

COLUMN ONE

# J.F.K. — Greatness in the Eye of the Beholder?

■ Some historians say Kennedy mystique lives on because we embrace a well-honed image that hides many flaws. Defenders say his value was in 'making us believe.'

By JOHN M. BRODER  
TIMES STAFF WRITER

BOSTON—He is venerated as a champion of civil rights when, in reality, he was furious with the Freedom Riders, who forced him to act before he was ready to embrace the cause of racial equality.

He is hailed as an apostle of world peace when, in truth, he

was one of the coldest of the Cold Warriors and conspired to assassinate some Third World leaders, including Fidel Castro and South Vietnam's Ngo Dinh Diem.

In fact, 30 years after he was killed in Dallas, John F. Kennedy is considered by the American public to have been the greatest of presidents, easily outranking Abraham Lincoln, Franklin D. Roosevelt, and George Washington. One recent survey even has him tied with Lincoln as the most influential world figure of the past 1,000 years.

And yet Kennedy's public mystique stands in stark contrast to the emerging verdict among historians: that he entered office unprepared and improved little in three years.

He is remembered as an idealist, but students of his presidency

increasingly conclude that he was a cunning and cold-eyed realist, even a cynic. His belated embrace of the civil rights cause was due in large part to political calculation. And a strong case can be made that he would have prosecuted the Vietnam War as vigorously as his successors did, with much the same result.

Revelations about his personal life show him to have been addicted to sex and danger, and to have been under constant medication that may have affected his judgment at critical junctures.

But even if the flesh-and-blood Kennedy falls short of the heroic standard, his memory is accorded mythic stature.

Historians can find only one explanation: the manner of his death. **Please see KENNEDY, A10**



John F. Kennedy

Associated Press

# Glowing Image Lingers

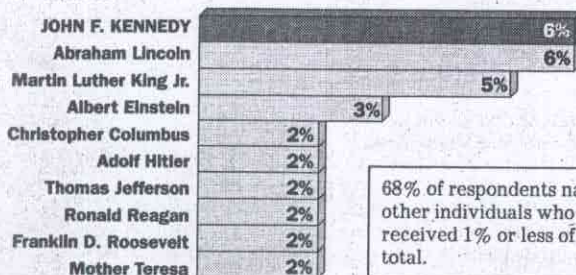
## JFK: Poll vs. Pundits

According to a poll, John F. Kennedy left an indelible mark on history . . .

■ **Question:** "As you may know, every year Time magazine names a Man of the Year. Suppose Time were to name a man or woman of the millenium, someone who for better or for worse has had the most impact on the course of history in the past 1,000 years. Whom would you name?"



Top responses



68% of respondents named other individuals who received 1% or less of the total.

. . . But historians see him differently.

"The historical judgment is really very negative at this point among the majority of my colleagues. . . . Right now on foreign policy, Kennedy is getting an F from most diplomatic historians. On domestic policy, most are writing that nothing was accomplished."

—Stephen Ambrose, presidential scholar at the University of New Orleans

"I don't think that most serious analysts would give him very high marks on anything but style. He wasn't President that long, but in terms of purely positive accomplishments, there weren't many. . . . It was obviously a time of action but not necessarily progress."

—Lee Sigelman, political scientist at George Washington University

Source: Poll of 800 adult Americans taken for Time/CNN in July, 1992, by Yankelovich, Clancy, Shulman.

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sudden and shocking death.

"The image of Kennedy is not based on what he accomplished but on his promise, the hope he held out," said presidential scholar Stephen Ambrose of the University of New Orleans. "There's a very strong sense that if he had not died, we would not have suffered the 30 years of nightmare that followed—the race riots, the white backlash, assassinations, Vietnam, Watergate, runaway inflation, Iran-Contra.

"People just want to believe that if only J.F.K. had lived, all this wouldn't have happened."

There are other factors: his youth (he was 43 at his inauguration in 1961), his looks, his wit and his irresistible charm. He was the first television President, and he used the medium better than any who followed.

