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(AN AP NEWSFEATURE FOR TUESDAY PMS)

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THE WORLD TODAY

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BY JAMES MARLOW

ASSOCIATED PRESS NEWS ANALYST

WASHINGTON, NOV. 22 (AP)--THREE YEARS AFTER HIS DEATH PRESIDENT JOHN F. KENNEDY HAS BECOME A MAGIC FIGURE TO MANY AMERICANS, PERHAPS TO MOST. HE RANKS FAR HIGHER IN POPULAR FAVOR THAN HIS SUCCESSOR, PRESIDENT JOHNSON.

BUT MUCH OF THIS APPRAISAL HAS ITS ROOTS NOT IN INTELLECT BUT IN EMOTION AND PERSONALITY, PLUS SOME OTHER FACTORS IN THE AMERICAN SOCIETY OF THIS TIME. IT IS NO BAROMETER FOR WHAT HISTORIANS WILL SAY 50 YEARS FROM NOW.

KENNEDY HAD STYLE, ONE OF THE MOST FREQUENTLY USED WORDS IN DESCRIBING HIM; GRACE, WIT, AND A STREAK OF THE POETIC IN HIS RESPONSE TO PEOPLE AND EVENTS.

AND HE ALWAYS HAD ENOUGH SELF-ASSURANCE TO KEEP HIS EGO OUT OF SIGHT IN A BOTTLE WITH A CORK IN IT IN THE HALL CLOSET. HE DIDN'T LET IT CREEP OUT ON HIM IN PUBLIC.

PERHAPS JUST AS IMPORTANT IN TRYING TO UNDERSTAND THE INTENSITY OF THE DEVOTION TO THIS MAN WHO DIED SO RECENTLY WAS THE SENSE OF YOUTH HE CONVEYED--NEW HOPE, NEW STARTS, NEW HORIZONS--IN A COUNTRY WHERE FAR MORE THAN HALF THE POPULATION IS UNDER 50. HE WAS 46 WHEN HE DIED.

THUS DYING WHEN AND HOW HE DID--STILL YOUNG BUT ASSASSINATED-- HE MOVED INSTANTLY INTO HISTORY ON THE RICH CARPET OF MARTYRDOM WITH ALL THAT MEANT IN THE ACCOMPANYING EMBROIDERY OF MYTHOLOGY: ADULATION, SENTIMENTALITY, AND MAGNIFIED APPRECIATION.

JOHNSON HAS LITTLE OF KENNEDY'S GLAMOUR AND SENSE OF YOUTH. HE'S OLDER, ANYWAY. HE'S 58. HE HAS NOT MUCH WIT, NOT MUCH GRACE IN THE KENNEDY SENSE, HIS UTTERANCES ARE NOT POETIC BUT PROSAIC.

AND HE WEARS HIS EGOTISM LIKE A GREEN BERET, WITH "I THIS" AND "WE THIS" AND "MY THAT." YET, RIGHT HERE ONE OF THE GREAT DIFFER-

ENCES BETWEEN JOHNSON AND KENNEDY APPEARS, ON THE SURFACE AT LEAST:

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WHERE THE SELF-ASSURED KENNEDY, OUT OF A WEALTHY AND CULTURED BACKGROUND, GAVE THE IMPRESSION OF TAKING PUBLIC APPROVAL FOR GRANTED, THE POORER-BACK-GROUNDED JOHNSON SEEMS UNCERTAIN OF IT BUT TERRIBLY ANXIOUS FOR IT.

THIS MAKES FOR AWKWARDNESS AND, IN COMPARISON WITH KENNEDY, JOHNSON IS AWKWARD. THIS MAY EXPLAIN WHY MANY PEOPLE, WHO CRINGE AT AWKWARDNESS AND CONSIDER THE INTRUSION OF THE EGO BAD TASTE, SAY THEY DISLIKE JOHNSON AND REMEMBER KENNEDY ALMOST WITH A SIGH.

THAT IS AN APPRAISAL BASED NOT ON PERFORMANCE BUT ON PERSONALITY. PERHAPS THE TIME IN WHICH WE LIVE--AFFLUENCE WITHOUT CRISIS OR PANIC ANYWHERE IN VIEW--IS THE BASIS FOR THIS KIND OF ATTITUDE.

IT GIVES PEOPLE THE LUXURY OF PICKING AND CHOOSING MORE ON HOW A MAN APPEALS TO THEM THAN ON WHAT HE DOES. BUT TO JUDGE JOHNSON ON HIS PERSONALITY IS NOT ONLY UNFAIR, IT'S UNREALISTIC, IF HE IS TO BE JUDGED AS A PRESIDENT.

KENNEDY NEVER WORKED AS HARD AT THE PRESIDENCY AS JOHNSON, WHO NEVER STOPS WORKING. HE KNOWS CONGRESS, AND HOW TO GET WHAT HE WANTS THERE, BETTER THAN KENNEDY EVER DID OR PERHAPS EVER WOULD HAVE.

IT'S DOUBTFUL KENNEDY COULD HAVE OBTAINED CONGRESSIONAL APPROVAL FOR THE MASS OF MAJOR LEGISLATION--SOME HIS, SOME JOHNSON'S--WHICH JOHNSON GOT THROUGH IN 1965.

NEITHER JOHNSON NOR KENNEDY WAS A BRILLIANT LIBERAL FIGURE IN MOST OF THEIR SENATE YEARS. THEY TOOK THE LIBERAL ROAD AS THEIR MAIN ROAD WHEN THEY ENTERED THE WHITE HOUSE.

LIBERAL INTELLECTUALS REPORTEDLY LOOK DOWN THEIR NOSES AT JOHNSON, IN COMPARISON WITH KENNEDY, BUT JOHNSON FOUGHT HARDER FOR LIBERAL PROGRAMS WITH CONGRESS THAN KENNEDY DID, AND MORE SUCCESSFULLY.

KENNEDY WAS A GLISTENING FIGURE. BUT JOHNSON IS A DIFFERENT KIND OF MAN, JUST AS EVERY PRESIDENT HAS BEEN DIFFERENT FROM ALL OTHERS.

A LONG TIME FROM NOW, WHEN HISTORIANS TRY TO DECIDE THE PROPER PLACE OF JOHNSON AND KENNEDY IN THE LIST OF PRESIDENTS, THE JUDGMENT WILL BE BASED NOT ON PERSONALITY BUT ON ACHIEVEMENT.

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