Robert Kennedy and His Times Study Guide

Robert Kennedy and His Times by Arthur Schlesinger, Jr.

BOOKRAGS

Contents

Plot Summary

Any public figure, particularly in government and politics, is the product of a variety of forces, not the least of which is the times in which he has grown and matured. In the detailed and superbly researched biography, Robert Kennedy and His Times, Arthur Schlesinger serves up an extensive and supremely detailed account of the brother of President John Kennedy from his childhood, to his legal careers, to the position of Attorney General in his brother's administration, to the Senate, and to his own run for the Presidency and ultimate assassination. The necessary ingredients in any biography of this type are pictures of domestic and international events, and, given his background as a historian and special assistant to President Kennedy, Schlesinger determined to give pictures as comprehensive as possible, so much so, in fact, that the work, in two volumes, can easily be considered a highly academic historical piece, specifically on the America of the 1960's.

Of all the Kennedy children (and there were nine), Robert was the most introverted—a gracious, shy kid, shorter than his brothers, with an unremarkable academic and athletic record. His initiation into politics was work on his brother John's Congressional campaign, having been given the tough Italian neighborhoods around Boston in which to campaign. He neither considered nor coveted a political career and, in fact, entered law school only after serving as a foreign correspondent for the Boston Post. His rise into politics truly began as he managed his brother's Senate campaign, during which time he truly "came into his own," demonstrating a tough, committed, direct, organized and energetic persona. His ensuing work as Counsel for the Senate Subcommittee on Investigations took him through the "McCarthy Era" and attempts to bring purported crooked labor leaders to justice. Coupled with his extensive travel abroad, Robert Kennedy began to emerge as a national figure in his own right, but clearly took the national stage when he became Attorney General under his brother's presidency.

The Kennedy brothers operated as a team in many ways, to the consternation of Vice-President Lyndon Johnson, who often saw himself as the "outsider." The mutual dislike of Robert Kennedy and Johnson clearly grew as the Kennedy term progressed and certainly reached it climactic peak following the assassination and the landslide election of 1964, placing Johnson at the helm. As Johnson's popularity waned, and as the domestic and international crises continued to mount, Johnson announced that he would not seek re-election in 1968. The time was ripe for another popular Kennedy to become a candidate, and Robert enthusiastically moved into that role. Having won a decisive primary victory in California, the phenomenal rise of another Kennedy was destroyed by assassination.

The triumphs and tragedies of Robert Kennedy's life are almost unfathomable for the average American. Certainly, he was of the privileged. Certainly, he had advantages which would be envied by most. However, he endured family tragedies that leave the reader in awe. In his lifetime, the triumphs and tragedies must be weighed against his true legacy—unfaltering commitment to the poor, the disadvantaged and the forgotten of American society, as well as his unalterable belief that all Americans must be given

equity of opportunity by their government and that all nations must respect the rights of others to pursue their own governing structures.

Chapters 1-5: the Family, The Father, The War, The Third Son, The Brothers: I

Chapters 1-5: the Family, The Father, The War, The Third Son, The Brothers: I Summary and Analysis

Irish immigrants of the 1800's were not particularly welcomed to America. They thus lacked power, money, educational opportunity, and, most important, the respect of WASP society. They settled in their own neighborhoods, married within their own group, and worked hard to achieve equity. Some became wealthy, as was the case with Rose Fitzgerald's family. Over her father's objections, Rose fell in love and married Joseph Patrick Kennedy, who became a banking millionaire by 1926, endearing himself, of course, to Rose's father. Money did not buy acceptance, however, so Joe moved his family to New York where anti-Irish sentiment was not so pronounced. Joe was a charming but blunt man who was also affectionate and demanding, but making money was not enough. The only place he could gain power was in politics, and he began as an ardent supporter of Franklin Roosevelt. As a part of his reform, Roosevelt established the Securities and Exchange Commission and appointed Joe Kennedy as its first chair. Together with Rose, Joe Kennedy produced nine children—Joe, John, Rosemary, Kathleen, Eunice, Patricia, Robert, Jean, and Edward—and eventually owned three huge homes in Hyannis Port, Palm Beach, and Bronxville. Together, Joe and Rose set high expectations for their children, teaching competition, achievement and victory.

Eventually, Joe was appointed Ambassador to England, sending his family home as war broke out. Initially opposed to the war, he watched all three sons enlist, John going to the Pacific and Joe Jr. as part of a bomber squadron. Robert's service was as a reservist while in college, eventually leaving Harvard to sail on a new Navy vessel commissioned the Joseph P. Kennedy, in honor of Joe Jr., whose plane had exploded over France. John was in a Naval hospital, Kathleen's husband killed in Belgium, and Rosemary, whose mental disability had become apparent, was placed in a convent. Family tragedy had begun.

The 1950's brought the beginning of a change in American politics. Joe Sr. was of the "old school," where political decisions were made in small rooms, and "bosses" controlled who ran for office. It was into this realm, as well as the Cold War, that John Kennedy launched his first political campaign for Congress from a district in and around Boston. His politics were "new" and involved energizing the young and achieving inclusion of everyone within the district. Robert worked hard on this campaign and experienced, first hand, poverty in the neighborhoods in the district. He began to understand the plight of the disenfranchised and those whose lives seemed hopeless. With Harvard degree in hand, he then spent six months in the Middle East and devastated post-war Europe, returning to attend law school at the University of Virginia,

where he excelled in constitutional law specifically. His personal life during this time included both tragedy (his sister Kathleen was killed in a plane crash) and happiness (he married Ethel Skakel, the "best thing that could have happened.." he said).

By 1956, Robert and Ethel had five children (there were ultimately eleven), and he was beginning a career in the Justice Department. The world, however, was changing, and old Joe's politics of isolationism would obviously not last. John and Robert traveled to Asia and witnessed the new nationalism among peoples who had decided to be free of European imperialism. Together, they solidified their relationship and realized that America would have to become involved in world affairs, if the new nations were to remain free of Communist control of Russia and/or China, especially in Indochina, where U.S. aid to France to fight the revolution had resulted in great hatred toward America. Upon their return, Robert gave up his position in Justice to manage John's Senate campaign, becoming the tough, direct, energizing person that characterized him from that point on.

Chapters 6-10: The First Investigating Committee: Joe McCarthy; Interlude: William O. Doublas and Adlai Stevenson; The Second Investigating Committee: Jimmy Hoffa; The Second Investigating Committee: Walter Reuther; 1960

Chapters 6-10: The First Investigating Committee: Joe McCarthy; Interlude: William O. Doublas and Adlai Stevenson; The Second Investigating Committee: Jimmy Hoffa; The Second Investigating Committee: Walter Reuther; 1960 Summary and Analysis

Joe McCarthy was liked by the Kennedys, because he was both a fellow Irishman and an ardent anti-Communist. He was also a bully. McCarthy launched a vehement campaign to expose Communist "subversives" with the U.S., and Joe Sr. obtained a position for Robert on the Senate Investigations Committee. Following the preparation of an excellent report on trading activity between U.S. allies and Communist China, Robert realized that McCarthy's goal was more a "witch-hunt" than an objective, dispassionate effort to thwart true threats to America and resigned. He returned to the Senate Investigations Committee following the demise and ultimate censure of McCarthy, to become once again its chief counsel, the focus now on fraud and corruption in government. In this capacity, he gained a reputation as a skilled and thorough investigator in his own right, as well as a relentless prosecutor with supreme integrity. Brief respites from this work allowed him to participate in the 1956 Democratic convention and his brother's failed attempt to gain the Vice-President nomination, participate in the campaign of nominee Adlai Stevenson, and travel to the Soviet Union with Justice Douglas, in order to determine the success of Communism in changing the domestic well-being of that country.

Back in Washington, the investigations of the Senate committee turned to corruptions and crime with the trade unions, specifically, Jimmy Hoffa, president of the Teamsters Union and Walter Reuther of the UAW. Hoffa was personally aggressive, devious, perverse, and ruthless, but the Committee's work was to investigate criminal activity. Kennedy was able to connect Hoffa with organized crime and was able to uncover Teamster leadership use of mob members for enforcement, money laundering, and assassinations. While charges were often brought, Hoffa was able to gain acquittals in every instance, as witnesses were either too frightened or dead. The case of Walter

Reuther was more political. While Hoffa was a Republican in an era of Republican domination in Washington, Reuther was a staunch Democrat, hated by Republicans, who saw him as a socialist, if not Communist, and and enemy of big business. The immediate issue was Reuther's support of a three-year long strike against Kohler Plumbing in Wisconsin, in which violence had been an issue on both sides. Kennedy traveled to Sheboygan, WI to interview all involved, returning to Washington with the view that Reuther was an honest, ethical man. The subsequent Senate hearings were a waste of time and, in fact, resulted in Kohler being found guilty of unfair labor practices and a failure to bargain in good faith. The strike came to an end, workers returned to their jobs, and Republicans were not happy.