He brought style and zest and optimism to a nation that had embraced the inertia of the 1950s after years of economic depression followed by war. His glamorous family fascinated the world and set a tone for Americans during a phase of unprecedented prosperity, material consumption and economic growth.

"I wish I could have met him. He had a real magic about him," said Marlyne Deibler, 57, of Warminster, Pa., as she gazed upon the flame at Kennedy's grave site at Arlington National Cemetery this past weekend.

"When I saw him on television, he always seemed like a person who would reach out to you and listen to you and understand your feelings," she said. "Given the chance to have stayed in office, he would have done a lot for the country."

Kennedy was blessed with magnificent ghostwriters and speech writers who allowed him to project the image of an intellectual when his tastes ran to Frank Sinatra and starlets.

His Pulitzer Prize-winning book, "Profiles in Courage," was helped greatly by Theodore C. Sorensen, his brilliant speech writer, and his earlier bestselling "Why England Slept" benefited from the ministrations of New York Times reporter and family friend Arthur Krock.

This carefully crafted public J.F.K. was eagerly consumed by the American people, who for perhaps the last time suspended their

natural disbelief in their leaders.

That suspension was aided by Kennedy's natural reserve, his essential opaqueness, which concealed his true thoughts and feelings from even those closest to him. Those who met with Kennedy left his office believing he agreed with them and would take the action they had recommended. But frequently that was not the case.

His handsome visage and his light-filled eyes were not a window to his soul but rather a mirror for all those who gazed upon them.

"He retained an impenetrability, even to those who thought they knew him well," said historian Doris Kearns Goodwin, who has written biographies of the Kennedy family and Lyndon B. Johnson and is completing a book on Roosevelt.

"Because of his death, he remains unfinished. The sense of possibility he left allows people to project back onto him not only what he might have become, but what they and the country might have become," said Goodwin, who is married to former Kennedy aide Richard Goodwin.

This mirror-like quality of the Kennedy presidency, Goodwin said, accounts for the gaping discrepancy between the cool assessments of professional historians and the passionate regard of the public. That and the assassination.

While an admirer of J.F.K. and an intimate of the Kennedy clan, Goodwin says as a historian it would be hard for her to rank Kennedy among the greatest presidents.

"I find this whole thing not just mystifying, but frustrating," she said in an interview in the library of her home in Concord, Mass. "It seems unfair to other presidents, particularly Roosevelt and Lincoln. He has just become what everyone wants him to be. And no one can match that. If he had completed the two terms, however extraordinary they might have been, the mystique he enjoys today could not be equaled."

Unfair, says Charles U. Daly, director of the John F. Kennedy Library overlooking Boston harbor, a video-age reliquary of the J.F.K. legend. Like other Kennedy defenders, Daly said he believes that ordinary historical standards cannot be applied to the 35th President.

He should not be judged by the number of bills signed, treaties

## Site Where J.F.K. Was Shot to Be U.S. Landmark

*From Associated Press*

**D**ALLAS—The site where President John F. Kennedy was assassinated will be designated as a national historic landmark today, the 30th anniversary of his death.

Nellie Connally, widow of former Texas Gov. John B. Connally, who was seriously wounded in the Nov. 22, 1963 attack, was scheduled to make the official presentation of the plaque.

The Connallys were riding in the same open-air limousine with the President and his wife when shots rang out in Dealey Plaza, on the west end of downtown.

"The dedication ceremony will focus on our responsibilities in a democracy to preserve both good and bad history," said Walter S. Blake, president of the Dallas County Historical Foundation.

**T**he designation of the assassination site as a national historic landmark was granted on Oct. 12 by Interior Secretary Bruce Babbitt.

The foundation runs a museum that draws about 400,000 visitors a year to the sixth floor of the old School Book Depository Building, where Lee Harvey Oswald was said to have fired the shots that killed Kennedy.

No official events were planned in Kennedy's hometown of Boston.

"We are not very enthusiastic about celebrating the day he got killed," said Charles Daley, director of the John F. Kennedy Library in Boston. "We celebrate Kennedy's birthday, which we think is more appropriate."

negotiated, crises managed and programs initiated, argues Daly, a former J.F.K. White House staff member. Rather, his greatness lies in the "intangibles." If he had not been a great President, Daly asked, "then why the hell are you here 30 years later?"

