

I am not misrepresenting the piece in any way. Quite the contrary. Talbot even gave space to two of the very worst and dishonest Kennedy chroniclers, namely Ron Rosenbaum and Thomas Reeves. But the good news is that in *Brothers* Talbot has largely reversed field. Today he criticizes people who write like he formerly did about the Kennedys, e.g. Christopher Hitchens. But the bad news is that he can't quite go the last yard. He can't quite let go of some of the empty baggage above. And this mars the good work in the volume.

I

The book has a neat plan to it. It begins with Robert Kennedy's reaction to the news of his brother's death in Dallas. The structure then flashes back to a year-by-year review of the Kennedy presidency. It then picks up again with RFK after his brother's death, and then follows him forward through to 1968 and his own assassination. It concludes with a summary of the actions taken to try and resolve the issues surrounding both assassinations since 1968. The book takes in a lot of space without being verbose or pretentiously bulky. Which, after the likes of *Ultimate Sacrifice*, is a relief. Further in this regard, Talbot is a skillful writer. So the book is not at all difficult to read.

In many ways, the first chapter is the best in the book. It opens with J. Edgar Hoover telling RFK that his brother has been shot. In conversations with two assistants, Bobby immediately refers to the perpetrator of the crime as "they" and not "him". He instinctively believes that the crime centers around the CIA, the Mafia and Cuba and he begins to question people with access to each group, including John McCone, Director of the CIA. (pgs. 6-9) When the body arrives back in Washington, RFK questions Secret Service agents Roy Kellerman and James Rowley and finds that both believe there was a crossfire in Dealey Plaza.

check on that

For future keep safe

Talbot then builds an argument that this early conclusion is what caused Robert Kennedy to take control of the president's autopsy exhibits, specifically the brain and tissue slides. Further, Talbot adduces evidence that RFK actually thought of taking the limousine also. After Oswald is killed by Ruby, Bobby begins to focus on the Mob and has labor lawyer Julius Draznin submit a report on Ruby's labor racketeering activities. RFK then told his friend Pat Moynihan to investigate the Secret Service while Bobby interviewed agent Clint Hill himself.

This chapter closes with a review of William Walton's mission to Moscow in the wake of President Kennedy's assassination. This extraordinary tale first surfaced in 1997 in one of the two best books on the Cuban Missile Crisis, *One Hell of a Gamble*. (The other volume being *The Kennedy Tapes*, published the same year.) Talbot goes into the background of Walton and why he was sent by RFK and Jackie Kennedy to send a secret message via Georgi Bolshakov who the Kennedys had used previously during the Missile Crisis as a back channel. RFK told Walton to see Bolshakov before he even reported to the American ambassador Foy Kohler. Bobby thought Kohler was anti-Kennedy, and a hardliner who could not get anything real done with the Russians. (p. 31) This new message had been presaged by another talk RFK had with the Russian

plate

in 1962. At that time Bobby told Bolshakov that Khrushchev did not seem to realize that every step his brother took to meet the premier "halfway costs my brother a lot of effort ... In a gust of blind hate, his enemies may go to any length, including killing him." (p. 32)

The new message fulfilled the earlier prophecy. Walton told Bolshakov that the president's brother and widow believed that JFK had been killed by a large political conspiracy. And although Lee Harvey Oswald was a former defector and alleged Castro sympathizer, they believed the conspiracy was domestic. Further, they felt that Lyndon Johnson would not be able to fulfill President Kennedy's grand design for Russo/American détente. That design would have to be filled by RFK who would find a temporary political base and then run for president himself. Walton said in this regard that "Robert agreed completely with his brother and, more important, actively sought to bring John F. Kennedy's ideas to fruition." (p. 33)

Talbot sums up the multi-layered significance of this momentous mission this way: "There is no other conclusion to reach. In the days following his brother's bloody ouster, Robert Kennedy placed more trust in the Soviet government than the one he served." (p. 34) From here, Talbot launches into a three chapter review of the Kennedy presidency which is meant to demonstrate why RFK felt more comfortable conveying his hidden suspicions about Dallas to the Soviets rather than say to the Warren Commission.

Be sure to read this

*Chpt. One
Use for
Class
Notes*

This chapter is the highlight of the book. It may be one of the most important ever written on either the Kennedy presidency, or Robert Kennedy himself. It basically confirms through much firsthand evidence what many have suspected. First, whatever Bobby said in public about the Warren Commission was only a figleaf. From the beginning, he never believed the lone gunman mythology. He always suspected a powerful domestic conspiracy. Second, he was going to bide his time. He would wait until he was in position to do something about the crime. But he would not jeopardize his path to get to that position by making public comments that would make him a media target in America. As pointed out by people like Jim Garrison and Harold Weisberg, this strategy entailed its own dangers. For enough people knew about Bobby's suspicions and goals to let the word reach out to others in the power elite. And this is probably one of the chief reasons for what happened in Los Angeles in June of 1968. In fact, both Harold Weisberg and Vincent Salandria predicted that if Bobby won that California primary, and if he remained silent in the interim, he would be killed before he won the presidency. Although Talbot does not go this far in explicit terms, his book is pregnant with that implication. I believe this is the first time that this message, however subliminal, has been contained in a book that reached a mainstream audience. That is a real and salutary accomplishment. In this regard, Talbot deserves kudos.

Notes

II

The second section of the book is a review of the Kennedy presidency that is meant to explain why RFK felt the way he did at the time of the assassination.