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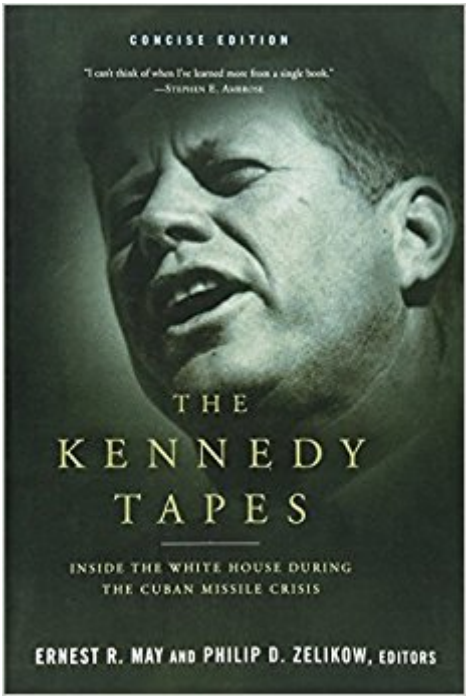
The Kennedy Tapes: Inside The White House During The Cuban Missile Crisis



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Synopsis

The closest most of us will ever come to being inside the Oval Office at a moment of crisis. For sheer drama, this work of history may never be duplicated. The events of the Cuban Missile Crisis unfold in the actual words of President John F. Kennedy and his top advisers. Now available in a new, concise edition, this book retains its gripping sense of history in the making. "[A] splendid achievement, as powerful and exciting a book as one is likely to read this year...."Ã¢â ¬â ¢Barry Gewen, New York Times Book Review "Gripping history."Ã¢â ¬â ¢Richard J. Tofel, Wall Street Journal "[M]esmerizing. I was utterly fascinated....the best, fullest account of crisis yet and will remain so for decades to come."Ã¢â ¬â ¢Stephen E. Ambrose "[A]s close as most people will ever get to being a fly on the wall during the discussions of leaders."Ã¢â ¬â ¢Los Angeles Times Sunday Book Review, James G. Blight 20 photographs

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Customer Reviews

For 13 days in October 1962, the United States and the Soviet Union teetered on the brink of a nuclear exchange after the Soviets placed intermediate-range missiles on the island of Cuba. U.S. forces were poised at red alert while the Soviets pledged to launch nuclear weapons if the island was invaded. As the world watched anxiously, President John F. Kennedy and Soviet Premier Nikita Khrushchev negotiated a truce that averted disaster. Throughout this tense period, Kennedy and his closest advisors planned their strategy carefully, while--unknown to all but Kennedy, his secretary, and possibly his brother Robert--the historic discussions were being taped by hidden microphones

placed in the Oval Office. More than 23 hours of meetings and telephone calls were recorded, all of which have been painstakingly transcribed and documented in The Kennedy Tapes, providing an intimate perspective on the decision- making process and the personalities involved. Enhanced by the commentary and analysis of historians Ernest R. May and Philip D. Zelikow, this volume is the essential reader on the Cuban missile crisis. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

The glimpse we get into the making of US policy in a crisis-- in this case the Cuban missile crisis--is unique and, in light of the historical and legal problems of the taping of White House conversations by presidents, may well remain so. Which is a great pity, for despite the apparently poor quality of the tapes and various unresolved questions relating to them, the picture of US officials dealing with the most serious crisis of the Cold War is memorable. Although the editors, both scholars at Harvard, rightly remark on the ``inherently disorderly character'' of such meetings, the quality of understanding and analysis the participants brought to the task was high. There are some exceptions: The lack of esteem felt by Kennedy for the Joint Chiefs of Staff seems justified by their performance (General LeMay openly equated Kennedy's actions with ``the appeasement at Munich''); the congressional group brought in to advise was less than helpful, Senator Fulbright, ironically, calling for an immediate all-out invasion. Kennedy privately chews Secretary Rusk out for failing to do contingency planning on the US missiles in Turkey. But the praise given by the editors to Kennedy seems justified, not only for his clear recognition of the awesome responsibilities of his actions, but for asking questions that his advisors had neglected. The editors write of his ``cold analytical mind,'' and indeed he alone notes that US allies think that on the subject of Cuba ``we're slightly demented''; if anything, he tends to be pessimistic (``He'll grab Berlin, of course,'' he says of Khrushchev). But it is particularly impressive when contrasted with the idiosyncratic, unsystematic, and uninformed policymaking of Khrushchev. A remarkable and truly historic record, well analyzed and put in context by May and Zelikow. (20 b&w photos, not seen) (Book-of- the-Month Club/History Book Club selection) -- Copyright Ã Â©1997, Kirkus Associates, LP. All rights reserved. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