Discouraged by his inability to obtain indictments and convictions of the "big players" in labor and management corruption, Robert Kennedy was discouraged and ready to resign. What he failed to see at that time, however, was the impact he had on the overall justice system and the benefit he had become to honest union laborers. Largely due to his efforts, his Senate brother was able to attain passage of an important new labor law, guaranteeing a secret ballot in union leadership elections. Due to his conduct during investigations, moreover, the important concept of separation of legislative and judicial branches was strongly reinforced. Committee investigations were conducted in a professional manner with no violations of individual civil rights, as had often occurred during the McCarthy era, and, as well, the Investigations Committee returned to is proper task—conducting investigations, not prosecutions. Robert Kennedy emerged from this activity as a national figure and a champion of the common man, as well as having an "...excess of zeal...a man driven by a conviction of righteousness, a fanaticism of virtue, a certitude about guilt that vaulted over gaps of innocence" (p.197). Personally, he was changed as well, no longer a theoretical liberal, but an activist—someone ready to move against greed, corruption, and apparent impunity of big business and crooked labor leaders.

Re-entry into politics came in 1960, as campaign manager for John's run for the Presidency. This would not be an easy campaign, especially with a primary race against Lyndon Johnson, a veteran Democrat with significant power within the party, and Hubert Humphrey, another long timer. Robert became the ..."tireless invigorator and goad, responsible for everything except the speeches. Outside he became the man to do the harsh jobs, to say no, telling people off, whipping the reluctant and the recalcitrant into line" (p. 202), traveling from state to state energizing and challenging Democrats to get working and moving. Two major issues involved Catholicism and civil rights. No Catholic had ever been elected, nor were the Southern Democrats ready to rally around one who was quickly becoming associated with Black civil rights leaders, especially Martin Luther King. John Kennedy's nomination, "forced" selection of running mate Lyndon Johnson, and ultimate victory began an administration characterized by an end to the status quo in politics and ushered in one of the most turbulent times in America's history.

Chapters 11-16: To the Department of Justice; the Pursuit of Justice: J. Edgar Hoover; The Pursuit of Justice: The Mob; The Pursuit of Justice: Civil Rights; The Pursuit of Justice: Ross Barnett and George Wallace; The Pursuit of Justice: Martin Luther K

Chapters 11-16: To the Department of Justice; the Pursuit of Justice: J. Edgar Hoover; The Pursuit of Justice: The Mob; The Pursuit of Justice: Civil Rights; The Pursuit of Justice: Ross Barnett and George Wallace; The Pursuit of Justice: Martin Luther King Summary and Analysis

The choice of cabinet leadership became critical, as the new President Kennedy, with advice and consent from brother Robert, sought to accomplish practical application of the promised "clean slate" politics of the campaign. Though Robert seemed a natural choice for the position of Attorney General, the press criticized the possibility as nepotism, and Robert himself was not enthusiastic. The need for someone who would be utterly honest, however, outweighed the drawbacks, and Robert was quickly confirmed by the Senate. In the mood of reform, the new Attorney General immediately unformalized the Justice Department, holding meetings with virtually all employees, appointing new assistant attorneys, traveling to U.S. attorney offices throughout the country, and visiting federal prisons. The overriding goal was to turn the Justice Department into a new agency, despite institutionalized resistance from many of its departments, especially the FBI.

J. Edgar Hoover had become the FBI Director in 1924 and had accumulated terrific, but terrifying, power. National security issues of the 1940's and 1950's (Naziism and Communism) had propelled him to national stature as the national security expert. Armed with such power, he began a process of covert defiance of his superiors (Attorneys General and Presidents), keeping secret lists and dossiers. He was a right-wing, egomaniac, who was both vindictive and devious, but who had no accountability. The FBI, in effect, operated as an independent agency, working outside the confines and control of any governmental branch or agency. He justified violation of civil liberties

and illegal investigatory techniques, because, in his mind, he was the only one watching over the internal threats to America. The new Attorney General, Robert Kennedy, was clearly a threat to his authority and autonomy, and the relationship between the two of them deteriorated, as Hoover's activities became more transparent during a number of Justice Department investigations and indictments.

While Hoover saw Communism as the greatest threat, linking the entire civil rights movements of the late 50's and early 60's to it, Kennedy saw organized crime as the prime target. Hoover resisted investigations of the "mob," primarily because it was much more difficult to gain convictions when one had to use facts and actual evidence. He preferred, rather, to use innuendo and "associations" to gain convictions of leftists, racking up great statistics and bolstering his reputation with Congress. Circumventing Hoover, Kennedy enlisted the aid of the Bureau of Narcotics and IRS, as well as the Interstate Commerce Commission, having secured a new law stating that narcotics sales, gambling, and money-laundering involved interstate activities and thus came under federal jurisdiction. Mindful of civil liberties, however, Kennedy also placed severe restrictions on wiretapping, one of Hoover's favorite techniques, prohibiting its use without a warrant. This did not, however, curtail local and state authorities who could continue to use wiretapping as their laws permitted. The wild card in all of this was the practice of "bugging." Kennedy was unaware that the practice was utilized, and Hoover certainly was not inclined to inform him of such. Much of the information Hoover gained about organized crime, in fact, came from bugging, while Kennedy was led to believe that sources came from infiltration.

A major area of contention between Kennedy and Hoover was the civil rights movement, which, by 1960, had picked up pace. Deciding that Congress was not fully committed to minority rights, President Kennedy urged his brother to begin by enforcing existing law and Supreme Court decisions. Robert's first act was to appoint a black Assistant Attorney General for Civil Rights, Burke Marshall. From this vantage point, he began to fill openings in the Justice Department, including U.S. Attorney positions throughout the country, with blacks. He pressed other executive departments to follow suit, especially the FBI, but Hoover would not budge. The enforcement of civil rights legislation and court decisions began in the South and included the areas of education, transportation, suffrage, housing and employment. The backlash was swift and significant, with civil rights leaders and demonstrators brutalized and, in some cases, killed. Kennedy did not hesitate to send in federal marshals when required, acts that further angered southerners, especially those in Congress. Burke Marshall began to bring federal lawsuits against southern states, relative to voting registrations of blacks, but, again, angry backlashes led to violence. The Justice Department faced the dilemma of having no national police force to enforce violations of constitutional law and the inability to go into every small town and city in the South to protect civil rights activists and blacks, but, rather, trying to rely on local and state police and officials to enforce federal law. It did not work. Kennedy was able, however, to appoint ten black U.S. attorneys, and the laws were more favorably enforced in those districts. The issue of open housing and equal employment opportunity were less successful than pushes for voting rights, and both Kennedy and civil rights leaders were disappointed and frustrated. As well, Kennedy clearly realized that segregation in housing and

employment was as much a problem in the North as the South. Obtaining Congressional action seemed remote.

Education became a prime focus of civil rights and was one area in which the Attorney General had some success. The 1954 Brown v. Board of Education decision had resulted in no educational changes in the South, and Kennedy was determined to move strongly in this area. Two governors, Ross Barnett of Mississippi and George Wallace of Alabama, openly defied the courts by refusing to allow black students to enroll in state universities. When Kennedy used federal marshals and the army to enforce enrollment, the South was shocked. These two incidents, coupled with continued violence and intimidation of blacks, culminating in the murder of Medgar Evers, forced "the Kennedys...to understand how profoundly the republic had been trapped by its history" (p. 339). From this point on, both John and Robert were committed to racial justice, a commitment applauded by nations around the world, which saw America as rigidly opposed to equality for all non-whites. Black leaders met with the Attorney General, blasting him for lack of progress, especially in the areas of employment, and he, in turn blasted Lyndon Johnson, Chairman of the Committee on Equal Employment Opportunity, for its lack of action. Tension over this issue was the beginning of continuous disputes and mounting dislike between Kennedy and Johnson for the remainder of their years in office.

