

depression and war, until he had extended it across oceans and continents, and made it the sole United States international line, an instrument of national strategy in peace and war.

With all this, Bender and Altschul give us a story, no more the definitive history of Pan Am than the definitive biography of Trippe. At some future time some able scholar-historian, perhaps an aviationist like Roger Bilstein, William M. Leary, Jr., or W. David Lewis, will provide a balanced study of Pan American Airways that will be at once a corporate history, a social history, and a significant slice of aviation history. One hopes that, when this task is accomplished, the result will elicit the admiration of other scholars without boring the general reader.

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The Kennedy Imprisonment: A Meditation on Power. By Garry Wills. Boston and Toronto: Atlantic Monthly Press/Little, Brown and Co., 1982. 310 pp. \$14.95.

As his subtitle indicates, Wills's latest book is not so much about the Kennedys as about the American approach to *power* in the last quarter-century. Wills uses the Kennedys—brothers John, Robert, and Edward, and father Joseph—as a vehicle for conveying certain lessons about the nation's misperception and misuse of its national power in the recent era, lessons he believes previous commentators on the 1960s have missed.

Wills's definition of power is the familiar one: the ability to persuade others do what one seeks of them. From such a perspective follows a further point, one Wills emphasizes to good effect: that the ability to destroy or physically subjugate one's enemies—be they Fidel Castro or partisans of the Viet Cong—does not actually constitute *power*, but just the ability to destroy. Given the will and the ability, destruction can be ordered, but the aftermath will show no increase in the supposed victor's actual influence.

Wills argues that the United States, and John Kennedy in particular, basically misunderstood the nature of power. Instead of realizing that America's influence in the world depended upon working *with* other countries, Kennedy and those around him assumed that exercising American power meant working their will *upon* the targets they selected. The possibility of simply deciding that Fidel Castro's Cuba should be let alone and tolerated as a presence in the Western hemisphere was never really considered; John and Robert Kennedy instead began by assuming that such an opponent must be conquered and disposed of. The debate then became one about means: if a Bay of Pigs military invasion had failed, perhaps a CIA-managed assassination plot against Castro could accomplish the goal more efficiently.

Wills suggests that much of John Kennedy's approach toward dealing with others—both people and nations—was rooted in his earlier life and family background. The initial influence, of course, was father Joseph, a man whose main goal in life was to leave behind his Irish ethnic heritage and win acceptance from those whom he felt were his cultural betters. Father Joe, Wills writes, "had no ideology but achievement," and that was a standard he passed along to his children. What counted was the appearance and experience of success. Neither substantive goals, nor limits on the means to be employed, were set forth, but the imperative of attaining success itself was always emphasized.

One subject where both Joseph and son John relentlessly pursued "success" was sex. Wills begins the book with a lengthy discussion of the Kennedy style of conduct toward women, conduct which Wills finds both revealing and revolting. Using information from a number of earlier books on the Kennedy family, Wills reviews the sexual conduct of father Joe, who regularly made blatant propositions to his sons' own girlfriends and attempted to force his affections upon other young women. "I had a really tough time getting out of his apartment," Wills quotes one victim as having recalled.

The father's approach to women, Wills argues, was passed down directly to the sons. What Wills finds important is not the simple fact of John Kennedy's relentless philandering, but the testimony of those involved at first-hand that Kennedy invested absolutely no emotional energy in any of his sexual liaisons. One acquaintance observed that Kennedy "had a contempt for women," and another noted that "once he got them, he lost interest and moved on to the next." Although Kennedy joked to intimates that sex was simply a physical need, Wills sees it as having represented much more for John Kennedy: a mechanism for reaching out "to manipulate others, to dominate," in short, something that reveals a Kennedy attitude towards other people in general, and not simply women.

The psychology of conquest, unpleasant when trained upon individual women, becomes far more devastating, Wills argues, when it is employed as a government's attitude toward the rest of the world. The Kennedy style and mystique, with its emphasis on vigor and courage, on the manly exercise of "power" as a force for conquest and control, has trapped or

imprisoned all those who in subsequent years have attempted to emulate the Kennedy approach. Until Americans appreciate that the Kennedy attitude toward power and government is damaging and self-defeating, other politicians will continue to imitate it.

Like many other observers, Wills too concludes that Robert Kennedy was the most promising and reflective of the brothers. Certainly he had his bad moments, as the "get Hoffa" effort, the surveillances of Martin Luther King, Jr., and the Castro assassination plots all show, but Wills agrees that Robert's final three years of life demonstrated a sensitivity and maturation generally missing from those earlier incidents.

While largely exculpating Robert from most of the family's worst flaws, Wills also emphasizes how Edward, the youngest and one surviving brother, has had to pay far more than his fair share for the brothers' accumulated sins. Instead of drastically altering history's evaluations of John and Robert, the revelations of the personal and official misconduct of those two brothers have simply increased manifold the dislike and distrust expressed toward "Teddy." His character flaws, Wills observes, seem "to me neither as deep nor as crippling as those displayed by other Kennedys, beginning with the father." But Edward has received "a kind and intensity of criticism" that none of the others did, largely because only he survives to represent the family's name. In being saddled not only with his own shortcomings, but with all of the burdens inherited from his father and brothers, "Teddy" is the most immediate victim of what Wills entitles the "Kennedy imprisonment."

Wills's book is by no means a standard historical treatment of the Kennedys or their era; it is instead, as the subtitle implies, simply an essay or "meditation" on certain issues concerning them that Wills finds inherently interesting. As such, the book contains no new information or factual revelations, and many of the specific arguments about particular Kennedy family traits can be traced in rough outline to previous volumes. Taken as a whole, however, the book amounts to precisely what it purports to be: an extended essay on what lessons we should learn from the Kennedys' roles in American life and government over the past quarter-century. Wills believes that there are important negative lessons that America must learn from the 1960s, principally the lesson that power is not what most American leaders of the last two decades—Lyndon Johnson and Richard Nixon as well as the Kennedys—have thought it is, namely the ability to conquer and destroy one's enemies. Such a self-centered view of the world, much like any similar self-centered approach to an individual life, will only lead the nation or person involved down a path of ultimate folly. The lessons of Cuba, of Vietnam, of other American efforts to enforce its will around the globe are that the United States cannot rule the world simply because individuals like John Kennedy decree it. The most potent power of the 1960s, Wills suggests in his conclusion, was not the force and aggressiveness of America in the world arena, but the moral persuasiveness of "the obscure army of virtue" that constituted the domestic civil rights movement. The real story of the Kennedy era, the real transformation that America experienced in the 1960s, has little to do with the Kennedys themselves; it is instead the experience and effects of "the movement" which Martin Luther King, Jr., symbolized for so many that is central to that decade. In that judgment, both of the Kennedys and of the nature of power, Wills is largely correct. His "meditation" on those themes is a book that readers will find valuable and stimulating, a timely reminder that much of what Americans celebrate of their recent history is wholly undeserving of that honor.

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