
The New Jew Canon: One Minute to Midnight & Counselor: A Life at the Edge of History by Jeffrey D. Sachs

Michael Dobbs' riveting account of the October 1962 Cuban Missile Crisis allows us to understand those heart-stopping days from the point of view of the key decision-makers, most importantly President John Kennedy and Chairman Nikita Khrushchev. Dobbs describes more vividly than ever before, and with new historical documentation, the deadly brew of miscalculation, limited information, mistakes, and false assumptions which almost triggered nuclear annihilation. As Kennedy famously remarked at one point when a U.S. spy plane went off course, potentially triggering a Soviet attack at an especially perilous moment, "There's always some son-of-a-bitch who doesn't get the message."

Theodore Sorenson's wonderful memoirs add greatly to our feel for President Kennedy as an individual and world leader, and also shine with Sorenson's own Olympian talents, not only as the greatest speechwriter of the modern Presidency but as a great and humane policy advisor and analyst. Read in conjunction with Dobb's book, Sorenson's memoirs help us to understand more deeply why the world survived the missile crisis. Kennedy's humanity, judgment, and good sense trumped the misguided and hothead advice of the generals. No doubt, Khrushchev's similar abhorrence of war was also pivotal. One of Kennedy's greatest strengths was his ability to intuit Khrushchev's shared will to find a peaceful outcome.

These harrowing events are not simply a matter of history. They speak to us across two generations. How shall we treat our adversaries? Shall we assume the worst and perhaps thereby accidentally trigger it? Can peace be found in the midst of bluster and missteps? I believe that the Cuban Missile Crisis and the successful negotiation the following year of the

Partial Nuclear Test Ban Treaty together confirm Kennedy's greatest insight: that our adversaries are, in the end, human beings with common interests and a similar will to survive. It is on those common interests that peace can be built.

John Kennedy and Theodore Sorenson put it this way, in the most important Presidential speech of modern history: John Kennedy's "Peace Speech" at the American University Commencement in June 1963.

So, let us not be blind to our differences — but let us also direct attention to our common interests and to the means by which those differences can be resolved. And if we can not now end our differences, at least we can help make the world safe for diversity. For, in the final analysis, our most basic common link is that we all inhabit this small planet. We all breathe the same air. We all cherish our children's future. And we are all mortal.

Professor Jeffrey D. Sachs is Director of the Earth Institute at Columbia University and author of *Common Wealth: Economics for a Crowded Planet* (Penguin, 2008). He is Special Advisor to United Nations Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon. From 2002 to 2006, he was Director of the UN Millennium Project and Special Advisor to United Nations Secretary-General Kofi Annan on the Millennium Development Goals, the internationally agreed goals to reduce extreme poverty, disease, and hunger by the year 2015. Sachs is also President and Co-Founder of Millennium Promise Alliance, a nonprofit organization aimed at ending extreme global poverty. He has been named as one of the 100 most influential people in the world by Time Magazine.