

Arthur Schlesinger is a brilliant, perceptive, eloquent and widely and justly honored historian. Youthful and vigorous, he became a Kennedy disciple during the campaign, in which he was a major participant. As a supporter of Adlai Stevenson, he had observed the younger Kennedy, his methods and political allies, during the unsuccessful 1956 campaign, when Kennedy sought the vice-presidential nomination. He was a friend of the family and ideally ~~suited~~ prepared for the Boswellian role in which he cast himself upon the death of the President, if not earlier. Schlesinger tells us he had agreed not to write the definitive history of the Kennedy years, leaving that to the President who was himself an accomplished writer; but that, with the debacle of the Bay of Pigs, the President released him from this promise - nay - ordered him to prepare the true and official version, on the ground that all the other groups and forces involved in the disaster had already begun the drafting of their own ~~own~~ versions, none of which, at least by inference, would be ~~fair~~ honest, full or fair to the President. These other histories, without doubt, were the apologies of those upon whose shoulders the President and Schlesinger ~~was~~ believed the real fault lay, despite the forthright and honorable conduct of the President in assuming full and unshared responsibility. (Quote book)

As a participant in the making of history, Schlesinger was in an ideal position to record the means by and manner in which it was made. The national trauma of the assassination had hardly begun to wane before he was at work. His book, "A Thousand Days", has about a page per day. It is a massive, monumental work in which the authors rare and unusual gifts and skilfully and employ/employed. His command of language and his deftness and lucidity in its employment, combined with his own intimate and often first-hand knowledge of the people and events, ~~resulted in~~ produced and unusual and exciting book whose readability novelists may well envy. It ranks, without possibility of doubt, as one of the major historical writings of all time.

This is not because it is essentially a work of history, for it is not. It is a polemic, a work of journalism, and this, perhaps, enhances its importance. Schlesinger is a great journalist, a scintillating raconteur, an eminently expressive and highly entertaining and persuasive apologist. And this is what his fascinating and enormously valuable work is, an apology for and explanation of the Kennedy years and a dedicated justification of the Kennedy acts. Nor is this in itself a failing or a fault, for Schlesinger was both a participant and a disciple, and there is no ~~work~~ wrong in a personal and personalized record, as it is obvious

there can be and in fact is the greatest value.

If Schlesinger and his book can be faulted, it is not because of its intimacy ~~and~~ or even its partisanship, a quality he disguises with consummate craft and magnificent language. Rather it is because of a quite human and excuseable lack of complete historical integrity. His purpose is to raise the stature of his hero from six to ten feet and from humanity to deity. Contemporaneously he has succeeded; historically he has failed.

Rarely does Schlesinger lance the phalanx of the adversaries of his God, preferring instead to smith ~~the~~ <sup>his</sup> account into spears upon which they will impail themselves. His verbal forge tempered fine steel upon each and all of ~~his~~ the opponents of his god, whether of minor or major stature, ~~the~~ is pierced. Whether or not fair to his adversaries, this results in a distorted picture of the President and an account of some aspects of his Presidency that, upon analysis by historians of detachment and of the future, will cast him in a Satanic shadow.

Kennedy, Schlesinger would have us believe, was almost without fault of error, and even those errors Kennedy acknowledged as his own, such as the final decision to proceed with the evil, illegal and entirely misbegotten Bay of Pig affair, were not, in fact, his own mistakes. Like God, Kennedy made no mistakes. Perhaps it would be more apt to say that, like Jesus, Kennedy erred

in trusting Judas, and almost anyone else was Judas.

This is not to say that so many of Kennedy's advisors did not betray him, for they did, from ignorance, misunderstanding or total and unrelieved dedication to the cold war. But it is to say that, when careful and competent historians of the future analyze this book, as in the heat and political gore of the day it has not been analyzed, they will find the dilanestation of a cold and crafty political pro, not a godly or even saintly man, as Schlesinger intended.

It may well be that as a record for history, the carefully edited accounts of the major events of the Kennedy years can serve the opposite end.

It is easy to find shockingly detailed documentation of Kennedy's dedication to self rather than country, such as in the preludes to the Presidents 1961 appearance at the United Nations on page 483. Here Kennedy is described as having told UN Ambassador Adlai Stevenson, " You have the hardest thing in the world to sell.

It really doesn't make/sense - <sup>any</sup> the idea that Taiwan represents China. But if we lose this fight, if Red China comes into the UN during our first year in town, your first year and mine, they'll run us both out. ... delay the admission of Red China until after the election. ... you must do everything you can... Whatever is required is okay by me. ... I am for any strategy that works..."

