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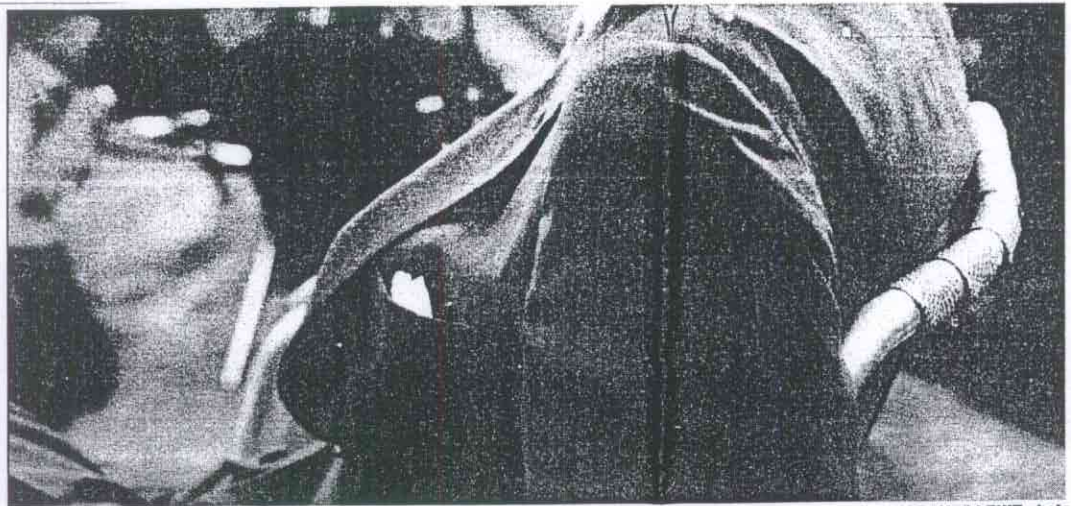
ABC photo

Patrick Dempsey stars as the young JFK in the ABC miniseries based on Kennedy's own letters, "JFK: Reckless Youth." The memoir reveals a randy young man obsessed with sexual exploits.



The family was part of the Camelot image the public loved. Here, John Jr., Jackie, Caroline and JFK pose in Hyannisport. The sexy good looks and fascination with movie stars live on in Kennedy's son.





JACQUES LOWE photo

John F. Kennedy was a millionaire war hero, had the good looks of a movie star and always acted as a superstar. Here, the future president is on the campaign trail in Omaha, Neb.

Kennedy's own tales of his youth fuel an erotic image of the charismatic leader who presided over Camelot. TV hopes to cash in by fanning the fires of fascination.

By MICHAEL MCWILLIAMS
The Detroit News

At the recent dedication of the John F. Kennedy Library near Boston, broadcast on C-SPAN, the stage was filled with blue-chip guests: Bill Clinton, Ted Kennedy, Jackie Onassis, Caroline Kennedy and, holding the stage by natural right, John F. Kennedy Jr.

Two of the speakers defined the tension of what JFK's image means today. On the downside was Kennedy wannabe Clinton, who somberly decried the "ipso facto revisionism" of the JFK legend.

But a real Kennedy — the delightfully pixilated Caroline — praised her father for his dedication, his character and his "twinkle."

The remark drew scattered titters throughout the well-heeled audience, perhaps because the truth is always funny. After all, there's only one thing that twinkles, and it's a star.

JFK is the biggest star of them all.

The revisionism that makes Clinton sweat, the dirty laundry that was supposed to soil the Kennedy legend, has actually made JFK a more compelling myth than he ever was in life or even in most of the 30 years since his assassination.

The media age has caught up with JFK, and my only regret is that he isn't around to make the cover of Entertainment Weekly.

JFK's superstardom — as an erotic image, not as a Camelot figurehead, much less a mere president — has been fueled by tales of his "lifestyle," most recently rendered in his own letters as a young man in "JFK: Reckless Youth," (\$30 hardback; \$15, paperback, Random House), a juicy tome soon to be a

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major miniseries on ABC (9 p.m. Sunday and Nov. 23), one among many JFK extravaganzas in the month of November.

"Reckless Youth," and other artifacts of JFK "revisionism," blow the lid off the bow-tied officialdom of Kennedy hagiographer Arthur Schlesinger Jr. and the mealy-mouthed I-didn't-know-a-thing-about-JFK's-sex-life line of Kennedy buddy and ex-Washington Post boss Ben Bradlee.

"Reckless Youth" documents Kennedy's sexual hunger and wit and almost sociopathic desire long before he ever met Marilyn Monroe or Angie Dickinson or Gene Tierney, long before he even got married.

It's now clear that JFK's grungy passion, justified by his beauty, had at least as much to do with the making of Camelot as all the romantic piety about social change and helping the poor and bringing blacks and whites together (which Elvis did more than JFK, anyway).

Of course, everybody has a different take on JFK's intimate compulsion. Oprah-ites call it an "addiction." More conventional moralists call it "indecent." But what both groups have in common is an all-American hypocrisy: private titillation meets public condemnation.

