

Jerry, re Reeves' "A Question of Character," 6/10/91

First the impression it made on the Post's reviewer, then the photo of all the many photos of JFK selected for the dust jacket and then the title, and that subtitle, "A Life of John F. Kennedy", led me to believe that this would not be a scholarly book and that it would be an ax job. "A" life? How many did he have? Anyway, I took it with me to the lab this morning and read it while resting between walking. First I checked and found no sources listed. That's because I knew her well and knew what she could have said about JFK and their relationship, I checked the index under Joan Hitchcock. It has a single mention that is carefully selected to say what advances Reeves' entirely dishonest representation of the man and his "character." Then I checked the photos. Of all the women in JFK's sex life he uses only Exner?

In the preface and 10 pages I became convinced that what I said to Gardner recently about Garrison and Stone is applicable to Reeves, he makes those who sell sex seem respectable. Reeves is, in fact, a historian trading on his credentials to whore around not only with history but with a very critical time in our history.

He is dishonest all the time. He treats sources that are at least dubious, like Jim Bishop and Victor Lasky, as impartial and dependable. He too often gives no sources and from recollection lies, as in saying, the exact words in the notes I'll give you with this, that RFK and JFK were involved in the CIA's attempts to assassinate Castro. The CIA's own records make this a deliberate lie because they have been disclosed. On this, he even says that JFK used Exner to keep tabs on the mafia plot. Not reasonable, not possible, not reasonable because he would never have let her know if he had had knowledge and would not have needed anyone like her to learn and not possible because he and Bobby had no knowledge of it, according to the CIA itself.

I was at the bottom of p. 9 when I had to use my free hand to keep pressure on the point where the needle was inserted so I made no notes beginning there, but there begins some of the rottenest, most dishonest trashiness that made me decide to read no farther in this book. I do not want to have to stop and think at every point whether he is fair or honest, whether he uses or misuses a source, whether I am in a position to evaluate what he cites, so much less than he should have cited, as with the CIA above and so much in these few pages.

His misrepresentation of the deep love the people have for JFK is indecent. Not like he was a King or anything like that.

If not before Reeves begins to equate "character" with sex life on 10, to say that sex life is the only measure of character, particularly of a President. And then not of Eisenhower or FDR or others, only of JFK, in whose Presidency he presents it as unique.

<sup>N</sup>/referring to Schlesinger as "sneering" he quotes him as though it is not true about

2

what is without question true (p. 9, graf 2, "It did not interfere with Kennedy's conduct of the Presidency." *It did not!*)

I got as far as the bottom of 10, where he says "The issue of character and political leadership is intertwined with the history of moral philodophy." By his standard Nixon had the finest character and JFK the lowest.

Because you got the impression that he said that Sorensen wrote "Profiles in Courage" I read that part carefully. He does intend to give the impression you took but it is not what he actually says. What he actually does is cite Farnet, who has either lied or is misquoted to make him lie and can't be entirely impartial <sup>him</sup> for the uses Reeves makes, his "account of Theodore Sorensen's dominant role in the creation of" that book.

What does this really mean? More than that Sorensen had the idea? Did the research? (Wasn't JFK flat on his back when he wrote it?) Edited? Made suggestions or corrections?

"Dominant role"? Why use these words and not be specific in giving them meaning?

I certainly had a "dominant role" in Chip Selby's excellent and prize-winning documentary, but the plain and simple truth is that it is nonetheless his and entirely his.

Is a thesis less that or the author because his professors have a "dominant role" in it?

Was it even hidden that JFK had speech writers? Is it not a fact that he was also in his own right a successful writer? Was he not, extemporaneously and under stress and pressure, a very articulate and often eloquent man?

Who would dare write that George Washington had no character, but cannot some of the same be said of him? And so many others who were good leaders, good politicians?

This wretch doesn't know what "character" is in a political leader because by his standard joining Nixon as a paragon would be Reagan and Bush, among so many others of the most questionable character, in the usual sense of the word.

Reeves is all the more dishonest because so careful a reading is required not to be deceived, misled, lied to.

If you can read them, you'll find illustrations in my notes. Such gross distortions, too, as his pretense that the Bay of Pigs was JFK's. No mention that it was a project of the Ike administration, with Nixon its point man for the White House, no mention to the position in which JFK was in this in those very earliest days of his administration, or of the fact that Allen Dulles was less than forthright in informing him about it during the interregnum.

I regard this rotten book as more than an effort to make a villain of a man who had become a great President before he was killed. It has to be part of a campaign to deprecate the many constructive accomplishments of his Presidency and of the many changes in policy that he initiated. It is an ax job disguised by the credentials of a professional historian. He even says that JFK intended divorcing Jackie because *somebody said that Spenser said it. Hitchcock told me the opposite - that he loved her (even if he had run around) although he suspected that she was running around too.*

HCC







