

A film revives painful

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DALLAS — John Herron was sitting in a movie theater when the pangs of shame and the painful memories caught up with him again.

The scene is etched forever in his mind: President John F. Kennedy flashing by in the motorcade that carried him to his death.

"You can't be a Dallas resident without it affecting you," said Herron, a Dallas designer. "Sitting there, watching the movie, it all came back. All those memories. It was a powerful moment."

All those memories, covered with 28 years of scar tissue, have been laid open again by the Oliver Stone film *JFK*, which debuted in Dallas on Dec. 19. And the city that once

employed denial and public amnesia to deal with the aftermath is grappling with the problem all over again.

The Kennedy assassination caused anguish across America, but nowhere was it more painful than in Dallas, where people felt they had been left with an indelible legacy of shame.

People had turned out by the thousands on Nov. 22, 1963, lining the streets to give Kennedy a welcome that would atone for the rude treatment given U.N. Ambassador Adlai Stevenson a month before.

The news of the assassination was almost incomprehensible.

"I will never forget it. Dallas was like a morgue," recalled Herron. "People were in

assassination memories

shock. All the stores closed; all the theaters closed. The city shut down."

"It is like having someone die in your home," said Greg Elam, vice president of communications for the Dallas Convention and Visitors Bureau.

Dallas — then a hotbed for ultraconservative activity — felt the nation's scorn.

In time, the city's people developed bitterness and symptoms of stress, as if they had been victims of a rape-like trauma, according to James Pennebaker, a psychology professor at Southern Methodist University who studied the assassination's effects on Dallas.

"Some of these people remember, shortly after the assassination, being refused service in out-of-state restaurants or having

long-distance telephone operators hang up on them as they tried to place a call," he said.

The suicide rate jumped 18 percent in the year after Kennedy's death, he said. The murder rate rose 27 percent.

Dallas coped with the trauma by trying to become a town without a memory.

"Dallas became a city obsessed with the future and a city without a past," Pennebaker said.

Any sign of public acknowledgment of the assassination was discouraged, he said. Even the name of an existing Kennedy Street eventually was changed for fear that people would think it was named after the President, Pennebaker said.

in Dallas

"I think that for people in Dallas the assassination is like a family secret," said Janice Lombardi, a teacher who moved to the area about 12 years ago. "They don't want it out in the open. . . . They feel really ashamed."

Now, the release of *JFK* has directed attention to Dallas again. This time, there is hope that the impact on the city's psyche will be positive.

"One of the values of movies, monuments or songs is . . . you can bring back memories and . . . talk about it," Pennebaker said. "I think that Dallas has moved beyond the denial stage now. . . . I think the Kennedy movie has helped Dallas get past it a bit more than it already has."

Since *JFK*'s release, assassination talk can
(See DALLAS on 6-C)

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