

MARIANNE MEANS

## Critics Attacking The Kennedy Clan

WASHINGTON—The signs are now unmistakably clear that the public attitude toward the Kennedy family, which for the past three years has ranged from fascination to adulation, is subtly undergoing a transformation.

A climate of suspicion and criticism, both public and private, has gradually but steadily been developing the past two months.



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To predict the effect of this disenchantment upon the political future of Sen. Robert Kennedy would be folly, since his first realistic opportunity to reach for the White House is yet six years away. It cannot, however, be of help to his ambitions.

There is no reliable method of measuring the disaffection, but unquestionably it exists and is accelerating. Thus far it has had two easily discernable results. The public appears to be increasingly willing to disassociate the legend of President Kennedy from the present-day adventures and political maneuvers of his widow, Jacqueline, and his brother, Robert. And many of those who have believed staunchly in a unique Kennedy destiny no longer accept as inevitable that Robert Kennedy will one day sit in the White House.

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THE NEW CRITICS ATTRIBUTE their hostile mood to three basic factors: an uncomfortable feeling that the Kennedy family is too unrestrained and arrogant in the use of money and power, an overadjustment to a prolonged period of worship of anything Kennedy, and a weariness at hearing too much too often about Robert and Jacqueline Kennedy. Little of this emotional fallout, surprisingly, seems to have touched Sen. Edward Kennedy.

Robert Kennedy's acute political antenna has already alerted him to what is happening, a Senate colleague warned him recently: "You're running too hard." And Kennedy himself remarked after the tussle over the contents of William Manchester's book, "Death of a President," that "they (Manchester and the publishers) have the money and we have the public relations problem."

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THE FIRST SIGNAL that the Kennedy popularity was vulnerable went up this fall, when not one Democratic candidate who openly campaigned as a devotee of Robert Kennedy was elected to office. The alienation, however, developed after FBI director J. Edgar Hoover accused Kennedy of en-

couraging eavesdropping while Attorney General, Mrs. Kennedy blocked publication of the Kennedy-authorized and edited account of the assassination, and a British journalist uncovered a questionable relationship between Robert Kennedy and the Kennedy-endowed Harvard Institute of Politics.

Adverse public reaction to all this is reflected in the sudden warm reception of anti-Kennedy material. Currently attracting attention in New York is an irreverent play titled "Mac Bird," a satire that depicts as villainous not only that familiar whipping boy Lyndon Johnson but Robert Kennedy as well. And the hottest-selling newspaper series today is a highly critical account of Mrs. Kennedy's behavior since the assassination, written by Liz Smith, a longtime society chronicler.

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IN PRIVATE THE ANTAGONISM is inescapable. In the capital, criticism of the Kennedys at social or official events is a regular occurrence; only a few weeks ago, it was unthinkable.

The prospect is that an anti-Kennedy sentiment will spiral. The serialization of the Manchester book goes through February; after that comes the book. Teamster boss Jimmy Hoffa's lawyers are introducing more evidence this week indicating Kennedy was deeply involved in bugging operations. Mrs. Kennedy plans a trip to Asia, including a country with which the U.S. does not have diplomatic relations. A television hour on the life of Robert Kennedy and the dedication of President Kennedy's tomb are scheduled in the spring. And shortly thereafter, Victor Lasky, who wrote the only anti-JFK best-seller, will publish a second book taking a similar view of Robert Kennedy.