The Two Faces of John F. Kennedy

The media have been weeping copious tears about how Richard Nixon has degraded the office of the presidency through his actions in regard to Watergate, but, as many observers have pointed out all along, the journalistic crew that covers Washington can never get quite as worked up about the "moral stain" brought to the White House by their own heroes.

Consider, for instance, the case of John Fitzgerald Kennedy, who was lionized in both life and death by the Fourth Estate. In a fascinating book published by Putnam's in January called Show Business Latte Bare, nationally syndicated columnist and noted celebrity watcher Earl Wilson portrays JFK as something other than a hallowed statesman.

While he was President, says Wilson, who documents his chapter on Kennedy with a wealth of sources, JFK's public image clashed mightily with his private life.

The voting public was saturated with stories by the Kennedy image-makers of JFK the kind family man, JFK the good husband, JFK the perfect father. But in truth, says Wilson, the President cultivated the life style of a swinger. He never ceased stepping out on his wife, and even arranged a tryst the night before his inauguration. He had affairs with dozens of women, including such movie stars as Marilyn Monroe. He participated in nude swimming parties with mixed couples at the presidential retreat of Camp David and he led this sybaritic, hedonistic life while he was in the White House and supposedly engaged in high-powered decisions affecting the lives of the entire world. Wilson hints at one point that JFK's penchant for womanizing was so strong that it might have even clouded his judgment regarding the Bay of Pigs.

As Wilson writes it, JFK would probably have approved of the contention that he was the "sexiest, swingiest President of the century, and not have thought it disreputable." His sources for such statements, says Wilson, are people with excellent credentials. They include people of near-Cabinet rank when JFK was President. They include film stars, film stars' secretaries, theatrical managers, pilots, babysitters and hotel employees.

Since the deaths of JFK, his brother Bobby and Marilyn (who, Wilson says, also had a close relationship with Bobby), the lips of many knowledgeable people "have become unsealed." Wilson says he has spoken to several "hears" for the President and Marilyn; that is, he spoke to those who pretended to be Marilyn's escort when she was really dating JFK.

When Human Events talked to Wilson, he asserted that his book, which has made a number of best seller lists, was not controverted in any way. Not a single member nor a single friend of the Kennedy family has called to tell Wilson's Hollywood columnist Sidney Skolsky, who is quoted as a source of Wilson's on the Marilyn Monroe affair, was reluctant to talk, but he did say. "If [Wilson] says it's true, it's true."

JFK, according to Wilson, had casual relationships with some women, and more lasting relationships with others. His manner was open. One night at a small White House dinner party, not attended by Jackie, he suddenly left, after coffee and desert, with a girl secretary. When one of the guests inquired as to where the couple was going, the President's closest friend at the dinner responded: "Are you kidding?"

The President was so casual about such an affair with a blond actress that she "danced around quite openly in a negligee in front of guests of the press during one of his visits to Palm Springs." When Wilson asked, "Isn't that a dangerous thing for her to do?" he was rebuffed: "Why is it dangerous? Why shouldn't she show herself off to be the girl friend of the President?" "But he is married to Jackie," Wilson replied. "So?" came back the response.

Dissecting the President's habits further, Wilson continues: "The President was probably the first White House nudist, loving to sit around naked there [Palm Springs] or at Camp David or in visits to California. Once he asked one of his 'hears' to come into the bedroom where he and a girl were nude."

President Kennedy, adds Wilson, "favored the Hotel Carlyle on East 76th Street in New York, and many was the young beauty who met him there. Not all celebrities either. Stewardesses, secretaries, models and those strange creatures who like to offer their bodies to Big Names. The President's score card, if he kept one, would have probably run into dozens, even possibly hundreds. There was always a nai danced to provide an apartment if there was some complication—such as his wife—at the hotel."

