

THE TROUBLE WITH TEDDY

*His legislative record is terrible,
his politics are opportunistic,
the ghost of Chappaquiddick
haunts his campaign. Yet still
Teddy plagues us.*

By NICHOLAS VON HOFFMAN

THE ONLY LOSER THE FAMILY HAS brought forth, Teddy is nevertheless the one male Kennedy who seems imperishable. Ballots can't kill him. He lives, constantly dieting toward the slim proportions that have enabled the Kennedy men to woo and wow females, whether registered to vote or not. That Teddy remains in the race, that his candidacy isn't being laughed off, that journalism hasn't consigned him to the graveyard, may not be vampire-ish, but it is at least preternatural.

On its face, this attempt to rush the White House is preposterous. Not since James G. Blaine lost to Grover Cleveland has any major candidate been encapsulated in quite the moral odium that surrounds Edward Kennedy. Blaine's honor, if not his honesty, had been impeached by the widely held belief that, when a member of the House of Representatives, he'd been enriched by the railroad interests. The case against Blaine was never exactly proved; the one against Teddy isn't

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disputed even by his admirers, who react to the odoriferous cloud around their champion by giving you to understand that it is gauche to discuss it.

Take Kennedy's name off the top of his curriculum vitae and what would one say of a candidate whose career résumé included these qualifications: kicked out of college for cheating; a Roman Catholic whose adulteries, it is repeatedly whispered, turned his wife into an alcoholic; the center of a scandalous episode involving the unexplained death of a young woman; accused by the British magazine *Private Eye* of attempting to use drugs to force his unwanted attentions on an American girl in a relatively recent incident in Athens, Greece; dismissed from his post as Democratic majority whip by his colleagues in the Senate because of his inattentiveness and neglect of his duties.

As a member of a body that includes men of the intellectual and moral stature of Herman Talmadge, Harrison Williams, Jacob Javits, and John Warner, with his record Kennedy fits in nicely. As the candidate for the presidency of a profoundly middle-class nation, you would think he would have been disqualified as the Fatty Arbuckle of American politics. (Arbuckle, for those who may not be silent-movie fans, lost his stardom and never worked in the movies again as a consequence of the unexplained death of a girl in a hotel suite fifty-odd years ago.)

BUT WITH THE KENNEDYS, THE ORDINARY laws of political and social cause and effect are suspended. Only close students of *People* magazine or the journalism of Geraldo Rivera can develop the intuition needed to understand why Teddy and his tribe are impervious to what would be a disgrace for you, me, or even Hamilton Jordan. Just as geneticists have designed microbes that feed on oil spills and extrude healthy, useful chemicals, so the Kennedys represent a social evolution which permits them to ingest the scum of scandal and excrete it in the form of enhanced status.

Recall the unorthodox launching of the playboy prince's run for the Rose Garden. After an infinity of interviews in which the handsome baritone said coyly, "I expect President Carter to be renominated and I expect to support him," stories of a different tenor began to appear. A certain Dudley Dudley, described by the *Washington Post's* David Broder as "a dazzling blonde," was spotted in New Hampshire forming up a crusade to demand that Baby Brother save America from the no-neck crackers. Dudley Dudley, who has since vanished from the mass media retina as quickly as she landed on it, was described as an unreconstructed greenie who heats with wood and lives off of silage—suggesting a marriage of convenience between the old blue-collar Kennedy constituents and the nature lovers at L. L. Bean's and Eddie Bauer's. In any event, we were led to believe that the dazzling blondes of this world had put our rich and somehow eternally young—or perhaps only eternally puerile—senator in an irresistible squeeze (we must watch our figures of speech hereabouts) and that he was being forced to break with the wisdom of his party and the history of the country that says you cannot deprive a sitting President of renomination, no, not even if he's Jerry Ford who wasn't even elected.

You may remember the next news was the leak that Teddums had asked the dowager empress, his mother Rose, if he might have the maternal blessing to follow the path his brothers had taken. Doubtless it was meant to induce a lump in the throat and a tear in the eye, but it came across more like:

"Mama, Mama, kin I run for President, kin I? Kin I,

pulleeze?"

"Not till you've had your bath, Teddy dear."

"But Mama, you said I could if I'd wait and take my nap."

"And you did wait, like Mama's good boy, but Teddy sweets, you must have a bath before you declare. We wouldn't want our President to have dirt in his tummy dimples or between his little piggy toes."

