

THE PRESS

CENSORSHIP

Good News for Rocky

Censorship of the press is hardly a rarity in Latin America, but Brazil's military-backed government seems more brazen about it than most. Instead of arresting, warning or otherwise punishing specific editors for printing articles that President Arthur da Costa e Silva finds offensive, the government is now flatly telling the nation's press how to handle stories in advance. Preparing for Nelson Rockefeller's scheduled visit to Brazil this week, the government ordered all editors to "collaborate in order to create a favorable climate for the stay among us of this representative of the Government of the United States of America on his trip of good will." More specifically, the order banned any mention of "hostile acts toward the illustrious visitor in any country of Latin America or reference to the postponement or cancellation of the visit." While Rocky is in Brazil, only positive news about the visit must be printed. Any demonstrations against him must be ignored.

MEMOIRS

Remembering Robert Kennedy

The anniversary of Robert Kennedy's assassination was marked by the reminiscence of columnists, the rebroadcast of old TV interviews, and the celebration of memorial Masses. But probably the most effective remembrance was the publication last week of Jack Newfield's *Robert Kennedy: A Memoir* (E. P. Dutton; \$6.95). It brings to three the number of full-length retrospectives by relatively young, able journalists who both knew and admired their subject. Each differs in tone and focus, and each has qualities the others lack.

The strength of David Halberstam's *The Unfinished Odyssey of Robert Kennedy* (Random House; \$4.95) lies in a felicity of language and a feeling for the political and social unease in the U.S. as the election of 1968 approached. (Halberstam, now 35 and an editor of *Harper's* magazine, won a Pulitzer prize for his 1963 *New York Times* coverage of Viet Nam.) He begins his account in the late summer of 1967 with a meeting between Bobby and Allard Lowenstein, a leader of the gathering anti-Johnson forces. He follows the Senator through his doomed campaign, ending with the terrible moment in Los Angeles.

To Halberstam, Kennedy was a man caught between principle and practicality, between the new politics and the old, racked by indecision and buffeted by forces and events beyond prophecy or control. "He was playing Hamlet," writes Halberstam, "thinking about the race constantly, wanting to make it, being led there by his emotions again and again, only to be brought back

from the brink by the cold words of his close advisors."

The narrative moves swiftly. Maintaining an even, detached perspective, Halberstam generates a momentum that carries the reader headlong into the stone-wall shock of the book's last sentence. "Then he descended to acknowledge his victory, to talk about the violence and divisiveness, and to let a nation discover in his death what it had never understood or believed about him during his life."

For all its literary flair, Halberstam's *Odyssey* lacks the historical detail of *85 Days—The Last Campaign of Robert Kennedy*, by Jules Witcover (Put-



NEWFIELD WITH R.F.K.
Most human and most engaging.

nam's; \$6.95). As chief political writer for the *Newhouse* newspapers, Witcover, 41, saw more of the campaign than Halberstam, and what he failed to see he diligently traced through those who did. Written chronologically (from January 1968 through the June funeral), *85 Days* abounds in unreported behind-the-scenes incidents and anecdotes. The author notes, for example, that Kennedy seriously urged TV Newscaster Walter Cronkite to run for Senator in New York. He vividly re-creates a hotel-room scene in which Kennedy, wearing only his shorts, berates Adam Walinsky and Jeff Greenfield, two young speech-writing aides, for spending more time plucking at guitars than pecking at typewriters. At the time, Kennedy was facing defeat in Oregon.

Despite a weakness for the gratuitous aside ("That was Gene McCarthy; he didn't know when he was licked"), Witcover usually keeps his feelings for Kennedy in check: his high esteem for the man comes through all the stronger because he also criticizes some of his actions. Taking Halberstam's Hamlet comparison a step further, Witcover sees in

Kennedy an earlier tragic archetype: "Like a hero in the Greek plays from which he was so fond of quoting to college audiences, he made one colossal error of judgment [waiting too late to declare his candidacy], and his efforts to overcome that fateful mistake determined the nature and the course of his candidacy and his last campaign."

I Over Eye. In *Robert Kennedy: A Memoir*, Jack Newfield is concerned less with the last campaign than with the man who made it. He sees Kennedy as an existential hero who painfully forged out a new consciousness in the years after Dallas and was transformed from a "McCarthyite (Joe, that is) who often acted as if error had no rights" into a genuine champion of the powerless and the poor. "I can accept the fact I may not be nominated now," Kennedy said to Newfield four days before the California primary. "If that happens, I will just go back to the Senate and say what I believe, and not try again in '72. Somebody has to speak up for the Negroes and Indians and Mexicans and poor whites. Maybe that's what I do best. Maybe my personality just isn't built for this . . . The issues are more important than me now."

An assistant editor of the highly independent Greenwich Village weekly newspaper the *Village Voice*, Newfield, 31, was personally the closest to Kennedy of the three authors. That explains both his book's greatest strengths and its occasional myopia. Clearly, Newfield is the most partisan. He is as rigorous in defense of his Kennedy (he first met him in 1966) as he is critical of R.F.K. the Attorney General. And he fails to avoid the greatest danger in personal journalism, a reliance on the "I" over the eye.

Still, Newfield's intimacy with his subject serves him well in delivering candid recollections. He reports, for example, that Kennedy suspected L.B.J. of tapping his Senate phone and quotes him discussing the possibility of Johnson's not running if the President showed up poorly in the primaries: "I think Johnson might quit the night before the convention opens. I think he is a coward."

Though at times discursive and hyperbolic, *A Memoir* presents the most human and ultimately most engaging Robert Kennedy of the three versions. As might be expected, Newfield's vision of a world without him is excessively bleak. His description of the funeral turns into a sort of sentimental apocalypse. "Now I realize," he writes, "what makes our generation unique . . . We are the first generation that learned from experience, in our innocent twenties, that things were not really getting better, that we shall *not* overcome. We felt, by the time we reached thirty, that we had already glimpsed the most compassionate leaders our nation could produce, and they had all been assassinated. And from this time forward, things would get worse: our best political leaders were part of memory now, not hope."