After

Upon his return to the United States from the Vienna conference with

Khrushchev in early 1961, which followed conference en route with President Dr. Gaulle

of France and Prime Minister MacMillan of Great Britain, Kennedy mobilized the

National Guard. At the time it was a major event, for it interrupted the lives and

countless families and shocked the country into an understanding that, at least

in the President's mind, a crisis-like condition existed, ~~was~~ <sup>one</sup> that might lead to

war

~~was~~ and one certainly requiring the immediate availability of more already-trained

men in the army. Schlesinger found this unworthy or note or even ~~as~~ the most

casual, off-hand mention, although a major portion of the book is devoted to

Vienna and developments and events flowing from it. He failed to mention it in

context context or anywhere else. He ignored it completely. Search of the index

discloses no mention anywhere in the book of the National Guard, mobilization,

the reserves, army or military. Nor is it listed under "Kennedy" or "Berlin", to

which it was closely related.

Yet such a dramatic display, especially following the tough exchanges

at Vienna, could not but have had the most serious attention in Moscow and, inevitably

~~was~~ a tremendous effect on Russian policy.

So it is also with those major occurrences any one of which might have incinerated the world or destroyed the United Nations. There is not a single reference to the phrase so descriptive of the then-prevalent mythology upon which policy was built, "The Russians only understand strength - get tough" in the accounts of those years in which this fiction dominated both thinking and policy. There is almost no mention of the Congo, and in the first half of the book, only incidental use of the word, such as in saying what De Gaulle thought of things. Where for five of the eleven hundred pages the Congo becomes a subject, Schlessinger seeks to show that Kennedy's Congo policy was merely that of the UN. This may not be the recollection of those who during the crisis went to bed at night wondering if they'd be burned <sup>to</sup> in a nuclear <sup>crisis</sup> catastrophe during their sleep, nor will it be the opinion of future, less journalistic historians. Many other things are glossed <sup>over</sup> to portray Kennedy in what, in the current concepts, is the best possible light. But the historical and the current views may not at all coincide.

What in the spirit of the cold war - and Schlessinger wages it against the Russians, the Republicans and enemy of the President's other advisors - may seem a glorification of his man may in history demean him.

Historians of the future can invoke this book to prove Kennedy was  
 realpolitik  
 an intellectual Haushofer, dividing his loyalties and dedication <sup>between</sup> first ~~to~~ his  
 own political ambitions and, subordinate to that, to a new American imperialism.  
 They can invoke it to prove that Kennedy and the United States, not Khrushchev  
 and the Soviet Union, kept the world teetering ~~in~~ on the inherited Dulles brink  
 of fiery extermination.

Without analysis, the quintessence of the man and his administration  
 are lost in the ferocity of political partisanship cloaked as history. Analysis  
 in depth and detail, must away the unfolding of the histories now being made and  
 the interpretations future Plutarchs, not Schlesingers. By consulting sources in  
 addition to Schlessinger, ~~xxxxxxxxxxxxx Kennedy~~ they will find a more human  
 Kennedy who made his own mistakes, learned to not trust his advisors, and had come  
 to an understanding of why he made his mistakes <sup>and their significance had</sup> and set ~~about~~ himself to their  
 rectification, a task by which he might have rewritten the history just recorded  
 and changed the direction of world events that had not yet <sup>come to pass.</sup> ~~transpired~~ It is  
 this that his assassination made impossible.

Despite his bias and what, because he is such a deservedly respected and  
 honored historian, may fairly be called lack of honesty, Schlesinger has done a

job the importance of which is not subject to exaggeration. Assuming the truthful recounting of those events he recounts and the honest representation of the conversations and conferences - and there is no reason not to so assume - and allowing for the elision of those words and events not comfortable to him in his purposes, he has done more than equip historians of the future with the raw materials for countless lifetimes of work and interpretations.

The very <sup>and detail</sup> mass of his material, <sup>and</sup> the incredible speed with which he assembled and wrote it - in itself a display of literary precocity almost unequalled, and in itself a ~~fastidious~~ consideration that denied both more serious editing and mature reflection - ~~combining~~ ~~into~~ ~~the~~ ~~richest~~ are of transcendently greater value than their importance for the future. Their pre-eminent value is current - for today - for the todays of the immediate future will determine whether there will be a future and what kind of future it will be. From it today's politicians, assisted to the degree possible by today's writers and analysts, must mine the knowledge of the errors, the flaws consequent of reasoning and the/defects of policy that led to the grossest misapprehension of the powers and forces we must live with in the nuclear world. And from this can come a better understanding of these forces and powers, what impels and controls



them, what they want and seek, and how they function, without which the preservation of the country if not the world itself may be impossible.