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# **Kennedy: Bobby's Last Crusade**

By  
DAVID ARROW

Featuring the speeches of Robert F. Kennedy

**Dramatic Publishing Company**  
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(KENNEDY: BOBBY'S LAST CRUSADE)

ISBN: 978-1-61959-236-0

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To family,  
always foremost in Robert Kennedy’s heart.

To my mother and father,  
who supported me in everything.

To Amber,  
whose love sustains me.

*Kennedy: Bobby's Last Crusade* premiered in New York City at the Theatre at St. Clement's. It was produced by To Seek a Newer World Productions and Lisa Dozier King in association with David Kronick and the New Circle Theatre Company.

#### CAST

Bob..... David Arrow

#### PRODUCTION

Director ..... Eric Nightengale

Set design..... James Morgan

Lighting design .....Miriam Nilofa Crowe

Sound design..... Ben Scheff

Projection design..... Kathrine R. Mitchell

Production Stage Manager..... Denise Yaney

The play was subsequently produced by Penguin Rep Theatre (Joe Brancato, Artistic Director; Andrew Horn, Executive Director). The creative team was the same with the addition of stage manager Michael Palmer and associate sound designer Max Silverman.

#### ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Lab 405, New Circle Theatre Company, San Jose Stage Company, LDK Productions, Penguin Rep Theatre, and the JFK library. Thank you to Marshall W. Mason, Daniel Irvine, David Kronick, Lisa Dozier King, Tammy Scozzafava, Sofia Cabrales, Denise Yaney, Joe Brancato, Andrew Horn, and to all the people who contributed to the play's first productions, particularly Eric Nightengale.

The author also wishes to thank the many speechwriters, advisors and family members who helped shape Robert Kennedy's 1968 campaign.

# Kennedy: Bobby's Last Crusade

## CHARACTERS

Robert F. Kennedy (Bob)

There is a Chinese curse that says,  
“May you live in interesting times.”  
Like it or not, we live in interesting times.

—Robert F. Kennedy, 1968

## PRODUCTION NOTES

**SET:** The design could evoke the Embassy Room ballroom at the Ambassador Hotel in Los Angeles in the wee hours of June 5, 1968. The room is now empty save the detritus from the celebration hours before. Campaign posters, flyers and other memorabilia as well as balloons and confetti are scattered on the floor. There is a chair or two, perhaps a rostrum and a lectern.

**LIGHTING:** The play is constructed in two modes: the formal (when KENNEDY is giving a speech) and the informal (when BOB is speaking to the audience). The lighting should reflect those two different realities.

**PROJECTIONS:** Captions showing the location and dates of the speeches are projected on the walls or on a screen. Other projections showing the crowds and images of the campaign or of the period might also be used.

**SOUND:** There are a number of places where specific sound cues are indicated. Sound can also be used to help define a moment or to spur a memory.

**CHARACTER:** When Kennedy is giving a formal public speech, the character is identified as KENNEDY. When he is speaking to the audience informally, he is identified as BOB. As a politician, he was known as Kennedy or RFK. Bob is how he was known among his friends and colleagues. To his family, and eventually to the world, he was Bobby.

## Kennedy: Bobby's Last Crusade

*(In the dark, a raucous crowd chants: "We want Kennedy, we want Kennedy.")*

*The crowd noise continues as lights come up on ROBERT F. KENNEDY in silhouette, facing upstage, standing behind a lectern, addressing the unseen crowd.)*

KENNEDY. What I think is—what I think is quite clear is that we can work together in the last analysis. And that what has been going on within the United States over the period of the last three years—the divisions, the violence, the disenchantment with our society, the divisions, whether it's between blacks and whites, between the poor and the more affluent, or between age groups, or on the war in Vietnam—that we can start to work together. We are a great country, an unselfish country, and a compassionate country. And I intend to make that my basis for running over the period of the next few months. So my thanks to all of you, and it's on to Chicago and let's win there.

*(Lightbulbs flash and the crowd noise suddenly stops. The light shifts as KENNEDY, now speaking as BOB, moves downstage.)*

BOB. I think I was supposed to follow Bill out through the crowd, but it was so packed that someone decided we should go through the kitchen. Did I decide?



