

Will It Hurt Bobby's Image?

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Political pundits were divided today on whether Sen. Robert F. Kennedy has been politically injured by the controversy over "Death of a President."

Some observers feel that the book suit has re-awakened the old image of Kennedy as "ruthless"—a man willing to re-write history, if necessary, to protect or enhance his political career.

Others believe, however, that Mrs. Jacqueline Kennedy, widow of the President, has clearly emerged as the moving force behind the lawsuit, with the Senator seen as merely supporting her out of family loyalty.

The latter school of thought holds that Kennedy may benefit from the incident because his role will be considered a noble gesture contrary to his best interests.

"It'll hurt a bit by reviving this 'ruthless' business," de-

clared one political expert. "The very notion of suppressing a book brings up the doubt again whether he is really a liberal."

Another expert said: "I think it will hurt Kennedy. That guy in the White House is sore as hell about the book. It's bound to look as though the book was written to further Kennedy's presidential ambitions."

"This is a sad thing, but it would be better if the book comes out. If it is suppressed, then Kennedy looks really bad. If I were advising him I'd tell him he's better off to let it come out."

A Republican politico disagreed, saying "it's hard to assess, but off-hand it probably won't hurt him."

"After all, the disagreement is between Mrs. Kennedy and (author William) Manchester. Kennedy isn't directly involved."

"The J. Edgar Hoover wire-

tap argument might cause Kennedy more embarrassment than the book.

"He's handling it as though he wished to spare President Johnson embarrassment. This looks like a noble thing—not as self-serving as it otherwise might if the book contained something critical of himself."

Another source, a shrewd politician, said he didn't think the situation would damage Kennedy's image because one incident doesn't change public opinion about a man.

"I just don't believe public opinion is molded so fast," he said. "I can remember several times when they said Herbert Lehman was through. He went on to become United States Senator, and he lived to 85 as the most potent Democrat in New York."

"Besides, this controversy is a matter concerning Jackie Kennedy more than the senator."