Medgar Evers had been shot and killed the night following the entry of the first black students to the University of Alabama. This incident served as a catalyst to a summer of violence and turbulence, in Maryland, Virginia and Alabama, to name a few. Robert Kennedy clearly placed the blame on Southern politicians and office holders and businessmen who had created a climate of acceptance of horrific actions against blacks, thus precipitating angry black response. At this point, President Kennedy drafted a major piece of civil rights legislation, a bill which brother Robert took seriously by putting pressure on legislators and businessmen to carry the torch. To engender their own support, black leaders proposed a march on Washington, lead by Martin Luther King. The Kennedys decided to make this march a success by engendering support and participation from whites, taking upon themselves the responsibility for careful security, paper-only cups, and other such details, in order to prevent violence. The march was a success, culminating in King's famous "I Have a Dream" speech. The response of many in government, however, was not as enthusiastic. While the Civil Rights Bill passed the House, with an added Fair Employment Practices Commission amendment, it stalled in the much more conservative Senate Judiciary Committee. As well, The Kennedys did not endear themselves to Hoover, who launched a campaign of wiretapping and stalking King, eventually releasing a report characterizing him as dangerous, depraved, and in collusion with Communists. Only by Kennedy intervention was Hoover prevented from public release of this report, as well hotel tapes which they claimed held evidence of King in sexual trists with women.

Chapters 17-18: The Politics of Justice; Justice and Poverty

Chapters 17-18: The Politics of Justice; Justice and Poverty Summary and Analysis

As Attorney General, Robert had high ideals and expectations. His goal was to make the Justice Department completely non-partisan and to fight corruption and law violations irregardless of party affiliation. What he discovered as he grew in this position was that the reality of government in America is compromise and deal-making. In order to achieve certain judicial appointments, he and his brother often had to compromise, making "deals" with Southern Democrats and Republicans in order to get important legislation passed. The appointments of federal judges, therefore, were certainly not as successful in terms of civil rights as he had wished.

In prosecutions, Kennedy had to make some difficult and painful decisions, indicting Democrats who had been loyal supporters of the Kennedys. Thus, he prosecuted Judge J. Vincent Keoh of the New York Supreme Court for taking a bribe. He prosecuted a construction company owned by the family of the ambassador to Ireland because it had constructed an inferior and faulty VA hospital with a government contract. Probably the biggest political case was that of Bobby Baker, a clerk of the Senate loved by Lyndon Johnson, resulting in an ultimate conviction for tax evasion and fraud. Johnson was vocally furious and accused Kennedy using the case to keep him (Johnson) off the ticket in 1963. Other cases involved personal friends of the Kennedy family, such as Oleg Cassini's brother and James Landis. Kennedy anguished over much of his work and, as he often pointed out, he had not wanted the position. Such a position, he stated, would always be subject to the pressures of politics, and he felt powerless to change that fact. In an effort to find substance in his position, he needed to find endeavors which transcended the petty politics surrounding him. He found such an endeavor in a personal and intimate study of poverty in America.

To Kennedy, the nation's ills all arose from inequity—in power, justice, money, eduction, and opportunity. The urban and rural poor, he came to see, had no chance in the wealthiest nation of the world. Identifying and attacking poverty, he believed, would define the Justice Department as more than an agency that merely chased "crooks." He began with a look at the comparative treatment of individuals by the court system. He learned what he suspected to be true. One's success in the federal court system depended upon money for bail and great personal counsel. To repair this inequity, he managed to obtain legislation which would release suspects in lesser crimes without bail. As well, a 1963 court case guaranteed a defense for accused within the federal court system. He launched prison reform with rehabilitation efforts and separation of youth from older, more hardened criminals. The inequity of sentencing was clearly apparent and related, again, to the quality of defense. As well, there were individuals

serving long sentences from the McCarthy era, for espionage and Communist activities, often without clear evidence, or simply because they refused to name others. Kennedy gained the release or sentence commutation for many.

In the pursuit of his research on poverty, Kennedy was naturally drawn to urban ghettos throughout the country. There he gained first-hand knowledge of a major consequence of poverty—juvenile delinquency. While educators and psychologists posited mental or social pathology as the clear cause, Kennedy saw it simply as anger over the lack of opportunity and hope for a middle-class life. The goal, then, was to change the structure of opportunity by re-organizing slum communities. Beginning in New York, with assistance from friend David Hackett, he began a model community program in New York, including early childhood intervention, vocational training, employment, day care, and legal services. It achieved a modicum of success, but the issue became finding the funds to replicate such programs in every slum in every city. Such funds were simply not available.

The anti-trust division of the Justice Department was particularly apathetic, and Kennedy set out to change that. He informed corporate leaders that he intended to investigate violations of anti-trust laws on the books, beginning with the appointment of a new division head, William Orrick. Probably the most famous anti-trust case involved the six largest steel companies which, together, decided to raise wholesale prices, even though they had managed to get steelworker approval of a "non-inflationary" contract. Kennedy immediately convened a grand jury and sent FBI agents to interview company executives and subpoena all personal records. Eventually, with public opinion clearly aligned with Kennedy, the steel companies backed down, and the grand jury activity ceased. While both Kennedys saw this as a major victory for the masses, the action served to solidify partisanship. From that point forward, the Republican Party became that of business, the Democrats that of labor.

Chapters 19-22: The Kennedys and the Cold War; the CIA and Counterinsurgency; The Cuban Connection: I; Robert Kennedy and the Missile Crisis

Chapters 19-22: The Kennedys and the Cold War; the CIA and Counterinsurgency; The Cuban Connection: I; Robert Kennedy and the Missile Crisis Summary and Analysis

The Cold War was still very much on the minds of Americans when John Kennedy was elected. Staunch conservatives believed in a strong, militaristic response to the threat of Communism; liberals preferred preparedness but "peaceful co-existence" and negotiation as the preferred foreign policy activities. The Cold War had evolved into a competition for friendship and loyalty among the emerging nations of Asia and Africa, and official U.S. policy was to prevent the spread of Communism in any new nation, by force if necessary. Both Kennedys ascribed to a policy known as "action diplomacy," becoming involved in new nations through organizations such as the Peace Corps and through friendship and aid, as opposed to the traditional diplomacy of ambassadors and foreign service officers. While this certainly created a favorable image of America on the part of masses of people in emerging nations, it did, as well, create a lot of entanglements in a lot of countries. Old liners in the State Department and Congress opposed these activities as "appeasement" and ineffective.

Other opponents of "active diplomacy" were numerous in the Pentagon and CIA, two institutions which had become extremely powerful during the Eisenhower years. In 1961, they convinced President Kennedy that an invasion of Cuba would be supported by internal insurgents, and the infamous and disastrous Bay of Pigs Invasion was launched, resulting in death or imprisonment of invading forces. At this point, the President realized that the CIA was certainly out of control, and Pentagon officials were tied too closely with right-wing members of Congress. Top CIA brass were replaced, although many of their activities, including continued assassination attempts on Castro, were still implemented. Robert's goal following the failed invasion was to gain release of the prisoners, and he spearheaded covert negotiations with Castro to this end. When their release was eventually achieved through payments of money, food and drugs, conservatives, who favored an all out invasion of Cuba, were furious.

Counter-insurgency is a term used to define the efforts of governments in emerging nations to fight revolutionaries attempting to disrupt and overthrow those governments. In many instances, the U.S. government supplied aid to these governments, with the hope that, in the process, local political leaders would implement social reforms that would bring economic stability to their populations. As is often the case, however, the concept of counter-insurgency was adulterated, and the U.S. sullied its reputation around the world by using aid to support despotic governments interested only in maintaining the status quo. It became the clear U.S. goal, as Robert Kennedy stated on many occasions, to maintain regimes friendly to America, no matter how corrupt or undemocratic.

Soviet leader Khrushchev decided to place nuclear missiles on Cuban soil, ostensibly for "Cuban protection from the U.S." In truth, "With one roll of the nuclear dice, Khrushchev might redress the strategic imbalance, humiliate the Americans, ...silence the Stalinists,...confound the Chinese and acquire a potent bargaining counter when he chose to replay Berlin. The risks seemed medium; the rewards colossal,"(pp. 526-527). Upon discovery of the missile sites, government leaders were quickly divided into two camps—hawks, who insisted on an immediate strike and doves, who favored a blockade and negotiation. Robert was a dove who could not condone the killing of innocent civilians and strongly advocated with his brother for a non-military response. The subsequent blockade and the ultimate capitulation of Russia was achieved possibly by Robert himself who negotiated in secret with both Dobrynin (Russian ambassador to the U.S.) and Georgi Bolshakov, the Soviet embassy's press attache, with whom he had become quite close. though none would publicly know it, Robert Kennedy clearly demonstrated his strength as a statesman. He remained calm, considered and was able to negotiate an end to a crisis that not only eliminated nuclear missiles on Cuba but Russian fighter-bombers as well.