The President was "occasionally at Camp David or at the Kennedy estate near Hyannis Port, and there came to me of his continuing fondness for nudity. At Camp David, the men and the girls went nude swimming, long before it was called skinny-dipping and sat around naked afterwards. The President, in the same, civilized, dignified and elegant manner as always, would ask to be paraded for yawning along about the middle of the afternoon. 'I'm going to take a nap,' he would say as he left the group. One of the girls would also leave later."

The President's weakness for women, Wilson hints over so slightly; may even have impaired his judgment concerning the plot to have pathetic Cuban missile men moved.

In one paragraph, Wilson writes: "...But that other blond was still in the neighborhood from time to time. The girl with the snapping eyes was in trouble. Jackie Kennedy had found out about her. She was barred from the White House. There was the Bay of Pigs. A famous man who knew of this completely commented: 'Here's this man with his head full of the Bay of Pigs, and he's got all these little sucking pigs running around after him.'"

Wilson's revelation, and Human Events has only touched on them, have to be considered something of a sensation. Not only must it be considered extremely newsworthy that the President was romantically linked with Hollywood's most glamorous actress, a legend in her own time, but the disclosures must be viewed as politically important because they strike at the heart of the JFK myth so assiduously promoted by his friends and the Kennedy enthusiasts.

If Wilson's information were widely spread over the pages of the daily, metropolitan papers or carried on national television, the impact could be devastating to the entire Kennedy myth and severely harm Teddy, already saddled with the Chappaquiddick burden, for 1976.

While the hardened Washington press corps and the Establishment elite would tend to look upon JFK's wenching as something of a joke and, indeed, may even admire such exploits, the news that he indulged in so many affairs and permitted a loose, moral atmosphere in the White House would be certain to scandalize the Bible Belt in the South, offend much of the Midwest and disillusion so many of the Catholic voters that went for JFK in overwhelming numbers in 1960 and who are probably prepared to go for Teddy just two years hence. Moreover, proven infidelity is not something that goes down well with women voters.

Just as the Profumo sex scandal was instrumental in collapsing the government of Prime Minister Harold Macmillan in England in 1963 and just as Gov. Nelson Rockefeller's divorce and remarriage sank his presidential chances in 1964, so could the widescale reporting of the "JFK scandals" rock Teddy's chances for 1976.

But the media have paid scant attention to the Wilson chapter. The major networks haven't highlighted any of the disclosures. Spokesmen for the Washington Post, Time and Newsweek said no major story or book review had been done by their respective publications.

Bill Rooder, who writes the Newsmaker section for Time, once told us he did "much the same story" in the book anyway. Wilson says that both major wire services did carry stories on his book, but he says he saw only a very cut-down version of one wire service report buried somewhere in the New York Times.

Whatever one thinks of the Watergate affair, then, one thing seems certain: the media will continue to administer political justice with a heavy, but uneven hand. Clearly, they tend to go after scand- alists serving their own ideological interests. And even if Richard Nixon deserves to be removed from office, it seems quite impossible to believe that the media will ever brand an Administration more suited to their liberal tastes with the same, bulldog tenacity that they have ferociously pursued Watergate.

Demo Senate Candidate Wins on Tax Issue

Pennsylvania will host the nation's most interesting Senate race this fall, one that pits a conservative, tax-cutting Democrat against a liberal Republican with all-out support from Big Labor.

Pittsburgh Mayor Pete Flaherty captured the Democratic senatorial primary last week. He is challenging GOP Sen. Richard Schweiker, who was unopposed for his party's nomination, and who is rated an early favorite.

Flaherty's victory was achieved in typical, low-budget, Southwestern style, with a posse of secret agents and advance men, the maverick Democrat campaigned on his record—that of a big-city mayor who made good on his promise to cut taxes. Flaherty's conservative appeal was so great that his chief primary opponent—former State Insurance Commission- er Herbert Denenberg—tailored his campaign to right-of-center voters.

Denenberg, a self-styled populist who had won headlines for his battles with the insurance industry, found it necessary to move rightward on several key issues. He disdained his hard-left supporters by opposing abortion and amnesty and supporting capital punishment. But Denenberg's shift to the right...