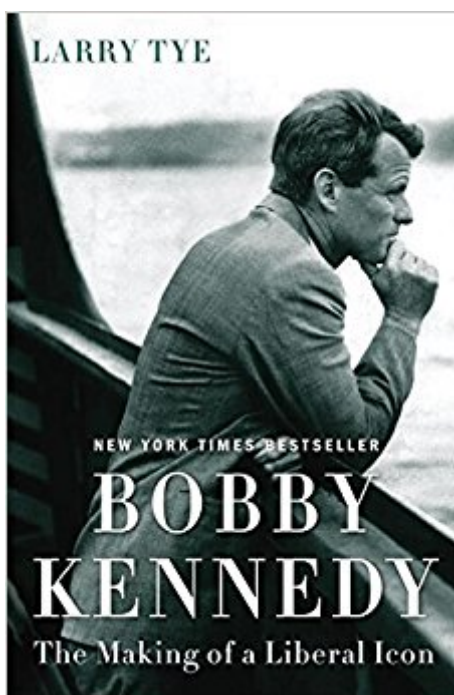


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Bobby Kennedy: The Making Of A Liberal Icon



Synopsis

NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLER • From the author of *Satchel* comes an in-depth, vibrant, and measured biography about the most complex and controversial member of the Kennedy family. History remembers Robert F. Kennedy as a racial healer, a tribune for the poor, and the last progressive knight of a bygone era of American politics. But Kennedy's enshrinement in the liberal pantheon was actually the final stage of a journey that had its beginnings in the conservative 1950s. In *Bobby Kennedy*, Larry Tye peels away layers of myth and misconception to paint a complete portrait of this singularly fascinating figure. To capture the full arc of his subject's life, Tye draws on unpublished memoirs, unreleased government files, and fifty-eight boxes of papers that had been under lock and key for the past forty years. He conducted hundreds of interviews with RFK intimates—including Bobby's widow, Ethel, his sister Jean, and his aide John Siegenthal—many of whom have never spoken to another biographer. Tye's determination to sift through the tangle of often contradictory opinions means that *Bobby Kennedy* will stand as the definitive one-volume biography of a man much beloved, but just as often misunderstood. Bobby Kennedy's transformation from cold warrior to fiery liberal is a profoundly moving personal story that also offers a lens onto two of the most chaotic and confounding decades of twentieth-century American history. The first half of RFK's career underlines what the country was like in the era of Eisenhower, while his last years as a champion of the underclass reflect the seismic shifts wrought by the 1960s. Nurtured on the rightist orthodoxies of his dynasty-building father, Bobby Kennedy began his public life as counsel to the red-baiting senator Joseph McCarthy. He ended it with a noble campaign to unite working-class whites with poor blacks and Latinos in an electoral coalition that seemed poised to redraw the face of presidential politics. Along the way, he turned up at the center of every event that mattered, from the Bay of Pigs and the Cuban Missile Crisis to race riots and Vietnam. Bare-knuckle operative, cynical White House insider, romantic visionary—Bobby Kennedy was all of these things at one time or another, and each of these aspects of his personality emerges in the pages of this powerful and perceptive new biography.

Praise for *Bobby Kennedy*

“We are in Larry Tye's debt for bringing back to life the young presidential candidate who . . . for a brief moment, almost half a century ago, instilled hope for the future in angry, fearful Americans.” —David Nasaw, *The New York Times Book Review*

“Sweeping . . . [Tye] captures RFK's rise and fall with straightforward prose bolstered by impressive research. Along with hundreds of interviews with Kennedy intimates, including his widow, Ethel, Tye sifted through unpublished memoirs, unreleased government files, and boxes of Kennedy papers that had been locked away for some forty years.” —*USA Today*

“Bobby Kennedy, who was assassinated

during his 1968 presidential campaign, is remembered for his antiwar stance and for standing up for civil rights and against poverty. But Tye (â œSupermanâ •) shows how RFK was not always the progressive hero but a work in progressâ ”after all, Kennedy worked for Joseph McCarthy for a spell. Tyeâ™s pages on the assassination are heart-wrenching.â •â ”New York Post â œThis biography will appeal not only to those wanting a portrait of a dynamic idealist, but also to those seeking to understand the emotions of the times in which he lived.â •â ”Henry A. Kissinger

