

## КУЛЬТУРНА ІДЕНТИЧНІСТЬ ТА КОМУНІКАЦІЯ

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## CULTURAL DIPLOMACY DURING KENNEDY'S PRESIDENCY: HOME AND ABROAD

**Background.** The article is devoted to an overview of the general strategy of cultural diplomacy during the presidency of John F. Kennedy (1961–1963), considered one of the important instruments of US foreign policy. In the Cold War conditions, culture became a means of mutual understanding between peoples and a strategic element of political influence and opposition to the communist bloc. The Kennedy administration implemented several initiatives that confirmed the importance of culture in the diplomatic dimension, including adopting the Act on Reciprocal Educational and Cultural Exchange (1961).

The purpose of the study is to analyze the use of culture as a means of diplomacy that served to achieve the foreign policy and strategic goals of the Kennedy administration.

**Methods.** The study is based on the principle of historicism, a systematic approach, problem-chronological and descriptive methods. Content analysis of documents, speeches of President Kennedy and some cultural programs, such as Art in Embassies, was used.

**Results.** The article provides a brief comparative analysis of cultural diplomacy of different periods. The article demonstrates that the cultural diplomacy of the Kennedy administration was systemic and centralized. Although official statements emphasized the independence of cultural initiatives, they were coordinated by Washington, considering the strategic interests of the United States, and not the cultural needs of the regions to which these initiatives were directed. The main components of this strategy were cultural exchanges, exhibitions, international programs, and the involvement of prominent figures in art and science in the promotion of American democratic values.

**Conclusions.** The John F. Kennedy administration demonstrated the use of cultural diplomacy in the context of global confrontation. The efforts of the US government in the field of culture became an important tool of "soft power", aimed not only at improving the international image of the country but also at creating a dialogue with the peoples of other states. At the same time, the centralization of such initiatives has aroused criticism due to insufficient attention to the cultural needs of individual regions.

**Keywords:** cultural diplomacy, J. Kennedy, Cold War, arts, educational and cultural exchanges.

**Background**

The end of World War II and the transition to a new, less dramatic in terms of human, military, and material losses, the Cold War, transformed culture as a social phenomenon from an instrument of "spiritual pleasure" to an instrument of "diplomatic influence", making it an integral part of US national security. Culture ranked 4th in importance in the sphere of political influence, giving way to economics, military affairs, and diplomacy. The focus on culture as a means by which it is possible to resist communism in Eastern Europe was the focus of attention of all presidential administrations in the US during the second half of the 20th century. To one degree or another, every American president considered it necessary to spread "American democratic values" (even where they were not needed) by all possible means, and culture, in this case, was considered one of the best options. Gradually moving away from the "Good Neighbor Policy," the United States government decided to adapt its cultural policy to the political realities of the Cold War. The change in these realities caused a natural transformation of the vector of the state's cultural policy. Culture became an important tool, the main task of which was not so much the display of various genres in music or literature but the formation of an attractive image of the United States in the communist world with an increased emphasis on individual freedom, material goods, technological achievements, and democratic traditions. Both Harry Truman and, to a greater extent, Dwight Eisenhower demonstrated their support for the idea of using culture as a tool of influence. G. Truman, while recognizing the importance of culture, was nevertheless in no hurry to provide systematic funding for international art exhibitions and any cultural programs in

general. D. Eisenhower had a diametrically opposite opinion (Krenn, 2017). During his presidency, cultural exchanges and the dissemination of educational programs took on a new meaning and were defined by him as "an important step toward world peace..." (Bu, 1999). The coming to power of J. Kennedy raised the question in the political establishment: which path (Truman or Eisenhower) would Kennedy choose? However, Kennedy realized in time that in the struggle for the people's favor, not only ideology and economics, but also culture began to play a decisive role. The participation of Frank Sinatra (the most famous cultural figure of the time and the "court singer of the mafia") in Kennedy's election campaign was, albeit a small, but vivid example of this.

In the academic environment, the figure of Kennedy and his policies arouse lively interest among researchers. Conventionally, the scientific achievements on the topic of the article can be divided into several thematic groups: works devoted directly to the figure of the president, his personality, character, political views (Dallek, 2004); works that focus specifically on his political steps and actions (Schlesinger, 2002; Dean, 1998); literature that concerns the theoretical understanding of the concepts of "cultural diplomacy" and "Cold War"; and subject-oriented scientific works that reveal the role of various elements of culture as tools for implementing cultural diplomacy in the specified period (Bartley, 2001; Davenport, 2009; Foster-Lussier, 2015). Kennedy's cultural policy was not the focus of researchers' attention. The endless number of interpretations of cultural, public diplomacy, or such a concept as "soft power", not only does not clarify but also makes it more confusing to understand the boundary that separates cultural diplomacy from public diplomacy.

