

0. A CALMING INFLUENCE - Story Preface

1. WHO WAS RFK?

2. BOBBY'S ROLE in the MISSILE CRISIS

3. THE SECRET DEAL

4. THE ACTUAL DEAL

5. LEARNING FROM PAIN

6. RFK on RACIAL INJUSTICE

7. PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATE

**8. A CALMING INFLUENCE**

9. THE AMBASSADOR HOTEL

10. THE SHOOTING

11. THE AFTERMATH

12. WHAT WOULD BOBBY SAY?

Bobby, according to those who knew him best, was a pious man. That characteristic was evident in his speeches. An example, considered by many scholars to be one of his most moving, is the extemporaneous address which he gave in Indianapolis the night Martin Luther King, Jr. was killed.

It is clear from the tape Kennedy was concerned about the crowd's lack of knowledge that their leader, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., had been shot in Memphis. Bobby asks the police: "Do they know about Martin Luther King?"

His remarks were only about the slain civil-rights leader:

*Ladies and gentlemen, I'm only going to talk to you just for a minute or so this evening because I have some very sad news for all of you - could you lower those signs [about his presidential campaign] please? - I have some very sad news for all of you, and, I think, sad news for all of our fellow citizens, and people who love peace all over the world, and that is that Martin Luther King was shot and was killed tonight [the crowd screams].*

*Martin Luther King dedicated his life to love and to justice between fellow human beings. He died in the cause of that effort.*

*In this difficult day, in this difficult time for the United States, it is perhaps well to ask what kind of a nation we are and what direction we want to move in. For those of you who are black - considering the evidence evidently is, that there were white people who were responsible - you can be filled with bitterness, and with hatred, and a desire for revenge. We can move in that direction as a country, in greater polarization - black people amongst blacks, and white amongst whites, filled with hatred toward one another.*

*Or we can make an effort, as Martin Luther King did, to understand, and to comprehend, and replace that violence, that stain of bloodshed that has spread across our land, with an effort to understand, compassion and love.*

*For those of you who are black and are tempted to be filled with hatred and mistrust of the injustice of such an act, against all white people, I would only say that I can also feel in my own heart the same kind of feeling. I had a member of my family killed, but he was killed by a white man. But we have to make an effort in the United States, we have to make an effort to understand, to get beyond or go beyond these rather difficult times.*

*My favorite poet was Aeschylus. And he once wrote: "Even in our sleep, pain which cannot forget falls drop by drop upon the heart until, in our own despair, against our will, comes wisdom through the awful grace of God." [He misquoted Aeschylus, but his remarks were extemporaneous.]*

*What we need in the United States is not division; what we need in the United States is not hatred; what we need in the United States is not violence and lawlessness; but is love and wisdom, and compassion toward one another, and a feeling of justice toward those who still suffer within our country, whether they be white or whether they be black.*

*So I shall ask you tonight to return home, to say a prayer for the family of Martin Luther King, that's true, but more importantly, to say a prayer for our own country, which all of us love - a prayer for understanding and that compassion of which I spoke.*

*We can do well in this country. We will have difficult times; we've had difficult times in the past; and we will have difficult times in the future. It is not the end of violence; it is not the end of lawlessness; and it is not the end of disorder.*

*But the vast majority of white people and the vast majority of black people in this country want to live together, want to improve the quality of our life, and want justice for all human beings that abide in our land.*

*Dedicate ourselves to what the Greeks wrote so many years ago: to tame the savageness of man and make gentle the life of this world.*

*Let us dedicate ourselves to that, and say a prayer for our country and for our people.*

While riots erupted in other American cities, following the death of Dr. King, Indianapolis remained calm. Many people give Robert Kennedy credit for that.

Meanwhile, the race for the Democratic presidential nomination continued, and Bobby campaigned hard in California.

See Alignments to State and Common Core standards for this story online at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicAlignment/A-CALMING-INFLUENCE-Bobby-Kennedy>

See Learning Tasks for this story online at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/AcademicActivities/A-CALMING-INFLUENCE-Bobby-Kennedy>

Media Stream

## Robert F. Kennedy - Announces Death of Dr. King

Bobby Kennedy's quote, in this clip, is from Aeschylus' *Agamemnon*. He likely read it in a book (*The Greek Way*, by Edith Hamilton) which his sister-in-law, Jackie Kennedy, gave him to help cope with the shocking death of his brother, Jack.

RFK, speaking extemporaneously, misquoted Aeschylus. (Note his pause - at 3:18 into the clip - just before the misquoting occurs.) It seems as though he was pondering whether it was OK to substantially misquote a famous Greek poet (and, in the process, change the meaning of the point). The impact of that misquote, however - changing "**despite**" to "**despair**" - has given the poem (and its sentiments) new meaning and greater popularity.

**Let's compare the two versions.**

### **Bobby's quote:**

*In our sleep, pain which cannot forget falls drop by drop upon the heart until, in our own **despair**, against our will, comes wisdom through the awful grace of God.*



### **Edith Hamilton's actual 1930 translation** (see page 156) **of Agamemnon:**

*And even in our sleep pain that cannot forget, falls drop by drop upon the heart, and in our own **despite**, against our will, comes wisdom to us by the awful grace of God.*

### **For further study, note Hamilton's translation, with Greek phrases included:**

*And even in our sleep [d' ény' ípnou] pain that cannot forget [mnhsip/Emvn pŌnow], falls drop by drop [stázei] upon the heart [prŪ kardεaw], and in our own despite [s°lma semnŪn sm°nvn], against our will [ka< par' êkontaw], comes wisdom to us [Σlye svfrone>n] by the awful grace of God [daimŌnvn d° pou xāriw bεaiow].*

Edith Hamilton, *The Greek Way* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company Inc., 1930), page 156.

Credit for comparing the differences in Hamilton's translation and RFK's speech:

"*In Our Own Despair*": Robert Kennedy, Richard Nixon, and Aeschylus' *Agamemnon*. Delivered at the Classical Association of Canada, Annual Meeting, May 12, 2002, by Christopher S. Morrissey, Department of Humanities, Simon Fraser University. Video online, courtesy Manny 535's Channel at YouTube.

View this asset at:

<http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/Robert-F.-Kennedy-Announces-Death-of-Dr.-King0>



### RFK - Ripple of Hope

This clip is the trailer to *Ripple of Hope*, a documentary on Robert F. Kennedy.

View this asset at: <http://www.awesomestories.com/asset/view/RFK-Ripple-of-Hope>