Daly's own answer: Kennedy must be ranked among the greatest

American leaders "for making us really believe."

Indeed, Kennedy served at a time of soaring optimism. His rhetorical legacy is unmatched by later presidents, and his unfinished story is one that will hold allure for generations.

One measure of his impact can be found in the stacks of the Library of Congress. The collection includes 714 books about Kennedy, compared with 685 about Washington and 845 about Lincoln. Lincoln's biographers needed more

than 100 years to match the output on Kennedy in just the past 30.

Of the books that are less than worshipful, two recent studies of his personal behavior attempt to portray him as reckless in his pursuit of women, a manipulator, a pawn of his ambitious, multimillionaire father and a liar.

Daly sniffed at the books—"A Question of Character" by Thomas C. Reeves and "Reckless Youth" by Nigel Hamilton—as the work of "a couple of literary whores" out to

Please see **KENNEDY**, A11



LINDA SCHAEFER / For The Times

Gilbert and Anita Bond tell their children about their memories of the assassination of President Kennedy.

the atmosphere that that man and his wife and his children created for the nation," he said. "There was a tone of hopeful expectancy. Along with that was the pride I felt, and so many other children felt, in a belief that you could do something to make a difference about the issues that were problematic in the country."

Bond, who is working on a doctoral dissertation on religion and literature at Emory University in Atlanta, said John and Robert F. Kennedy and King will always represent a holy "trptych" in Afri-

can American households.

"I think many black folks, at least many black Christians, start from a foundation that human beings are terribly flawed," Bond said. "And so they don't create a sort of false, pristine image of who people ultimately are. . . . They are not deeply disturbed to find out that, oh, the man was deeply limited in so many ways. For them that is not mutually exclusive."

Bond paused and picked up a Life magazine dated Dec. 6, 1963, the first issue after Kennedy's assassination. He pointed out to his

4-year-old son, Jacob, a photo of a young boy, holding a candle, standing in the rain at a public mourning service in Chicago. A tear rolls down the cheek of the boy in the black-and-white image.

"That's the way Daddy looked when Daddy heard Kennedy died," he told his young son. "Daddy was so sad he cried at school and couldn't eat his lunch. And, when he went out on the playground, no one was playing."

Times researcher Edith Stanley in Atlanta contributed to this story.

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make a quick buck.

The tales of J.F.K.'s womanizing have been well-trod since the mid-1970s, when Judith Campbell Exner revealed her liaisons with the leader of the free world. Later accounts have placed Kennedy in the clandestine company of dozens of other women.

But the revelations have done little to puncture the Kennedy mystique. In a perverse way, they may have magnified it, putting him in the company of movie, sports and rock stars who live by different rules from the rest of us.

Certainly the instant sense of loss after his assassination propelled the American people into a wave of idolatry more typically reserved for presidents who had withstood the test of time. By the hundreds, schools, roads, bridges, parks and airports were named for him throughout the remainder of the decade.

Perhaps the clearest evolution of the Kennedy legacy occurs among black Americans.

Kennedy tried to discourage Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and other black leaders from holding the landmark August, 1963, March on Washington, fearing that it would lead to violence, looting and—more important—a mark against his Administration.

Despite the civil rights leaders' entreaties, Kennedy refused to participate in the march.

After it concluded peacefully, Kennedy invited King and the others to the White House, where he congratulated them—in private.

One of those leaders, John Lewis, then the 2-year-old chairman of the Student Non-Violent Coordinating Committee and now a Democratic congressman from Georgia, said he and other black leaders were incensed by Kennedy's stance. Many protests of the era, he said, were designed to provoke a reluctant Kennedy to act.

"In my own speech during the March, I said that Kennedy's [civil rights] legislation was too little and too late," Lewis said in an interview. "Many of the people in my organization disagreed with him profoundly."

And yet, Lewis said, he has come to appreciate Kennedy for the small strides he took on race, and for the soaring rhetoric that accompanied them.