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American historian Milton Cummings defines cultural diplomacy as "the exchange of ideas, information, art, and other aspects of culture between nations and their peoples to promote mutual understanding" (Cummings, 2003). We consider cultural diplomacy to be a part of a type of public diplomacy and one of the tools of "soft power".

The article aims to review the use of culture as a tool of diplomacy in Kennedy's domestic and foreign policy to show that in addition to the "main" diplomatic and economic instruments, US influence was also shaped by the activities of American cultural and philanthropic institutions.

### Methods

The methodology of the article is multi-component and encompasses interdisciplinary approaches. The historical method is used to examine the context of cultural diplomacy during the presidency of John F. Kennedy (1961–1963). This includes an analysis of the main historical events that influenced cultural initiatives, as well as the global political situation of the Cold War period. The method of discourse analysis is used to focus attention on Kennedy's rhetoric, in particular in speeches, and addresses to national and international audiences. Particular attention is paid to the use of conceptual apparatus that reflects the values of culture, freedom, and democracy, which were actively promoted in US foreign policy campaigns. Using the method of content analysis helps to identify the main themes and messages that contributed to the advancement of US interests abroad. The article also uses a comparative method that allows us to compare Kennedy's cultural diplomacy with the initiatives of previous US presidents. This allows us to determine the innovativeness of his approaches (or vice versa) and their contribution to the development of US "soft power" instruments. The use of the case study method made it possible to examine key Kennedy initiatives, such as supporting cultural exchanges and international travel for artists and intellectuals, and to demonstrate their effectiveness through specific examples.

### Results

It is difficult to imagine John F. Kennedy, the youngest 35th president in US history, as a cultural promoter. He seemed to be concerned with much more important and "down-to-earth" things – foreign policy, defense, opposition to the Soviet Union. His supporters perceived his election as the beginning of a new era in American diplomacy, which was to finally undermine the influence of the Soviet Union in the world, and few of them thought of him as a cultural ambassador.

In 1956, a few years before he was elected President of the United States, Kennedy published the documentary "Profiles in Courage", which not only became a bestseller, but also won the Pulitzer Prize in the "Biography" category in 1957. John Kennedy also shared the view of John Buchan (author of one of his favorite books, "The Pilgrim's Progress") that politics was "one of the best and riskiest professions." In addition, his strong friendship with Frank Sinatra and his affair with actress Marilyn Monroe also served as additional evidence that Kennedy was not a "culturally limited" person.

Kennedy's inauguration day, when he invited more than fifty writers, artists, poets, and musicians, became a kind of messenger to the political elite and the American public about his vision of culture. Kennedy also decided to go all-in and invite Robert Frost to read a poem at the inauguration. Robert Frost was a prominent American poet, one of the greatest poets in US history, and a four-time

Pulitzer Prize winner. Later, in 1962, at the request of US President J. Kennedy Frost visited the USSR as a "goodwill ambassador". Robert Frost was the first poet to speak at the inauguration of a president, reciting from memory "The Gift Outright," when the sun's glare prevented him from reading "Dedication," a poem he had written especially for the occasion (Fink, 2024). The inauguration ceremonies lasted until the morning. The event was organized at the request of J. Kennedy by Frank Sinatra, who was deeply involved in his election campaign. Sinatra was joined by Ella Fitzgerald, Sidney Poitier, and Nat King Cole at the concert. ("Don't ask...", 2011). John F. Kennedy's father, Joseph, paid a large sum of money for the time to film the concert using video technology, which was extremely rare at the time. Sinatra would happily show the film to his friends for years to come, although Kennedy quickly cut ties with the star because of his mafia connections. ("Don't ask...", 2011).

Upon taking office, Kennedy immediately began the process of approving new people for the presidential administration. Along with the appointments of D. Rusk (US Secretary of State), E. Stevenson (US Ambassador to the UN), and R. Kennedy (US Attorney General), Phillip Coombs was appointed by the President to be the first Assistant Secretary of State for Educational and Cultural Affairs, and in September 1961 the President decided to appoint August Heckscher as the first special adviser to the President on the arts. Kennedy believed that the President should show respect and recognize cultural and intellectual superiority. A few months later, after the official appointment, an article appeared in the New York Times with the headline, "White House gets aide for culture... For the first time in history, the White House will have a cultural coordinator" (Gelb, 1962). Kennedy generally recognized that the federal government's role in the arts was historically and constitutionally limited, but at the same time sought to be consulted in areas where public policy touched on artistic aspects (Arts and Culture in the Kennedy White House).

