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J.F. Chronicle & Examiner "Book Review" — 10/26/97

BOOK REVIEW • CHILDREN'S PAGE

A Cub Reporter's Coverage of JFK's Assassination

FOR THE YOUNGER READER
Susan Faust

Given John Kennedy's enduring hold on the national imagination, it's hard to believe he served as president for only three years. Two new books explain something about the powerful legacy he left behind.

The story of President Kennedy's shocking death is recreated with minute-by-minute immediacy in **KENNEDY ASSASSINATED: The World Mourns** (Candlewick Press; 96 pages; \$17.99; ages 10-15) by Wilborn Hampton, who was a cub reporter at the time. He remembers picking up the phone at United Press International's Dallas office on Nov. 22, 1963, and hearing a reporter shout, "Three shots were fired at the motorcade!"

"There are some things in life for which there simply is no preparation," writes Hampton. "Certainly there was never anything in any of the journalism courses I took in college or in my orientation at U.P.I. that covered what to do in case you received such a telephone call." How an inexperienced but earnest novice covered the story with distinction makes for a terrific book filled with suspense, drama, irony and high emotion.

Somber black-and-white newspaper photos parallel Hampton's gripping ac-



FROM 'KENNEDY ASSASSINATED'

count of the frenzied press' fierce competition for every angle. Without today's requisite cellular phones, Hampton had to use ingenuity — he had his office call a pay phone in the lobby of Parkland Hospital, where Kennedy had been taken, and hold the line open indefinitely. It's also moving to read how he managed to keep his feelings of "anger and grief" in check when necessary. Finally, late in the afternoon, on his way to police headquarters, Hampton broke down and cried.

Hampton puts Dallas police officer J.D. Tippitt, Lee Harvey Oswald and Jack Ruby into historical context for those "not even born when those shots were fired in Dallas." Missing is any discussion of subsequent conspiracy theories, but that is be-

cause this is Hampton's account of a weekend in 1963 when a president died and a career in journalism was born.

Assassination froze President Kennedy in the prime of life as a perpetual symbol of America's best hopes, a fate also dealt to his younger brother, Robert. Barbara Harrison and Daniel Terris' laudatory biography, **A RIPPLE OF HOPE: The Life of Robert F. Kennedy** (Lodestar; 133 pages; \$16.99; ages 10-14), establishes early on that as the seventh child in a competitive family of 11 children, young Bobby was not considered smart, popular or athletic. He was not, as a friend once said, "the pick of the litter." How Bobby came to be a presidential contender and a staunch defender of the underdog makes for an inspiring story.

Using research gathered for an HBO documentary, Harrison and Terris have produced a worthy companion to their JFK biography, "A Twilight Struggle." The black-and-white photographs that pepper the crisp text show Bobby's family, his religious bent (he was a devout Catholic) and his crises of faith (JFK's death plunged him into despair).

The authors take the high road, avoiding tales about Kennedy's alleged relationships with Marilyn Monroe and the Mob. But they temper their unabashed adulation with discussions of incongruities in his public life — how he helped Senator Joseph McCarthy prosecute domestic communists in the '50s yet campaigned to end the war against Vietnamese communists in the late '60s, how as attorney general in his brother's administration, Kennedy OK'd wiretaps of the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. even though he supported his work.

Harrison and Terris honestly struggle to place Bobby Kennedy's puzzling choices in context. The King wiretap, they write, was "an ugly counterbalance to an otherwise distinguished record of championing the cause of justice and freedom for African Americans." Infused with the kind of idealism that propelled Bobby Kennedy, this thoughtful biography introduces recent history to a new generation.

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