Chapters 23-25: The Cuban Connection II; Missions to the Third World; The Brothers II

Chapters 23-25: The Cuban Connection II; Missions to the Third World; The Brothers II Summary and Analysis

Following the disastrous Bay of Pigs Invasion, American policies and activities with respect to Cuba were in a shambles. Invaders sat in Cuban prisons; conservatives pressed for an all out invasion; Robert Kennedy's only thought was for the prisoners whom he vowed to get released. "Operation Mongoose" was launched by the CIA without complete administration approval, and was designed to promote insurgency from within. In the end, it was a failure, and the CIA moved on to other ineffective and treacherous endeavors, specifically the assassination of Fidel Castro. Several failed attempts, when rumored and leaked, further embarrassed the U.S. In the meantime, Robert Kennedy was in secret negotiations with Castro, through friend and colleague John Donovan, to secure prisoner release. In the end, the release was secured for a combination of money, food and drugs. While strained relations continued, it appeared that Castro was moving in a direction of being more independent of the Soviet Union, and that was promising news.

By the summer of 1963, relationship between the U.S. and the Soviet Union was beginning to thaw, and a limited test ban treaty was signed. Still, in an effort to prevent the spread of Communism, however, Robert was sent on a major trip to third world nations in Asia and Africa, promising assistance and support for the infant governments. In addition, he traveled to Latin America, in order to garner support for the Alliance for Progress, another program of aid to assist in social and economic reform and thus prevent Communist takeovers. Robert came home realizing that there was a great deal of anti-American sentiment among people in these nations, who felt that the U.S. continued to support despotic regimes simply because they were anti-Communist. As well, he realized, along with brother John, that all problems, domestic and foreign, could not be solved. They would have to pick and choose and set priorities.

As they set their priorities in early 1963, Robert selected the issues of poverty and civil rights. By this time in his political career, he had seen enough suffering within America to know that it had to be addressed if the nation was to move forward peacefully. He personally found injustices unbearable and, for the remainder of his career, it became his mission to fully understand the plight of the poor and disenfranchised and to find ways in which to bring these individuals into the mainstream of an abundant society.

Chapters 26-29: Corridors of Grief; Stranger in a Strange Land; The Vice Presidency; To the Senate

Chapters 26-29: Corridors of Grief; Stranger in a Strange Land; The Vice Presidency; To the Senate Summary and Analysis

As preparations began for John Kennedy's re-election campaign of 1964, much of the country was still enamored with The New Frontier and the culture of "Camelot." All was not well with big business and Southern conservatives, however, who saw the administration as "leftist" and filled with "bleeding heart liberals." The campaign would be a tough one for Kennedy and for his Democratic colleagues in local and state offices. Committing to continued control of the Democrats of key states, therefore, meant that John would travel throughout the country, promoting himself and his fellow elected officials. Thus, the trip to Dallas, Texas in November, 1963, where he was assassinated. Robert was paralyzed for quite a while following the event, with both personal grief and with the belief that his career now seemed lost. As a result, he withdrew from active business of the Justice Department, avoided involvement with the Warren Commission investigation and, ultimately, refused to accept the investigation report, possibly knowing that both the FBI and the CIA had withheld information from the Commission. He emerged from his grief with a sense of "stoicism and fatalism: a conviction that man could not escape his destiny, but that this did not relieve him of his responsibility of fulfilling his own best self," (p. 648).

Returning to his position with Justice, Robert felt like a "stranger in a strange land." Lyndon Johnson was at the helm, a man with whom there was mutual dislike and distrust. Johnson was jealous, and Robert thought Johnson conniving and deceitful. Hoover saw his chance to undermine Robert by feeding rumors to Johnson about Kennedy's attempts to get him (Johnson) off the ticket in 1964. To irritate Kennedy further, Johnson then exempted Hoover from the mandatory seventy-year old retirement. To further change the scenery, some of Kennedy's cabinet members and advisers had resigned by January, 1964. The one use Johnson had for Kennedy was in the area of civil rights. Realizing that solidifying the legacy of John Kennedy was to his political advantage, Johnson asked Robert to draft a major piece of civil rights legislation which he would present to Congress, in honor of the late President.

As 1964 moved forward, the relationship between Kennedy and Johnson continued to deteriorate, much of the strain fueled by pressure from a number of Democrats for Robert to pursue the vice-presidential nomination. Neither Johnson nor Kennedy thought this was a good idea, and Robert finally resigned as Attorney General to run for the Senate from New York. Still paranoid, Johnson had Kennedy's convention hotel

room bugged, still fearful that there might by some insidious plot to run him on the ticket. What Johnson did not realize was the Robert would not have even attended the convention had he not been called upon to give a tribute to his brother on the final night.

Kennedy won his Senate seat by seven hundred thousand votes, and, as a junior senator, served on three committees without much clout. He earned a reputation, however, for being blunt, dogged, passionate, and a "rough and tumble debater," (p. 714). Johnson and Kennedy had an armed truce during this time, but both clearly undermined one another privately. In fact, however, Kennedy actually enjoyed the Senate and believed he had found his political "home." In this place, he might have an opportunity to make a difference for the poor and blacks, with promotion of tough legislation.

Chapters 30-33: The Foreign Policy Breach: Latin America; Vietnam Legacy; The Breach Widens: Vietnam; The Breach Widens: South Africa, New York

Chapters 30-33: The Foreign Policy Breach: Latin America; Vietnam Legacy; The Breach Widens: Vietnam; The Breach Widens: South Africa, New York Summary and Analysis

One of Kennedy's disappointments during the early Johnson Presidency was the change in the purpose of the Alliance for Progress. Rather than using it to foster internal change, it was used more to favor U.S. corporations doing business in Latin America. Kennedy traveled to South America in the fall of 1965, in an attempt to encourage democratic young people to press for change and to encourage oligarchical leaders to make reforms, in order to prevent violent revolutions and uprisings. Back home, he pressed for better policies toward Latin American, decrying the practice of withholding aid unless U.S. businesses were given certain advantages and pushing for more assistance in social and economic reforms. If policies did not change, he warned, Communism would grow. "Batista, not Castro," he said "was the major cause of Communism in Latin America," (p. 733). No one listened.

Latin American problems were replicated in Indochina. When Indochina broke into four countries, Vietnam was divided into Communist North and Non-Communist South, a country supported by the United States and run by a rigid, hated dictator, Diem, who refused to initiate reforms to alleviate the poverty of the masses. Communism was gaining in popularity. Despite advice that the solution was to force Diem to launch major reforms and thus rebuff the attraction of Communism, Republicans and Pentagon officials in the early 1960's pressed for ground troops to be dispatched to fight both North Vietnam and the insurgent Viet Cong in the South. President Kennedy was asking questions but obviously not enough. A coup, supported by U.S. military and ambassador to South Vietnam, Henry Cabot Lodge, ousted Diem. Opinions within America were clearly divided. Voices for complete withdrawal of the U.S. stated that we had no business there, that the conflict was a civil war. Opposition voices believed that Vietnam was too important is our fight against the spread of Communism. Under Johnson, the decision was made to stay and, in fact, to increase U.S. military presence. Kennedy openly criticized the lack of reform in South Vietnam and pressed for negotiations that would include the Viet Cong in a new governmental structure. Traditional Democrats did not take this criticism, nor his activities to condemn apartheid and "mob" control of local

politics in New York, well. Kennedy was becoming a "reformer" and challenging the status quo in dangerous ways.

Chapter 34-35: Time of Troubles; Tribune of the Underclass

Chapter 34-35: Time of Troubles; Tribune of the Underclass Summary and Analysis

As Vietnam heated up, Kennedy's opposition did as well. His public statements pressed for a cessation of bombing and negotiation with Ho Chi Minh, whom he saw as more nationalist than Communist. Traditional Democrats and Republicans rebuked his position, even as the American public became increasingly alarmed at the cost in money and human lives. It was still, however, a poor man's war, as student deferments meant that only the poor actually provided the ground troops for this adventure. When student deferments were eliminated in late 1967, however, the middle class finally moved to Kennedy's side of the fence.