There was an astonishing patrician arrogance in the way the Kennedy retinue started off the campaign. You never felt it was his candidacy but theirs—the blood relatives in the immediate clan and the extended one, including the ambitious asps from Harvard, the old-fashioned coat-holders, the society ladies, and the fraternity of well-born, loose-brained youngest brothers. Such fatuous innocence hadn't been seen since representatives of the same social stratum had their coachmen drive them across the Potomac, expecting to watch General McDowell's army destroy the Southerners at the First Battle of Bull Run. In the ensuing rout of the Union army, the spectators almost got themselves killed. This time, though, instead of Stonewall Jackson, the Southerner's name would be Jimmy Carter; he scattered this overconfident and poorly prepared mob in Iowa.

The way the campaign began promised the slaughter that so quickly came to pass. First there was the nasty business with the drug problems of one of his nephews—not to mention the giggly talk about sister-in-law Ethel (the same *Private Eye* magazine published a story alleging she'd been caught shoplifting in Georgetown). The campaign itself had a Bull Run insouciance about it, beginning with the \$40,000 redecoration of the Boeing 727 that was to be the Kennedy campaign plane. This is the kind of thing other men—even the megalomaniacal Mr. Nixon—do after they've won the election and can pass the bill on to the taxpayers. To fly the damn plane cost \$10,000 a day, and during the Christmas holidays, while Teddy was vacationing in Palm Beach, the plane just sat on the tarmac eating up \$5,000 a day. It was that sort of campaigning—at the beginning—with twelve advisers on the payroll, each getting forty-to-fifty grand a year. It's hard to believe that

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nobody had told them that in politics you make your money after you're elected; before, you live like Jack Sprat. You don't do what brother-in-law and campaign manager Stephen Smith did, which was to spend what would later be so badly wanted in Illinois on such necessities as putting a new window in his office. (The office was in Kennedy's national headquarters—located, appropriately, in what was once a Cadillac dealership.)

The campaign suffered terrible prenatal damage. Roger Mudd reached in and mangled the fetus with that devastating

special aired on CBS just before the announcement so the network wouldn't have to give Jerry Brown and Jimmy Carter equal amounts of prime time. The competition was showing *Jaws* that night, but apparently a lot of people were more interested in watching Teddy Boy being eaten alive than some unknown girl on a beach. That was the program where he revealed himself as Mr. Articulate when asked if he thought the populace would come to believe the palpable falsehoods of his Chappaquiddick story:

"Oh there's, the problem is, from that night, I, I, found the conduct, the behavior, almost beyond belief myself. I mean that's why it's been, but I think that's, that's, that's the way it was. That, that happens to be the way it was. Now I find it as I have stated that I have found that the conduct that in, in that evening and in, in the, as a result of the impact of the accident of the, and the sense of loss, the sense of hope, and, the, and the sense of tragedy, and the whole set of circumstances, that the, the behavior was inexplicable."

It makes Jimmy Carter sound like Demosthenes. Still and all you can't take away from Teddy that he can, when he's on, give a moving speech. He's got the delivery, and in Ted Sorensen and Dick Goodwin he's got the speech writers, the same gifted craftsmen who did so well by his older brothers. Whatever money it took to teach Teddy how to talk, to equip him with the best words to talk, was spent. That's the difference between him and Carter. Teddy was an indifferent piece of wood who has been planed and sanded and polished and waxed by the best political carpenters obtainable; Jimmy is the self-improvement kid. He may not do it well, whatever it is, but you've got to concede he did it by himself.

An encounter with Teddy in an interview where the topic is one that he isn't yet well-schooled in leaves you wondering whether he isn't just a bit dumb. Perhaps he's merely a slow starter, but the chaotic syntax, the dribbled language, and the impenetrable thickets of unrelated words aren't confined to subjects about which he may feel guilty or nervous. He can mess up most anything that way. You would think, for instance, that Kennedy would have a fairly well articulated rap on the difference between himself and Jimmy Carter. But listen to his reply to such a question: "Well, it's um, you have to grips with the different issues that, ah, that, ah, we're facing, I mean we can, we have to deal with each of the various questions that we're talking about, whether it's a question of the economy, whether it's in the area of energy."

FROM THE START YOU COULD TELL WHO was running, but not why. Lined up beside the candidate, with his Rooseveltian jowl but not the fingertip political sensitivity of FDR, was a selection of losers from the '68 and '72 liberal efforts. They had missed out on Carter for one reason or another and were now after yet one more shot at the White House limousines and the special importance that goes with being a special assistant to America's suffragan monarch. As Arthur Schlesinger Jr.'s boy Stephen, who worked for Bobby in 1968, explained about that year: "It was our moment in history. We felt a real sense of loss, and we wondered, was our time ever going to come?" There has always been about those in the Kennedys' retinue a feeling that they were cheated out of their due by the assassins, that what the random gunfire of political crazies stole from them, history should make up.