"He was the first President to

say the issue of race was a moral issue," Lewis said. "That tied him to the black community forever."

But these are all views from the elite. It is at ground level that Kennedy continues to inspire millions of Americans, that his picture still hangs in homes across the land and around the world. Could the experts be wrong and the masses right?

Gilbert Bond thinks so. Bond, 41, who lives with his wife and four children in a modest bungalow in an Atlanta suburb, said Kennedy's critics miss his significance to black families such as his when he was growing up in Kentucky and Southern California as the son of a laborer.

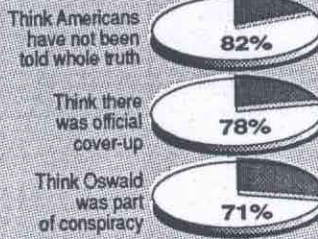
"What they don't capture was

Associated Press Poll



# Kennedy assassination

## Many remain suspicious...



## Conspiracy believers suspect:



Source: AP national poll of 1,026 adults taken Nov. 5-9 by ICR Survey Research Group of Media, Pa., part of AUS Consultants. Margin of error: 3 percentage points, plus or minus.

# Kennedy Legacy Changes, Endures After 30 Years

HYANNISPORT, Mass. (AP) — Ed Cliggott has stood guard — literally and figuratively — over the Kennedy legacy.

As a policeman, he manned the entrance to the Kennedy compound. Then he became a teacher, answering President John F. Kennedy's call to public service.

But that was long ago. These days, Cliggott has trouble conveying JFK's impact to his young students.

"I've found it impossible to relate to my kids the feeling of those three years," said Cliggott. "The kids know the celebrity aspect of it. I don't think they understand the idealism."

Even in this community so long associated with John F. Kennedy, his image has begun to blur three decades after his Presidency ended with an assassination that shocked and riveted the world.

"I've heard JFK was such a great President, but we weren't there," said Megan Ough, 16, a student in Cliggott's honors class in U.S. history. "To us, the way he died is the only thing that makes him different."

"When a President gets assassinated, you only hear about the good things," she said. "Then there are all the movies and the

books and everything. It's kind of confusing."

Indeed, considerably more has been alleged about Kennedy in the last 30 years than was widely known during his lifetime, when by contemporary accounts he was perceived as far above the baser vices.

The re-examination more or less began with Chappaquiddick, which raised questions about the judgment of U.S. Sen. Edward M. Kennedy and whispers about the libido of his brothers.

Then there were accounts of affairs with Marilyn Monroe and Judith Exner, said to have been the mistress of mobster Sam Giancana as well. And tell-alls about Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis, once the sainted queen of Camelot.

Others asked: Did someone ghost-write Kennedy's Pulitzer Prize-winning book "Profiles in Courage"? Did the Kennedy administration disguise a lackluster performance behind brilliant public relations?

Time, too, has dimmed the glow of Camelot.

Larry Newman, a friend and neighbor of the Kennedys, said the buses that still clog the narrow streets of picturesque Hyannisport bear older people or for-

eign tourists — not young Americans — who hope to glimpse the famous compound.

"Most of the young people today really have no idea who he was or what he was about, because it's a long time ago," said Newman.

"Between his assassination and Bobby's assassination and the war in Vietnam, America has changed completely," Newman said. "We're a great deal more

cynical."

Perhaps the greatest evidence of the alarm about preserving Kennedy's memory is in Boston's JFK museum, which has been revamped to make its subject relevant to people who do not remember Kennedy.

Kennedy's daughter, Caroline, noted when the new museum was opened last month that most of its visitors were not yet born when he was President.



# The Question: Who

By MIKE COCHRAN  
Associated Press Writer

**DALLAS (AP)** — In death as in life, John Connally could not escape the echoes of gunfire 30 years ago in Dealey Plaza.

As the former Texas governor lay in state in Austin this summer, researchers were demanding bullet fragments from his body. They insisted tests would prove President John F. Kennedy's slaying was the result of a conspiracy.

The attempt failed. The fragments from the horror of November 1963 were buried with Connally. But the theories were not.

Indeed, they have never been more pronounced than today, as a generation of Americans born after the assassination reaches adulthood.