I was walking down the corridor. Saw you—you had a terrific smile on your face. You're one of the busboys, and I remember—you delivered room service to us just a few days ago. I reached out to shake your hand. I remember that. Was there someone behind you? I looked back for Ethel ...

*(Sound: Chaos and the cries of “get the gun, get the gun.”  
The sound fades.)*

*(Projection: the image of Juan Romero, the busboy, kneeling over the fallen Kennedy.)*

BOB *(cont'd)*. And then, here you are, holding me. Thank you for putting your rosary in my hand. I want to remember ... I want to remember the faces ... Is everybody else all right ... ? How did I get here?

*(A spot illuminates the lectern.)*

*Sound and projections: a jumble of overlapping news reports and music from 1968.*

*The informal lights come up on the rest of the stage.)*

BOB *(cont'd)*. Our country is in such turmoil—the war in Vietnam, riots in our cities, and a desperate president who can never admit to making a mistake.

How did I get here?

Last summer, Allard Lowenstein formed the “Dump Johnson” movement and asked me to be their candidate. He was persuasive, but I told him if I ran against President Johnson, it might be perceived as animosity and could even have the effect of Johnson doing something reckless just to spite me.

I suggested to Lowenstein that he talk to George McGovern. McGovern suggested Eugene McCarthy, and McCarthy suggested me.

I don't know how many people I asked for an opinion on whether or not I should run for president, but at least four times as many gave me their opinion whether I asked or not. All the political professionals said that I would lose, that it would destroy the party, and that it was political suicide.

Most of Jack's people—President Kennedy's people—have been telling me to wait until 1972. That I didn't have a chance now, and if I lost, I never would. My own staff said if I didn't do it now, I would lose any moral authority to ever run again.

Even my family is split. My wife Ethel is for it—my brother Teddy, opposed. My sisters are in favor—Jackie is afraid.

We took a poll of my children. We wanted to get a cross section of the younger generation. I got four votes. Two votes went to Teddy and two went to my sister Pat. The others are reassessing their position.

After the Tet Offensive earlier this year, Johnson's response was to downplay our failure and vulnerability, and his solution was to send 250,000 more troops to Vietnam.

Jack liked to say, "The hottest places in Hell are reserved for those who, at a time of moral crisis, preserve their neutrality." Well, I did—Gene McCarthy didn't, and back in November declared that he would challenge Johnson in the New Hampshire primary.

He came close—getting forty-two percent of the vote. But honestly, I don't think he has what it takes. He's serious, but he's not decisive. And he's not the man to beat Johnson.

Jack Newfield wrote a piece in the *Village Voice* that said: If I ... “If Kennedy doesn’t run in 1968, the best side of his character will die. He will kill it every time he butchers his conscience ... ”

Then—I got a letter from the writer Pete Hamell. He said that I should run, because if I won, the country might be saved—and that after the Watts riots in Los Angeles, when he walked through some of the homes, he didn’t see pictures of Malcolm X on the walls—he saw pictures of Jack. He said I had an obligation, an obligation to stay true to whatever it was that put those pictures on those walls.

*(KENNEDY walks to the lectern, turns it to face downstage and steps behind it.*

*Projected caption: U.S. Capitol Building, Senate Caucus Room, Washington, D.C., March 16, 1968.*

*A formal light comes up.)*

KENNEDY. I am today announcing my candidacy for the presidency of the United States. I do not run for the presidency merely to oppose any man but to propose new policies. I run because I am convinced that this country is on a perilous course, and I feel that I’m obliged to do all that I can.

I run to seek new policies—policies to end the bloodshed in Vietnam and in our cities; policies to close the gaps that now exist between black and white, between rich and poor, between young and old, in this country and around the rest of the world.

I have traveled and I have listened to the young people of our nation and felt their anger about the war they are sent to fight and about the world they’re about to inherit.

My decision reflects no personal animosity or disrespect toward President Johnson. He served President Kennedy with the utmost loyalty and was extremely kind to me and members of my family in the difficult months which followed the events of November 1963. But the issue is not personal. It is our profound differences over where we are heading and what we want to accomplish.

*(The informal lights come up on the rest of the stage.)*

BOB. That was a difficult speech for me to make—not the least of which is because I hate making speeches.

