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History Will Rate Kennedy Highly,

BY BOB THOMPSON

In a recent interview at The Chronicle, Richard Reeves, a Los Angeles-based author and syndicated columnist, discussed his new book, "President Kennedy: Profile of Power" (reviewed October 24), a meticulously researched examination (Reeves says he spent six years on the book) of John Kennedy and those

BOOKS

around him during his brief presidency.

Above all, Reeves emphasized, Kennedy "was a professional politician, a rich boy, a little bit of a dilettante. The important thing about John Kennedy was that he was connected to society as a veteran. I came to believe that Kenne-

President Kennedy

By Richard Reeves
Simon & Schuster, 798 pages, \$30

dy's World War II experience was central and taught him a good deal of what he personally knew about America, as opposed to what he had read."

Reeves, who never met Kenne-

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, Author Maintains

dy, says, "Kennedy had this personal charm and magnetism that set him apart. I know a lot of people are charming, but you just can't listen to people over and over again telling you how magic the guy was without believing that there was something magic about him."

Despite this, Reeves doesn't feel that Kennedy's motives were always of the highest nature.

"Kennedy wanted to be president because he wanted to be president," not because of any idealism, "and he thought it was the best job in the world." What could be more natural for a son of Joseph P. Kennedy than to seek the best job in the world?

Reeves says that of all the material he *didn't* have space for in the book, what he found most telling about the Kennedy aura was "something amazing. The Kennedy daughters used to watch by the hour, over and over again, Katharine Hepburn movies and they totally modeled themselves after Katharine Hepburn. They created a certain persona before any of the family was in elective politics."

'Sequential Seductions'

In the book Reeves mentions, without going into detail, that Kennedy's attitude toward women was one of "sequential seductions." In the interview, though, he said, "You must realize the Kennedys did not have a middle-class marriage. It was an upper-class marriage and there was a lot of tension, a lot of being separate and a lot of third parties. I think the marriage was much better at the end



John F. Kennedy: more like Picasso than Eisenhower

than at the beginning. I think the August 1963 miscarriage brought them closer together."

About the plethora of books on the Kennedy assassination, Reeves feels that most of them are much ado about nothing. "The amount of contradiction and confusion in the Kennedy case seems to me to be within the normal range. From the beginning the Zapruder film makes the assassination look like a difficult thing. But that wasn't the way it looked to whoever fired the shot. Kennedy was only 220 feet from the muzzle, the car was going about 10 mph straight away from the window and the guy had a full-power scope. Anyone with any military training could have handled that shot. I don't think there was any big conspiracy."

Reeves' humor, sadly lacking throughout most of the book, comes through in person. He described Bobby Kennedy as "a little p---k" because of his habit of running roughshod over those with less ready access to the president, and Bobby "could do whatever he wanted."

'Lunatic in High Heels'

Asked why Kennedy didn't fire J. Edgar Hoover, Reeves was quick to point out, "Hoover was the most admired man in the country. We forget — I have trouble with young audiences because they think he was some lunatic running up and down Pennsylvania Avenue in high heels. There's no question he was a nut and a no-good son of a bitch. I don't think Kennedy had the power to fire him."

Ultimately, Reeves thinks, Kennedy will rank higher as president than most current historians are willing to allow. "I think his legacy is more like Picasso than it is like Eisenhower in the sense that he changed the way people saw things. He was an artist in that sense. This was a 39-year-old guy who decided he would break or bend the political institutions in this country to get what he wanted. He did it."

Bob Thompson is a former member of The Chronicle staff.
