

John Chamberlain ————— They Died for Beliefs

When something like the Kennedy tragedy happens, and people respond by accusing themselves and their fellow citizens of complicity in some strange and undefined collective guilt, it leaves you with a rather hopeless feeling.

You don't want to dissociate yourself from the general accusation, for—who knows?—perhaps you could have done something along the line to make this a safer environment in which to conduct the political arguments that are the heart's blood of democracy.

But then (so you ruminate, trying to avoid smugness) there is the reputation of your country to consider, and it can't be that it is uniquely evil on a planet that has never been really civilized within the full meaning of the term.

With no desire to dodge any issue, you find yourself bridling at the accusation of collective guilt.

Trying to discover a common denominator in the recent assassination, you find it impossible to link the Martin Luther King murder with the killing of the two Kennedys.

James Earl Ray, the accused murderer of King, was a common jailbird who has yet to speak out, and nothing really definite is known to the public of his associates and his activities.

At least one commentator has tried to link the Kennedy murders with that of King by saying

that the subject of race had so poisoned American life that violence has taken over.



JOHN CHAMBERLAIN

But Lee Harvey Oswald, the presumed killer of John F. Kennedy, was not interested in racial politics. He was a class warrior who had cut his eye-teeth on Marxist literature and whose admiration went out to Fidel Castro.

As for the man who shot Sen. Robert F. Kennedy, he apparently did it for something that is only remotely related to the common life of America.

Bobby Kennedy had made some remarks about the need to maintain the integrity of Israel which any other United States political candidate might have made. His accused killer, a Jordanian whose childhood was spent in that hot and desiccated

land below the Mount of Olives in the Arab part of Palestine, happened to hear Kennedy on the subject of Israel instead of Gene McCarthy, Hubert Humphrey, Richard Nixon or Nelson Rockefeller, all of whom shared Kennedy's feelings about the need for a peaceful adjustment in the Middle East. So Bobby Kennedy became the sacrifice.

The truth would seem to be that the world plucks at America in ways that mock the workings of the old Madisonian conception of politics, which is built on the idea of temperate argument between the representatives of various checks and balances.

The class war theories and the nationalist passions of the Old World intrude upon the New World as Jefferson and Washington feared they would if we took sides in the partisan quarrels of other peoples.

The world, of course, is no longer what it was in the time of Washington and Jefferson. For better or worse, we are caught in the planetary undertow. And this suggests a theme that should be explored by President Johnson's recently created commission to conduct "a penetrating search for the causes of violence."

Instead of bowing our heads in shame because of the death of the two Kennedys, we might assert the glory of their essentially American attitude to the world.

John F. Kennedy was killed because he had a thoroughly decent objection to the sanguinary class war politics of a Fidel Castro. And Bobby Kennedy was killed because he had an equally decent concern for the safety of the state of Israel.

Seen in this light, the Kennedy brothers are martyrs to causes that Americans can embrace with absolutely no feelings of guilt, whether collective or otherwise.

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