The poor were a continual concern for Kennedy, not just because of their burden in Vietnam but as well for their overall condition within America. To this end, he expanded his study of poverty in urban areas throughout America, among migrant farm workers, and on Native American reservations. What he found was appalling. Squalor in city slums meant that families lived in condemned buildings, violence ruled, and hope was nonexistent. There was anger, however, and it was about to explode into major violence. Kennedy sought Cesar Chavez as his guide through agricultural areas where migrant workers worked for a pittance and lived in cars and buses, sick, filthy, and hopeless. He traveled to reservations and observed terrible living and educational conditions and, again, a sense of hopelessness. This to Kennedy was the "shame of poverty," that the wealthiest nation in the world could tolerate such conditions for any of its citizenry. He made specific recommendations to the administration for legislation and funding, all of which Johnson opposed.

The summer of 1967 exploded with riots in ghettos of major cities. Johnson's priority turned from the Great Society and civil rights to internal security and crime control. Kennedy's priority was to withdraw from Vietnam and bring the money home to be spent on urban renewal, education and jobs.

Chapters 36-38: Images; The Dilemma; the Decision

Chapters 36-38: Images; The Dilemma; the Decision Summary and Analysis

By 1967, Robert Kennedy was both idealist and realist. The idealist could see an America transformed with substantive change that created real opportunities for the disadvantaged. The realist could see that the structures of politics in Washington would speak to the issues but avoid the hard work and cost involved in putting talk into action. America's domestic and international situation was both violent and bleak; ghettos were exploding; 525,000 troops were stuck in Vietnam in a futile conflict; 13,000 soldiers were dead; open opposition to the war across the country was loud and sometimes violent. The Johnson administration was falling apart, and Johnson himself was isolating himself, becoming, as some believed, more and more irrational and paranoid. Within this framework, Kennedy considered the possibility of running for the 1968 nomination, but faced a dilemma. He was committed to ending the war and attacking poverty, but, at the same time, hesitated to run against the incumbent of his own party, even though he (the incumbent) had failed in both areas of priority.

Probably the greatest impetus in Kennedy's decision was the Tet Offensive, a major attack by North Vietnamese and Viet Cong forces, while Johnson and General Westmoreland were telling America that victory was within grasp. Tet also served to make Eugene McCarthy a serious primary candidate as well, running on one platform only—an end to the war. McCarthy had announced his candidacy much earlier, and now Kennedy was in an intolerable position. He could not support Lyndon Johnson, who had not yet stated his decision not to seek another term. Likewise, he could not support McCarthy, whom he saw as committed but not strong enough to win. Against the advice of many, but with the support of his wife and several close friends and advisers, Kennedy announced his candidacy.

Chapters 39-41: The Journey Begins; The Long Day Wanes; To Sail Beyond...the Western Stars, Until I Die

Chapters 39-41: The Journey Begins; The Long Day Wanes; To Sail Beyond...the Western Stars, Until I Die Summary and Analysis

There came almost a free-for-all for the Democratic nomination, once Johnson made his intentions public. Of Course, Hubert Humphrey joined the race—as sitting Vice-President, he was "entitled." Both Kennedy and Humphrey were too late for the early primaries, but quickly entered those that were remaining. McCarthy supporters were particularly angry with Kennedy who they saw as an opportunist, allowing McCarthy to "test the waters" and then jumping in. His enemies came out in full force, and they were numerous—big business, labor leaders, Southern conservatives, angry blacks who felt he had spoken well but had not delivered, and, of course, Republicans and traditional Democrats. He entered the campaign perhaps the most hated candidate of the top three, and the job of winning voters would be daunting.

Aside from the war, the issues were equal opportunity and justice for the disadvantaged. Kennedy had no problem speaking to this issue, because he had experienced it first-hand. Then, Martin Luther King was assassinated. It was a sobering event for all candidates who now had to find a way to empathize with blacks and yet urge them to remain non-violent, taking a strong stand on law and order at the same time, so as not to alienate white voters. This was a difficult task, but Kennedy found it easier because in addition to having personally involved himself in the lives of the poor, he had also spent three years as Attorney General. While other candidates were struggling to find the balance, Kennedy relaxed and spoke easily to both blacks and whites. Slowly, gradually, people came to see Kennedy as the one candidate who just might be able to resolve the exploding domestic situation. Polls began to change in his favor, and, just as important, he began to turn the tide with the media who at first disliked him. By June, the month of a debate and the primary in California, Robert Kennedy was the favored candidate. He began to make overtures to McCarthy to merge their campaigns, to take the ticket together, to no avail. On Monday, June 3, 1968, the California primary occurred. Early returns demonstrated that Kennedy would win, and he retired to his suite at the Ambassador Hotel to watch the returns and prepare his speech, which congratulated McCarthy, again asking him to join forces, "not for myself, but for the cause and the ideas which moved you to begin this great popular movement," (p. 955).

Having finished the speech, Kennedy took a detour through the hotel kitchen to get to a press conference. At this point, a young man with a gun shot and killed him. Kennedy's body was returned to New York for a funeral service at St. Patrick's Cathedral and then

taken by train for burial at Arlington Cemetery. The story ends, without further comment from author Schlesinger. Perhaps there was no more to be said, for, throughout the entire work, the reader came to know Robert Kennedy thoroughly and intimately. His death changed nothing of his life to that point, but one wonders if his Presidency would have altered the course of American history from 1968 forward.

Characters

Robert Kennedy

Robert Kennedy was born into a strong Irish family—a fiery, opinionated, domineering father and a gentle, devoutly religious mother. Together, these parents influenced their children to be strong and competitive but humane and civilized as well. Robert was the third male child of this family and found himself at times overwhelmed by the successes of his two older brothers, Joe Jr. and John, and attempting always to meet the expectations of a demanding father. His desire for acceptance as an equal led to a diligence and perseverance not characteristic of that, in his mind, of his more naturally gifted brothers. Nevertheless, Bobby attended Harvard and University of Virginia Law School, with a particular gift in Constitutional law, and matured through personal experiences of international travel, studies of the arts, and, perhaps most important, hands-on research into the plight of the poor and disadvantaged in America. Working on John's campaigns forced Robert to become more outgoing and persuasive in his relationships with others; his position as legal counsel for the Senate Investigations Committee both inspired and revolted him; his work as Attorney General during his brother's presidency served to solidify his staunch resolve to bring real justice to the forefront of American life. Thus, he stalked crooked labor leaders and the mob; he enforced Supreme Court decisions regarding desegregation; he fought for legislation which would guarantee voting rights and equal employment opportunity to all. With his brother gone and a Johnson Presidency falling apart, Robert, after much agony and vacillation, made the decision to enter the race for the Democratic Party presidential nomination in 1968. He was a late-comer to the process but won a significant victory in the California primary. Taking a detour through the hotel kitchen to get to a press conference, Kennedy was assassinated.

Joseph Kennedy, Sr.

Patriarch of the Kennedy clan, Joseph Kennedy was a Harvard graduate who went into banking, becoming a millionaire by 1926. Fortunately, he avoided the financial ruin of the Depression, married Rose Fitzgerald, and together, they had nine children. Irish Catholics were not fully accepted in Boston society, and Joe, wishing for cultural absorption for his family, moved to the more diverse area of Riverdale, New York. This father had an intense personality, charming but often blunt, described as rude on occasion, but was generous with affection when given appropriate loyalty in return. Money was not enough, however. Joe wanted recognition and power of other sorts, and the reasonable path appeared to be in politics. A staunch supporter of Franklin Roosevelt, Kennedy was repaid when Roosevelt, as President, established the Securities and Exchange Commission, naming him as chairman in 1934. Kennedy created a top flight agency, but resigned one year later to pursue other challenges, including corporate consulting. While other businessmen were criticizing the New Deal, Joe Kennedy remained a staunch supporter, insisting that, were it not for the New Deal,

there would be no businesses which could pay employees who in turn could spend money to bring profits to businesses. Eventually, Kennedy was appointed Ambassador to England, a post he held unhappily for several years. After World War II, Joe Sr. became an ardent isolationist who felt that America should not become involved in the politics of other nations and that Communism would eventually decline on its own. As a father, Joe Kennedy was demanding, having high expectations for his children, especially the sons, and they did not disappoint him.

John Kennedy

John Kennedy was the second son of Joe and Rose Kennedy, an athletic and academically fit youngster, despite several illnesses during his youth. By 1941, John was in the Navy, commanding a PT boat in the Pacific. He matured quickly when his boat was rammed by a Japanese destroyer and the crew had to hole up on an island until rescue. The deaths of two of his crew members deeply affected him, as he recuperated in a naval hospital. Armed with a law degree from Harvard, John ran for Congress in a district in and around Boston, demonstrating a new era in politics, relying on young friends and peers to man the campaign, as opposed to the "old guard" back-room political cronies of his father's time. John was an intellectual, more independent of his family than the other children, thoughtful and reflective. He disagreed with his father's political views, and eventually won a seat in the Senate from Boston, bringing significant focus to foreign policy, as former colonies in Asia and Africa began to establish new independent nations. In 1956, John worked for Adlai Stevenson's campaign and learned a great deal about successes and failures of a presidential bid. In 1960, John Kennedy was elected President and served until November, 1963 when he was assassinated while in a Dallas, Texas motorcade.

