

# TV's Impact for Kennedys

**SCHOLARS** Dr. Frederick Wilhelmsen and Mrs. Jane Bret have written an important book, "The War in Man: Media and Machines."

I turn to it in the question of TV's impact in the 1972 presidential election year because the book reveals much about this: the teething ring on which political darlings sharpen their molars.

**BY TV'S IMPACT**, the living room is now a voting booth. We live in a day of image-making politics. A race horse has been described as an animal which can take great numbers of people for a ride at the same time. So can TV's image-making power. The consequences are not only very large but go to the very root of representative government.

TV's impact can, and often does, circumvent the rational side of man.

Wilhelmsen-Bret search analytically for the meaning of the John F. Kennedy impact and the echoing place of Sen. Edward M. Kennedy in this. These scholars do so impersonally.

First, Wilhelmsen-Bret see TV as placing President Kennedy in the White House. They cite his TV debates with then Vice-President Nixon as surely accounting for more than the 118,551 votes by which he won. Then follows their claim that if a political figure can achieve a television impact equivalent to President Kennedy's, his lack of substance matters little to the average voter.

Beginning with the Bay of Pigs and ending with President Kennedy impetuously committing the first U.S. ground troops into

the morass of Vietnam, his foreign policy, on the record, was not a policy; it was a catastrophe — a series of catastrophes. On the domestic front, in turn, practically none of President Kennedy's proposals were accepted.

Wilhelmsen-Bret accordingly contend that what Senator Ted Kennedy has inherited through the memory of John F. Kennedy is the memory not of a successful President but of a television personality — the mystique finally being entrenched by the ghastly Dallas horror.

These scholars point to the fact that it would normally be unbelievable that President Kennedy's younger brother could conceivably bypass his Chappaquiddick demonstration, the contrived cover-up, the silence enforced on witnesses, the impounding of the court records, etc., and be regarded as suitable to be president of the United States.

**THE SCHOLARS EXPLAIN** that Senator Kennedy, however, has riding with him the memory of John F. Kennedy. And the impact of that mystique, with what it tells us about the consequences on representative government, is among the book's contributions.

Surely, many people can hold a fantasy so stubbornly that it becomes a reality, a controlling image engraved in their minds and in their opinions. Thus Wilhelmsen-Bret supply an answer to the riddle of Senator Kennedy being discussed for the presidency, which puzzles so many astonished millions.