Have you ever wondered what is being said behind closed doors, in those places where important decisions are made?. If you have, Ernest R. May and Philip D. Zelikow allow you to learn just that, at least regarding the conversations that took place in the White House during the Cuban Missile Crisis.This book contains the transcriptions of those discussions, and many notes that contribute to

clarify certain details that the reader might well not be aware of. The editors of "The Kennedy tapes" are able to offer us this unexpected treat thanks to the fact that an audio tape recorded the conversations of the committee that was formed to deal with the crisis. It is generally thought that only President Kennedy and his secretary knew that their words were being recorded, and we can easily believe that when we realize that the different functionaries said exactly what they thought, without wasting time in order to formulate their ideas in a politically correct way :)It is almost scary to know how little did the persons involved in the decision making process know about what was really happening at that time, and about how would the URSS react to their optional courses of action. But then, I guess that complete information is never available, and less during a crisis of that magnitude... However, after reading these pages, I cannot help but wonder what would have happened if, for example, USA had launched a preventive attack on Cuba. The answers to that question are many, and none of them is good. I suppose we should be grateful to President Kennedy and his advisors, for somehow arriving to a course of action that avoided the real possibility of a nuclear war.I think it is worthwhile to point out that the editors of this book wrote not only an interesting introduction, but also an excellent conclusion to this book. The introduction explains very well the Cold War context in which this crisis developed, and how recent and ongoing events affected the perspective of the decision makers. On the other hand, the conclusion sums up what happened, taking into account "the other side" (URSS), and the peculiarities of the decision-making process in Soviet Russia. The editors also include their own considerations, all of which I consider worthwhile remembering. For example, when they reflect on the kind of lesson they think this book can teach to the reader, they say that "Someone who wants to learn all that can be learned from this extraordinary record of decision-making needs not only to notice how the process stutters and veers amid barrages of detail but also to infer how individuals of different backgrounds and temperaments are sorting the detail, discerning choices, and electing among those choices (...)"."The Kennedy tapes" is a rather impressive book due to the fact that it is quite long. However, it is also very helpful if you want to know more about the Cuban Missile Crisis, and the kind of environment that surrounds difficult decisions in the higher levels of authority. It is certainly more comfortable to believe that those decisions are at all times informed and rational, but unfortunately (as this book shows) that not always happens. May and Zelikow say that "Reconstruction that oversimplifies or ignores the incessant tension between realities and beliefs makes us no wiser. By coming fully to grips with the particulars of past moments of choice, we may become better able to handle our own". We can only hope that is the case...On the whole, I think you will benefit a lot from reading this book. It allows you the opportunity to really "listen" to what happened in the discussions

surrounding the 1962 Cuban Missile Crisis, without intermediaries. Take advantage of the privilege of listening to what happens behind closed doors!.Belen Alcat

To be honest, I bought this book used after seeing the movie "13 Days." In fact, I ordered this book the very night I came home from the movie, wondering if it would be worth the money spent.. Now, having read through it, I must admit that this was a very fascinating and intriguing book.The book is an actual copy (i.e. transcript) of taped conversations that occurred in the Whitehouse during the Cuban Missile crisis. The book was so fascinating for the sole fact that it presents (true to life) all the details which were actually being spoken of, on, about, etc. The reader can actually sense the emotion, tension, anguish, and despair that comes out in some of these conversations. In fact, the intensity in this book puts the movie to shame (which is usually the case with most good books).This book consists of conversation's of the National Security Council, President Kennedy,Robert Kennedy, and the President's advisors. The book is very revealing and honest (since it is true to life) and it paints a very vulnerable picture of just how easy things could fall apart in this 'invincible' place we call home. Fortunately, we as readers today actually know the outcome is positive. However, the terror comes through the pages when, as I read, the realization that these men have no idea what is going to happen as this whole situation unfolds. That was one of the riveting things about this book.Overall, this is a great book for those who are interested in American history, or Presidential history, etc. I recommend it, especially since it is so fascinating and also because it is an actual account word for word accurate. That makes for great objective history.

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Fascinating but scary to hear first hand accounts of what people were thinking at the time. The Generals always seem to want to wage war, thankfully the diplomats counter their argument.

Highly recommended for those who are fascinated with the Kennedy administration and international politics of the period. I give it four stars only because it's a demanding read - not for someone who's looking for a light weekend read.- it requires patience and an ability to endure repetition. But for the serious researcher this is an invaluable document..It's a real eye opener. The overwhelming feeling I got after completing it was profound gratitude that JFK was in charge (which he clearly was,) and how much pressure he was receiving to invade or bomb Cuba, and in more than one case to actually bomb Moscow..Those devoted to the subject should search out the now

out of print "Khrushchev's Cold War" which gives the view from the other side, including Khruschev's private papers and extensive notes from Presidium meetings. Even more so than "The Kennedy Tapes" it shows how very close we came to war, within a hair's length, and not just over Cuba but over air routes over East Germany. It also shows that the one-sided portrait we were painted of Khruschev was not accurate at all.Both books leave us with a simple question. Why was it OK for the US to station ICBM's in Turkey (able to hit Moscow) but not OK for the Soviets to station missiles in Cuba?A fair minded reader of both must also conclude that Khruschev gained much from the showdown and achieved all of his reasons for placing the missiles in the first place- he got a guarantee that the US would never invade Cuba and he got JFK's commitment to remove US missiles from Turkey. That having been said, JFK's handling of the crisis was brilliant and we should all be thankful that a sane, patient and rational man was at the helm, a man who understood diplomacy and the need for back channels. If a John McCain had been the leader, we likely would not be here to read these reviews.. ..

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