

Assassin Also Killed a Promise

By Patrick O'Donovan
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The assassination of great men, of men of power, of men who have become symbols of attitudes and views, can at times almost offer a second chance to a faltering nation.

In the shocked hush that followed the idiot murder of President John Kennedy there seemed a new promise of sobriety and compassion, not only in the United States, but almost everywhere.

In fact that promise was never fulfilled. But in the slaughtering of Senator Robert Kennedy there is not even that thin and illusory promise.

His death has interrupted one of the most significant elections in the history of the U.S. There were many people in America who resented

his "opportunism." And it is true that he was a politician with that politician's drive toward power that is an essential part of the trade.

DEPRIVATIONS

He had more than that. There was the Kennedy cult of success born of the deprivations that were once imposed on the Irish in America. It was the success that seemed to attend him and the frankness about his ambitions that enraged his opponents and worried many in his own party.

But he stood for something. He was much more than a man on the make. He stood for more specific things than did his murdered brother. And in this election he was fighting for these things and making a great election in the process.

For once in the Democratic ritual, he and Senator

McCarty were forcing the U.S. electorate to consider the quality of their life and government, the morality of their war in Vietnam, the plight and anger of their turbulent minorities.

In fact, more than Eugene McCarthy, his real moral rival, he had identified himself with the opposition to the sins of U.S. society. He was passionate about the existence of poverty in that affluent society. He came out on the side of the Mexican-Americans who, in the hot California fields and vineyards, were being exploited by employers. He identified himself with the Negroes.

OPPORTUNISM

Other men had done the same. And his opponents again blamed this identification on his political ambition and his opportunism. But it was certainly real to him and

it was also real to the people he supported.

Of all the men of power in America, he was the one that they trusted the most. They did not mind the frank and open techniques with which he courted power. They were promises of effective action.

When they, the poor and the black, had rejected the liberals, the agonized dogooders, they were prepared to accept this tough and effective politician. He could go down to the Negro ghetto of Watts in Los Angeles and get a hero's welcome, where McCarthy got indifference, and any other politician would have got a hail of stones.

It is an irony of his death that he was killed apparently by an Arab, because of his support of another minority — Israel. His support of Israel was of the rea-

soned kind. He insisted that the country existed and had a right to continue to exist.

He wanted the United States to supply it with arms so that it could ensure its existence on its own. And for this detail of his program he was killed.

SUSPICIONS

Now the minorities will be further embittered. It will make the solution of their problems the more difficult to achieve. It will deepen their suspicions. And make violence a more attractive alternative to constitutional methods.

On the political scene, his death is an act of chaos. It was no secret that there was bitterness between him and Senator McCarthy, whose views were similar but whose techniques were more gentle, more amateur. It is unlikely that his followers

will transfer with any enthusiasm to McCarthy who lacks, not honesty, or wit or intelligence, but the charisma of success.

Senator Kennedy scored an indecisive success in the California primary. He may never have got the nomination as Democratic candidate for the presidency at the Chicago convention.

But now it seems all but certain that the contest will lie with the Old Guard, that it will lie between Vice President Hubert Humphrey and ex-Vice President Nixon.

And even the promise of fruitful change has been blotted out. This is a tragic death and it is also a disastrous one. No shred of optimism can be found in this latest carnage. The implications of this death go beyond death itself. They are infinitely depressing.