

Fifty-two years after the Houston ministers speech

By [Steve Thorngate](#)

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The great newish online journal *Religion & Politics* [alerted me to the fact](#) that today is the anniversary of JFK's speech to the Houston ministers. From the *R&P* editors:

In 2007, Mitt Romney gave an [address](#) that was undeniably modeled on Kennedy's—remarks delivered on similar religious issues, in the same state, but about a different faith.

True, but the differences were as notable as the similarities. It's not just the difference between Catholicism's status in U.S. culture in 1960 and Mormonism's status today, which may well be roughly comparable. Kennedy was the Democratic nominee for president when he gave his speech, while Romney was running in a (modern) Republican primary.

Kennedy's task was challenging but somewhat straightforward: relieve fears that he intended to be the Vatican's man in Washington. Romney was in more of a double bind. While many Republican primary voters in 2007 may not have been excited about a Mormon candidate, they also wouldn't have been thrilled to hear that a candidate's faith could be compartmentalized such that it wouldn't affect his action. [The speech](#) was a delicate balancing act of pluralism and piety.

Still, it's an instructive parallel—because American fear of the religious other (like other others) changes but doesn't really go away.