Other people had other things to compensate for, notably the hacks and hackettes of Washington's corpse de press. The media's pro-Kennedy bias in 1960 and 1968 was so marked it's still remembered with awe. The pack, with wagging tails, emitting sweet guttural sounds of love to Jack and Bobby,

barred its collective canines and snarled at Baby Brother. The princeling would pay. This time nobody would sneer that the First Amendment had been traded off for a luncheon invitation at Ethel's. So this time they did what they ought to do all the time, and showed him for what he was—an ineffectual lifeguard and little else.

In essence he did not differ from his Georgia opponent, so he began his campaign offering little more than that amorphous quality called leadership. For all anyone knows, leadership simply means reading the UN resolutions before telling Ambassador McHenry to vote for them. When the ayatollah's

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protégés put the snatch on the fifty Americans, Philo Flub in the White House suddenly took on a Napoleonic aura, thus demonstrating that, to some extent at least, leadership is in the eyes of those being led. Followership became fashionable, and Teddy was up the proverbial Iowa cornfield completely husked.

His had been a lupine strategy from the start, not one founded in a deep or distinct conviction about where America or his party should be going. During Carter's White House squat, no senator had been more consistently supportive. Thus it was Mr. Lupus the wolf, not Sir Teddy the enraged moralist, who split with the President. The plumpish Massachusetts carnivore would trail after the Georgian's flock and whenever a weakling would lag behind, our hunter would pounce.

A few of these stragglers, like Israel, may prove meaty. Neither Hubert Humphrey nor Scoop Jackson, alive or dead, can be accused of giving more support to our principal Middle East ally than Senator Teddy. Call it vote-pimping of the most transparent sort, he may still luck out. American Jews who are emotionally connected to Israel—let it be said many are not—have had misgivings about Carter for several years. Those misgivings may have solidified into unalterable mistrust after the debacle of the UN resolution recantation.

Not that there aren't ample reasons to mistrust Teddy. As chairman of the Senate Judiciary Committee, Kennedy has fathered an entire rewriting of the U.S. Criminal Code. It is a document that pushes civil libertarians alternately into rage and despair. Containing not only what amounts to preventive detention and a violation of the protection against double jeopardy by permitting the government to appeal sentences it deems too short, the bill, S. 1722, could make life miserable for people with heterodox ideas. These kinds of people, the sort the government likes to spy on, will find out that under Senator Teddy's new law it will be a crime to rip out the microphone the FBI has planted under your pillow.

The conspiracy statutes, the most convenient legal tools

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against dissent, have been broadened. You can now be convicted of a conspiracy if one of your alleged coconspirators, without your knowledge or permission or even against your desires, solicits someone to commit an illegal act. Solicitation is enough; the act need not be committed and some of the acts defined as illegal would include civil disobedience at a piece of ground where a utility plans to build a nuclear power plant. Here is an example of what might happen, as provided by John Shattuck of the American Civil Liberties Union's Washington office:

"An antinuclear group is conducting a very vigorous demonstration at Seabrook, and one of the speakers takes it upon himself to urge the demonstrators, or anyone in the audience, to enter the grounds of the facility and attack some of the physical facilities, like chomping through a pipe. No one accepts the invitation. Nothing of the sort happens. Yet, under S. 1722, the speaker can be charged with soliciting the crowd to engage in criminal entry. . . . The criminal charge itself would empower the FBI—under the bill's expanded federal power—to infiltrate the organization holding the demonstration in order to monitor its future activities."

LIBERALS, YOU SEE, ARE NOT ALWAYS civil libertarians, so Mr. Carter—concerned as he is about freeing the CIA from the bonds of Congressional servitude—will not be heckling Kennedy about S. 1722. Jimmy and Teddy may end up quarreling in public over draft registration, but Little Bro's opposition arises out of the campaign's wolf tactics, not principle. As soon as Carter asked for it, Kennedy sunk fangs into his back and again lucked into picking up a degree of support from some concerned collegians. His anticonscription feelings are newly sprung, however, as this 1971 quote attests: "I would support a volunteer army in peacetime. But when American men are dying in Vietnam, Cambodia and perhaps now in Laos, I believe a volunteer army is both unwise and inequitable. . . . In addition to the compelling moral argument for imposing the risks of death on all classes of society equally, there is the issue of political wisdom as well. I frankly do not want to insulate middle- and upper-class Americans from the horrors of war."

