

## URG PROPOSAL: CASEY KUKLICK

Casey begins by indicating both the kinds of **sources** he will use (archives & newspapers) and the **purpose** of the project (to reconstruct a significant historical moment). He fleshes out the details later, but he recognizes that readers look for a succinct statement at the outset.

This sentence offers a clear answer to one of the specific questions readers will have: what contribution to knowledge will this project make?

This paragraph begins well by emphasizing the contrast that Casey introduced at the top. In its careful framing of information, the paragraph also sets up the interpretive solution that Casey will propose.

On the night of April 4th 1968, Martin Luther King was assassinated in Memphis, Tennessee. On that same night, halfway across the country in Indianapolis, Democratic presidential hopeful Robert F. Kennedy was preparing to give a campaign speech in a mostly black, working class neighborhood. When he learned of King's death, however, Kennedy chose to inform the crowd of the assassination and delivered an impromptu, inspired address imploring the nation and the black community to emulate King and embrace wisdom and peace in the face of violence and disorder. The speech, in effect, represented the potential coming together of two powerful movements in the late 1960s—the liberal Democratic Party and the civil rights movement—which offered the country the hope for renewal in an era of turmoil.

My project will use archival and newspaper research to reconstruct what I consider to be a transcendent moment in American political culture in the late 1960s. This research will contribute to a greater understanding of the growing synergy of Kennedy's campaign and the civil rights movement in its later stages. Robert Kennedy's speech on April 4th, and the crowd's response to it, tellingly reveals this fusion. I will begin my project immediately following the end of Spring Quarter and continue it throughout the summer, traveling to both Indianapolis and to Boston.

1968 saw both political and social upheaval in the United States. In the midst of anti-war and King-inspired anti-poverty protests at home, Robert Kennedy's campaign sought to unite poor, black, and otherwise oppressed voters in order to secure the Democratic nomination for the presidency. At a time when these voters were disenchanted with U.S. policy both in Vietnam and at home with Lyndon Johnson's War on Poverty, Kennedy managed to overcome their misgivings about politics and his own political nervousness to ignite the support of an enthusiastic base. By the time of his assassination in June of that year, Kennedy had strong prospects for the Presidency.

By contrast, Martin Luther King's status in the black community was under fire. Various elements of the black community, such as the Black Panthers and SNCC, were starting to speak out against King's non-violent approach to civil rights. Further, King's gradual shift to anti-war and anti-poverty campaigns did not have the same effect on the American public as his earlier civil rights campaigns had had. His disappointments were manifested most in a march in Memphis that turned into an embarrassing display of looting and violence in what was supposed to be a trademark non-violent King protest.

Despite the seemingly opposite directions these two political leaders were moving, in reality their goals and visions for the future of American society were converging at the time of King's death. RFK's Indianapolis speech highlights this convergence of ideals. The fact that Kennedy was willing to talk to the crowd about King and his legacy reveals his growing empathy with the black community. In addition, he

Casey's use of familiar events helps orient readers. The juxtaposition establishes a compelling tension that guides readers' attention toward the central issues of the project.

After setting the scene, Casey needs to immediately give readers a sense of the project's significance. This sentence also gives insight into Casey's interpretive framework.

Readers are likely familiar with many aspects of Casey's topic, so why does he devote two full paragraphs to "background"? Since his project aims to offer a new interpretation of familiar events, he begins this section with a paragraph of relevant facts for each of the two topics he brings together. This brief historical context is essential for considering the interpretive framework he articulates two paragraphs later.

relates to their feelings of vulnerability by invoking memories of his own pain felt after his brother's death. His words resonated with them, conveyed not forcefully or high-handedly, but with a sense of real urgency and conviction. That speech, and that moment Kennedy presided over, symbolized a larger feeling of "what might have been" had Kennedy and King lived to lead America into what turned out to be the most turbulent years of the 20th century, both at home and abroad.

