

The Kennedys . . . Hero Worship

By ARNOLD B. SAWISLAK
WASHINGTON (UPI). —
He was a slavemaster. he was hooked on gadgets and gimmicks, and he had trouble managing his own financial affairs.

He despised cities. He was accused of squandering \$15 million to buy an uncharted tract of land. some said he didn't believe in God.

He was President of the United States.

THOMAS JEFFERSON.

And, with such facts and allegations as above, it probably would be possible to put together as harsh a picture of Jefferson as a pair of newly-published "revisionist" critics have painted of John F. Kennedy and his relatives.

Some Americans may have believed in the 1960s that the Kennedys were near-divine, incapable of error. Some still may think so.

But both Henry Fairlie, an English newspaperman, and Nancy Gager Clinch, an American freelance writer, have had to build into their arguments a premise that all Americans lost their hearts and heads to the Kennedys during the last decade and remain transfixed by misplaced hero worship.

FAIRLIE, who came to the United States to live in 1965, takes the position in "The Kennedy Promise" that John and Robert dispensed a kind of snake-oil politics that upset the populace and jeopardized the nation.

Clinch, self-taught in psy-



JOHN KENNEDY
. . . the 'emperor'?

chology, undertakes to demonstrate in her "psychohistory" called "The Kennedy Neurosis" that the entire family was motivated solely by compulsive personal needs for glory rather than any wish to serve the country or its people.

While the Kennedys are central to both books, each has a secondary point: Fairlie is saying that the United States never will be a grown-up world power with leaders such as the Kennedys (and Lyndon Johnson); and Clinch is saying Americans are in deep emotional trouble if they persist in making heroes of sexist, success-made politicians like — well, you know who.

THERE IS SOMETHING else here, especially in the Clinch book. It is hard to put down the feeling that this outbreak of "revisionist" history is really aimed at the prospective Presidential candidacy of Edward Kennedy, and there is a temptation to view it as the first of the 1976 cam-

paigned tracts, rather than an even-handed effort to explain the family.

This is the pity of both books: almost 10 years after John Kennedy's death, they are almost as one-sided as the puff pieces and hatchet jobs of a decade ago.

Each gestures toward weighing the good on the same scale as the bad, but the butcher's thumb comes with the meat when the anti-Kennedy points are being made.

CLINCH CONCEDES her emphasis might seem "generally negative," but explains that as necessary to balance "irrational and untrue" adulation of the Kennedys in the past.

Fairlie is too seasoned a writer to so poison his own wells, but gives an early idea of his point of view when he says of the Kennedy graves at Arlington:

"To an outsider, it seems as if the American people, for the first time in their history, have buried an emperor and, alongside him, his rightful but deprived heir."

PERHAPS THAT kind of thing is to be expected when the stuff of history still is hot.

It took almost 40 years to get a fair look at Huey Long (from T. Harry Williams), and we still are waiting for views of Herbert Hoover and Franklin D. Roosevelt unskewed by the "hidden scar" carried by most Americans who lived through the Depression.

There seems to be less mal-



EDWARD KENNEDY
. . . the target?

ice in the Fairlie book than a sense of dismay — that American politics is different from British politics, and that Presidents, unlike English rulers, do not confine themselves to seeking "to communicate a sense of purpose only to Welsh corgis, racehorses and pedigree cattle."

Fairlie writes, "It could be persuasively argued that John Kennedy's achievements were less significant than those of James K. Polk, and that Robert Kennedy's contribution to the political life of his country does not match that of Jacob K. Javits."

"IT IS POSSIBLE that an Englishman does not altogether appreciate the office of the Presidency." That quotation will serve here as comment on the two that precede it.

The nut of Fairlie's criticisms of John Kennedy is that he promised too much and delivered too little, and that he "neglected the actual political processes by which his pur-

Swings to Bitter Denunciations

pose could be achieved, while arousing the expectation that they would be achieved merely by a dramatic expression of the popular will."

FAIRLIE WAS NOT here in 1960 when Kennedy beat Richard Nixon by .2 of 1 percent of the popular vote and came to office with a Congress effectively controlled by Southern and Western Democratic conservatives who had been making common cause with Republicans to thwart liberal legislation since Franklin Roosevelt's second mid-term.

In England, of course, a Tory votes with or gets out of his party, but that is not "the actual political process" in the United States.

AS TO THE CHARGE that Kennedy needlessly sought to arouse "the popular will," it is ironic that Fairlie chose FDR as his model of an American President who practiced politics as "the art of the necessary" instead of trying to sell "the impossible" to the people.

To imagine that Roosevelt invented the "fireside chat" for some reason other than the hope of rallying public opinion behind his New Deal would require a conclusion that only congressmen owned radios in the 1930s and '40s.

THERE IS a temptation to simply hoot at the Clinch book's theory that the children of Joseph and Rose Kennedy became neurotics because their parents suffered

real and imagined social slights in Brahmin-dominated Boston.

That could be true, and so could a lot of other conclusions she reaches about the Kennedys; but it would be nice to think that someone who undertakes to go plumbing in another person's head had some credentials or some special knowledge. Clinch, however, is not a psychologist,

and she never met Joseph, Joseph Jr., John, Robert or Edward Kennedy.

HER CONCLUSIONS about their mental states are based on reading, and she uses these sources to make some of the most appalling speculative leaps, such as suggesting that the retarded Kennedy sister may have had to be institutionalized because the hyperactive life style of the rest

of the family worsened her condition.

Whatever the psychological validity of the book, Clinch makes some political judgments that can be examined on their own.

For example, she says John Kennedy could have negotiated with the Russians to remove their missiles from Cuba instead of clapping on an embargo.