It is the fate of all contemporary politicians who lack a firmly principled party base to follow trends rather than setting them. Like one of his sailboats Teddy comes around to fly nicely before the prevailing winds, unlike Bobby, say, who did his 180-degree swings abruptly. So as decontrol became trendy, the Teddly One came under the influence of a Harvard professor named Stephen Breyer, who sold him on airline

and trucking deregulation. It may have helped convince a few people that the candidate wasn't one of those "sixties liberals" afflicted with cranky dogmatisms. Better to define him as a classic eclectic, a senator with presidential ambitions, in the political cafeteria, selecting or eclectic a little deregulation, several mountainous dollops of national health insurance, a generous spoonful of government subsidies for synfuel development, and so forth and so on until he reaches the cashier—whereupon he must decide whether to charge it or pay for it now. As a senator he has been accustomed to shouting, "Put it on the cuff." But this year the trend is toward posturing parsimony, so his call is "Don't put quite so much of it on the cuff." To be fair to the man, he differs from his opponents only in the arrangement of comestibles on his tray. He hasn't switched diets.

Nevertheless, his prospects aren't bad and his accomplishments in the campaign barely stop short of being prodigious. Look at what the Baby Brother has done. He begins the campaign with no particularly distinctive set of political proposals, with the mass media waiting to dry-gulch him, with a national reputation for vice and improper conduct, and goes on to get 25 to 30 percent of the vote in primary after primary against a sitting President who is a fellow Democrat. This is practically unheard of, and it is even more astounding for it to occur at a time of patriotic whoop-de-do when all are told to rally about the President.

At the minimum Kennedy's performance reflects a large voter opinion that James Earl Carter's talents are more suited to growing peanuts than dressing up in grown men's clothes and playing President. As the foreign policy crisis gimmick wears out from overuse, Kennedy, having squeezed Jerry Brown pretty much out of contention, may find himself being a very serious challenger. A lot of people may go for him on the basis of better a scoundrel in private affairs than a *stumpf* in public ones.

Carter's inability to get the fifty hostages out of Iran may end up hurting him more than it helped him. He's been winning the early primaries by saying he's got to stay home at the Casa Blanca to work on freeing our fellow citizens. No time for self-serving vote harvesting. A frustrated Kennedy was unable to dare, taunt, or trick him into debating or even campaigning. But what is Carter going to do if voter sentiment begins to run against him and the hostages still aren't free? He's walled himself into the White House by repeatedly saying he can't leave until our people are out of Iran. It is imaginable that he will be forced to stick to his word rather than look like a liar, while Kennedy is out on the loose, campaigning and cutting down a Carter who dares not leave the White House to do battle with him.

Kennedy's support of controls may also help him, even with big business. After all, look who adored John Connally, and we know his record on controls. As the inflation-caused panic among the nation's creditor groups grows, they may join the existing numerical majority who, according to the public opinion surveys, favor controls. At that point, Teddy, instead of looking outrageously liberal, may be viewed as the embodiment of bold leadership, clear policy innovation, and any number of other favorable clichés, while Carter may come to be regarded as a presidential paraplegic by a nation that has turned against helping the handicapped.

Mamas' boys, the last-born, youngest children, are supposed to be the crybabies who quit and go home. There is just an outside chance that Teddums will turn out to be Mommy's little tough nut and—like so many other youngest sibs—the happy, indulged, effortlessly lucky one. □

PERILS OF THE PERSIAN GULF

**INQUIRY asked seven
American foreign-policy
analysts and political figures
to comment on what the
Carter Doctrine
portends for the future.
Their unanimous response:
nothing good.**

**THE RUSSIANS
ARE COMING,
THE RUSSIANS
ARE COMING**

By EUGENE J. MCCARTHY

THE COMMUNISTS ARE coming again, and so is the Cold War. The Communists are coming again but by a route different from the route or routes they were supposed to have come by in the 1950s, in the 1960s, and in the 1970s.

In the 1950s it was the Russian Communists: They were coming by bomber over Alaska, the North Pole, and Canada. This moved the United States to set up, at great expense, an early warning system known at various stages as DEW line and SAGE—a system that was deemed both unnecessary and obsolete even before it was finished—and also to deploy at strategic airfields fighter-interceptors designed to control the northern air access to the United States. In the 1960s, following the emphasis on the missile gap by candidate John Kennedy (even though it was discovered after the campaign by the new administration that the gap which did exist was in our favor), the word that determined weapons procurement was that the Russians' missiles were coming. After the naval confrontations that were part of the Bay of Pigs and the Cuban missile crisis, and the subsequent Russian build-up of submarines and naval strength, some suggested they might also be coming by submarine.

In the late sixties, along with the Russian missile threat, a new Communist threat was perceived, that of the Communist Chinese. They were on their way first via expansion to Vietnam and then, according to the projections of Dean Rusk, into all of Southeast Asia, possibly to Australia. This combination of new

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