



Sons & Brothers: The Days of Jack and Bobby Kennedy

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Mahoney, former JFK Scholar at the U. of Massachusetts and the Kennedy Library and current teacher at the Thunderbird School of International Management in Phoenix, provides a dual biography of Jack and Bobby Kennedy, describing their relationship and the role their bond played in their accomplishments, blunders and, ultimately, their murders.

Sons & Brothers: The Days of Jack and Bobby Kennedy Details

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Samantha says

First of all, let's get it out of the way. I really love the Kennedys. I enjoy most of the books about them and always learn something of each (yes, even the crazy conspiracy books). This book was a little different. I learned a lot. I enjoyed how it was put together. It starts with the 1950's and then takes 1960, 1961, 1962, 1963 and then Bobby Alone as separate topics. It has stories from their growing years in each as if looking back to show why they were doing what they were doing at that time in their life. I really got in the Bobby Alone section from 1964 to 1968. It showed how Bobby totally changed his views and what he went through in order to come to the conclusion that he needed to run for President. Mr. Mahoney does drag out the New Orleans, Cuban, and Mafia stuff but it's ok. Most nowadays do. I would highly recommend this book to anyone looking for a well rounded book on the Kennedy boys.

Roger Dier says

At the outset, I liked reading the book and I think anyone who is interested in that period of time, or the political Kennedys, will find some merit in the pages of Mr. Mahoney. Some of Mr. Mahoney's writing is striking and thought provoking, but he takes liberty with the truth to fold events into his theory that Mob-backed elements killed JFK, and by inference, Bobby as well. There are many instances where Mr. Mahoney cites as Gospel truth the unconfirmed and unproven ramblings of curious characters who gained tiny fame for being in Dallas on November 22, 1963, or knowing a guy who knew someone who saw a combative Lee Oswald at a firing range three weeks before JFK's assassination. More specific, he cites the since-debunked conclusions of Robert Blakey, a committed conspiracy buff, to reinforce his narrative leading up to Nov. 23, 1963. Simply because people hold titles, academic or otherwise, does not mean they are the sole purveyors of insight or truth. Mr. Mahoney leans hard of the puffery of titles and banks those opinions as knowledge. At the end of the book, he cites an unnamed friend of RFK leaning down over his dying face to hear Bobby whisper, "Jack. Jack." The source, cited as Richard Goodwin, was the person he selected to quote to close his story, but according to Mr. Mahoney's own end notes, there were two other things others reported the dying Bobby as saying before he lost consciousness, but he plucked something out of Mr. Goodwin's book because it was a convenient closing for his own.

I suppose that is the writer's choice.

As an aside, the more I learn about J. Edgar Hoover the more I'm convinced the man was a moral criminal. We would have all been better off had Hoover disappeared from the FBI long before he did. And if JFK brought out the best in politics, his Presidential successor reflected the worst in American politics.

I'm glad I bought the book, and I enjoyed the read, but as your mother or best teacher should have told you long ago, "Don't believe everything you read."

Sadie says

Well written and interesting, no doubt, but for a large part not what I'd expected. The very last part, entitled

"Bobby alone" is what I'd hoped this whole book would be: A close look at the person, his behaviour, growth, reception, self reflection, what not - that last part was a joy to read, making me sigh and swoon and think and mourn. I was close to this book right then, I felt it. And I'd so expected, no, hoped, for the rest of the book to be the same, with both JFK and RFK, their similarities, distinctions, interactions and what not being the center of it all and just getting to me, you know? And there was some of it, sure, and it was good and so promising. However, there was so much more, which made this book more of an overview of all things Kennedy administration. Which, again, is interesting. But you know, there's a time and a place for everything, and when I expect an indepth look at the brothers, I don't want to read pages of who's who in the mob. Some is necessary to put it all into perspective - mob, yes, as well as Cuba, foreign politics in general, all that - but this book lost focus too often. It just wanted too much instead of staying on its main topic. If you know that and accept and expect that, it's a good read though, just not the kind I'd expected it to be.

Aubrey says

This book was only okay. I wanted to point out two nitpicky things: driving from Springfield to Amherst Massachusetts doesn't bring you through the Berkshires, and Mishawaka, Indiana had a population of 33,000 in 1960, which I don't consider a "tiny" place. Maybe I'm just too particular with getting those kind of things right in a book!

Maureen says

Why don't you learn any of this stuff in school? My AP US History book gave about a paragraph to Bay of Pigs, the Missile Crisis and Bobby Kennedy, total. None of this intrigue between the different branches of the CIA, FBI, and Justice, let alone secret dealings with the Mafia. Shame on "The Enduring Vision" for giving us such a bland, whitewashed version of recent history.

That said, the book has flaws- the portrait of RFK post-JFK's assassination borders on saintly, and the allusions to tragic Greek heroes were overdone. Also I'm not sure the author gave Johnson a fair showing. Still, definitely worth a read.