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Customer Reviews

Let me first admit that I am a fan of John and Robert Kennedy since my childhood. In my extended family, JFK was spoken about as a member of the family. I have clear memories of each brothersâ™ deaths. But, I do not read biographies of them or the Kennedys with an uncritical eye for books that are either written as too much a love letter or for baseless attacks. This new book by Larry Tye is gratefully one that deserves the highest praise. I received my copy as a pre-publication ebook. That format provided me quick access to the many footnotes in each chapter and I enjoyed how the footnotes were often so interesting as to make me wonder why many of them were not simply inserted in the main text. The author obviously worked hard at this biography unlike some other authors who mostly wrote their works by reading other authors and watching documentaries. It includes numerous interviews and readings of materials not previously provided to others including from Ethel Kennedyâ™s thoughts and documents. Tye gives us the main points of Kennedyâ™s inspirational South African â œRipple of Hopeâ • speech for which I donâ™t off hand recall before

reading. He also goes more in depth with the significance of RFK's term as senator than what other biographers have provided. But be clear that the author does not shy away from impressing upon the reader the misjudgments and sometimes angry behaviors by Robert Kennedy. This includes his defense of Joe McCarthy. Or how he worked himself into a frenzy to best an opponent. "Bobby never denied wanting to come out on top, although he never understood how slippery the slope was between fervor and fanaticism." Overall, the author is an obvious fan but not one who is fearful of noticing his subject's faults.

I wanted to read this book because of the title and its reference to the growth, politically and personally, behind his becoming the man whose death meant so much to my generation. Tye reminds us of Bobby before was a crusader for the poor, before his determination to heal the racial divide: the commie hating, law and order, political operative who worked for family friend Senator Joseph McCarthy and approved wire-taping Martin Luther King, Jr. The Bobby who wanted to bring down Jimmy Hoffa and Fidel Castro. The expectations of his father and the examples of his older brothers meant Bobby was filling the roles set out for him. Until the death of his brother President John Kennedy, a blow that sent Bobby spiraling into grief but also freed him to explore his own path and seek his own way. Bobby was a complex man with many 'sides' and Tye brings all to life, marking each stride in Bobby's growing maturity and wisdom. It was Bobby's empathy and determination to act against injustice that has immortalized him. "Let's face it, I appeal best to people who have problems," he remarked during his presidential run. But it was no PR act. He truly loved children. He was enraged by the poverty he encountered and that he deemed was worse than what he had seen abroad. And he was courageous, fearless. His extemporized speech to a nearly all-black crowd, telling them about the assassination of MLK, was an eloquent and poetic plea for compassion.

It took courage to be Bobby Kennedy, and it took a different kind of courage for Larry Tye to write a book about him. From all that has been written and said, it's easy to think we know what we need to know about Bobby and his times. But Tye has proven otherwise. This seasoned writer and reporter presents a nuanced, richly documented probe into the many facets of Bobby Kennedy's public actions and private persona, starting with a childhood during which he was overshadowed by older brothers and overlooked by his father, the headstrong tycoon whose primary devotion was to making his son Jack a political star. It was only when Bobby proved himself invaluable to his brother's 1962 Senate bid that he gained real stature within the family and beyond. Tye does a

masterful job bursting simplistic assumptions about Bobbyâ€™s political leanings. His ideological alignment with Joe McCarthy in the Fifties is well-known, but Tye digs deeper, revealing a personal friendship and allegiance that Bobby sustained even when he knew its political price. Bobbyâ€™s Cold War hawkishness was real, though, carrying over to his days as JFKâ€™s attorney general and closest adviser. As Tye reveals, Bobby may have been JFKâ€™s strongest aide in resolving the Cuban missile crisis, but that didnâ€™t stop him from being the administrationâ€™s lead advocate for covert operations against Castro before, during, and after that crisis. If Jack was more cerebral, Bobbyâ€™s politics were driven by principle and passion. Of the many points in Tyeâ€™s account where this comes through, none are more moving than the many accounts of Bobbyâ€™s deeply personal efforts to bring long-overdue civil rights to African Americans. Larry Tyeâ€™s book is a gift not just to those who were moved by Bobby Kennedy in his lifetime.

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