It is almost as if the trauma of Kennedy's death and the memory of his Camelot cannot compete with the clamor about conspiracy.

The question these three decades later, it seems, is not "Who was JFK?"

It is "Who killed JFK?"

The sky was overcast that Friday morning, but the autumn sun melted away the chill and the cloud cover as Air Force One made the short hop from Fort Worth to Dallas Love Field.

It was Nov. 22, 1963.

At the urging of local politicians, Kennedy ordered the reflective glass shield atop the Presidential limousine removed.

Huge, enthusiastic crowds greeted the motorcade. Kennedy, his wife Jackie at his side, smiled and waved from the back seat. Up front, John and Nellie Connally beamed at the Texas welcome.

Just before 12:30 p.m., the motorcade slipped out of the glass and steel canyons of downtown and zigzagged toward Elm Street and a drab, seven-story brick building.

The first shot sounded like a

## Killed JFK?

firecracker. The second and third shots were unmistakably gunfire.

In 1964, the Warren Commission concluded that three shots were fired on the motorcade, all from the depository building's sixth floor and all by Lee Harvey Oswald.

Soon, however, the first wave of conspiracy buffs were arguing over how many shots were fired, from where and by whom. The grassy knoll next to the book warehouse would become, as one writer called it, "an elevation on the American landscape as prominent as Mount Rushmore."

Significantly, no one reported seeing a second gunman that day, and virtually everyone reported hearing no more than three shots.

Even so, the Warren Report came under attack almost immediately, and a zealous district attorney in New Orleans launched an investigation that eventually resulted in the only criminal trial connected to the bloodshed in Dallas.

Jim Garrison prosecuted businessman Clay Shaw on conspiracy charges in a trial that included 34 days of testimony and less than an hour of jury deliberations. After the acquittal, Garrison arrested Shaw for perjury, but the courts dismissed the

case, branding it outrageous and inexcusable persecution.

Thirty years later, surveys show that more than eight out of 10 Americans do not accept the basic conclusion that Oswald, a lifetime misfit, was the lone assassin.

Yet, as so many reject the commission's finding, the Kennedy family itself accepts it.

At the heart of most conspiracy arguments is whether the same bullet — the so-called Magic Bullet — could have passed through Kennedy's upper back and caused the wounds suffered by Connally.

The two were struck almost at the same instant. If the same bullet could not have wounded both men, there had to have been a second bullet — and therefore a second gunman.

A new book by lawyer-journalist Gerald Posner offers a case for the single-bullet theory that adheres to the government's basic conclusion.

Posner explains how medical expertise combined with computerized re-enactments, special enhancements of the Zapruder film and new bullet-impact tests prove the single-bullet theory. Accordingly, Oswald's first shot

missed, the second hit both Kennedy and Connally and the third indisputably was the fatal Kennedy head shot.

But so many, still, refuse to believe. Partly, it is because Kennedy's death was such a consuming event; partly, it is because in subsequent years — during Vietnam, throughout the Watergate scandal, at so many other junctures — the government lied.

## Implausible Case Builds Skepticism

WASHINGTON (AP) — The mob did it. Fidel Castro did it. The KGB did it. The right wing did it. The left wing did it. The government did it.

Thirty years after the murder of John F. Kennedy, most Americans think that someone other than Lee Harvey Oswald killed Kennedy. Or they think Oswald had helpers, never apprehended, in a plot that's never been investigated.

They reject the Warren Commission's conclusion that Oswald was a warped loner who acted alone, without the knowledge of anyone else.

If the Kennedy family itself accepts the commission's conclusion, why is it so widely doubted? Even Bill Clinton and Al Gore told reporters last year that they doubted the official version.

One reason for the skepticism is obvious: the case is so implausible.

Consider:

A 19-year-old former Marine defects to the Soviet Union at the height of the Cold War and marries a Russian woman. Three years after his defection, Soviet authorities allow him to return to this country. He drifts to Dallas and on the day that the President is to visit, he is able to sneak a rifle into his work place, overlooking the route of the Presidential motorcade.

