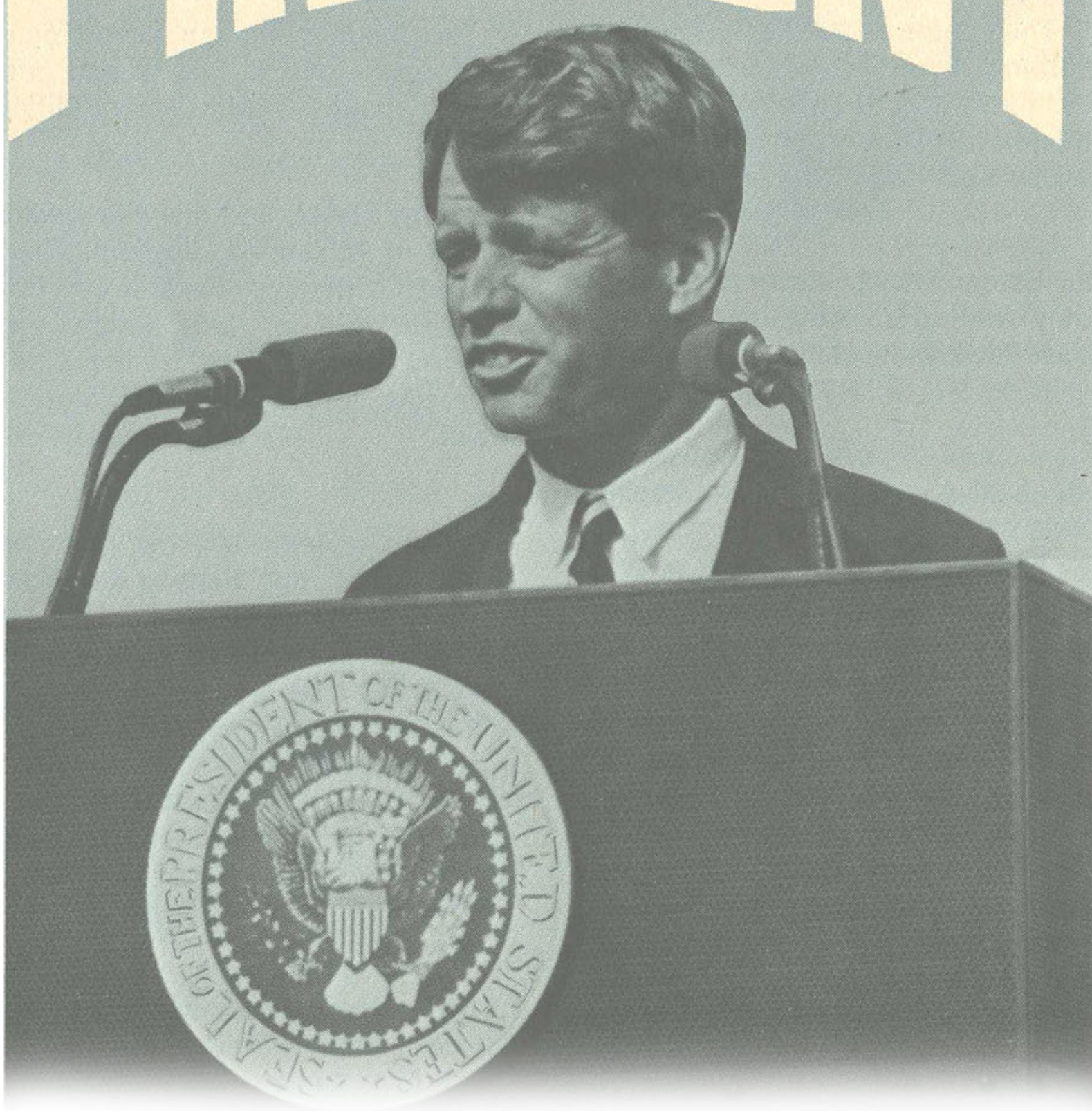


★ IF BOBBY WERE ★

# PRESIDENT



*A reassuring dream to his supporters, a nightmare to others, is the fantasy an inevitable fact?*

**by Martin Smith**

**T**he long desk is cluttered with papers and ragged blue memo slips. Some are lying near a large, framed photograph of a wife surrounded by a small host of children. The man who sifts through the scrawled messages can occasionally glance through a French door over the gardened lawn onto Pennsylvania Avenue.

