

PUBLICITY

F. Y. I.  
GENERAL BOOKS

## Family albums: studies in character, contrast and clay feet

THE KENNEDYS: AN AMERICAN DRAMA by Peter Collier and David Horowitz (Summit: \$20.95; 576 pp.)  
THE KENNEDYS: DYNASTY AND DISASTER, 1848-1983 by John H. Davis (McGraw-Hill: \$24.95; 722 pp.)

Half century ago, when Franklin D. Roosevelt was President, press photographers rarely, if ever, took pictures that would indicate he was unable to walk on his own. Many Americans were unaware of the extent of the handicaps caused by his polio.

That sort of mass ignorance would not be possible today. Now, television and all kinds of writers strive to inform us of every moral and physical weakness, often to the point of serious exaggeration—not only about our leaders, but their wives, friends, children and even their grandchildren.

The first of these books, by Peter Collier and David Horowitz, is an extreme example of the new style. The last hundred pages deal mainly with the problems, particularly the drug-related ones, of three of Robert F. Kennedy's 11 children who were left psychologically damaged by the assassination of their father. Indeed, throughout the book the authors have taken every opportunity to point out in vivid detail any sign of lustful or dissipated behavior by the principals in the Kennedy saga, by their companions or offspring.

On the other hand, the reader finds but scant reference to the moral leadership of the Kennedys in civil rights, in aiding the poor at home and underdeveloped societies abroad or in pursuing better relations with the Soviets. And when some of the children have, to all appearances, been well brought up, as apparently is the case with John F. Kennedy Jr. and his sister, Caroline, there is only brief mention.

This book is well written. But its approach raises serious questions whether this constitutes, in many respects, an appeal to prurient interest. It satisfies the common taste for scandal, but is it a serious quest for the truth about this complex family, a family which certainly has had its share of weaknesses and tragedies but also has inspired millions of persons throughout the world?

Consider the following passage, discussing the aftermath of the paralyzing stroke suffered by Joseph P. Kennedy in 1961: "He drooled out of the right side of his mouth. The tensor muscles in his right hand contracted, drawing his fingers into a claw. His grandchildren looked at him and were frightened; they would run away crying." Is this detail the price that must be paid to write a best seller? Is it worth it?

The second of these books, by John H. Davis, is far better balanced, if more awkwardly written. The author is a cousin of Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis, but in some



respects is rather unsparing of her. Happily, he examines issues in their full complexity without, at the same time, claiming to have all the answers.

Davis' summary, for instance, of the known facts and outstanding issues in the assassination of John F. Kennedy, is filled with questions, but they appear to be responsible questions, and they are put in a reasonable framework. Unlike Collier and Horowitz, he spends little time on the young generation of Kennedys.

It would be wrong to give the impression that Davis' book is somehow less interesting than the other. It is the more restrained and, thus, perhaps, will be more ultimately satisfying to those seriously interested in the truth.

Reviewed by Kenneth Reich

The contrast can be seen in both books' relatively lengthy treatment of the question of President Kennedy's health, both in his youth and in the White House. Collier and Horowitz have him frequently at death's door. Davis takes a less dramatic view, although he remarks, "The chronology of Jack Kennedy's health problems, many of which are only just beginning to come to light, while several of which still remain hidden because his family has refused to release his medical records, is both astonishing and sobering."

Both books deal with roughly the same time span, beginning with the arrival of the Kennedy family in America and continuing almost to the present. The Collier and Horowitz volume, however, does include the recent death, from an apparent drug overdose, of David A. Kennedy, third son of Robert F. Kennedy; Davis' effort does not. Davis devotes a far greater proportion of his volume to the central figures of John and Robert Kennedy than Collier and Horowitz do.

Davis may also have the surer grasp of what are the central issues in the Kennedy saga. For instance, in the inevitable passages about several generations of Kennedy womanizing, he devotes proportionally more space to President Kennedy's affair with Judith Campbell Exner. Because of her romantic association at the same time with Mafia boss Sam Giancana, this affair obviously deserves more lengthy treatment.

After years of mostly laudatory books about the Kennedys, some of them sycophantic in tone, here are two important critical books, one of them, it seems, excessively so. The major balanced Kennedy work is still to be written.

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