Ethel Skakel Kennedy

A friend of Robert's sister Jean, Ethel Skakel first entered into a relationship with the rest of the Kennedy family when she worked on John Kennedy's Congressional campaign. The daughter of a self-made millionaire, Ethel was the sixth of seven children, living in Connecticut in wealth. Like the Kennedy children, Ethel was athletic, competitive, and extroverted, and deeply committed to her Catholic faith. She married Robert Kennedy during his last year in law school, Robert stating that she was the best thing that ever happened to him. Together, they had eleven children, and Ethel was a superior, fiercely loyal and enthusiastic wife and mother.

J. Edgar Hoover

J. Edgar Hoover became the Director of the FBI in 1924 and held the post for approximately forty years. During this time, he accumulated terrific and terrifying power, and, by the time the Kennedy's entered politics, he operated quite independently of any governmental branch, with little to no accountability. By the end of World War II,

Hoover's focus was on national security, specifically upon Communist infiltration into America. Bolstered by Senator Joe McCarthy, he became a national figure, keeping secret lists and dossiers on thousands of "suspected" Communists and Communist sympathizers. Hoover has been described as a vindictive, right-wing egomaniac and master blackmailer. Government officials feared him, for he had significant information on most of them, and, as a result, were not prone to disagree with or oppose his actions, even when clearly illegal and involving dangerous violations of individual civil liberties. Hoover saw Bobby Kennedy as a threat to his autonomy, especially in the area if wiretapping and bugging, and, in turn, Bobby made it clear the Hoover was a threat to democracy.

Joseph McCarthy

Senator Joe McCarthy from Wisconsin was the Chairman of the Senate Investigations Committee during the 1950's. An avid anti-Communist, McCarthy launched a major campaign to root out any Communists and/or Communist sympathizers, expose them, and imprison any of them who refused to answer questions involving their own activities or to name fellow Communist-leaning individuals. McCarthy was an alcoholic and often characterized as an irrational demagogue. His demise was as swift as his rise, and he eventually died of alcoholic-related liver conditions.

Arthur Schlesinger, Jr.

Author of this book, as well as A Thousand Days, memorializing the Presidency of John Kennedy, Arthur Schlesinger was a close personal friend and adviser of both John and Robert Kennedy. As such, he became the primary historian of these two political careers, having first-hand and intimate knowledge of both their personal and political lives.

Lyndon Johnson

Vice-President to John Kennedy, Lyndon Johnson became President when Kennedy was assassinated. He completed Kennedy's term and was elected by a landslide in 1964, vowing to finish the domestic reform goals of President Kennedy. During his four-year elected term, Johnson became embroiled in Vietnam, escalating the war to heights that drained public coffers and support. In his attempts to bear the cost of a war and domestic programs, he could not be successful in either. During the last year of his term, he was clearly devastated by his failures and became, in the eyes of many White House aides and advisers, paranoid, convinced that the Kennedys were out to crucify him. In 1968, faced with rioting cities and huge anti-war demonstrations, Johnson announced that he would not seek a second term in office.

John Seigenthaler

John Seigenthaler was an assistant to Robert Kennedy during his year as Attorney General and remained a close personal friend and adviser, traveling with the Attorney General during his bid for the 1968 Democratic nomination for President.

Cesar Chavez

Mexican-American farm worker who became a farm labor leader and organizer. Robert Kennedy traveled with him to farms to see first-hand the plight of migrant farm workers.

Eugene McCarthy

Senator Eugene McCarthy served the state of Minnesota during the 1950's and 1960's. In early 1968, he announced his candidacy for the Democratic nomination for President, running largely on an anti-Vietnam War platform. Lacking the serious backing of most Democrats, his popularity with young people rose astronomically following the Tet Offensive, demonstrating the clear failure of the U.S. to gain a military solution to this largely civil war.

Jimmy Hoffa

Controversial leader of the Teamsters Union, purported to be closely connected with the mob and doggedly pursued by Robert Kennedy

hawks

term given to those who believed that the Vietnam War should be waged with total military might and North Vietnam completely defeated.

doves

term given to those who believed that the Vietnam War should be settled through negotiation and a withdrawal of U.S. troops

Objects/Places

Boston Post

newspaper which hired Robert Kennedy as a foreign correspondent, following his graduation from Harvard.

Teamsters Union

National union of transportation workers, headed, during the Kennedy years, by Jimmy Hoffa, a man who was the target of Robert Kennedy's relentless investigation

UAW

United Auto Workers Union, headed by Walter Reuther during the Kennedy years, a union Robert Kennedy felt had far less corruption than the Teamsters

Brown v. Board of Education

Monumental Supreme Court case in 1954 in which school segregation was declared unconstitutional

Commission on Equal Employment Opportunity

A commission begun by President Kennedy to research inequity in employment and to propose solutions to guarantee affirmative action in government and within any company receiving government contracts.

SCLC

Southern Christian Leadership Conference—the civil rights organization founded by Dr. Martin Luther King

Ole Miss

Nickname for the University of Mississippi in Oxford, Mississippi and site of a showdown when black student James Meredith attempted to enroll. Governor Ross Barnett eventually gave in.

University of Alabama

Site of another showdown when black students attempted to enroll. Governor George Wallace eventually capitulated.

Hyannis Port, Massachusetts

Town in which the Kennedy family compound is located

Hickory Hill

Estate home of Robert Kennedy in McLean, Virginia, during his time as Attorney General

Bay of Pigs Invasion

Failed invasion of Castro's Cuba by Cuban nationalists, backed by the CIA and Pentagon. It was an embarrassing incident for America, and the invaders were either killed or imprisoned by Castro's forces.

Action Diplomacy

Policy of John and Robert Kennedy to win over emerging nations by providing assistance in social and economic development

counterinsurgency

Governmental policy in which the U.S. helped new governments in emerging nations fight off revolutionary forces, usually Communist

Mongoose

Name for American operations which promoted revolution against Castro from within Cuba itself

Alliance for Progress

Name given to an American government program under President Kennedy, which provided aid to Latin American countries in the hope of generating political, economic and social changes and thus preventing Communism.

Warren Comission

Investigative commission established to investigate the assassination of John Kennedy

Indochina

Area of Southeast colonized by the French. In 1954, insurgency resulted in independence and the area was divided into the countries of Laos, Cambodia, North and South Vietnam.

Tet Offensive

A major attack by North Vietnamese and Viet Cong during the New Year's holiday truce. The devastation caused pointed to the lack of progress made by Johnson and General Westmoreland in achieving military stability in South Vietnam, and significantly reinforced the anti-war movement in the U.S.

The Great Society

name for President Lyndon Johnson's comprehensive domestic reform plan

Hotel Ambassador

Hotel in Los Angeles where Robert Kennedy stayed during the California primary in June, 1968 and where he was assassinated following his win in the primary.

Themes

Challenging the Status Quo

Principled individuals undoubtedly find themselves in positions of opposition to the status quo, and the measure of their courage and commitment is often defined by action taken in such circumstances. When the status quo is generally popular and supported by powerful individuals, moreover, challenging it can result in sharp criticism, public ridicule, and, on occasion, danger. The "safe" strategy is to retreat; the courageous strategy is to confront. Robert Kennedy lived in a time when challenges to the status quo were abundant, but largely ineffective, because, while such challenges were lead by courageous men and women, they were not embraced by those in power. Robert Kennedy would become one who had the power to assist those without power and ultimately became the champion of virtually every challenge to the status quo of the 1960's. As a less mature young man, Kennedy was placed into situations which, while immersed in the status quo, assisted in the development of principles from which he would carve his ultimate beliefs about democracy and its responsibility to all of America's citizens. As legal counsel for the Senate Investigations Committee, he assisted the Communist "witch-hunt" of Joe McCarthy. In an effort to maintain his father's pleasure, he accepted the "old guard" views of Democrats who believed that politics was a process of back-room deals. There were other forces at work, however, that would significantly alter Kennedy's principles and cause him to challenge the status quo in courageous and very public ways. Taking on the empire of J. Edgar Hoover, corrupt labor leaders, Southern segregationists, and a sitting President were not "safe" tasks, to be sure, and gained Kennedy as many enemies as friends. The commitment (and a penchant for risk-taking), however, never waned, and Robert Kennedy, even in death, served as a model to others who continue to pursue the challenges he pursued.