The current literature does not adequately address the convergence of Kennedy and King's platforms in the late 1960s. Biographies of both men mention ideological similarities between the two, but fail to investigate simultaneously the parallel moral motivations of each man on behalf of the poor, oppressed, and anti-war constituencies to which each man was appealing. Much is made in Arthur Schlesinger's RFK biography, for instance, of Kennedy's admiration for and political advocacy on behalf of American Indians, Mexicans, and working class whites. Similarly, in *At Canaan's Edge*, Taylor Branch chronicles King's insistence on including these same minority groups in the Poor People's Campaign, much to the dismay of SCLC workers who wanted the movement to remain primarily black. In *From Civil Rights to Human Rights*, Thomas Jackson argues that King's movement was increasingly radical on behalf of economic and social justice for the poor. I contend that Kennedy's campaign, too, was moving along the same ideological lines, and that these similarities are important in understanding the evolution of American political culture during the time. Hypothetically, their increasingly radical viewpoints, if merged into coherent policy, could have changed the direction of both the Vietnam War abroad and the pace of LBJ's Great Society programs at home. With regard to the speech especially, prevailing wisdom holds that "Indianapolis was silent" in the days following King's assassination, presumably because of Kennedy's influence. But Richard Pierce claims in *Polite Protest* that the Indianapolis black community is historically unique in its utilization of nonaggressive protest for gains in civil and economic rights. How does this notion fit in with the reaction to Kennedy's speech in the aftermath of the assassination?

My project seeks to recreate the moment in time in Indianapolis when Bobby Kennedy presumably inspired a poor, black crowd to remain calm in the wake of a highly personal and community tragedy. Was there really a comparative calm in Indianapolis in the days following King's assassination? If so, was it because of Kennedy's speech, and how did it take advantage of the "space" opened by Pierce's claim of black Indianapolis' relative passivity? How do Kennedy's evolving political and personal platform, the King assassination, and the nature of the crowd combine to provide a distinctive lens from which to investigate the nature of both men's converging ideals and their potential effect on American political culture in the 1960s? How and why does Kennedy's speech, and the crowd's reaction to it, highlight his potential ability to assume King's "moral mantle" in the black community? Kennedy was uniquely equipped on that April night in 1968 to reach out to poor blacks by virtue of his ideological similarities with King. Fundamentally, this is the assertion that my project seeks to investigate.

*The opening of this paragraph exemplifies the smart use of limited space. The first sentence of Casey's "research questions" clarifies what he seeks to accomplish with his research. He builds on the momentum he established with his earlier, more general statement, then breaks down this larger purpose into a series of specific questions that help readers envision the kinds of information he will look for.*

*The first two sentences of the literature review not only identify the "holes" in existing research, but also suggest how the proposed research goes beyond this research. The rest of the paragraph highlights the many contradictions in the literature. By showing how scholars have not resolved questions about political affinities between King and Kennedy, Casey implies how he might propose an alternative interpretation—a strategy that leads into the project's specific research questions and methods.*

I will pursue my research in three areas, using the secondary literature of the civil rights movement, black Indianapolis, and King and Kennedy themselves as tentative interpretative frameworks. I will explore Kennedy's ideas and aspirations for change in American society at the Kennedy Library in Boston, which holds his campaign papers from 1968 and oral histories of his staff members. King's papers and correspondence detailing his evolving platform for social and economic justice will be accessed at the Howard Gotlieb Archives at Boston University. In Indianapolis itself, I will research databases of black Indianapolis and national newspapers as well as visit the Indianapolis Historical Society, which has erected a commemorative marker at the site of Kennedy's speech. By compiling and contrasting materials from these three archival bodies, I can construct a historical narrative that will, as I have mentioned, contribute to our overall understanding of the potential direction of American political culture in the late 1960s.

*In the methods section, Casey demonstrates his knowledge of relevant sources, where they are located, and what types of materials are available at each location. Before actually conducting research, no one knows for sure what he/she will find, but Casey shows that he has identified multiple promising collections.*

I have prepared for this project as a history major by taking many relevant courses, including: 20th Century U.S. History, Civil Rights and Black Liberation, Political Parties and Elections, Problems of Cities, Revolution and Social Change, and Black Activist Debates. I have established contacts with Professors Thomas Sugrue at the University of Pennsylvania and Richard Pierce at Notre Dame. I have also contacted various archivists at each site I intend to visit. Finally, I intend to use this research next year to produce an honors thesis in history on the speech, possibly expanding on its implications and meanings for civil rights and politics in the 1960s.

*Casey's "preparation" is effective because the course titles show that he is well-qualified to evaluate the materials he will examine. He summarizes essential legwork by noting his contact with archivists and scholars who can help advance his agenda.*

### **Bibliography**

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*A brief explanation of who Professors Sugrue and Pierce are (e.g., are they experts on this topic?) would have added greater clarity, but Casey has nonetheless strengthened his proposal by indicating the ways he has independently sought out assistance—a trait that increases the likelihood of completion.*