

# The Qualities of Kennedy

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In many ways, the personal characteristics of Robert Kennedy were very much like the dominant characteristics of the American people.

We are an ambitious, strenuous, combative, youthful, inconsistent, abrupt, moralistic, sports-loving, non-intellectual breed, and he was all these things.

Yet paradoxically, he was running behind for the presidency precisely because he exploited and personified these typical American traits of character.

The professional politicians, and much of Big Business and Big Labor, all of them ambitious, competitive and abrupt men of action themselves, opposed him actively.

The young, the Negroes and much of the rest of the poor backed him, all in both categories for the same reasons. He was a passionate and pugnacious man who confronted the inevitable and sometimes the avoidable contradictions of life, and inspired great loyalty and great fear in the process.

He was not going to make it in this election — there were too many powerful forces against him — but this does not prove that he was either wrong or right.

It merely proves that he was more willing than his party and the rest of the country to throw all his passion and energy into ending the war in Vietnam and transforming the life of the cities.

He was an all-or-nothing man and he lost everything in the end, but he was determined to face the terrible dilemmas of the war and the cities.

He was prepared to choose, between defeat at home and defeat in Vietnam, between Israel and the Arabs, as few politicians and few Americans are, and this cost him not only the leadership of his party but his life.

One of the many tragedies of his death is that it occurred just when he seemed to be regaining confidence in his own power. He lost it for a while during the agony of his brother's death. He went through a couple of bad years, when he seemed stunned and stumbled into a



The Kennedy brothers—Edward, John and Robert—in 1958, before the decade that brought fame and death.

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can foreign policy, and he was certainly not the favorite political darling of the Jews in New York or anywhere else. Yet he is gone.

Many men succeed in politics by using their worst qualities and this applied to Robert Kennedy at the beginning of his legislative career. But in the end, he failed while using his best qualities. It is all very strange, and for the moment repulsive.

"Politics!" exclaimed Paul Valery. "At that word I am overcome with silence . . . I regard the political necessity of exploiting all that is lowest in man's psyche as the greatest danger of the present time . . . there (in politics), vibrant and buzzing, are the meddlers, the bores, the buffoons . . ."

"Some roar, others whisper in your ear. Some know everything and are silent. Those who talk know nothing. By a trick of inverted lights, friends see each other as enemies, fools look impressive to the intelligent . . . I could lose myself at this fantastic fair, where even arithmetic — in fact arithmetic especially — is subject to strange upsets."

couple of silly and unnecessary conflicts.

Somehow the Kennedys seem to be able to save everything but themselves. Having all the attributes of life most men desire — good looks, money, power, success, love and even fame — they are the targets of envy

and, to twisted minds, the symbols of the inequality of life.

Killing Robert Kennedy to avenge the hatred of the Arab states for Israel — if that was the assassin's motive — was a wholly irrational act. He had nothing to do with

Israel's spectacular victory in last year's war. He had no influence on President Johnson or Secretary of State Dean Rusk on Middle Eastern policy — or any other policy for that matter. He was not on his way to the presidency, where he might have directed Ameri-