Mae Clair says

I'm not sure how I became so enamored of Bobby Kennedy, why, or when. I think it started by watching a movie about his life several years ago. After that I started searching out anything I could find - - movies, documentaries and books.

This was the first book I read on the Kennedys. While I normally search for titles that are strictly on Bobby, this one revolved around him and Jack. It was an eye opener in many ways. I was far too young to remember the Kennedy era but I have a shadowy memory of that fateful day when RFK was gunned down at the Ambassador Hotel. I vaguely remember a news clip, but had no idea what it was about or what it meant at the time.

Of all the books I've read on Bobby(and the Kennedys)this is my favorite. It illustrated the difference in temperament between JFK and RFK and introduced me to a family that played a crucial part in American history.

Joy Johnson says

Fascinating. Learned so much.

Raghu says

Richard Mahoney's book on the Kennedy brothers is a well-researched and well written history of John and Robert Kennedy's years between 1952 and 1968. It provides interesting answers and pointers to the many 'puzzles' surrounding the murder of both the brothers and also the extent of the roles of the Mafia, the anti-Castro exiles in Miami, the Teamsters Union, the CIA and the FBI in an advanced industrial democracy like the US in the 1950s and sixties.

The picture that emerges from the book about the two brothers and their father is somewhat as follows: Jack Kennedy was basically one who had statesman-like qualities which he showed clearly in the Cuban missile-crisis, in his reluctance to authorize the assassination of Castro on moral grounds and in his ability to see the futility of the war in Vietnam. He was idealistic enough to pursue the civil rights legislation but also political enough not to alienate his white constituency in the south. Jack also was detached enough to privately admit that he would probably be assassinated but he dealt with it in his own light-hearted manner. On the other hand, Jack was a philanderer and had used the Mafia in rigging the election results in Illinois to win his presidency. He knew about his father's buying the party bosses in Virginia with money to make him win the democratic primaries in 1960. Though he was a devoted and affectionate father, he wasn't a faithful husband to Jackie, even though he knew that it affected his much younger wife.

On the other hand, Bobby Kennedy was more upright and also self-righteous. Except for a brief affair with Marilyn Monroe, he was faithful to his wife. He was a staunch Catholic, believed in right and wrong as black and white and went after the Mafia, the corrupt unions and also Fidel Castro with a vengeance, even though he knew that his own father was neck-deep in collusion with the crime bosses. He saw no contradiction in using the anti-Castro exiles to assassinate Fidel Castro. He believed in ends justifying the means. He believed strongly in civil rights. He took himself too seriously and pursued relentlessly his dangerous agendas thereby alienating the FBI boss Edgar Hoover, Lyndon Johnson, the Mafia, the union bosses and eventually the anti-Castro exiles.

The book also brings out the close relationship between the brothers. Bobby was totally devoted and loyal to Jack. Jack admired Bobby's zeal and passion and his abilities to get things done. They both had a deep affection towards each other.

In the end, one can surmise from the book that the brothers were killed because of Bobby's pursuit of the crime bosses even though Jack and his dad had used them to get to the Presidency. In the eyes of the crime bosses, the Kennedys did not keep their end of the bargain. They let down the Miami exiles badly in the disastrous Bay of Pigs invasion. The FBI, under Hoover, also conspired by withholding information about the imminent danger to their lives. Both the brothers had a fatalistic view about their own lives as a result. One disturbing image that arises from the book is the extent to which American politics at the highest level was corrupted and influenced by the Mob, the exile lobby and corrupt trade unions in the 1950s and 60s. Both Jack and LBJ had corruption to thank for to their rise to the highest offices. If this was the case in a rich, industrial democracy nearly 200 hundred years after independence, then it seems very self-righteous and unfair for the Administration of today to call the Afghan and Iraqi govts corrupt and beset by warlords. Applying this interpretation, one can say that J.Edgar Hoover behaved like a 'warlord' in the 1960s by using blackmail and snooping to advance his interests. The crime bosses and the CIA were their own centres of power in the 60s. The book is a humbling experience for anyone who is too critical of the struggle of democracy in Iraq and Afghanistan today.

Finally, the author suggests that even though Bobby did not believe in the conclusions of the Warren commission, he 'accepted' them because that was the only way to protect Jack's and his family's legacies as well as his own guilt that he may have contributed to the murder of his own beloved brother by his relentless pursuit of the mob.

This is an excellent and eminently readable book for all Kennedy admirers and non-admirers alike.

Sara says

If you are familiar with Arthur Schlesinger's books about JFK and RFK, then this will come off as a rehash. This book covers much of the allegations and evidence that Seymour Hersh presented in "The Dark Side of Camelot." The frequent typos are mildly annoying. (Not exactly the best book on the Kennedy brothers, but I've read way worse. Probably best recommended to those unfamiliar with 1960s history and/or casual Kennedy admirers.)

