

# Kennedy: Apostle of Involvement

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WASHINGTON, June 6—A year after he succumbed to an assassin's bullet in a Los Angeles hospital, Robert F. Kennedy is best remembered as an apostle of involvement as against alienation, that rare politician who could talk with the people who feel left out.

In the political world that he left in turmoil, a mention of the former Senator from New York is a poignant reminder of the steadily increasing difficulty of many party figures in talking with the outcasts with whom Mr. Kennedy seemed the closest.

"Bob Kennedy proved that it could be done," Senator Fred R. Harris, the Democratic national chairman, said today. "He proved you can take strong ideological stands on behalf of those without much political strength of their own and still not lose support from the majority."

Interviews with other leaders, inside and outside the Kennedy camp, on the anniversary of the Senator's death strongly emphasized his ability to appeal to young people, as well as Negroes, Mexican-Americans and other disaffected minorities.

## 'A Political X-Ray'

"He was like a political X-ray," said Hubert H. Humphrey, the man who won the Democratic nomination when Mr. Kennedy's challenge was halted. "He could penetrate more deeply into the problems of our time, not only observe them but make a diagnosis and advocate some remedy."

"In a very unique way, he had the power of conversation with the people who felt left out. His greatest contribution was his ability to give a sense of belonging to people who were not even used to being heard."

The former Vice President was asked if he saw anyone in public life today who might succeed Mr. Kennedy as this kind of communicator.

"I think a good deal of his mission was accomplished," Mr. Humphrey replied, "because we're all a little more perceptive today and more keenly sensitive to the needs of forgotten people. He left behind him a cadre of sensitive spokesmen and, I hope, thoughtful leaders."

To Lawrence F. O'Brien, who organized pre-convention campaigns successively for former President Lyndon B. Johnson, Senator Kennedy and Vice President Humphrey, the most important aspect of the Kennedy legacy was his ability to get people interested in public activity who had never been active before.

"Bob Kennedy had a lasting impact on the American political scene because millions of Americans, particularly the

## Senator Recalled as Favorite Politician of the Outcasts

young people, were spurred to follow him, to participate in the democratic process, through his leadership," Mr. O'Brien declared.

The former longtime political adviser to President Kennedy said he believed the campus unrest of today might have been less serious had Mr. Kennedy lived because "he had given to young America the kind of leadership that would have ultimately been extremely productive."

## 'A Continuing Challenge'

Mr. O'Brien said he regarded Robert Kennedy's record as "a continuing challenge to the Democratic party, to Ted Kennedy and others, to try to maintain the pace and move with some vigor," producing as a result "a greater effort than is now being expended."

Senator Eugene J. McCarthy, the third major challenger for the Democratic nomination last year, declined to give his views on the contributions Senator Kennedy had or had not made to American political life.

Mr. McCarthy said his perspective on Mr. Kennedy was too complicated to be discussed in an interview but would be dealt with in detail in a book he has been writing, which is scheduled for publication next fall.

Republican comments on the Kennedy legacy tended to reflect the same viewpoint as those of the Democrats. Senator Charles H. Percy of Illinois said Mr. Kennedy had "struck a particularly responsive chord with our young people, with the poor and with others who have been left out of the mainstream of American life."

"In doing so," Mr. Percy added, "he alerted the country to the deep problem of poverty in our midst and the great inequities between rich and poor that exist in our society."

Senator Charles E. Goodell, Mr. Kennedy's successor as junior Senator from New York, said the Democrat had "significantly influenced the course of our country" because he "deeply sensed the changing tide in our society" and was "dedicated to peaceful change, to giving all Americans a full share of opportunity."

The young people to whom Mr. Kennedy appealed so extensively reacted in sharply different ways. A staunch McCarthy worker said that with the Kennedy assassination "I think we lost the last chance to save this country from falling apart completely."

"I have no personal grief for him [Kennedy] at all," the young man continued. "I think he was a mean, miserable little so-and-so. But he had the

ability to rally the white middle class, and now we've lost that altogether."

A West Coast college student whose father was close to Senator Kennedy predictably praised him, saying he had "a vision of what should be rather than what is, of what is possible rather than what is least difficult."

Generally, the senior politicians concluded that it would be unlikely for the Robert Kennedy constituency to transfer itself intact to any other politician, even his brother, Senator Edward M. Kennedy.

"Theoretically, I suppose that all those Negroes and Mexican-Americans and blue collar workers and young idealists could move over somewhere in a bloc. But I doubt it," one Democratic leader said. "It was really a pretty personal thing."

A major bequest left by Senator Kennedy was the great file of unanswered political questions that are still being debated hotly a year later. Could he have won the Democratic nomination if he had lived? If he had been nominated, could he have beaten Richard M. Nixon?

A spot check of three of the Senator's biographers showed them all giving him both the nomination and the election. Although narrowly and with some reservations.

Jules Witcover, author of "85 Days — the Last Campaign of Robert Kennedy," said he believed that the mood of the Chicago convention, searching for an alternative to Mr. Humphrey, would have turned the delegates to Kennedy, who in turn would have made Vietnam a real issue in the campaign.

David Halberstam, who wrote "The Unfinished Odyssey of Robert Kennedy," said that, after a bitterly divisive convention, the New Yorker's capacity to bear continued exposure and still attract people would have pulled him even with Mr. Nixon by mid-October and given him a close election.

William V. Shannon, author of "The Heir Apparent — Robert Kennedy and the Struggle for Power," said that Senator Kennedy's ability to deal with the political professionals would have carried the convention and his money and personal appeal the campaign.