

Birth of a Feud: The Kennedy-Johnson Fray

BY DREW PEARSON

The public at first did not know of the tension aboard the Presidential plane as the dead President and the new President flew back from Dallas. But shortly after the return, signs began to appear that all was not well between the two most powerful political families in the United States—the Johnsons and the Kennedys.

Immediately following the assassination, members of the Kennedy staff spoke savagely of the fact that President Kennedy had gone to Texas at all and seemed to blame Mr. Johnson for luring him down there. Apparently they did not know—or else had forgotten—that it was Mr. Kennedy who took the initiative, that Mr. Johnson discouraged the trip.

Ted Sorenson, counsel to J.F.K., said he wished Texas could be blown off the map. Arthur Schlesinger Jr., remarked that he simply couldn't bear to hear American foreign policy proclaimed in a Texas twang.

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The day after his return to Washington, the new President sent an aide, Richard Nelson, to the White House for two sheets of Presidential stationery. Snarled a Kennedy aide: "Can't he even wait until the body is cold?"

Mr. Johnson wanted the stationery to write longhand letters to the late President's two children, Caroline and John Jr.

It was reported that on the night after the assassination, members of the Kennedy staff and family stayed up in the White House most of the night planning how they could rebuild the Kennedy image and take the headlines away from Mr. Johnson. Plans were laid for a state funeral in which the presidents, the prime ministers, and the kings of all the allied countries would march behind the casket.

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When Franklin Roosevelt died in Warm Springs, Ga., and when Vice President Truman was immediately sworn in as his successor, Mrs. Roosevelt was asked by the man who replaced her husband: "What can I do for you?"

"The question, Mr. President, is what we can do for you," replied Mrs. Roosevelt. She moved out of the White House the next day.

The Johnsons remained in their private home in Spring Valley for 14 days, during which Mrs. Kennedy lived in the White House. The period was so prolonged that newsmen started asking Mrs. Johnson when Mrs. Kennedy was expected to move. Mrs. Johnson retorted almost angrily: "I would to God I could serve Mrs. Kennedy's comfort. I can at least serve her convenience."

The new President stayed out of the White House office until after the funeral; had extra phone lines strung into his home and Vice Presidential office so he could conduct the nation's affairs without disturbing the Kennedy family.

He brought the huge deluge of condolence mail that followed the assassination to his home, rather than dump it on the Kennedy staff, which should have answered it. Mrs. Johnson recruited volunteer help, chiefly congressmen's wives to sort out the mail and answer it at the Johnson home.

Some of the late President Kennedy's staff stayed away from their jobs for days at a time. Nevertheless, Mr. Johnson invited each one of them with their wives to the residence part of the White House to discuss their future. He offered them a chance to stay on with him or take other appointments in the federal government.

When Mrs. Kennedy asked that the Cape Canaveral missile site be named after her husband, Mr. Johnson complied immediately, despite opposition from Florida residents and the local Chamber of Commerce. And he also sent a bill to Congress asking for \$17,500,000 to finance the John F. Kennedy Cultural Center in Washington, an enterprise started by the Kennedys and supposed to be financed by private funds.

In addition, he put \$50,000 in his own White House budget to be paid



"We cannot escape history"—Lincoln
Rosen in Albany Times-Union

to Mrs. Kennedy annually for a public relations assistant, Miss Pamela Turnure, plus a secretarial staff. This was the first time in history that the widow of a President had received funds for such an office. In the past, White House widows have been voted \$10,000 a year pension, but that's all.