JFK charisma attributed to office

By DON DES JARLAIS

Charisma, style and American values were pinpointed as some of the mythological and psychological aspects of the Kennedy Era by a panel of social scientists as part of the current Jones College symposium.

The Wednesday evening panel consisted of Dr. Edwin Harwood of the Rice sociology Department; the Rev. James Williams, a social worker in the Fifth Ward; and Dr. Mary Ellen Goodman of the Rice Anthropology Department.

Each of these three had a slightly varying explanation of the growth and continuance of the Kennedy myth.

Charisma of Office

Harwood emphasized Kennedy’s charisma, but pointed out that Eisenhower’s was similar if not greater. Harwood attributed the charisma to the position of the men as President, rather than to any personal characteristics of the men.

Rev. Williams focused on Kennedy’s particular style as a President. “Pragmatic” was the word used to describe JFK in his presidential role. It was this pragmatism that led to the founding of such programs as the War on Poverty, which were later enacted under Johnson, Williams said.

Mrs. Goodman related Kennedy’s personal characteristics to the traditional American values; he was an embodiment of almost all of them. He was young, handsome, had inherited wealth, intelligence, a good war record, practical skills—all dramatized by a tragic death. Given this congruence between Kennedy and American values, one would expect a myth to develop around him, she said.