CHRONOLOGY OF KENNEDY’S LIFE

1917  John Fitzgerald Kennedy is born to Joseph Kennedy Sr. and Rose Fitzgerald Kennedy on May 29 in Brookline, Massachusetts. He will become the first U.S. president to be born in the twentieth century.

1920  Kennedy contracts scarlet fever and is hospitalized for more than two months at Boston City Hospital.

1927  The Kennedy family moves to Riverdale, the Bronx, New York, where John attends the Riverdale Country School.

1931–35  Kennedy attends the Choate Boarding School in Connecticut.

1934  Kennedy is hospitalized at Yale–New Haven Hospital, then admitted to the Mayo Clinic, where he is diagnosed with colitis.

1935  Kennedy travels to England with his parents and sister, but he cuts the trip short because of health problems. He enrolls at Princeton but drops out shortly thereafter after becoming ill.

1936  Kennedy transfers to Harvard.

1937  President Franklin Roosevelt names Joseph Kennedy Sr. ambassador to Great Britain.

1938  Kennedy accompanies his father and his elder brother Joseph Kennedy Jr. to England.


1941  After health problems prevent him from joining the army, Kennedy enlists in the U.S. Navy.
1942–43    Kennedy serves on a series of torpedo boats in the South Pacific, eventually rising to command several. A Japanese destroyer rams his boat PT-109 in August 1943. Despite suffering injuries that aggravate his chronic lower back condition, Kennedy performs bravely in leading his crew to their eventual rescue. He is awarded the Navy and Marine Corps Medal and the Purple Heart.

1944    Joseph Kennedy Jr. dies on August 12 when his plane explodes during a mission in Europe. The New Yorker publishes John Hersey’s article “Survival,” based on JFK’s experience with PT-109, in May; Reader’s Digest prints a condensed version (at the urging of Joseph Kennedy Sr.) in August.

1945    Kennedy is discharged from the navy and becomes a correspondent for the Hearst newspapers.

1946    Kennedy runs for Congress and is elected representative for Massachusetts’ Eleventh Congressional District.

1947    While on a trip to England, Kennedy is diagnosed with Addison’s disease, although the public will not learn of his condition until after his election to the presidency.

1948    Kennedy’s sister Kathleen dies in a plane crash. JFK is elected to a second term in the House.

1950    Kennedy is elected to a third term in the House.

1952    With his younger brother Robert as his campaign manager, Kennedy defeats the incumbent, Henry Cabot Lodge Jr., to become a Massachusetts senator.

1953    Kennedy marries Jacqueline Bouvier.

1954    Kennedy undergoes spinal surgery to address his chronic back pain.

1956    Kennedy publishes Profiles in Courage, written with his speechwriter, Theodore Sorensen. At the Democratic National Convention, Tennessee Senator Estes Kefauver defeats JFK to become Adlai Stevenson’s running mate in the upcoming presidential election.

1957    Kennedy is awarded the Pulitzer Prize for Profiles in Courage. His daughter, Caroline, is born. He obtains positions on
the Senate Foreign Relations Committee and on Harvard University’s Board of Overseers. In July, he delivers a speech in Congress supporting Algeria in its struggle for independence from France.

1958

Kennedy is elected to a second term in the Senate.

1960

Kennedy publishes *The Strategy of Peace*. He wins the Democratic nomination for president and chooses Lyndon Johnson as his running mate. During the campaign he participates in the first-ever televised presidential debates with Richard Nixon. He telephones Coretta Scott King when her husband, Martin Luther King Jr., is jailed in Birmingham, Alabama, and Robert Kennedy works behind the scenes to obtain King’s release. Kennedy defeats Nixon in a very close election. Shortly thereafter Kennedy’s son, John Jr., is born. Kennedy delivers his inaugural address featuring the famous line, “My fellow Americans, ask not what your country can do for you, ask what you can do for your country.”

1961

Shortly after being sworn in as president, Kennedy appoints his brother Robert as attorney general and establishes the Peace Corps by executive order. In April, his administration backs an attempted invasion of Cuba that ends in disaster at the Bay of Pigs when the invaders are captured by Fidel Castro’s forces. In May, Kennedy sends Lyndon Johnson to meet with President Ngô Đình Diệm of South Vietnam about combating the spread of communism in Southeast Asia. Kennedy and Nikita Khrushchev hold a summit in Vienna in June. Kennedy and Khrushchev clash over the status of divided Berlin, ending when Khrushchev authorizes the construction of the Berlin Wall. The United States and Latin American nations join in the Alliance for Progress, a program designed to forestall future communist revolutions such as Cuba’s through development aid.

1962

CBS and NBC simulcast *A Tour of the White House with Mrs. John F. Kennedy* on Valentine’s Day, garnering a then-record audience of 56 million viewers. In April, US Steel executives renege on an understanding, reached during negotiations with the United Steelworkers, to not raise prices in exchange for concessions from the union; Kennedy pursues a variety of strategies (including canceling government

xvii
contracts and having the FBI harass steel executives) to win a reversal. Responding to cosmonaut Yuri Gagarin’s 1961 feat of becoming the first man in space, Kennedy proposes a U.S. mission to the moon. In September, Robert Kennedy sends 400 federal marshals to the University of Mississippi to facilitate the enrollment of the black student James Meredith; JFK commits 3,000 U.S. troops when violence erupts. The Cuban Missile Crisis of October 14–28 begins when the United States obtains photos of Soviet nuclear missiles on the island. The tense stalemate between the United States and the Soviet Union ends when the Soviets agree to remove the missiles and the United States promises never to invade Cuba (and secretly agrees to dismantle some of its own missiles in Europe). Kennedy proposes cuts in income and corporate taxes to spur economic growth.

1963

In June, Kennedy gives a speech calling on Congress to enact civil rights legislation. He also during that month establishes the Advisory Council on the Arts, the forerunner of the National Endowment for the Arts, and travels to West Berlin (where he delivers his famous “Ich bin ein Berliner” speech), Ireland, and the Vatican. In August, Kennedy’s son Patrick is born and dies after just two days from a lung condition. At the end of August, Martin Luther King Jr., other civil rights leaders, and 100,000 others participate in the March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom. In September the United States, the USSR, and the United Kingdom sign a treaty banning nuclear testing aboveground, in the air, and underwater. A November coup undertaken with U.S. approval deposes Ngô Đình Diệm. Kennedy is assassinated in Dallas, Texas, on November 22, 1963. Lyndon Johnson is sworn in as president on Air Force One, as it sits on Love Field.