You might think that would be a handicap for a politician—and you'd be right. My hands shake, I get a knot in my stomach. Jack was good at it. I always envied his ease.

There's a saying: "Jack was nimble, Jack was quick, but Bobby simply makes me sick."

I know I waited too long to declare. And I know that running against an incumbent president of my own party will be viewed as a betrayal—or that I'm capitalizing on Gene McCarthy's strong showing in New Hampshire. Or simply that it's ruthless. Or worse, that it will be seen as just another chapter in the feud between Bob Kennedy and Lyndon Johnson.

Before the 1960 campaign, Jack sent me down to Texas to ask Johnson if he was planning to run. He told me no, and that he would do nothing to stand in Jack's way. He was lying. I now know that there's a way to tell when Johnson's lying—his lips are moving. He was working behind the scenes to get the nomination for himself. At the convention, he told the press that Jack had Addison's disease and called

my father an anti-Semite and an appeaser during World War II. Then he enlisted Gene McCarthy to nominate Adlai Stevenson for a third run—just so Jack wouldn't get enough delegate votes on the first ballot and Johnson could present himself as a consensus candidate.

Jack won the nomination on the first ballot. Then he had to pick a running mate.

There was a lot of pressure on us to choose Johnson. He would help carry Texas, but no one on the staff wanted him. Jack thought we should ask him anyway, and he was sure to turn it down. Why would he leave the most powerful position in the United States Senate to become Vice President? Much to our surprise, he accepted. Then Jack sent me to try to talk him out of it. It was ugly and unpleasant. Johnson can be mean, bitter, vicious—an animal in many ways. But we were stuck with each other.

Jack announced his candidacy on January second, 1960—but really we'd been planning the campaign for almost four years. The well-oiled Kennedy machine. And now, with only five months before the convention, my campaign headquarters is my living room. I'm going to need an oil can.

I made my announcement in the Senate Caucus Room. The same room where Jack made his eight years ago. It's also the room where I got a name for myself as chief counsel for the Senate Rackets Committee interviewing witnesses on organized crime and labor racketeering—people like Jimmy Hoffa and Sam Giancana—

*(Remembering.)* Are you going to answer my questions, Mr. Giancana, or are you just going to giggle? I thought only little girls giggled—

It wasn't a particularly nice name: "Ruthless Bobby Kennedy."

After the announcement, I flew to New York to march in the Saint Patrick's Day parade. Lots of cheering and shouting. People yelled things like "coward," "opportunist" and "get a haircut"!

There were a few admirers, some of them waving to me from the window of their Fifth Avenue apartment.

*(He looks up, seeing them.)* Jackie and John-John. We haven't been as close since Jackie moved to New York. We still talk, but not nearly as often—it was nice to see that face smiling down at me.

The next day, the campaigning really began.

*(Lights change.)*

*Caption: Kansas State University, March 18, 1968.)*

KENNEDY. There has been a good deal written about setting up a commission to study the war. Really, the only difference between all of us was the makeup of that commission. I suggested and wanted Senator Mansfield, Senator Fulbright and Senator Morse. And President Johnson, in his own inimitable way, wanted General Westmoreland, John Wayne and Martha Raye.

This is a year of choice—a year when we choose not simply who will lead us, but where we wish to be led; the country we want for ourselves—and the kind we want for our children.

Today I would like to speak to you about the war in Vietnam.

I believe most Americans are concerned that the course we are following at the present time is deeply wrong. I am concerned—as I believe most Americans are concerned—that our present course will not bring victory; will not bring peace;

will not stop the bloodshed; and will not advance the interests of the United States or the cause of peace in the world.

I am concerned that, at the end of it all, there will only be more Americans killed; more of our treasure spilled out; and because of the bitterness and hatred on every side of this war, more hundreds of thousands of Vietnamese slaughtered; so that they may say, as Tacitus said of Rome: “They made a desert, and called it peace.”

I was involved in many of the early decisions on Vietnam, decisions that helped set us on our present path. And I am willing to bear my share of the responsibility, before history and before my fellow citizens. But past error is no excuse for its own perpetuation. As in the *Antigone* of Sophocles: “All men make mistakes, but a good man yields when he knows his course is wrong.”

