

**Richard J. Whalen, Nationally-Known Author,
Journalist and Presidential Adviser, Dies on July 18**

Richard James Whalen – a nationally known journalist, best-selling author, adviser to three Republican presidents, State Department consultant and founder of a Washington-based international news service and consulting company, died on July 18, 2023 in Yorktown Heights, NY. He was 87.

Mr. Whalen was an adviser to Presidents Richard M. Nixon, and George H. W. Bush, but his strongest ties were with President Ronald Reagan. As a personal adviser, Mr. Whalen helped to implement Reagan's North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) as well as many political and economic policies in the 1980s.



Mr. Whalen, the author of seven books, wrote [The Founding Father: The Story of Joseph P. Kennedy](#) as a twenty-nine year-old editor of *Fortune*. His critically acclaimed book was on the *New York Times'* bestseller list for more than a year and was the runner-up for both the 1964 Pulitzer Prize and the National Book Award. Still in print (fourth edition 1993) and now available as an E-book, it is the foundation of two generations of Kennedy scholarship.

Born in Brooklyn, N.Y. on September 23, 1935, Whalen was the eldest son of textile executive George C. Whalen and Veronica Southwick Whalen. He grew up in New York City's South Queens and was the third generation of his family to graduate with honors from Richmond Hill High School. He attended Queens College and received a BA with honors in English and Political

Science in January, 1957. He also played centerfield on the varsity baseball team. An enthusiastic sandlot ballplayer in the Queens-Nassau League, he often played two double-headers in a single weekend.

As part of a campus romance, Whalen's poetry to his future wife, Joan, resulted in his founding of the campus magazine, *New Poems*.

Whalen began his career in 1957 as a reporter for the Richmond (Virginia) *News Leader* and covered school desegregation cases throughout the state including the public school closings in Warren County and Prince Edward County. He also wrote freelance editorials and within two years became associate editor of the *News Leader*, under Editor James Jackson Kirkpatrick. At 23, he was the youngest editorial writer on a metropolitan U.S. daily. Whalen won national attention as he contributed freelance articles to such magazines as *The New Leader* and *National Review*.

In April 1960, Whalen joined *Time Magazine* as a National Affairs writer, and soon convinced the editors to assign him to return to the South and cover the new civil rights front --the lunch-counter sit-in movement. He filed reports from Nashville and Greensboro, describing the movement as a "social and cultural revolution."

Editor Vermont Royster briefly lured Whalen back to editorial writing at the *Wall Street Journal*, but within a year, John Chamberlain recruited him to Time Inc. and he found his journalistic home at *Fortune* writing editorials and feature articles and working directly with Time Inc.'s founder and Editor-in-Chief Henry R. Luce.

In the spring of 1962, President John F. Kennedy's public battle with the steel industry over price increases prompted him to remark: "My father always said businessmen were Sob's." Luce, a long-time acquaintance of John Kennedy's father, Joe Kennedy, was inspired to "remind people what kind of businessman old Joe was." Almost nothing was known about the elder Kennedy. Luce assigned 27-year-old Whalen, an outspoken and idealistic conservative, to research and write a full-scale profile of the controversial multimillionaire who had been an intimate adviser of President Franklin D. Roosevelt, a Wall Street speculator and Hollywood producer.

The Kennedys refused their cooperation but Whalen, with Luce's enthusiastic backing, spent six months digging out sources and documents to tell the untold story of Joe Kennedy's deal-making and fiercely ambitious dynasty-building. He wrote a 13,000-word profile article that was published in the January, 1963 issue of *Fortune*. *Life* and *The Saturday Evening Post* published abridged versions.

The *Fortune* article caused a sensation. Book publishers launched a bidding war. New American Library, a subsidiary of Los Angeles' Times Mirror Corp., relied on Editor David Brown's judgment and paid Whalen the highest advance paid up to that time for a first work of non-fiction -- \$100,000 -- the equivalent of more than \$1 million today. Brown insured Whalen's life for the advance and held him to a tight production deadline.