It's the same attitude reserved for present-day stars, from Madonna to Ice-T. But the way in which JFK's sex life intersected with his death puts him closer to such tragically mythic stars as James Dean and Jim Morrison. His ugly demise enhanced the allure of his sexuality, making him eternally unattainable — which is the essence of his myth.

In a way, JFK was never cut out to be anything as dull as a president; his older brother, Joe, who

See JFK — C2

NBC photo

Helena Bonham Carter plays the young Russian who finds herself married to the most infamous man in America, in "Fatal Deception: Mrs. Lee Oswald."

JFKORNUCOPIA

It's a JFKomucopia of TV specials this month, resulting from the cosmic convergence of the November ratings sweeps and the 30th anniversary of President Kennedy's assassination. The roster:

"Fatal Deception: Mrs. Lee Harvey Oswald" (9 tonight, KYW [3], WMAR [2]), a made-for-TV drama starring Helena Bonham Carter as the immigrant wife of America's most wanted felon.

"Frontline: Who Was Lee Harvey Oswald?" (8 p.m. Tuesday, WHYY [12/64], 9 p.m. MPT [28/67]), an investigative study by public television's award-winning documentary series.

"The Plot to Kill President Kennedy" (11 p.m. Tuesday, WHYY [12/64]), 1983 documentary links mobsters to the assassination, based on interviews and declassified files.

"Frontline: JFK, Hoffa and the Mob" (10 p.m. Wednesday, WHYY [12/64]), Mafia lawyer alleges the Mafia was involved in the CIA and in the deaths of JFK and Jimmy Hoffa.

"The Kennedy Years - In Words and Music" (10:30 p.m. Wednesday, MPT [28/67]), a concert recollection of 1960s political anthems.

"Jack" (9 p.m. Wednesday, WCAU [10], WBAL [11], WBOC [16]), a sentimental journey through JFK's life by the interweaving of news footage, home movies and recollections of friends and colleagues.

"Who Shot President Kennedy?" (9 p.m. Friday, WHYY [12/64]), analytical inquiry from the weekly science series Nova.

"CBS Reports: Who Killed JFK? The Final Chapter" (9 p.m. Friday, WCAU [10], WBAL [11], WBOC [16]), the last word on the greatest mystery in U.S. history, a CBS News special backed by Washington Post and Newsweek magazine resources.

"JFK: In His Own Words" (4 p.m. Sunday WHYY [12/64]), PBS rebroadcast mixes newsreel footage and speech excerpts.

"A Walton Thanksgiving Reunion" (9 p.m. Sunday, WCAU [10], WBAL [11], WBOC [16]), the Kennedy assassination shatters the calm of Walton's Mountain in a new TV movie gathering of the clan from CBS' classic family drama.

"The End of Camelot" (9 p.m. Sunday, The Discovery Channel), cable-TV airing of a documentary focusing on the emotional state of the Union after Dallas.

"JFK: Reckless Youth" (9 p.m. Sunday and Nov. 23, WPVI [6], WJZ [13], WMDT [47]), Patrick Dempsey as a ribald young Jack in a miniseries adaptation of Nigel Hamilton's best seller.

"The JFK Assassination: As It Happened" (1:53 p.m. Sunday, KYW [3], WMAR [2]), uninterrupted six-hour replay of the actual NBC coverage of Nov. 22, 1963.

"Nov. 22, 1963: Where Were You?" (8 p.m. Sunday, TNT), a special hosted by Larry King asks for personal reflections of that fateful day from the Clintons, entertainers, journalists and call-in viewers. (Repeated at 8 p.m. Nov. 22.)

"Four Days in November" (9:30 p.m. Nov. 22, TNT), documentary recalls a nation's horror as its president is slain.

"Investigative Reports: The Men Who Killed JFK" (11 p.m. Nov. 22-26, Arts and Entertainment), Bill Kurtis anchors a multi-night examination of assassination theories.

—The Detroit News

JFK: The man emerges from the myth

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was killed in World War II, was anointed at birth by Daddy.

From cradle to grave, JFK acted more like a movie star, bemused by affairs of state. This explains his lifelong attraction to silver-screen goddesses, and why his presidency yields little conversation beyond the Bay of Pigs and the Cuban Missile Crisis, now dust in Castro's yellow teeth.

In other words, JFK revision-

ism has supplanted a musty legend with a more timely one: immortality through image, eroticized by media.

And the most astounding legacy is that the physical embodiment of that legend — JFK Jr. — walks the Earth among us, photographed wherever he goes, like a rock star on tour.

At the Kennedy Library dedication, the Kennedys — including the faux one, Clinton — were lined up on the podium like monks in a pew, except for JFK Jr., who fidgeted and kept recrossing his legs and scratched the back of his neck. He was the image of Reckless Youth.

Some say JFK Jr. wanted to be an actor (he likes those movie goddesses, too), but Mother wouldn't hear of it. He obeyed Mommy, just as his father obeyed Daddy.

But the truth in both cases is clear: You can take the boy out of the twinkle, but you can't take the twinkle out of the boy. Through his son, JFK lives on, and not just spiritually.