He is in shirt sleeves. A wiry but fit and tanned man of forty-six, he has reddish-blond hair touched with gray and cut shorter than the curling lock he sported as a senator.

He absent-mindedly takes a short, thin cigar from a silver cigarette case. The inscription on the case reads: "When I'm through, how about you?" And President Robert Francis Kennedy has fulfilled his late brother's prophetic jest.

The scene is common to the dreams of Robert Kennedy supporters throughout the nation. To that extent, it is not so different from the dreams Rockefeller or Romney or Reagan or Humphrey supporters have for their men.

If that victorious event is a reassuring dream to many, it is a nightmare to almost as many others. "The inevitability of Bobby" comes just after that of death and taxes, says Conservative quipster William Buckley, only half in fun. Should Bobby decide to let L.B.J. peacefully defend his Potomac spread this year, there certainly will be a Kennedy move in another four.

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Senator Kennedy's opponents have criticized the vehicle he's using in his drive to Pennsylvania Avenue. Los Angeles Mayor Sam Yorty put it in its nastiest form: "He's trying to ride on his brother's fame and his father's fortune to the presidency."

Bobby's answer to these charges has been to ignore them or ridicule them. It's a combination of responses that maddens rivals who lack the Kennedy charisma or wit. In his senatorial campaign against incumbent Kenneth Keating, he used both tactics against the carpetbagging issue and drove home one theme: "Who Will Make a Great Senator?"

So it's only fair that we ask, "Will Bobby make a great President?" Or even a good one? What would his policies be?

For that matter, we can also wonder who will be part of Bobby's team. There are plenty of politicians who have quietly edged their way into Robert and Ted Kennedy's good graces in the nervous anticipation of a Newer Frontier. These generally have the attitude expressed by a fellow senator from the East: "I'm a practical politician. One of these boys might be President some day, and it makes you kind of cautious."

A strong President: Those are the words that will be used most frequently if Bob Kennedy makes it to the house where Warren Harding meekly whiled away the days writing erotic notes to Nan Britton. With Bobby, the house would have more the aura of a battlefield headquarters. He has a general's or a football coach's concept of life and politics; he enjoys nothing more than marshaling the good guys against the bad guys.

It is this sort of executive power that he is well-fitted for by parental training from Joe Kennedy, Sr., and by his own Justice Department experience. Says his top administrative aide, Joe Dolan, "The kind of guy you want for President is the guy you shake in the middle of the night when the radar blips are going wild and the transatlantic cables are cut, and the guy acts better, tougher than ever. John F. Kennedy was that sort of guy. So is Robert Kennedy."

It's a view that Bobby unabashedly shares. He sees the President's role as an active one, more active even than Lyndon Johnson's view and far beyond Dwight Eisenhower's caretaker concept.

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The question is what would Robert Kennedy do with the power he fervently seeks? One close friend and political associate says this:

“Robert Kennedy has an obsession with proving his worth. Remember, he was the smallest Kennedy, but he was the only one to get his ‘H’ in football at Harvard. The last thing he will be remembered as twenty years from now will be Little Brother.

“His aims? For one thing, I could guess that he would redirect America’s efforts back from Southeast Asia to Europe, where we are much better equipped to operate. Like his brother in Laos, he would settle for less than the whole loaf in Vietnam. If this means admission of Red China into the United Nations and Vietcong participation in any South Vietnamese government, then I think his hesitation would be mainly public.”

It’s a fair assessment. Most of Kennedy’s advisers are of the Europe-oriented breed, which would signal a decline in the influence of the Asia Firsters in American policy. Robert Kennedy’s general goal, though, is seizing Third World initiative from the Russians and the Chinese.

“He has a vision of turning the tables on the Reds throughout Asia, Africa, and South America,” another aide says. “He doesn’t want the United States to be pictured by the new nations of the world as the symbol of the status quo. He wants the new, angry leaders of these impoverished people to look to us for guidance, not to Peking.”