During Kennedy's presidency, an event occurred that determined the official course of the United States in the field of culture. On September 16, 1961, the 87th United States Congress passed The Fulbright-Hays Act of 1961, officially known as the Mutual Educational and Cultural Exchange Act of 1961. As one State Department official put it, that legislation "restored international educational and exchange programs as a recognized area of our official foreign relations." (Cummings, 2009). The explanation of the relevance of this Act stated that the United States government would have the ability to "increase mutual understanding between the people of the United States and the people of other countries using educational and cultural exchange; to strengthen the ties which unite us with other nations by demonstrating the educational and cultural interests, developments, and achievements of the people of the United States and other nations, and the contributions being made toward a peaceful and more fruitful life for people throughout the world; to promote international cooperation for educational and cultural advancement; and thus to assist in the development of friendly, sympathetic, and peaceful relations between the United States and the other countries of the world" (Mutual Educational and Cultural Exchange Act of 1961). At the legislative level, it was determined what the US government understands as elements of cultural diplomacy, namely educational exchanges, cultural exchanges (visits and interchanges between the United

States and other countries of leaders, experts in fields of specialized knowledge or skill; tours in countries abroad; United States representation in international artistic, dramatic, musical, sports, and other cultural festivals, competitions, meetings, and like exhibitions and assemblies; participation in international fairs and expositions abroad, including trade and industrial fairs and other public or private demonstrations of United States economic accomplishments and cultural attainments etc.) (Mutual Educational and Cultural Exchange Act of 1961).

Having come to power, Kennedy realized that it would not be possible to achieve quick positive results both at home and abroad, and therefore, he relied on «"peaceful evolutionary changes" rather than revolutionary actions» (Kubricht, 1987). In his speeches, he repeatedly emphasized that the United States of America should launch technical, cultural, and economic initiatives to gradually reduce the economic and ideological dependence of certain regions of the world on the USSR. Culture was not the last place in his policy and strategy. Continuing the trend established after the Second World War, and so carefully supported by his predecessors, Kennedy reported that cultural influence constitutes a large part of American soft power in the postwar world: in fact, culture is the demand of an international actor to conduct foreign policy, interacting with the foreign public (Cull, 2009).

Kennedy did not consider education as a means of strengthening postcolonial citizenship. Kennedy wanted education to produce "human resources", and to create a labor force reserve (Gerits, 2017; "Special Message to the Congress on Foreign Aid", 1961). After Kennedy's address to Congress on March 22, 1961, faith in education as a tool for projecting US values faded almost instantly (Gerits, 2017).

The actual tour of Europe, where Kennedy went after the Cuban Missile Operation, can also be attributed to cultural diplomacy because Kennedy himself was perceived as a cult. Kennedy's charisma, his oratorical skills, intellectual authority, and ability to dialogue in the international arena created the image of a leader who personified the "new course" of America – energetic, confident, but open to cooperation with partners. In essence, his manner of behavior was supposed to say – look at me and understand what America is today. As R. Dean notes, "Kennedy created an aristocratic personality, embodying the virtues of a stoic warrior-intellectual" (Dean, 1998). Kennedy's European tour was marked not only by meetings at the highest political level but also by numerous speeches that had a deep cultural and symbolic dimension. His speech in Berlin with the famous phrase "Ich bin ein Berliner" was the moment when the US president went beyond the framework of classical diplomacy and addressed the people of Europe through the language of solidarity and humanity. Kennedy himself became a cult figure associated with progress, freedom, and transnational values. A special role in this tour was played by how the European audience perceived Kennedy. His youth, style, and image as a family man (which he was not) and an intellectual created a new standard of political leadership that emphasized the relationship between politics and culture. For example, his travels were accompanied by impressive receptions, which were not only official but also cultural and social events, where Kennedy communicated with artists, intellectuals, and young people, which consolidated his image as an "innovative president". As Nancy Snow mentioned, «The image of the "Ugly American" had been confronted by the sophisticated young couple in the White House» (Snow, 2008).

In April 1962, President John F. Kennedy hosted a memorable White House dinner honoring Nobel Prize winners. The event celebrated some of the greatest minds of the era, symbolizing the administration's deep appreciation for intellectual achievement, scientific progress, and artistic excellence. It also underscored Kennedy's commitment to fostering dialogue between government, academia, and the arts, highlighting the vital role of knowledge and creativity in shaping a better future. The Art in Embassies (AIE) program, established by the U.S. Department of State, is crucial in promoting cross-cultural dialogue and enhancing mutual understanding through visual arts and vibrant artist exchanges. Originally conceptualized by the Museum of Modern Art in 1953, this global arts initiative was officially integrated into the U.S. Department of State by President John F. Kennedy in 1963. In this year, President Kennedy established, by executive order, an Advisory Council on the Arts, including Nancy Kefauver, Art in Embassies first director, appointed by the President in November.

