
Remembering President Kennedy

In your assessment of President John F. Kennedy ("Historians Lost in Mists of Camelot," Part I, Nov. 21), the historians interviewed say that the seeds of the Vietnam War were planted during Kennedy's Administration, but certainly not the beginnings of the Civil Rights Act and other social reforms. I find this strangely inconsistent. But let the historians bicker over the relative accomplishments and faults of this one presidency. I want to get to larger matters.

Historians shouldn't discount the feeling Kennedy gave the post-World War II generation. It's as tangible as a veto; the Reagan era is proof that a carefully orchestrated style (regardless of substance) can be sold effectively and translated into votes.

The difference for me and millions of others who unabashedly mourn Kennedy's death is in what our leaders stand for.

Kennedy articulated better than any modern President the need for our people to look to the future and make it work for everyone, for every nation. Leaders should inspire the best in us, and I believe Kennedy tried to do just that (the Peace Corps and our early space program are just two examples).

I prefer J.F.K. and Bobby Kennedy's message of hope to the hypocritical talk of "values" that shrouds the Reagan-Bush-Dukakis era.

GREGORY LEE
Laguna Hills

In remembering President Kennedy, Les Payne tells us of the applauding in an officers' club in Texas in reaction to Walter Cronkite's news that their commander-in-chief had been shot (Op-Ed Page, Nov. 21).

His comments bring back memories of an April day in 1945 at an Army installation in Denver, as the soldiers there went about their testing duties, to the news that President Franklin D. Roosevelt, their commander-in-chief in wartime, had died.

The reaction at that time was similar to Payne's account: namely a sense of glee that almost resulted in fist fights, prevented by an alert noncommissioned officer!

Attitudes of hatred based on emotionally charged ideas are difficult to overcome.

Therefore, major attention in our schools

and in the media must be given to the education and re-education of not only immigrant populations, the focus of so much attention today, but also our own American public—for "good will" to all, so as to eliminate the dangerous consequences of emotionally charged hatred and ill will.

H. ROGIE ROGOSIN
Los Angeles

I opened my Times this morning to see a group of school children pictured before former President Kennedy's grave at Arlington Cemetery (Part I, Nov. 21).

A lump grew in my throat. I looked at my watch with the little date on it. Tomorrow is the 25th anniversary of an event I will never forget. I rose from the breakfast table and went to a special drawer in my desk. I opened it and my fingers touched gently upon another copy of The Times concealed there, yellowed with age, but the impact of its picture and article no less dimmed than if it had been printed yesterday. I picked up the Nov. 23, 1963, issue. The headline read, "Kennedy Assassinated."

Suddenly, I was 13 years old again, sitting in journalism class, a freshman at Sierra High School in Whittier. The dread announcement blared over the school intercom. The bell rang. Students changed classes. Halls were cold and silent. Stunned faces passed, mostly weeping. Children hugged each other with no parents to cry to. Cold chills tingled my scalp spreading into goose bumps down my back and arms. I walked and walked to a class I can't remember.

I looked up from the yellowed pages and checked my watch again . . . 7:30 a.m., Nov. 21, 1988. I'd better hurry. Have to get to work. Not to the newspaper office I'd envisioned at 13, but to the Ecumenical Food Center where I now work at 39.

Five hundred needy families will receive free Thanksgiving food packages soon. There's lots of work to do. Someone will be there I don't want to miss.

If only in spirit, somehow I think President Kennedy will be watching with an approving eye.

SUE SCHOENSIEGEL
La Habra

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