It’s quite a vision for the acting patriarch of a \$300-million investment portfolio. If Robert Kennedy did become President and sought this goal—already instilled in Bolivia’s huts and South Africa’s kraals by his late brother—and failed, it would be the largest disillusionment of the twentieth century.

Kennedy operates with both assets and liabilities in this foreign adventure. His main asset is his ability to touch the still-existent well of affection among other peoples for this country and his family. “It’s like competing with royalty,” Senator Jacob Javits once said.

What Bobby would *not* have, and which could destroy his ambitions for effective generalship of the free world, is the support of Congress. The forty-two-year-old legislator is tolerated in the Senate now much as a ball of Saint Elmo’s fire would be

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tolerated in the average living room.

"Bobby just doesn't like the way the Senate operates," a colleague says. "He doesn't have the patience for sitting in committees, so he and Teddy spend their time passing notes back and forth and laughing. Actually, Ted is the charmer, the Senate pet of the Southerners who control the passage of bills. Bob has far surpassed both Jack and Ted in the introduction of good legislation, but the Southerners have long memories. They will have their turn, they figure, if Bobby becomes President."

The only factor that may save Bob from being hamstrung as Chief Executive is a landslide victory that would pull in a great number of Kennedy Democrats and give him the impetus of a mandate. Even so, he would have to operate in the face of sullen party leadership and the combined mistrust of the Joint Chiefs of Staff and the Central Intelligence Agency. Both of these groups have greatly increased their influence since Johnson came to power. The Kennedys, burned by their Bay of Pigs adventure (run by the CIA), have been scornful of military experts ever since. It is an accepted fact on the Potomac that the Chiefs and the CIA have had a large say in all foreign policy for the last few years.

At home, Kennedy would throw his fate with the cities and the race problem. "There are other problems that the Senator wants to face," an aide says, "but he feels these are the basic questions in the country." A critic adds tersely, "There are many votes in the cities and ghettos."

If there are votes it is because the great majority of Americans will be living in the troubled cities when Bob Kennedy makes his move for the presidency. Moreover, as with the people of the Third World nations, Kennedy can reach angry American minorities. One member of a New York gang said, after talking to Bobby on the debating platform of a street curb, "He's sort of an in-between guy. You know: not hip, but not square."

In the Senate, Kennedy introduced an urban housing bill at the same time as Senator Charles Percy and shortly before President Johnson launched his. Analyzing the bills, Percy remarked that his bill and Kennedy's were fundamentally different while that of the administration was plainly inferior to each. A point made was that Kennedy has

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point made was that Kennedy has employed, with his own money, better and more imaginative housing experts than the government has.

His concern for minorities springs from a puritanical loathing of bigotry and anything smacking of foul play. Whether this idealism could encourage him to interfere with the big-city bosses who represent so much of his solid political base from Chicago east is another matter. A number of Northern mayors have told Kennedy what they think of placing anything remotely resembling independent political power in the hands of the poor. His struggle between idealism and political realism is likely to be a long one.

The style that Robert Kennedy would bring to the White House would certainly be his own, neither that of Jack nor L.B.J. "I can't predict what the style around the old mansion would be," says a Washington matron, "but, goodness knows, it will be active. In the first place, where is he going to put all those children and pets?"

It's a good question. The Robert Kennedys have ten children, now. At one time the kids had a menagerie of pets that numbered a horse, three ponies, a goat, a burro, a herd of rabbits, hamsters, and a sea lion.

The top quarterback on the Kennedy team is reported to be Ethel Skakel Kennedy. This millionaire's daughter combines the gung-ho spirit of a Lady Bird and the grace of a Jacqueline. She would also provide a gentleness that is often badly needed by her husband's abrasive image. In all, Mrs. Robert Kennedy is one of Robert Kennedy's strongest assets. He once said, "Ethel and I can beat anybody." He wasn't just talking about touch football.

While Ethel would set up home in the cramped family wing of the White House, Bobby would be gathering his team in the executive wing. It would be composed basically of experienced retainers inherited from his brother and soldiers enlisted from his own Justice Department days. No matter which group, almost all the applicants for positions of power would have to accept the Bobby Kennedy attitude.

