

Books of The Times

Kennedy: Memorials and Assaults

By ELIOT FREMONT-SMITH

- THE DAY KENNEDY WAS SHOT.** By Jim Bishop. 713 pages. Funk & Wagnalls. \$7.95.
1:33. In Memoriam: John F. Kennedy. By Bruce Henderson and Sam Summerlin. Illustrated. 244 pages. Cowles. \$4.95.
JOHN FITZGERALD KENNEDY: The World Remembers. By Alex J. Goldman. 144 pages. Fleet. \$10.
TRIUMPH AND TRAGEDY: The Story of the Kennedys. By The Associated Press. Illustrated. 256 pages. Morrow. \$4.95.
ASSASSINATION: Robert F. Kennedy, 1925-1968. By United Press International and Cowles. Edited by Francine Klagsbrun and David C. Whitney. Illustrated. 272 pages. Cowles. \$4.95.
KENNEDY AND SIRHAN: Why? By M. T. Mehdi. Illustrated. 100 pages. New World Press. Paperback, \$1.95.
"AN HONORABLE PROFESSION": A Tribute to Robert F. Kennedy. Edited by Pierre Salinger, Edwin Guthman, Frank Maniewicz and John Seigenthaler. Illustrated. 182 pages. Doubleday. Boxed. \$5.95.
ROBERT F. KENNEDY: Apostle of Change. Edited by Douglas Ross. 600 pages. Trident. \$7.95.
ROBERT F. KENNEDY: The Myth and the Man. By Victor Lasky. 448 pages. Trident. \$6.95.

FIVE years ago today President John Fitzgerald Kennedy was shot and killed in Dallas. Last June 5, his brother and Presidential aspirant, Senator Robert Francis Kennedy, was shot in Los Angeles. He died the following day. It is no wonder at all that we are confronted at this time with an outpouring of books on these two men and the national anguish of their deaths.

I suppose memorial volumes, inquests, recollections and critiques are to be an annual affair, though probably not on the scale of the last five years.

Yet Kennedy books will doubtless continue to be produced and sold. For one thing, death, tears and tragedy are not exempt from commerce. It is all very well to call it exploitive or ghoulish or in bad taste, this public printed mourning and continual rehashing; yet for many people, apparently, such books have a soothing or healing effect, and have helped to place terrible events in a viable context and isolate to some degree the shock, bitterness and cynicism that might otherwise be crippling to us all. For those who object, not without good reason, to slick and maudlin legendizing, it is useful to remember that the real offense is not in these books but in the acts of murder.

Of the nine titles above, one is truly shocking and one is genuinely moving. The shocker is M. T. Mehdi's "Kennedy and Sirhan: Why?," a bizarre tract sponsored by the Action Committee on American-Arab Relations, which argues that Senator Kennedy was a victim of Zionism and of an "immoral" exchange of sympathy for Israel for Jewish votes at home, and that in shooting him, Sirhan B. Sirhan acted certainly illegally and unwisely but not necessarily immorally.

The book gives, I suppose, insight into a type of political thinking that makes the conflicts in the Middle East so difficult to resolve. "The author," a note says, "is contributing all profits to prevent the sale of Phantom jets to Israel so that Mr. Kennedy's death will not be a wasted tragedy."

The other book—for my own taste, at any rate, a model for memorials, quiet, dignified but natural, handsomely produced—is "An Honorable Profession": A

Tribute to Robert F. Kennedy," edited by four of his closest associates. The title comes from the Senator's own statement: "An honorable profession calls forth the chance for responsibility and the opportunity for achievement; against these measures politics is a truly exciting adventure."

The volume includes his younger brother's eulogy to him, his own eulogies to President Kennedy and Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and numerous articles written about him, both before and after his death, by associates, admirers, reporters and political leaders around the world. There is a lot here that is solid, and very little that is saccharine. Proceeds from the sale of the volume "will be given over to the support of the Robert F. Kennedy Memorial Fund."

In "The Day Kennedy Was Shot," Jim Bishop, author of such other "day" books as "The Day Lincoln Was Shot," "The Day Christ Died," "A Day in the Life of President Kennedy" and "A Day in the Life of President Johnson," offers a detailed recapitulation of the assassination in Dallas. It differs from William Manchester's account in being extremely partial to President Johnson's viewpoint (Mr. Bishop was able to get to the President, but not to the Kennedy's—just the opposite of Mr. Manchester's situation). The prose is journalistic—less sweaty than Mr. Manchester's, and also a good deal less forceful. The book is advertised as "uncensored" and promises revelations, but it contains little that we do not already know.

Impact of News

The title "1:33" refers to the moment President Kennedy died; this book is an account of how the news was received around the world. "John Fitzgerald Kennedy: The World Remembers" is a compendium of such memorials, monuments and tributes as educational and cultural foundations established in his name, re-designated streets and dams and airports, and medals and stamps issued in his honor. The book is high priced for what it is.

"Triumph and Tragedy" is a rather slick, familiarly illustrated saga of the Kennedy family by the same Associated Press team that produced "The Torch Is Passed." Pictorially it seems inferior both to that book and to the special issue Life magazine got out on the Kennedys last summer. The United Press International volume, "Assassination," is a profusely illustrated account of the events of Robert F. Kennedy's death, from June 4, through June 9.

Victor Lasky's "Robert F. Kennedy: The Myth and the Man" follows the waspish pattern of his previous "JFK: The Man and the Myth." Intended as an anticampaign book, it is a compendium of mostly denigrating fact, gossip and hearsay. Mr. Lasky's timing is once again unfortunate; he completed the book before the shooting and has added a new introduction and concluding chapter. Possibly out of a sense of balance, Trident Press is also bringing out "Robert F. Kennedy: Apostle of Change," a review, largely in his own words, of his public record on various issues. The book draws on speeches, interviews, press conferences and the like, is sensibly organized and contains an intelligent running commentary by Douglas Ross, the late Senator's legislative aide.