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KENNEDY IN SAN FERNANDO

# My Brother's Keeper

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Bobby Kennedy spoke to a huge, cheering crowd at San Fernando Valley State College Monday morning, on a brief, two-day campaign tour of Southern California. There were more than 12,000 people, mostly students, waiting there in the blazing sun when he arrived.

He was nearly crushed by the pressure of frantic, converging bodies as he walked the short distance from the parking lot to the speakers' platform. The moment his limousine arrived, the din of thousands of cheering voices swept across the campus. Photographers, walking alongside Kennedy in the crushing mob, held cameras high over their heads to get a shot as swarms of people pushed toward him, hoping to shake his hand, get a closer look or whatever. It was a kind of crowd reaction distinctly different from any I have ever witnessed—almost as if a Messiah were coming!

Yet the crowd clearly had reservations about their Messiah, and had not come in a mood of blind adoration. Many of the signs, held high by the spectators, were critical of Bobby.

One of the largest of these read, "When are you going to open the



Archives?" Another read: "Did you decide you were opposed to the war before or AFTER the N.H. primary?" Others, some of them hastily scrawled and clumsily worded, accused the Senator of taking an equivocal position on the war, the assassination and other issues. And of course there were the Nixon and Reagan signs, and others that were crudely derogatory. One young man circulated through the crowd passing out copies of a mimeographed flyer that read: "ASK BOBBY WHO KILLED HIS BROTHER."

As Bobby ascended to the speakers' platform, the applause swelled to a shrill crescendo. Jesse Unruh stepped forward to introduce Kennedy and was booed.

He made his introductory remarks extremely brief and stepped aside as the waiting masses of students gave Kennedy another rousing ovation.

As he begins to speak, you cannot but admire his style: he is a smooth professional. He has style and grace. Tanned, immaculately dressed, impeccably barbered, he has a kind of youthful, collegiate, boyish glamour that throws him into sharp contrast with such colorless, grotesque, middle-aged adversaries as Nixon, Johnson, et al. He radiates confidence, and calm optimism.

He begins his spiel with a couple of jokes, as did his late brother. John Kennedy hired Mort Sahl to write funny lines for his campaign speeches. Obviously Bobby has hired the most competent professionals available.

Joke number one: "I'm beginning to feel more optimistic about

my campaign. The other day, George Hamilton called me up and asked me if he could take out my daughter."

Joke number two: "I asked my brother to have some campaign buttons made up that would say 'Kennedy for President' — and when I got them, they had HIS face on them. Next thing you know, he'll be running for President. And they'll say he's ruthless."

He devoted the better part of his speech to the subject of youth, praising the students of Krakow and Warsaw, as well as the students of the United States. He said that the real division in the world today is between those who are living in the past and those who are on the side of youth.

"I am on the side of youth," he said. He defined youth as "... not a time of life, but a state of mind."

"I am on the side of those who have a decent respect for the opinion of mankind."

"I am on the side of those who are willing to recognize past mistakes, as I have recognized mine..."

"I am on the side of those who would put an end to bankrupt policies that rend us from our friends."



Bobby and supporters. (Photo by Allen Zak)



"I am on the side of those who do not shout down others but who listen and then propose a better policy for America."

He called for "a new leadership that will not risk more lives of Americans or Vietnamese, in the name of false pride."

Speaking of tremendous expenditure of lives and of billions of dollars in Vietnam, he said, "I think we should change our course of action." His listeners cheered lustily at this.

However, he ran into trouble when he said that we cannot negotiate unilaterally with the Viet Cong and withdraw.

"Why not?" shouted several students angrily.

He was cheered again when he said that we must accept the fact "... that the NLF will be a part of any future government of South Vietnam."

He also stated that we "... are going to have to end the search and destroy missions that have cost so many lives."

"This is the year that will change the course of the United States for decades to come," he warned. "You have the chance to change the future of the United States, and you've got to do it!"

He also said that "... we cannot go on being an island of affluence in a sea of poverty." In reference to ghetto riots and the predictions of more and more hot summers, he said, "We don't have to accept that. We can do better than that."

He closed his speech with a restatement of the need for a new leadership that will change the



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# Kennedy at SFVSC

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course of action in the United States. "And that's why I'm running for President."

Unexpectedly, he then invited the audience to ask questions. He might have been wiser not to do

this.

The first question was, "Will you fight to de-escalate our influence in other countries?"

"It's not as simple as that," he answered. He said that he was in favor of foreign aid, "... but not in favor of attempting to subject another country to our political control"

The next question was, "If elected, will you open the archives so that we can find out who killed the president?"

The answer was no. Not unless there was "a reason." "Nobody would be more interested in finding out the truth about the death of President Kennedy than I would," he said cryptically. "I would not reopen the Warren Commission Report. I stand by the Warren Commission Report." There was a substantial chorus of boos and groans as he said this.

"Should conscientious objectors go to jail?" another student asked.

"No," he replied. "A genuine conscientious objector should not." He recalled his late brother's statement that one day, hopefully, we will give medals to honor the courage of conscientious objectors, as well as those who go to war.

"Will you stop the draft?" somebody asked.

"I don't think that's possible now," he answered. He also said that if he were drafted he would go to Vietnam, even though he is against the war. There were groans of displeasure and even a few boos as he said this.

"I'm telling it like it is," he said. "You may not agree with anything I say." He also said he opposed student deferments. This was received with stunned silence.

In answer to another question about withdrawal from Vietnam, he said, "There are thousands of people there we don't want to be under the Communists or the North Vietnamese government, and we owe a responsibility to them." He also said that there are many who don't want to be under the United States.

Asked if his candidacy would

split the Democratic Party, he replied, "It's already split."

He ended the festivities with an urgent plea for help. "I need your help, and the help of your friends, to organize, to canvass, to register people... to change the course of life in this country."

As he left the speakers platform and walked back to the waiting car, the crowd pressed in on him again, so heavily that at times he was forced to raise his arms in self-defense. Women asked him for his cufflinks, his tie, his jacket and other personal effects, which he obligingly gave to them. Caught in the tide, I was swept to within a few feet of Kennedy. As we briefly faced each other, he laughed and said, "How ya doing?" Then the human tidal wave swept me off in another direction.

As the crowd dissipated, I found myself in the midst of a group of students who were discussing what they had witnessed.

"He's no radical," said one.

"No, he's kind of... kind of... square!" said another.

"Yeah," said a bearded youth with Semitic features. "He's a typical Jewish liberal."