

A 20th century leader

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' Robert Kennedy: His Life' is the autobiography of Robert F. Kennedy (popularly referred to as RFK). It was written by Evan Thomas, a former senior editor of Newsweek in Washington.

He was the first biographer to have access to Kennedy's personal papers as attorney general. Though the book contains no shocking revelations, there is a lot of fresh information gathered from Robert's surviving colleagues, files and other sources. In the book, Thomas gives an elucidation of the man's strengths as well as failures, and discloses the complex web of relationships in the Kennedy family.

Depicting RFK as a man whose ' house had a lot of mansions', Thomas refers to him as ' the lucky one'. Throughout the book, Thomas brings out the many phases of Kennedy's personality. He was a very rich individual who could act like a spoiled child one day, and show sympathy to the minorities the next. Though the book honors a man whose potential was cut short too soon, Thomas' book focuses on a man, a family and an era about whom Americans will never fully understand.

Robert was the younger brother of U. S. President John F. Kennedy (JFK). Born on November 20, 1925, he was the seventh born of Rose Fitzgerald and Joseph P. Kennedy. After living in Brookline, Massachusetts for two years, Robert and his family moved severally to mansions located in different parts of New York such as Riverdale and Bronxville.

Robert schooled at Riverdale and Bronxville elementary schools till 5th grade, and then moved to Riverdale Country School for 6th grade. In 1938 when 12 years old, Robert took his first trip abroad with his family to

England, where his father was serving as an American envoy. After finishing high school in 1943, Robert was drafted into the U. S. Naval Reserve as a trainee seaman.

Robert Kennedy's involvement in politics

According to Brian (1996), when World War II broke out, Robert took a break from studies at Harvard and joined the U. S. Navy. After the war, he went on to complete his studies and graduated with a law degree from University of Virginia. In the 1950s, he served as a counsel to a US Senate committee probing labor unions, leading to his open feud with the Teamsters leader Jimmy Hoffa.

Robert's political career is more closely associated with his brother, JFK. He oversaw JFK's successful campaigns for the US Senate in 1952 and the presidency in 1960, and then was appointed as Attorney General in John's administration.

He was at the forefront of enforcing civil rights measures in the South and became the president's closest adviser on all issues, for example foreign policy matters such as the Cuban missile crisis. After his brother's assassination in 1963, Robert continued to serve in the Lyndon Johnson government as Attorney General and was unhappy that Johnson overlooked him for vice-presidency in 1964.

Robert ran successfully for senator of New York. As senator, he was loved by African Americans and other minorities such as immigrant groups and Native Americans. He spoke convincingly in favor of the excluded, disaffected and

impoverished, hence getting the support of social justice campaigners and leaders of the civil rights struggle.

He backed President Johnson on domestic matters, particularly civil rights and the war on poverty, but did not agree with him over the war in Vietnam. By 1968, he was one of the most vocal advocates against the American policy on Vietnam. On domestic policy however, he became more and more liberal and developed a soft spot for the dispossessed and the minorities.

Robert declared his candidacy for the US presidency in early 1968. He was assassinated on June, 5, 1968 at the Ambassador Hotel in Los Angeles just after delivering a speech to his supporters upon capturing the California primary. He was pronounced dead the following morning.

Attitudes and Approach

According to Brian (1996), Robert as a child was frequently the target of his father's domineering temperament. However as he got older, he won the admiration of his father and brothers through his competitiveness. During his brother's campaigns, Robert was more tenacious, passionate and involved than the candidate himself, aggressively tackling every detail and fighting every battle.