

Ethel Kennedy and Joseph Kennedy III prayed at St. Patrick's

AP Wirephoto

Search for the Magic

The Mourners' Mood

By Russell Baker
New York Times

New York

The people had always needed to touch him—it was part of what the commentators liked to call "the Kennedy magic"—and yesterday they came for the last time with hands outstretched and reaching.

Now, however, the touch was timidly, tenderly proffered, with fingers resting just a fraction of a moment on the foot of the coffin in gesture of gentle farewell.

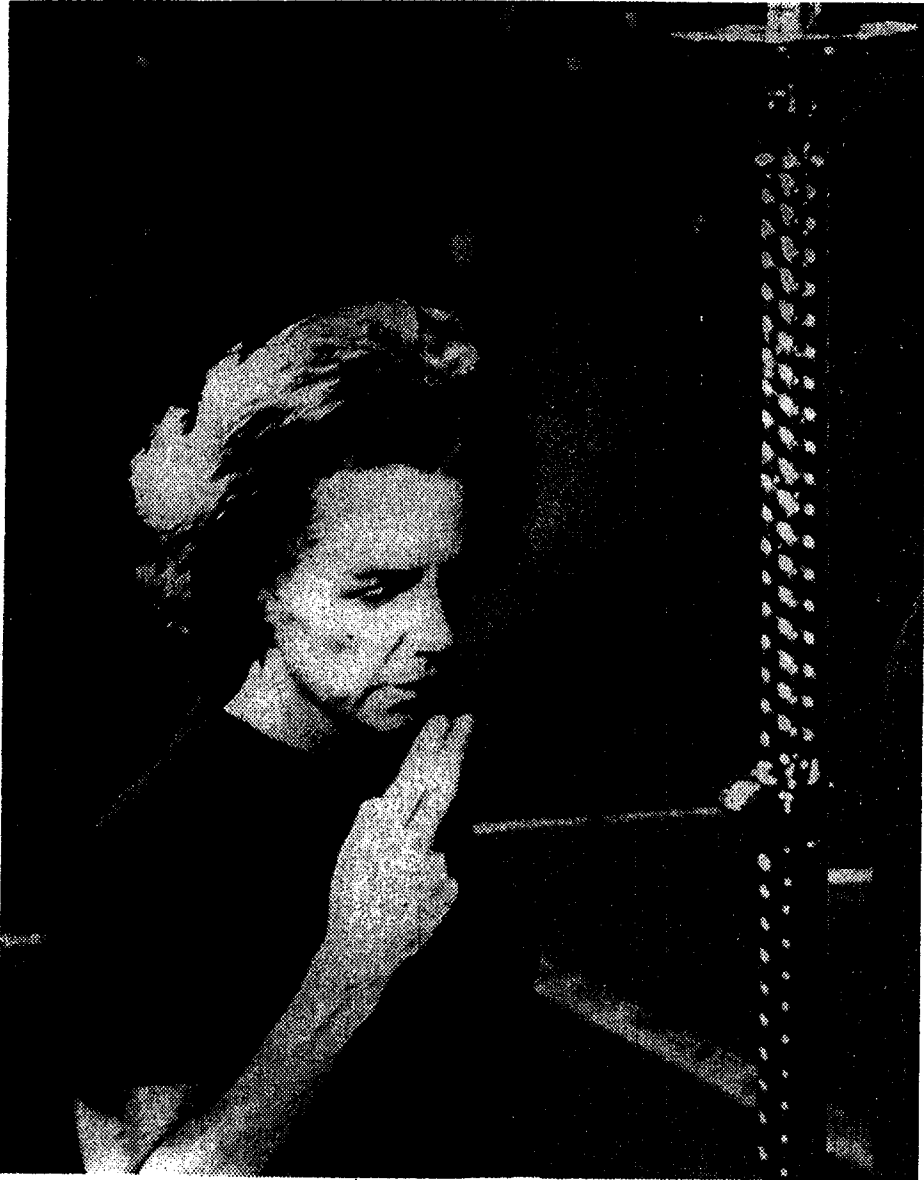
All day long they filed past the bier, lifting their hands, letting the fingers flicker momentarily

on the dark mahogany, and then passed from St. Patrick's Cathedral into the steamy heat of East 50th street.

The funeral today will be the occasion for the austere, the official and the eminent, but yesterday was the people's, and for all its solemnity there was much of the mass excitement about it that his political campaigns had engendered.

It was in pointed contrast to the bleak November Sunday in

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ETHEL KENNEDY AT THE CASKET
A brief kiss for her slain husband

AP Wirephoto

Kennedy Magic

The Mood of N.Y. Mourners

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1963 when his brother's body had lain in state in the rotunda of the Capitol in Washington.

There, too, the crowds queued for a mile and more to pass the coffin, but they were gray crowds bundled against the cold in a city as silent as a mausoleum, and in the Capitol rotunda they were able to look but not approach near enough to reach out.

Very few probably would have wished to, for that was a high occasion of state in which grief was suffused with awe.

Yesterday's, by contrast, was a people's occasion. The coffin rested on a lower bier that placed its top only waist high for the passing throngs, and they were allowed a democratic proximity to it that made it possible for them to brush it with a hand in passing.

SOBS

Once, an elderly woman in deep mourning began quivering with sobs as she passed and had to be saved by a policeman from collapsing over the coffin.

The ubiquitous television lights, which turn even our most solemn moments into theater, beat down ceaselessly from the steps approaching the altar, illuminating for the home viewer the faces of the famous who stood vigil beside the coffin.

Andy Williams, the singer, took his turn there, and so, briefly did Leonard Bernstein the conductor, in white suit and white shoes. Robert S. McNamara, the former Secretary of Defense, and Douglas Dillon, the former Secretary of the Treasury, served their vigils together in colorless gray, and Sugar Ray Robinson, the former boxer, in green slacks and white sport shirt open at the collar.

Just beyond the glare of the floodlights newsmen clus-

tered to exchange notes, broadcast technicians worked on their electronic equipment, workmen toiled to prepare the Cathedral for today's ceremony, walkie-talkie radios squawked and a priest celebrated mass at a small altar off the north transept.

PEOPLE

The people who waited in a line 25 blocks long, eight abreast at many points, were neither shattered nor awed for the most part.

They were a cross-section of everybody, including the shouters and jumpers and touchers who had been attracted by every campaign of all three Kennedys.

A few wore mourning. Some had obviously put on their Sunday best. But most were dressed for hot weather, as a crowd might dress for an outdoor political rally in midsummer.

The heat in which they chose to wait for periods up to five hours was a choking miasma of cooking exhaust fumes. Many fainted.

"They're turning it into a festival," a policeman complained. "They're bringing babies and children and they're dropping over like flies."

One woman from the Bronx, who seemed to reflect the general absence of awe for the occasion, boasted: "I just snuck across the street and cut the line. I've got guts like he had."

The people waited with patience, fainted and returned to the line, took what sustenance the soft-drink vendors could manage to offer against the opposition of the police lines and littered Park avenue ankle deep in soft-drink tins and food wrappers.

Theirs was the mood of the people whom he had often kept waiting because he often fell so far behind schedule in his campaigns for Senate and White House. In death, as he had been in life, Bobby Kennedy was an event, and some quality about him made people want to participate in it.