#### Discussion and conclusions

In the American political tradition, culture is an effective means by which the United States government promotes the values and ideals of the United States internationally. With the beginning of the Cold War, culture acquired an "additional" function – to support US foreign policy and to have a deep strategic significance. In this way, culture became both a productive and a vulnerable medium. Assessing the impact of cultural diplomacy always faces many problems: for example, there is no guarantee of the "correct" interpretation of the elements of cultural diplomacy from the point of view of the target audience; often, the result of perception may not be what the organizers and leaders of cultural diplomacy hoped for; in addition, "cultural ambassadors" do not necessarily act as they are "supposed" to do in the diplomatic process (Hatzivassiliou, 2014). Kennedy, not paying attention to such risks, made art a part of his life in the White House. The tour of Europe was also a kind of cultural demonstration of American values through the personality of John F. Kennedy, who himself became a symbol of the ideas of modernism, cultural understanding, and inspiration for young generations in the West. This confirmed that in the context of the Cold War, the personal diplomacy of a leader could be an instrument not only of political influence but also of cultural transformation of the international perception of the United States. Kennedy understood the value of soft power. He had a progressive understanding of culture, which was reflected in his policies, rhetorical statements, and key initiatives. This understanding influenced his international and domestic policies. His administration supported American art, which was intended to demonstrate the richness and openness of American culture. Some critics of Kennedy's policies argue that his cultural initiatives were exclusively about promoting American values, creating the impression of cultural colonization. The initiatives often presented US culture as the best model to follow, with limited ability to take into account the richness of other countries' cultures. This patronizing attitude sometimes provoked resistance among countries that sought to protect their cultural traditions. It is also worth emphasizing that cultural diplomacy initiatives had a more centralized approach than local adaptation. Often, projects were dictated by Washington rather than coordinated with the needs of the regions.

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## КУЛЬТУРНА ДИПЛОМАТІЯ ЧАСІВ ПРЕЗИДЕНТСТВА КЕННЕДІ: ВНУТРІШНІ ТА ЗОВНІШНІ АСПЕКТИ

**Вступ.** Стаття присвячена огляду загальної стратегії культурної дипломатії за президентства Джона Ф. Кеннеді (1961–1963 рр.), яка розглядалася як один із важливих інструментів зовнішньополітичної діяльності США. В умовах холодної війни культура стала не лише засобом взаєморозуміння між народами, а й стратегічним елементом політичного впливу та протистояння комуністичному блоку. Адміністрація Кеннеді впровадила низку ініціатив, які підтвердили вагомість культури в дипломатичному вимірі, зокрема ухвалення Закону про взаємний освітній і культурний обмін (1961 р.).

**Мета дослідження** полягає в аналізі використання культури як засобу дипломатії, що слугував досягненню зовнішньополітичних і стратегічних цілей адміністрації Кеннеді.

**Методи.** Дослідження базується на принципі історизму, системному підході, проблемно-хронологічному та описовому методах. Використано контент-аналіз документів, промов президента Кеннеді та деяких культурних програм, таких як *Art in Embassies*.

**Результати.** У статті надано короткий порівняльний аналіз культурної дипломатії різних періодів. Стаття демонструє, що культурна дипломатія адміністрації Кеннеді мала системний і централізований характер. Хоча в офіційних заявах підкреслювалася незалежність культурних ініціатив, насправді їх координував Вашингтон, ураховуючи стратегічні інтереси США, а не культурні потреби регіонів, куди ці ініціативи спрямовувалися. Основними компонентами цієї стратегії були культурні обміни, виставки, міжнародні програми та залучення видатних діячів мистецтва й науки до промоції американських демократичних цінностей.

**Висновки.** Адміністрація Джона Кеннеді продемонструвала використання культурної дипломатії в умовах глобального протистояння. Зусилля уряду США у сфері культури стали важливим інструментом "м'якої сили", спрямованим не лише на покращення міжнародного іміджу країни, а й на створення діалогу з народами інших держав. Водночас централізація таких ініціатив викликала критику через недостатню увагу до культурних потреб окремих регіонів.

**Ключові слова:** культурна дипломатія, Дж. Кеннеді, холодна війна, мистецтво, освітні та культурні обміни.

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