Erin says

The real title of this book should be How The CIA & The Mafia Conspired & Killed The Kennedys. I love conspiracy theories! I just think they make life more fun and I almost never believe what the government or media tells me. This book is not really about the relationship between the brothers Kennedy but more about how Bobby got both himself & his brother killed.

Bobby Kennedy has always been my favorite Kennedy. He was tough, ruthless, loyal, and very compassionate. I truly believe that The Kennedy administration would have done nothing about Civil Rights had it not been for Bobby. This country needs more Bobby Kennedys. This book put forth a lot of theories. Are they true? I don't think we'll ever know who or why JFK & RFK were killed but I enjoy reading about all the theories.

Colleen says

What a misrepresenting title. Ought to be "Mafia, Mobsters, Hitmen." I was under the impression based on the description of the book (not to mention the title) that it would examine how the brothers interacted with each other, and with their father. Granted, this was covered (with not many more insights than the obvious ones covered by the Reelz miniseries that aired earlier this year) but this book was much more about Castro, Cubans, the FBI and CIA, and mobsters from Miami to Chicago to Las Vegas. I feel as though I came away with more insights about the character of J. Edgar Hoover than I did about either RFK or JFK, with the exception of the revelation that some people, Mahoney included, probably want RFK beatified and sainted.

Skirting around the endless 'Cuban commandos and murky underworld parties' chapters in which the book went tens of pages without mention of either the President or his brother, there was plenty of interest in this book, but that doesn't overcome my disappointment at the misrepresentation.

KOMET says

"THE KENNEDY BROTHERS: The Rise and Fall of Jack and Bobby" offers the reader various views and perspectives on the evolution of the relationship between John F. Kennedy and his younger brother Robert between 1951 and 1963. At the same time, it also provides, in a large sense, a living history of the Kennedy Administration; the challenges, setbacks and triumphs it experienced; and the roles Robert Kennedy played in that history as Attorney General (e.g. his relentless fight against organized crime and his moral support for the cause of civil rights) and enforcer and protector of his brother, the President.

Then we also experience the inner struggles and agonies Robert Kennedy endured after his brother was assassinated in Dallas in November 1963. After years of supporting JFK through his various political campaigns and in the White House, he was faced with having to find his own voice and place. In the process, Robert Kennedy's humaneness and compassion for the poor and disenfranchised - coupled with his fearlessness and the spirit of his character - came to define him in the eyes of millions of Americans as he went on to win election to the U.S. Senate from New York in 1964 and embarked on the path that led him to his last crusade, his run for the Presidency in 1968.

In the words of the author: "... the Kennedys, with all their romance and irony, finally unite in an aesthetic comparable to the Greeks that they read about and quoted: they were daring and they were doomed, and they knew it and accepted it. They would die and make their deaths into creative acts of history. They would be heroes. And they would give their country an imperishable poignancy in its heart."

J.P. Willson says

Review to follow...

Matt says

This was a really good read. Fairly ballanced version of the Brothers' story.

Good level of detail in summary of the connections between the deals they cut on the way up, and the price they obviously paid. Just too many connections to the underworld and the two assinations.

In the end these two really paid for sins of their Father.

Although JFK had a fascinating run. Not exactly the model family man. Complex.

Barbara M says

An interesting well researched book about Jack and Bobby Kennedy. The author grew up around the Kennedy's - his father was a friend of Bobby's and a US ambassador (appointed by Jack). The author, Richard Mahoney, was a JFK scholar and worked at the Kennedy Library.

I learned a lot reading this book. I went to school in the US, but very little, if any, of the Kennedy era history was taught in school. I am not a history buff, but I found the history of events happening in the 60s very

interesting to read about - the Bay of Pigs, the conflict with Castro, racial desegregation of schools. The author presented the historical material in a very readable format. As the author describes the men personally - they emerge as strong characters who have strengths, as well as, flaws.

Although the title of the book is the "Kennedy brothers" - it really is about 3 Kennedys - the father Joe and the two brothers. Joe Kennedy, the father of Jack & Bobby, is portrayed as a powerful man who "bought" the election for his son, Jack. The author also discusses Joe's association with notable people in the Mafia. Jack is described as charismatic with "movie star" appeal who is beset with health problems that he hides from the public. Although good looking and charming, Jack appears to be a difficult man to be married to - he has affairs throughout his marriage including an affair with Marilyn Monroe. Bobby is described as fierce and passionate - a powerful bulldog. He is not always liked by everyone - he is someone who gets into the middle of things and gets things done. Bobby's faith shapes his morality and he becomes a moral compass for his brother, Jack. It was interesting to learn about how their upbringing and different personalities shaped their lives and the presidency. The two brothers seemed to complement one another. I learned how much Jack relied on his brother Bobby during his presidency and the special bond they had with one another.