Personal Growth

A variety of factors determine the adult that an individual becomes—family relationships, genetic and environmental circumstances, significant events, education—and this was certainly apparent in the story of Robert Kennedy. Born into wealth and privilege, Robert Kennedy might have had options most others do not. His parents,however, and especially his father, set courses for their sons that would have made frivolous lifestyles impossible. Joe Kennedy Sr. insisted that the four sons be competitive, athletic, academically solid and aggressive. Of the four sons, Robert was perhaps the least of any of these, far more introverted and gentle than his brothers, but bent on meeting his father's expectations. Tenacity and diligence thus became an integral part of his character, although gentle compassion was retained, albeit temporarily buried, within his character.

Significant events in one's life impact personal growth, and Kennedy certainly had a number of these. Tragedy was common and frequent, including Joe, Jr.'s death and

John's injury during World War II, the deaths of a brother-in-law and sister in separate airplane crashes, a mentally handicapped sister who was eventually institutionalized, and, of course the assassination of his brother. There was grief, to be certain, but, as well, a stoicism that moved him forward with a need to accomplish.

Travels throughout the world at a young age, both with a family friend and as a newspaper correspondent, provided experiences with the poverty and degradation of vast numbers of people, who had no hope for a better existence. He was more profoundly affected by the personal and intimate experiences with poverty and inequality in his own country, as well as the needless suffering and death of pointless wars and rigid politicians who resisted change that would improve human conditions.

Certainly, Robert's work as legal counsel for the Senate Investigation Committee and his dogged pursuit of criminals as Attorney General confirmed his belief that wrongs had to be righted, no matter what the personal or political cost. His pursuit of justice and equality for the disenfranchised was relentless.

Like Robert Kennedy, growth from infancy to adulthood is inevitable for everyone. In this growth, every human develops a set of values, principles, and a psychological make-up that guide both his actions and his views of his fellow man.

Empathy

Empathy is defined as a willingness and an ability to place oneself in another's position and see an event, circumstance, or life picture from that person's viewpoint. While most humans can experience sympathy for others, there is still a separation which prevents deep understanding. Robert Kennedy developed empathy as he matured and began to experience the totally foreign world of those whose horrible life conditions were the result of being forgotten, neglected or hated by the rich and/or powerful. He walked the city slums and heard the stories of their residents; he traveled to the fields worked by migrant farm workers; he sat with poor rural blacks in Georgia and Mississippi; and in placing himself in their positions, he developed the ability to see this country through their eyes. He understood their hopelessness and their anger, stating that, had he been born into similar circumstances, he would have been a juvenile delinquent or a revolutionary. Such empathy committed Robert Kennedy to causes of justice for the poor, an end to the Vietnam War, and, ultimately, to a presidential campaign with its own tragic end. What society can learn from his life, however, is that properly developed empathy fosters action that pursues lofty, humane purposes and promotes a decline in egocentric practices which pit man against man and nation against nation.

Style

Perspective

Similar to his previous book on the Kennedy Presidency (One Thousand Days), Schlesinger is as much a victim of his background and biases as all authors who write biographies of individuals with whom they have had personal and intimate friendships. While much of the work is written in the third person, there is a significant amount of first person commentary and opinion, particularly in the form of response to criticism of Kennedy's politics and actions. His decision to run for his party's nomination in 1968, for example, was seen by many as impulsive and a result of selfish opportunism, and Schlesinger finds a need to devote two complete chapters to the complexities of the internal struggle he insists occurred before Kennedy's decision was ultimately made. As well, the reader will find a wealth of original source material, in the form of conversations and letters, to confirm the numerous facets of a complex man, who consistently struggled with the contradictions of idealism and reality and placed the commitment to equality, justice and world peace above his own political career. Thus, Schlesinger posits, Kennedy took great political risks, challenging conservatives, corrupt labor leaders, segregationists, and hawks within his own party in order to promote loftier missions. Certainly, Robert Kennedy was a complex figure; certainly, Robert Kennedy had an abiding concern for the disadvantaged; certainly, Robert Kennedy was willing to take risks in pursuit of equality and justice; but, certainly, as well, Robert Kennedy was a politician. This final aspect of his character is relegated to a minor position by Schlesinger, who obviously wishes the legacy of Robert Kennedy to be, as he himself states, to be the "good" Bobby.

Tone

Arthur Schlesinger is, first of all, a historian, a man who experienced and documented the presidencies and American political history, from Franklin Roosevelt forward, and their impact on both domestic and international relations. He was, admittedly, a liberal Democrat, and his focus, in teaching at Harvard, in his involvement in campaigns and the Kennedy White House, and in all of his writings, was to promote the philosophy and politics of liberal Democrats. Lack of objectivity and transparent partisanship is evident in this work; however, this bias does not result in an unworthy piece, but, rather, creates a thorough picture of a multi-faceted personality, focusing more on the achievements and lofty missions than on the political and obsessive aspects of Robert Kennedy's character. Other writers and historians have accused Schlesinger of skewing his portrayals of the Kennedy men because of his "love affair" with the family; however, the evident partisanship would more correctly be attributed to the fact that his political views were so closely aligned to liberals of his times, and these included John, Robert and Ted Kennedy. Having written speeches for all three, having served in the campaigns of all three, and having participated in the John Kennedy administration, Schlesinger

becomes more than a mere "Kennedy lover." He becomes an individual supremely qualified to chronicle the life of Robert Kennedy.

Structure

Schlesinger begins his lengthy work with a historical look at the Kennedy family's entry to America and the background of Robert Kennedy's parents. The book ends with the June, 1968 assassination. One might be lead to believe, therefore, that the work will be chronological in nature. In fact, the chronology is present, but certainly not in the strictest sense of the word. Once Robert is in Washington, whether as counsel to a Senate Committee, campaigner for his brother John, Attorney General, Senator or presidential candidate, the structure folds into a far more thematic approach. Thus, chapters covering salient concepts and issues of the 1960's, such as pursuit of corrupt labor leaders, civil rights, and Vietnam, create smaller chronologies with the larger march of time. This appears to be critical to the work, moreover, because, without the treatment of an individual issue in its entirety, important perspective is lost. Once the reader becomes accustomed to the "back and forth" so critical to the thorough nature of the work, the necessity for this structure becomes clear, and one is left with much greater understanding of the role Robert Kennedy played in an era of turmoil and upheaval in both domestic and international climates of the times.

Quotes

It took long years, a family of his own, experience with life, experience with death, to reintegrate the element of personality loosened by the shock, in so many respects the salutary shock, of his upbringing. But it happened—in spite of his father, because of his father, Robert Kennedy was indeed a most determined person. His father made him what he appeared to be. Yet Jacqueline Kennedy, who adored both Robert and his father, once said that, of the brothers, he was "least like his father." (p. 102)

Robert spoke as often as the rest. Patrick Lucey, the state chairman, told him he should decide whether to be manager or campaigner. "But he insisted on doing both and did both quite well. It was amazing to me how he could find the amount of energy that he was able to put into the thing." He was still not fluent on his feet, but he was gaining confidence. A slight figure—he lost a pound a week in Wisconsin—bare headed, his collar turned up against the icy March winds, he drove from town to town along roads piled high with snow, stopping at high schools, Rotary clubs and political rallies to explain why his brother should be President. (p. 204)

John Kennedy recognized that a campaign required a son of a bitch—and that it could not be the candidate. Robert was prepared to do what the candidate should not have done. Stewart Alsop called it a "sweet-and-sour brother act, Jack uses his charm and wave the carrot and then Bobby wades in with the big stick." "Every politician in Massachusetts," John Kennedy said, "was mad at Bobby after 1952, but we had the best organization in history." (p. 224)

"The hardest problems of all in law enforcement," Kennedy had told the University of Georgia, "are those involving a conflict of law and local custom." The white south's customs were rooted in a bitter history. The Supreme Court's law came on them as a threat to tradition, womanhood and social order. Southern blacks, awakening after so many years to their constitutional rights, were growing as militant for federal law as whites were for local custom. The negotiating approach underestimated both the intractability of the old-school whites and the passion of the new-school blacks. (p.307)

Yet, for all their good intentions, for all their sensitivity to racial injustice, for all their unpopularity with the segregationists, the Kennedys after a year and a half were proving something of a disappointment to civil rights leaders. The refusal to call for legislation, the failure to protect civil rights workers, the interminable litigation over voting rights, the southern judicial appointments, the prolonged postponement of the stroke of the pen, the leniency with government contractors—all these were beginning to convince the movement that good intentions were not solving many problems. (p. 326)