He fires three shots in short order. A single bullet kills the President and wounds Texas Gov. John Connally. Then, despite the intense security that accompanies any President, he gets away from the murder scene on foot.

But he is arrested and jailed. Two days later, while being transferred from one jail to another, a nightclub owner with ties to the mob manages to get into the jail with a gun and to kill Oswald.

It seemed preposterous 30 years ago; it seems preposterous still. Small wonder that to millions of people it remains beyond be-

liever.

And that's not all. The official commission created to investigate the murder made mistakes of its own, starting with the way it conducted the investigation.

Instead of hiring independent investigators, the Warren Commission depended on the work of the CIA and the FBI, the very agencies that some saw as part of the conspiracy.

And when the House Select Committee on Assassinations restudied the Kennedy case in 1979, it concluded that the slaying "probably" was the result of a plot. But having decided that, it disbanded. No government body followed up.

The writer of a recent best-seller that finds fault with the Warren Commission's work but endorses its fundamental conclusion points to an additional factor to account for the skepticism.

Oswald never was put on trial. Because of that, said Gerald Posner, author of "Case Closed," the American adversarial system of justice — in which two sides lay their cases before a neutral judge or jury — was denied the opportunity to work.

Compare Oswald's fate to that of James Earl Ray, who was tried in the murder of Martin Luther King Jr. and found guilty. Ray subsequently wrote a book asserting that he was part of a conspiracy.

"But we don't pay him much heed because Ray had his day in court," Posner said.

"Oswald never had that day. If he were sitting in jail today and saying there was a conspiracy, some people might listen to him, but it would not be the same," Posner said.

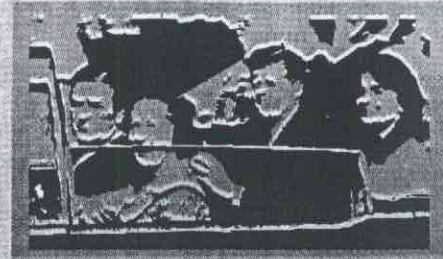
Distrust of the government runs strong and feeds the skepticism, said Tulane University psychologist Fred Koenig.

The sense that a massive conspiracy and coverup existed was reinforced for the millions who saw the 1991 Oliver Stone movie, "JFK."

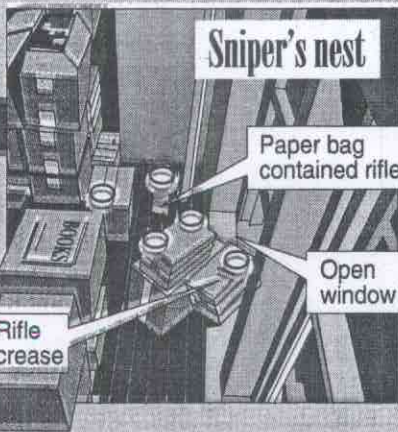


# November 22, 1963

The horrifying scene that unfolded in Dealey plaza at 12:30 p.m. was intensified by the presence of First Lady Jacqueline Kennedy. Her cry of "Oh my God, they have shot my husband!" reported minutes after the shooting, was the first indication to the outside world that Kennedy had been hit. And her ashen appearance in Washington beside her husband's casket, with her dress smeared with blood, shocked the nation.



Two Secret Service agents were in the front seat. In the left jump seat, Nellie Connolly; in the right was Texas Gov. John B. Connolly; left-rear, First Lady Jacqueline Kennedy; The President, right rear. Bullet damage to the inside-front windshield helped support arguments that Kennedy was shot from behind. Lack of bullet damage elsewhere in interior supported single bullet theory.



## THREE SHOTS



No clear audio tape of the assassination exists. But many witnesses, including reporters, police, and secret service agents, testified to three shots. A Dallas radio reporter had a tape, later erased, indicating three shots.

The Warren Commission said two hit: the first passed through JFK's neck and Gov. Connolly's chest and wrist, lodging in his thigh; the second struck Kennedy, fatally, in the head.

Palm and fingerprints and a rifle crease were discovered on cardboard book boxes at the open window.

# Dealey Plaza