Whalen spent a year expanding his library research, interviews and writing and delivering the book a chapter at a time. *The Founding Father: The Story of Joseph P. Kennedy*, published in November, 1964, was an instant critical and commercial success.

Praised for its fairness and objectivity, the book nonetheless probed deeply into the darkest corners of Joe Kennedy's life and career, including his alleged bootlegging, corporate-raiding and anti-Semitism. The runner-up for both the Pulitzer Prize and the National Book Award, the book vaulted to the top of the *New York Times* bestseller list for non-fiction and remained on the list for 54 weeks.

In *National Review*, Joan Didion called the book "fine and hauntingly detailed . . . brilliantly memorable." Ian Mac Loed, writing in *The Spectator* (London) declared: "I think it is one of the great modern biographies." The novelist, John Dos Passos, whom Whalen had known in Virginia, supported his election to the Cosmos Club in 1968 in a letter calling him "one of the ablest writers of his generation" and praising his "carefully thought-out book (as)...a permanent contribution to contemporary history."

First published a year after John F. Kennedy's assassination, it has been reissued in three subsequent editions. In the 1993 Regnery Gateway edition, historian Thomas C. Reeves, in his introduction, wrote that the book "marked the beginning of serious, objective research on the Kennedys."

The well-known *New York Times* columnist Arthur Krock, a Joe Kennedy intimate who suggested the title to Whalen, told the 29-year-old author: "You deserve the Pulitzer and I'm lobbying for you, but you're too young and too early with your truth-telling."

Whalen was promoted to *Fortune's* Board of Editors in 1962. When his mentor, Henry Luce retired, Whalen decided to leave New York for Washington in 1965. At the invitation of Admiral Arleigh Burke, the former Chief of Naval Operations and director of a new think tank, The Center for Strategic and International Studies, he joined the Center's staff as writer-in-residence.

At the Center, Whalen wrote the first unclassified study of multiple, independently targetable re-entry vehicles (MIRVs) and the prospects for ballistic-missile defense. The article, published in *Fortune* as "The Shifting Equation of Nuclear Defense," caught the attention of Richard M. Nixon, then assembling his campaign staff for a comeback bid in 1968. He invited Whalen to join a small cadre of new, young advisors, like JFK's New Frontiersmen. Whalen agreed to advise on strategy and write speeches. Nixon assigned him the task of devising his position on the Vietnam War.

Based on his interviews with frustrated and disillusioned younger military officers at the Center, Whalen had become extremely critical of the limited "policy war" strategy being pursued by President Lyndon B. Johnson and Defense Secretary Robert S. McNamara.

Whalen began preparing for Nixon a future avenue of careful, diplomatic retreat from Southeast Asia and Nixon called it his "secret plan to end the war and win the peace."

In a speech he drafted for Nixon in April, 1968, describing the patriotic, law-abiding Americans who silently bore the sacrifice of their sons in Vietnam while the draft-dodging offspring of the affluent burned American flags, Whalen coined the phrase "the silent majority".

Whalen, with his background in the South, was keenly attuned to the emerging, increasingly violent civil rights front. When the Reverend Martin Luther King, Jr. was assassinated, he successfully urged that Nixon, as would-be President of all the American people attend Dr. King's funeral.

Nixon later blamed Whalen's advice for almost costing him the South. Some 160 U.S. cities experienced racial rioting and looting after King's death, shifting the focus of the campaign from war in Southeast Asia to racial conflict in America's cities. When Lyndon B. Johnson dropped out of the presidential race, Nixon shelved his plan for a Vietnam strategy statement.

