.
p. cm.
Originally published: New York: Free Press, 1991.

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Editorial Reviews

From Publishers Weekly

This riveting biography by a University of Wisconsin history professor explores John Kennedy's character, assesses its influence on his presidential decisionmaking and brings into focus the discrepancy between the Camelot image and the man himself. Reeves reveals how indifferent Kennedy was to the moral and legal objections to the Bay of Pigs invasion, the overthrow of the Diem regime in South Vietnam, and plans for the assassination of Fidel Castro. There is a wealth of new material here concerning JFK's often precarious health, his relationship with his wife, his flagrant philandering. Reeves concludes that Kennedy abused his high position for personal self-gratification, that his reckless liaisons with women and mobsters were "irresponsible, dangerous, and demeaning to the office of chief executive." By the author of *The Life and Times of Joe McCarthy*, this is a solidly researched look at John Kennedy's morals or his lack thereof. History Book Club main selection.
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Review

"Readers interested in a serious revisionist examination of Kennedy's life and record should look at ***A Question of Character***, . . . a book that, judging by Hersh's 'Chapter Notes,' seems not to have come to his attention. If it had, perhaps we would have been spared *The Dark Side of Camelot*."

? **Jonathan Yardley**, in his *Washington Post* review of Seymour Hersh's *The Dark Side of Camelot*.

"The John Kennedy who emerges from these pages was not a man of good moral character. He was reared not to be good but to win."

? **Los Angeles Times**

"It is the Marilyn Monroe chapter that speaks the loudest in this book of the incredible hubris of Jack and Bobby Kennedy. You have to read it to believe it."

? **Liz Smith** -- Review -- This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

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ISBN-10: 0029259657

ISBN-13: 978-0029259658

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By [John G. Hilliard](#) (Toronto Canada) - [See all my reviews](#)

TOP 500 REVIEWER REAL NAME

This review is from: [A Question of Character: A Life of John F. Kennedy \(Paperback\)](#)

The title of the book says it all, A Question of Character. This is one author's attempt at looking at the political life of President John F. Kennedy's, before and during his time in the White House. It details the differences in what the spin is and the private life that is described as being close to Hugh Hefner's. We also get a very detailed and for me, somewhat troubling, view of the constant controls his father, Joe Kennedy's had of JFK throughout his career. Not that comforting given the somewhat dubious reputation of Joe.

The author came close to a Kitty Kelly sex scandal tell all, but did not completely let himself drop that low. I thought the author was almost sad to be telling me, the reader, some of the less then faltering truths here. Almost if he was a firm believer in Camelot and this book and research pained him. Overall this is a well-written book that has some interesting conclusions. The author could have spent more time on the domestic policies and international issues that faced JFK to make the account better rounded. I do not think it is the one-volume definitive story of JFK, but it is a very good start.

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As he cuts through the myths of Camelot, Thomas Reeves could have been content with dragging the name of JFK through the mud. That

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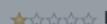
I have not read this book yet, but it arrived quickly and in good shape.

Published 5 months ago by Jenn

 **Overall, a valuable character study:**

I enjoyed this biography - which is more a character study than a strict biography - for several reasons. [Read more](#)

Published 9 months ago by SusieQ

 **No question of character for the real JFK**

I was alive during the JFK presidency. I watched and experienced his public life. How can anyone with common sense and historical knowledge conclude that JFK had

certainly would have been easy enough to do; all the affairs, the dubious origin of the family fortune, the murky ties with organized crime...it all has the makings of a wonderful chop-job, a character assassination.

However, Reeves rises above this. He acknowledges that good morals do not necessarily make for a good president, and that an effective president does not always have a scandal-free private life. This book was written before the Clinton presidency, which would have made for an interesting comparison.

Reeves is not content to throw one prurient revelation after another at the reader; that is Kitty Kelly's job. He is interested in good history. How did these moral defects apply to the man's ability to be an effective president, and how did the president's effectiveness have an impact on the course of our nation's history?

Reeves believes that important theme here isn't the questionable behavior in and of itself, but the fact that Kennedy's lack of any real commitment to anything but the acquisition and wielding of power ultimately made him an overall weak president. Despite Democratic control of Congress, Kennedy could get barely 25% of his legislation passed in Congress in 1962-63. Members of Congress had little regard for the man as a leader, and his luke-warm commitment on various issues did little to induce the Congress to act on his legislation. Compare that with LBJ, whose legislative success rate and mastery of Congress between 1963 and 1966 stands in stark contrast.

Reeves does observe that JFK was beginning to grow into the office by the time of his death, but stops short of predicting a glorious Kennedy legacy had the man lived. It was far from a given that JFK could have won re-election in 1964, and Reeves knows this.

Overall, this is an excellent example of a measured, critical biography that contributes to the scholarly dialogue, rather than simply being a "tell-all" book.

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By **A Customer**

This review is from: [A Question of Character: A Life of John F. Kennedy \(Paperback\)](#)

To those who want to get past the hype and drivel, Reeve's well written and researched book makes a convincing case that yes, character does matter. The argument that John Kennedy was a great, but flawed, leader is shown by Reeves to be erroneous. The seeds of the Bay of Pigs disaster was sown in Kennedy's youth. PT-109, interestingly, was the first and only PT boat ever rammed by an enemy destroyer. Not on a foggy night with the men topside, but in clear weather and daylight, with Kennedy and his men below decks sleeping and swapping war stories.

"My story about the collision is getting better all the time," Kennedy told a friend after launching his political career. "Now I've got a Jew and a Nigg-- in the story and with me being a Catholic, that's great."

Kennedy's bringing the U.S. to the brink of war was typical of the disasters he'd made in his personal and military life. The real reason the Soviets put missiles in Cuba was because of U.S. missiles in Turkey. School children are seldom taught that the U.S. had to withdraw its nukes from Turkey in exchange for the Soviets "backing down" in the Western Hemisphere.

From the Kennedys' dealings with the mob to the wiretaps of Martin Luther King, Jr., the fact that Kennedy could not remain faithful in a marital relationship is hardly a dichotomy in leadership.

So yes, Virginia, character does count. Now and in the latter part of the 1990s. Those who say it doesn't are probably also lacking in this area.

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★★★★☆ **A hatchet job on one of our most courageous & revolutionary presidents**

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Published on June 8, 2007 by Darin Fan

★★★★☆ **This book starts with an incorrect statement of a fact**

This book starts with a totally incorrect statement. JFK took the oath of office on Jan 20th, 1961. This is dictated by the 20th Amendment

Published on April 1, 2007 by T. Bacher

★★★★★ **John F. Kennedy was not someone to look up to**

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