**Process Paper**

***The Leadership of John F. Kennedy During the Cuban Missile Crisis: Thirteen Days that Galvanized a Legacy***

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**Senior Group Website**

Our topic selection process began at last year’s national competition. As our group toured our nation’s capital and learned about American history at its source, we gained a new appreciation for the men and women who lead our country. At the pinnacle of our government is the President, and we were inspired by the resolve it requires to be the “leader of the free world”. We looked for a president who had impact on not only our country, but on the entire world. Our search led us to the Cuban Missile Crisis, a pivotal moment during the Cold War that threatened global destruction. The Cuban Missile Crisis has been described as “the most dangerous moment in human history,” and it was President Kennedy’s leadership that played a crucial role in preventing the outbreak of nuclear war.

First, we learned about the context surrounding the Cuban Missile Crisis: the history of the Cold War and the factors that molded Kennedy into a leader. Once we understood the Crisis on a conceptual level, we then delved into its details. With the excellent resources from NARA, The JFK Library, and the CIA, we had little difficulty finding copious amounts of primary sources to understand the events. It was a greater challenge, however, sifting through all of them and figuring out what was most important. So, while emphasizing Kennedy’s leadership, we attempted to tell the story of the Cuban Missile Crisis through primary documents. We also had the incredible opportunity to interview several experts on this subject, who provided unique perspectives on the Crisis that gave our presentation balance. As we continued to research, we tried to look at the Cuban Missile Crisis through not only through the eyes of Americans, but through the eyes of Russians and Cubans as well.

While designing our website, we identified the main components of the Cuban Missile Crisis: the context and contributing factors, the actual event, and the legacy. These concepts became the framework for our website. The heart of our project is comprised of our “Thirteen Days” pages, where we examined, in detail, the specific actions that Kennedy took during the Crisis.

During the Cuban Missile Crisis, Kennedy’s leadership was the United States’ final defense against nuclear war. If he had made different decisions those fateful days in October 1962, none of us might be here to talk about it. While researching, we often found ourselves reflecting on what might have been. Our world was perched on the cusp of nuclear war, and it was Kennedy’s leadership, along with collaboration from the US government and the USSR, that coaxed us away from the edge. Learning from his previous mistakes, Kennedy struck meaningful balance between aggression and negotiation. The resolution of the Cuban Missile Crisis laid the foundation for the Nuclear Test Ban Treaty of 1963, and for further reconciliation. Although his life was ended by an act of incredible violence less than a year later, Kennedy’s legacy of peace still resonates.