In June 1968, Whalen and the group of young Nixon advisors -- John Sears, Pat Buchanan, Martin Anderson, Ray Price, Richard Allen and Alan Greenspan -- unanimously recommended a bold move that Whalen presented to Nixon. He urged Nixon to select California's Governor Ronald Reagan as his vice-presidential running-

mate. Whalen argued that Reagan would symbolize "law and order" at home while Nixon concentrated on all-important foreign policy and peace-making in Asia.

A reluctant Nixon heard out the recommendation, but then chose Maryland's Governor Spiro T. Agnew, whom he barely knew, as a misperceived "moderate" and urban affairs expert. After Nixon was nominated in July 1968, Whalen had a clear path to a senior White House staff appointment, but he resigned from the Nixon campaign in protest against the "say nothing" strategy on Vietnam.

After Nixon narrowly won the 1968 election, Whalen became a personal consultant to Secretary of State William P. Rogers, and wrote the Secretary's first "State of the World" report in 1969-1970, which became an annual tradition.

Whalen left the State Department in 1970 and went ahead with his own memoir of the 1968 campaign and his insider's analysis of the 1969-72 first term of the Nixon presidency. Catch The Falling Flag: A Republican's Challenge to His Party was published in May, 1972, a month before the break-in at the Democratic National Committee's office at the Watergate complex and more than a year before the Watergate scandal and cover-up erupted.

Whalen clearly foresaw the White House upheaval that would destroy the Nixon presidency and warned in his book that Nixon faced the prospect of being only a one-term president. White House Chief of Staff Bob Haldeman, who clashed with Whalen in 1968 before his resignation, said of the book a decade later: "It was absolutely prophetic." Decades later, as the Nixon presidency came into sharp historical focus, *Catch* received critical and scholarly acclaim.

A prolific freelance writer for the *Saturday Evening Post*, *Harpers* and the *Washington Post*, Whalen decided in 1971 to launch his own personal international news service – Worldwide Information Resources, Inc. (WIRES, Ltd.), distributed twice-weekly by telex and facsimile. When Whalen returned to New York City in 1995, he changed the name of his news service to *The Big Picture* by e-mail.

Whalen described the inner workings of national politics, the economy, trade and foreign policy to an audience of business and financial leaders and foreign government decision-makers around the world.

Whalen also branched into public affairs strategy and consulting, lobbying and representation of more than two dozen domestic and foreign clients. For 17 years, for example, he was the principal public affairs strategist and lobbyist for Toyota. He advised the government of Pakistan during the decisive closing years of the Cold War.

In 1974-5, the same group of young men who had resurrected Nixon (and escaped the stain of Watergate) formed around Ronald Reagan. Whalen served Reagan as an adviser and speechwriter, and was a senior aide at the 1976 GOP National Convention, where Reagan narrowly lost the nomination to Jerry Ford, the Nixon-appointed "accidental" President.

In 1977, the nation's first Energy Secretary James R. Schlesinger enlisted Whalen to write the Carter Energy Plan. Whalen also wrote the script of a PBS film, *The Energy War*, which he co-directed with Don Pennebaker.

While working toward Reagan's re-run in 1980, Whalen nimbly exploited his Democratic Party ties to such leading figures as Senator Henry M. (Scoop) Jackson and Senator Ernest F. (Fritz) Hollings. Reagan had confided to Whalen his inner dread of nuclear war and Whalen helped him write private strategy papers advising him how to use his "hardline" image to great advantage. Reagan, a gifted writer for himself, trusted Whalen to edit and revise his speech drafts.

Whalen had an open door to a senior White House position – both Reagans sought to recruit him as press secretary but he preferred to remain a private citizen in the private sector.

Whalen, though outside the White House and its inevitable staff intrigues, moved freely throughout the upper ranks of the Reagan Administration, beginning with the Oval Office. He had easy and prompt telephone access to the President and informal one-on-one conversations with Reagan. Whalen devised for Reagan pro-free trade alliances and helped him maintain his commitment to open markets despite "voluntary" restraints on Japanese auto imports.