In just three years, we have gone from 16,000 advisors to over 500,000 troops; from no American bombing North or South, to an air campaign against both, greater than that waged in all the European theater in World War II; from less than 300 American dead in all the years prior to 1965, to more than 500 dead in a single week of combat in 1968.

No one really knows the number of civilian casualties.

Can we ordain to ourselves the awful majesty of God—to decide what cities and villages are to be destroyed, who will live and who will die, and who will join the refugees wandering in a desert of our own creation?

We have prayed to different gods, and the prayers of neither have been answered fully. Now, while there is still time for some of them to be partly answered, now is the time to stop.

So I come here today to ask your help: You are the people, as President Kennedy said, “who have the least ties to the present and the greatest ties to the future.” The nation that Thomas Jefferson once told us was the last, best hope of man.

*(The lights shift momentarily.)*

BOB. That went incredibly well. I thought I was going to bomb. I didn't think a conservative crowd would welcome what I had to say. But the young people—the students—they rushed the stage to shake my hand. They grabbed and crowded around me like I had just appeared on *Ed Sullivan*.

There wasn't much time to celebrate before we had to travel the eighty miles to Lawrence and the University of Kansas.

*(Lights change again.)*

*Caption: University of Kansas, March 18, 1968.)*

KENNEDY. I'm really not here to make a speech—I've come because I came from Kansas State, and they want to send their love to all of you. They did. That's all they talk about over there, how much they love you.

This morning I spoke about the war in Vietnam, but there is much more to this critical election year than the war. It is, at the root, the root of all of it, the national soul of the United States.

If we believe that we, as Americans, are bound together by a common concern for each other, then an urgent national priority is upon us. Too much and for too long, we seemed to have surrendered personal excellence and community values in the mere accumulation of material things.



Our Gross National Product, now, is over \$800 billion dollars a year, but that Gross National Product—if we judge the United States of America by that—that Gross National Product counts air pollution and cigarette advertising, and ambulances to clear our highways of carnage. It counts special locks for our doors and the jails for the people who break them. It counts the destruction of the redwood and the loss of our natural wonder in chaotic sprawl. It counts napalm, and it counts nuclear warheads and armored cars for the police to fight the riots in our cities. It counts Whitman's rifle and Speck's knife, and the television programs which glorify violence in order to sell toys to our children.

Yet the Gross National Product does not allow for the health of our children, the quality of their education, or the joy of their play. It does not include the beauty of our poetry or the strength of our marriages, the intelligence of our public debate or the integrity of our public officials. It measures neither our wit nor our courage, neither our wisdom nor our learning, neither our compassion nor our devotion to our country; it measures everything in short, except that which makes life worthwhile. And it can tell us everything about America except why we are proud that we are Americans.

*(The lights change.)*

BOB. After that, it was nonstop campaigning. I flew to more than twelve states in less than two weeks.

I asked my brother Teddy to have 10,000 Kennedy campaign buttons made. I opened them up on the plane—they all had his picture on them.

Most of the delegates who vote at the Democratic National Convention are controlled by the party bosses. People like

Mayor Daley of Chicago—where the convention's going to be held. Because there are just fourteen states holding primaries, and I entered the race too late to compete in all but six of them, winning these primaries is the best way to show the bosses that I can get enough public support to challenge Johnson at the convention.

I need to show them that I can draw large crowds—and I am. Although I can't help thinking that the people aren't there for me—they're there because of Jack.

It's intimidating, and the knot in my stomach hasn't gone away—but I like seeing that people are listening.

Our government has been lying to us. We can no longer differ on *reality*.

*(Lights change.)*

*(Caption: Vanderbilt University, Nashville, Tennessee, March 21, 1968.)*

KENNEDY. When we are told to forgo all dissent and division, we must ask: who is it that is truly dividing the country?

Those who now call for an end to dissent, moreover, seem not to understand what this country is all about. For debate and dissent are the very heart of the American process.

So if we are uneasy about our country today, perhaps it is because we are truer to our principles than we realize; because we know that our happiness will come not from the goods we have, but from the good we do together.

*(Caption: University of Alabama, Tuscaloosa, Alabama, March 21, 1968.)*