

The Kennedys under a microscope

They were not born to blush unseen and two new books assure that they won't

THE KENNEDYS.
An American Drama
By Peter Collier & David Horowitz
Summit Books, \$29.95.

THE KENNEDYS.
Dynasty and Disaster 1848-1983
By John H. Davis, McGraw-Hill, \$24.95.

By JOSEPH PATRICK KENNEDY

TRUE TO their titles, these two books, whose combined pages number more than 1,200, offer drama, dynasty, disaster and more about what might be the most written about family in American history. These are not works of flattery. If we grant that these are responsible and experienced authors, then their research will take them wherever it leads. If the truth must somehow come out, and it is in fact the complete and whole truth, then is not justice served? Time and perseverance seem to erode the already fine boundary between public and private life. It would appear that what can be known will someday be known. The Kennedys were not born to blush unseen. Joseph Patrick Kennedy, family patriarch and financier, who married Rose Fitzgerald, saw to that.

The Kennedys, *An American Drama* should render the gods mortal for some time. It is a most revealing study of father and sons, of brothers and women, of rulers and subjects. It will not likely receive the Kennedy imprimatur. It contains intimate revelations and generally unfavorable findings which Collier and Horowitz have obtained from numerous interviews and their research of diverse records. In this American drama there are promiscuity, wealth, power, achievements, humor, problems of health, drugs, tragedies, politics, organized crime and intramillennial strife.

Many of the imperfections and, undoubtedly, some of the good qualities of future Kennedys are suggested in the character and life of Joe Kennedy as set forth here. Collier and Horowitz succinctly characterize him as "architect of their lives." There were politicians among the ancestors Kennedy's, but the ascendancy of the current Kennedy generations was under the aegis of Joe Kennedy. His specialty was making money. His philosophy seemed to be that winning was everything, even if you had to pay for it. He could. He bought into the campaign of Franklin D. Roosevelt and reaped the benefits of political patronage. He was named chairman of the Securities and Exchange Commission and later was U.S.



The Kennedy family on the Riviera in 1930, back row: Kathleen, Joe Jr., Rosemary, Mrs. Kennedy and Teddy, Middle row: Jack, Eunice, Joseph P. Kennedy and Patricia. Front row: Bobby and Jean.

ambassador to the Court of St. James, until he fell out of favor with FDR.

Some of Joe Kennedy's behavior and lifestyle may have foreshadowed things to come. During his affair and dealings with Gloria Swanson, Rose Kennedy carried on publicly as if it were business as usual. She took frequent trips to Europe. Jacqueline Kennedy seemed unusually silent about Jack's sexual encounters with other women. These find ample coverage in this book, which reads like a soap opera of once and future presidents. Perhaps a time will come when readers will skip lightly over the sections on Marilyn Monroe in Kennedy books to get on with the unexpected parts. Incredibly, one of JFK's friends was Judith Campbell Exner, who was also the friend of Sam Giancana, a figure from the world of organized crime. J. Edgar Hoover kept JFK under surveillance. Robert Kennedy is seen as trying to steer the ship of state between Hoover and the underworld, both of whom seemingly

knew too much.

Members of the Kennedy family were individuals, sharing a common name and an ambitious father, but some were closer than others. One "Kennedy friend" is quoted as saying, "These three — Joe Junior, Jack, and Kick (Kathleen) — were like a family within the family, a charmed triangle." Upon the death of Joe Junior, Jack became the shining light. Success would be his father's, failure would be his. Jack's letters to his life-long friend Lem Billings reveal a candid, youthful, witty, promiscuous individual. He had an extraordinary capacity for pain.

Perhaps the burden of wealth, prominence and family tragedy was seen again in the sad death of David Kennedy, son of Robert and Ethel. David spoke to these authors, who quote him as saying about the Kennedys, "They have their own idea of reality which isn't mine but it has a hold on me." The Kennedys, *An American Drama* offers an unusual concentration of the trouble brewing in Camelot, long before and since. Others might

have achieved a more equitable treatment. *The Kennedys Dynasty and Disaster 1848-1983* recounts about 155 years of the long, promising and painful story of the Kennedys, which is set forth here with a sense of proportion and research that will not go unappreciated. John F. Davis, a member of the Bouvier family, has been observing the Kennedy family since his cousin married John F. Kennedy in 1953. His book is not unduly adulatory. It has been an, emotionally, difficult" book for Davis to write. He has been close to his subjects on many occasions. What Davis achieves is a copious history with numerous insights about the Kennedy and Bouvier families and their "detailments," such as the assassinations and Chappaquiddick.

Davis traces the Kennedys from their origins in Duganslow, Ireland, through Sen. Edward Kennedy's defeat in the 1980 presidential nomination and beyond. While there is much here about the families and their rise to power, the book is particularly thought-provoking on the deaths of Robert and Jack Kennedy. "Seen in the perspective of the last 20 years, with all that has come to light during that period, the assassination of President Kennedy and the investigation of that assassination, coupled with the uncritical acceptance of that investigation by press and public, appear as a truly monumental failure of the administration of justice in the United States." The brothers had been placed in a compromised position by the now familiar indiscretions and certain policies of the administration described in this book. According to Davis, Robert F. Kennedy "was compelled to thwart the investigation of his own brother's murder even though there was a high probability that organized crime was involved." Perhaps if Robert Kennedy had become president we would have known more about JFK's assassination. Robert is quoted as telling at a audience in California on June 3, 1968, "That only the powers of the presidency will reveal the secrets of my brother's death." It was three days later that he, too, was shot down.

Houston Chronicle columnist Maxine Mueseler has said words to the effect that if you don't want to read about it, don't do it. The Kennedys have done it, or at least some of it, and some good accounts had have become known. Collier and Horowitz report mainly the bad. Davis offers a more equitable account. These books may shock some will inform, amaze and perhaps irritate others but those who have read Plato and looked about the world a bit already know that virtue and affluence are seldom, close companions.

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