Whalen noted Reagan's impressive mental acuity and positive, upbeat personality, and how he delighted in hearing new jokes to add to his huge personal collection. "For a presidential visit," Whalen recalled, "I'd spend perhaps a half-hour on my talking points -- and most of the day finding three really good jokes to tell the President -- one to get on-stage, one to nail down my main point, and a closer that hopefully would delight "the Gipper" enough for him to write down the punch-line. Then you knew that you'd scored."

Whalen also sought to undo the bureaucratic self-promotion of Secretary of State George Shultz and his former State Department colleagues. "George Schultz was one of several people in the Reagan Cabinet and senior staff who were certain that they were smarter than the President. When they tried to steal Reagan's presidential authority and remove his own loyal political appointees from major embassies, opening up slots for Foreign Service bureaucrats, I went into action and helped Reagan protect his turf and control of his policy. I could have gotten Shultz fired, but that would have been messy and counter-productive. Shultz never knew that I'd been into the Oval Office right behind him, undoing his schemes."

Whalen similarly opposed Treasury Secretary Donald T. Regan, who had been his client as CEO at Merrill Lynch. Regan wanted to control the Federal Reserve.

In the spring of 1979, Whalen became the secret Reagan liaison to Paul Volcker, the new Chairman of the Federal Reserve Board and a conservative Democrat. Volcker's bold attack on soaring double-digit inflation laid the groundwork for the coming Reagan political "revolution."

Whalen quietly engineered Reagan's reappointment of Volcker over Regan's choice, Treasury aide Beryl Sprinkel. "I gave my Volcker reappointment memo and package to Senator Paul Laxalt and he took it up to Camp David over a weekend with the President," Whalen recalled. "Monday, he telephoned and said: 'It's done. You can tell Paul to expect a call.'"

Whalen enjoyed much the same access to then-Vice President George H.W. Bush, whose selection he had recommended to Reagan. In 1970, Whalen served as a campaign adviser and writer for Bush in his losing Texas Senate contest with Lloyd Bentsen, the elder Bush's last bid for elective office for a decade.

An effective television personality, Whalen was a frequent guest on *CNN's* long-running program *Crossfire* in the 1980s. He was featured in the concluding segment of *PBS's* three-part documentary *The Irish in America* (1999) and the History channel's two-hour special *Nixon: The Arrogance of Power* (2000). He was interviewed by Sean Stone for the DVD accompanying his father Oliver Stone's 2007 re-issue of his movie *Nixon* with Anthony Hopkins and also provided consultation on sources and interviewees.

In 2004-5, Whalen served as counselor to former Federal Reserve Board Chairman Paul Volcker in his investigation of the United Nations' Oil for Food Program. In 2006, he was appointed senior adviser to President David M. Abshire at the Center for the Study of the Presidency in Washington, D.C.

In 2008, Whalen became a commentator for "Press TV".

During the 2007-8 academic year, Whalen was invited to return to his alma mater as Distinguished Lecturer. In a February 2008, he joined Republicans for Obama and told his students: "I believe Barack Obama is going to be nominated. And I believe that if he's nominated, he's going to win. I'm a lifelong Republican, but I'm saying this because I think....it would be very, very good for us as a nation to do this. And it would be a message to the world that America is back."

Whalen was a member of Washington D.C.'s Cosmos Club, New York City's Century Association, and The Council on Foreign Relations. His other books include *A City Destroying Itself: An Angry View of New York* (1965), *Taking Sides* (1975); *Trade Warriors* (1978, 1990) and *The Wealth Weapon* (1980).

Whalen is survived by his wife, Joan Marie Giuffré Whalen, their children R. Christopher Whalen, Laura Aram, Michael Whalen and grandchildren Alexandra Valencia, Nicholas Aram, Julia Whalen and William Whalen.

Mr. Whalen will be interred in the family's plot in the Gate of Heaven Cemetery, Silver Spring, MD.