It all began mildly enough when Robert Kennedy in his first press conference spoke about the "alarming increase" in juvenile delinquency. The predicament of the young always concerned him; in part, no doubt, because of the contrast between his own economically secure childhood and the scramble for survival among kids in the slums. So much depended on where one began. Jack Newfield once asked him what he might

have become if he had not been born a Kennedy. He replied, "Perhaps a juvenile delinquent or a revolutionary." Widespread delinquency seemed to him a self-evident symptom of derangement in the social order. (p. 426)

This was simply the Robert Kennedy who twenty years before at Milton rushed to the side of the underdog and never worried about embarrassing his friends. Life had only enlarged his knowledge of underdogs—first the Rackets Committee, then the civil rights movement, then the poverty wars. His convictions about participation, his readiness to bypass established bureaucracies, his impulse to experiment with new institutional forms, above all, his instinct for sympathy: these were the key to his growing identification with the minorities of the republic—and theirs with him.(pp. 433-34)

Intelligence agencies, sealed off by walls of secrecy from the rest of the community, tend to form societies of their own. Prolonged immersion in the self-contained, self-justifying, ultimately hallucinatory world of clandestinity and deception erodes the reality principle. So intelligence operatives, in the CIA as well as the FBI, had begun to see themselves as the appointed guardians of the Republic, infinitely more devoted and knowledgeable than transient elected officials, morally authorized to do on their own whatever they believed the nation's security demanded. Let others interfere at their peril. (p. 474)

As a weapon, counterinsurgency was turning cruelly in the hand of the user. In the end it was a ghastly illusion. Its primary consequence was to keep alive the American belief in the capacity and right to intervene in foreign lands. God save us always from the innocent and the good. The failure of counterinsurgency was another phase in the education of Robert Kennedy. (p.487)

Ever since their journey across Asia in 1951, John and Robert Kennedy had believed that nationalism was the most vital political emotion in the developing world. They instinctively sympathized with new nations struggling for survival; and, after Khrushchev's 1961 prediction of Communist world victory through national liberation wars, they saw the third World as the crucial battleground between communism and democracy. As President, John Kennedy cultivated the new leaders, welcomed them to Washington and, to emphasize his personal, confided the Peace Corps to his brother-in-law and dispatched his brother on Third World missions. (p.584)

He was now the head of the family. With his father stricken, his older brothers dead, he was accountable to himself. The qualities he had so long subordinated in the interest of others—the concern under the combativeness, the gentleness under the carapace, the idealism, at once wistful and passionate, under the toughness—could rise freely to the surface. He could be himself at last. (p. 648).

Reemployment would only establish the economic preconditions for healthier cities. There remained the gnawing political problems—powerlessness and participation. The crisis of the city, Kennedy believed, came ultimately from "the destruction of the sense, and often the fact, of community, of human dialogue, the thousand invisible strands of common experience and purpose, affection and respect which tie men to their fellows."

The history of the human race, "until today," had been the "history of community." Now community was disappearing at the time when its "sustaining strength" was more than ever necessary in a world grown "impersonal and abstract." The child of the ghetto was "a prisoner in an area which is not a community or even a series of communities, but a vast, gray undifferentiated slum" (pp. 818-819)

If his heart was in the hills, his head was in the councils of state. In the predominant half of his nature he remained the realistic political leader. The ethic of responsibility prevailed over the ethic of ultimate ends. He wanted to be President, he believed in constitutional democracy, he abhorred violence, he could not have been a revolutionary. Still, something more than conventional politics was required. The process was plainly not working. It was not stopping the escalation of the war. It was not giving the poor a fair break or the minorities an equal opportunity. It was not dealing with rural squalor or urban decay. It appeared to be good only at keeping power arrangements as they were. Because it seemed useless for change, the poor, the minorities, the young were losing faith in it. (p. 837)

For Kennedy the decision posed moral as well as political questions. He deeply believed that Johnson's war, his growing neglect of poverty and racial justice and his violent personality were disasters for the republic. Was there not a case, as he had already suggested at the December war council, for running no matter whether he won or lost? Had he not said so often that an individual could make a difference? Had he not, like his brother before him, reserved the hottest place in hell for those who remained neutral in the face of injustice? Did he not regard courage as the transcendent virtue? (p. 871)

Yet a theme remained—the theme that, along with the war, had absorbed him most in the Senate. For, more than anyone else in American politics, he had become the tribune of the underclass, the leader determined "to show," as he said, "that the individual does count in a society where he actually appears to count less and less," determined to overcome the alienations of American society, to bind the wounds of American life. As soon as he became a candidate he had reaffirmed this theme. "We are more divided now than perhaps we have been in a hundred years," he said on March 17. The great need was "to heal the deep divisions that exist between races, between age groups and on the war." Now that he and McCarthy together had moderated the Vietnam policy and driven Johnson into retirement, he was free to move ahead where McCarthy could not easily follow—toward a coalition of the poor and powerless in the battle to bring the excluded groups into the national community. "I've got every establishment in America against me," he said on April 2. "I want to work for all who are not represented," he told Charles Evers. "I want to be their President." (p. 986)

Thus his mission: to bridge the great schisms—between white and nonwhite, between affluent and poor, between age and youth, between the old and the new politics, between order and dissent, between the past and the future. It was an undertaking that, as Kennedy conceived it, required not only specific programs but active leadership. Kennedy had no doubt that Johnson had abused executive power in foreign affairs. But a general recession of presidential leadership, he believed, would increase the nation's

impotence in the face of deep and angry national division. In the back of his mind was FDR during the depression. Only an activist Presidency and an affirmative national government, as he saw it, could pull together a divided people in a stormy time. (p. 931)

The train arrived in Washington. Night had fallen. Mourners with twinkling candles followed the coffin into Arlington Cemetery. "There was," wrote a grieving Lady Bird Johnson, "a great white moon riding high in the sky." But the cemetery itself was dark and shadowed. The pallbearers, not sure where to place the coffin, walked on uncertainly in the night. Averell Harriman finally said to Stephen Smith, "Steve, do you know where you're going?" Smith said, "Well, I'm not sure." Then Smith said, "I distinctly heard a voice coming out of the coffin saying, "Damn it. If you fellows put me down, I'll show you the way." (p. 1061)

Topics for Discussion

"Washington is broken" is a common statement, most often heard during election years. In what ways did Robert Kennedy feel Washington to be broken?

Was Kennedy's tenure as Attorney General successful or not? Support your position with specific examples.

Robert Kennedy committed himself to improving the conditions of blacks, Hispanic migrant workers, Native Americans, and any others living in poverty. As Attorney General, what resources were available to him to pursue these goals? What forces served to block his activities in these areas? As President, how could he have perhaps been more successful?

Robert Kennedy's opposition to the Vietnam War was two-fold: first, innocent civilians, particularly women and children, were killed and maimed by U.S. military strikes, and U.S. troops were dying for a war that could not be won; second, the war effort was to support a corrupt, ineffective government which refused to give a large portion of its population a voice in the governing of the country. In what ways are these two objections similar to the objections raised about the Iraq war? In what ways are they different?

Schlesinger speaks often to an almost insatiable curiosity on the part of Robert Kennedy that lead him in many directions, intellectually, politically, socially, and physically. What in Kennedy's life and activities support this notion?

As Attorney General, Kennedy was criticized for turning the legal process upside down. Rather than identify a crime and then launch an investigation to find the criminal, Kennedy often identified a criminal first and then searched for crimes he believed had been committed. Explain how his pursuit of Jimmy Hoffa gave credence to his critics. Give an example of the use of such tactics today.

The fact that Robert Kennedy would not participate in the Warren Commission investigation and refused, in the end, to accept it, has been a part of the contention that there indeed was more to be known. Those who hold to a "conspiracy" often cite as potential culprits enemies and/or combinations of enemies John Kennedy had made—segregationists, the mob, large corporations, Castro, and others. Do you think the two assassinations could be connected? Why or why not?

Robert Kennedy and Lyndon Johnson clearly disliked one another. What were the major points of personal and political contention between them? Had they been able to bury their feud and become allies, working for mutual benefit, might they have both been more successful? Why or why not?

Foreign policy during the 1960's, particularly as related to underdeveloped countries of Asia, Africa and Latin America, was often based upon whether conservatives or liberals

prevailed. What was the general position of each of these groups relative to policies and activities in these emerging countries?