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THE WORLD BANK

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McNamara Papers

USS John F. Kennedy Commissioning,  
Sept 8, 1968 (Vol 1)

Folder 1

The World Bank Group  
**Archives**  
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USS JFK Kennedy commissioning address - Correspondence 01



9/11 To Mr. Gilligan  
Sept. 9, 1968

874/1/1

No letter I have received in  
recent years has meant more  
to me. I am deeply grateful

F. M. Gilligan  
22626 Pac. Coast Hwy.  
Malibu, Calif. 90265

+ you for writing.  
Robert. McNamara

Hon, Robert McNamara, President.  
World Bank.  
Washington, D.C.

Dear sir;

I saw you on television last night delivering an  
address at the commissioning of the U. S. S. JOHN F.  
KENNEDY. It was not so much what you said, but the  
effect. My previous admiration for you altered to a  
genuine regard and affection.

The poignancy and emotion evoked many memories of  
that tragic day.

Less than a month later I too lost the one friend  
who meant more to me and influenced my life to a greater  
degree than any other individual I had ever met.

You displayed a very warm human trait that is rarely  
seen in today's world and if it is it is soon forgotten,  
perhaps it has not restored faith completely but, it has  
inspired hope.

I am sure that the feelings we both have are not  
morbid but a true reflection of love and sorrow.

I am not an educated man and perhaps that accounts  
for the difference in our reactions following these  
personal tragedies. You continued to serve with your  
very great talents with effectiveness, honor and dis-  
tinction while I retreated cursing the unfairness of  
it all and threw away everything I had worked for and  
all that I had learned from David. It has been that  
way ever since.

After hearing and seeing you I had the beginnings  
of the feeling of hope that now I can start the effort  
of returning to the living world at least with the sure  
knowledge that there are others who can 'feel' profoundly.

My thanks to you for making this possible, I am,

Respectfully yours;

F. M. Gilligan  
F. M. Gilligan





814/1/2

Mrs. Kennedy, Members of the Kennedy family, Mr. Secretary, Captain Yates,  
Ladies and Gentlemen:



Somewhat over a year ago, many of us here witnessed the hand of a  
child bestow her father's name on this great steel ship.

It is a name that puts one in mind of the sea. For the man who bore  
this name loved the sea, and sailed it with valor.

A ship is like a man's life.

For a ship must needs put to sea, and brave such perils as await it.

The man whose name is borne by this great vessel never turned away  
from those perils. His whole life was monogrammed with courage.

He sailed his course in too brief a time.

Not in too brief a time for him. For he lived life with a fullness  
few men achieve.

But in too brief a time for us. For our hearts were quickened, and  
our hopes were spurred, and our spirits were moved by this man. And for a bright,  
blazing moment his youth made us all feel young with him.

And then the moment was gone. And we, all of us, lost something of  
ourselves.

Of no man -- no matter how great -- can we say that he alone turned  
the tides of history.

For history is like the sea: intractable, horizonless, in eternal  
movement.

But there are men, whose very course across the sea of history  
alters the course of other men.



There are men in history who sail by so noble a heading, that other men -- looking on -- fix their compass to the same course, and follow afterwards.

So it is with us.

For though brief was his voyage, we who knew him will never again be the same men.

And it is thus not only for us few, but for multitudes of others the globe around.

For they -- as we -- saw in him the embodiment of a new hope: that reason, and civility, and sanity might prevail. That the rigidities of extremism might give way to the realities of accommodation.

That prejudice be less pervasive, and bigotry less contagious.

That human diversity be accepted not simply as a fact, but as a value.

That gaiety, and grace, and composure be not merely the mark of civilized men, but of civilized nations as well.

That the arts be promoted, and the life of the mind made to flourish.

That American endeavor -- in whatever forum -- be always stamped with the hallmark of excellence.

And most fundamental of all: that a peace be forged -- forged not in the furnace of mutual hatred, but on the anvil of mutual interest.

A peace founded not on fantasy, or falsehood, or face-saving; but pursued step by cautious step -- and built stone by careful stone.

Not a peace that is perfect. But a peace that is possible.

That is the hope that millions saw in this man.

And that is the course that he charted: a course whose destination was the fulfillment of all these daring dreams.



We dreamed his dreams with him. And those dreams have not died.

Our world -- marred as it is with the scars of human folly -- yet bears the mark of his wisdom.

He passed this way -- and his path bears yet the imprint of his passing.

He journeyed not alone.

There stood by his side another.

She stands here today.

And like this great ship, she stands with a quiet, inner strength.

Her warmth, her grace, and her beauty were his immense pride -- and through every setback and suffering, his enduring consolation.

Her presence -- at his side -- did not merely add to his achievement: it multiplied it many times over.

This ship is honored by his name. It is graced by her presence.

It is graced too by the memory of another -- a brother John Kennedy loved beyond the ties of blood that bound them together.

Last year, he stood here as this vessel was christened.

Now he stands among us no longer.

Providence, who oversees both the joy and sadness among men, has once again inscrutably put to the test our courage in the face of bereavement.

To the Kennedy family, here today, over whom these repeated waves of grief have swept, no man can find words worthy of the wounds sustained.

We can but say that the losses they have borne are our losses as well.

And now the USS JOHN F. KENNEDY, duly commissioned, will go forth -- to sail the sea he loved.

It now begins an odyssey whose final landfall we cannot clearly foretell.



For there is an unfathomable poignancy about the sea. It is -- like life itself -- beyond our power to predict.

In the last speech of his life, President Kennedy reminded us:

"This is a dangerous and uncertain world. No one expects our lives to be easy -- not in this decade -- not in this century."

The life of this ship may not prove to be easy; but may it always mirror the life of him for whom it is named.

May it sail with his integrity.

May it sail with his valor.

May it sail with his true greatness.

E N D