"You have to go through something with Bob Kennedy before you have a relationship with him. Relationships are everything to him," explains Ed Guthman, national news

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editor of *The Los Angeles Times* and an old Justice hand who is said to be available for a possible White House lineup.

Jimmy Hoffa was such an experience for Kennedy, and those who passed it with him in the Justice Department are Guthman, John Seigenthaler, and Burke Marshall. Seigenthaler is said to have ghostwritten *The Enemy Within* for Bobby; also he and Guthman were the first to read William Manchester's transcript of *Death of a President* for their former boss. Burke Marshall, at forty-four the only one of the Justice trio older than Kennedy, was head of the Department's Civil Rights Division and, according to Bobby, "has the world's best judgment on anything." All three could be expected to bulwark a Kennedy staff.

"Utility outfielders," is one Kennedy aide's label for Ted Sorensen and Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., two of the best-known fixtures of John Kennedy's administration. Distant from Bobby for some time since the assassination (and the publication of their own books on the tragedy), they have been moving closer as Bobby moves closer to ultimate power. Of late, they have been diligently sniping at President Johnson's foreign policy along with Richard Goodwin, who boasted he would work in the White House before he was thirty and made it with both Jack and Lyndon Johnson.

In Johnson's own camp, Bobby has a battalion of possible defectors. It is a mark not so much of Kennedy's acumen as of L.B.J.'s inability to bring his own talent into his administration and hold it. These Kennedy-Johnson men include Labor Secretary Willard Wirtz, Agriculture Secretary Orville Freeman, Interior Secretary Stewart Udall, and United Nations Representative Arthur Goldberg. Other possibilities on the list are Postmaster - General Larry O'Brien, Urban Development Secretary Robert Weaver, and Attorney-General Nicholas Katzenbach, a Kennedy protégé who has been going out on a limb for Johnson on Vietnam and may have placed himself beyond "rehabilitation."

The jockeying for Cabinet seats in a possible Kennedy restoration has begun. Bobby, like most modern politicians, takes most of his information orally; therefore, whoever has his

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ear has power. Today he is in contact with hundreds of eager professors, researchers, and businessmen. Tomorrow, he may have to elevate them to offices of influence.

That's what they believe. In truth, there would be few seats up for the grabbing. Some, from tradition, immediately go to Republicans: the Treasury and Defense Departments, and directorship of the CIA. Kennedy would probably ask McNamara to return to Defense, offer Treasury to able acquaintances Roswell Gilpatric or Douglas Dillon, and just keep a tighter rein on the cloak-and-dagger set.

Known as the best gagwriter in the Kennedy circle, natty historian Schlesinger, Jr., will, with Sorensen and Goodwin, have a major say on any Kennedy speech. Goodwin, like Kennedy, has a strong interest in Latin America and might take a powerful position related to that area.

Robert Kennedy would be his own Secretary of State, though through someone else whose name would definitely not be Dean Rusk. The someone could very well be Arthur Goldberg. Former Supreme Court Justice, former Labor Secretary, and genuine politician, Goldberg is forced by his present employer to keep a tactful distance from the Kennedy clan, but this did not prevent Bobby from seeking advice of Goldberg about what to say during the New York City transit strike. With his growing diplomatic reputation, he would be the perfect compromise between Kennedy's sometimes radical advisers and the stolid conventionality of another Rusk.

No matter who makes the Kennedy team, it would be a team with only one leader. Once the decision is made, everybody pulls together. After the Bay of Pigs fiasco, Bobby pressed his brother to dump Undersecretary of State Chester Bowles for leaking the word that he had opposed the invasion. Failing in that, he went to see Bowles himself and said, "I understand that you advised against this operation. Well, as of now, you were for it."

Of course, all this speculation is based on a dream, and the Kennedys have learned well not to trust fate. Besides fate, there are the heady obstacles of politics, and of other bright young presidential hopefuls like Chuck Percy, John Lindsay, and

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Mark Hatfield. Who knows how many pretenders to the throne we may see months from now, let alone in another four years?



*RFK by Roy Lichtenstein*

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