

A MOMENT FROZEN IN TIME

For the half of us who remember the day JFK

By **JOHN MARSHALL**

New York Times News Service

Those shots in Dallas also struck us.

In our hearts, at first. And in our memories, it seems, forever.

Thirty years have now passed since that Friday afternoon in November 1963. Three decades of tumult and change. More than 10,000 days.

For those who were at least 3 or 4 back then, the moment of first hearing the terrible news is still cemented in memory, along with the look of that time and that place. A high school classroom. The aisle of a supermarket. An airport concourse. A room at home with a black-and-white TV.

Eight simple words still bring it all roaring back, the look, the feel, the exact emotions. All it takes is someone asking, "Where were you when President Kennedy was shot?"

Abigail Van Buren posed that question last year in her column, asking readers to briefly recall the moment in a card or letter. Responses poured in from more than 300,000 people from around the globe, with many of the comments now collected in a new paperback, "Where Were You When President Kennedy Was Shot?" (Andrews and McMeel, \$6.95).

Larry King, the talk-show host, posed that question to many of his nightly guests over the past three years, with the resulting taped interviews to be broadcast this Sunday on TNT. King's guests share what have become indelible memories for them, people ranging from athletes to business executives to journalists to entertainers to politicians.

A bright and ambitious young man

in Hot Springs, Ark., drawn to politics himself, had maneuvered himself into shaking Kennedy's hand during a White House ceremony only four months earlier in 1963. Then came the unbelievable news.

"I was in fourth-period advanced math," President Clinton recalled for King. "There were seven students in class, and the teacher — we, we met

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Associated Press
A Secret Service agent clings to the back of the limousine carrying President John F. Kennedy moments after the fatal shots rang out.

died, a poignant anniversary

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in an annex — and the teacher was the assistant principal for the annex building. And he was called to the phone, something that as far as I know had never happened at any other time.

“He came back totally ashen-faced — I’ll never forget it in my life, I never saw such a desolate look on a man’s face — and said that the president had been shot and was probably killed... I put my head down on the desk and said a little prayer.”

The surprise these days is not that these memories still linger, with crystalline sharpness despite all the passing years and events. The surprise now is that everyone in the country does not have this capacity for instant recall of JFK’s assassination, what once seemed nothing less than a universal characteristic of American citizenship.

The country is now split along a Great Divide of those who remember the assassination and those who do not, with the momentous event experienced only through books or films or TV retrospectives for those under 30 — some 112 million Americans.

Young recall Challenger

As 27-year-old Peter Haney of Seattle remarks, “Our Kennedy assassination was the Space Shuttle exploding. Every now and then, someone among us will ask, ‘Where were you when the Challenger blew up?’ And I immediately recall I was in college at the time and a friend called to tell us we had to turn on CNN.”

Of course, there was no CNN way back in 1963. But television is widely credited with playing a crucial role in turning the Kennedy assassination into a shared moment of national communion.

The bulletins from Dallas set off a mad scramble at the television networks. CBS went live as soon as a camera could be warmed up in the newsroom. “When it came over the wire, we immediately shouted that we had to take air, take air,” Walter Cronkite, the former anchorman, told King. “Unfortunately, we didn’t have a camera hot that could record it in the studio... It was nearly 10 minutes before we got cameras into

the room and went on camera and and... we were there for four days.”

Four days when it seemed that the whole country was sitting in front of the electronic box, four days which were, as a University of Washington history professor, William Rora-baugh, emphasizes, “the only time commercial television disappeared in this country, almost instantaneously.”

Instead, there were these riveting images: The oath administered to the new president, the new widow standing at his side in her blood-stained suit. The horse-drawn caisson making its way from the White House to the Capitol. The accused assassin being gunned down himself on live TV. The funeral procession slowly making its way along Washington boulevards. A 3-year-old nicknamed John-John saluting his dead father. Three salvos of rifle fire followed by the forlorn notes of “Taps” echoing across the rolling hills of Arlington National Cemetery.

TV transformed moment

Kennedy’s relative youth — he was just 46 and seemed so vibrant — made the assassination all the more shocking. But television transformed what had been unthinkable into the familiar in a few days. No wonder that the scenes — from that bad Friday in Dallas to the National Day of Mourning on Monday — cemented themselves in memory.

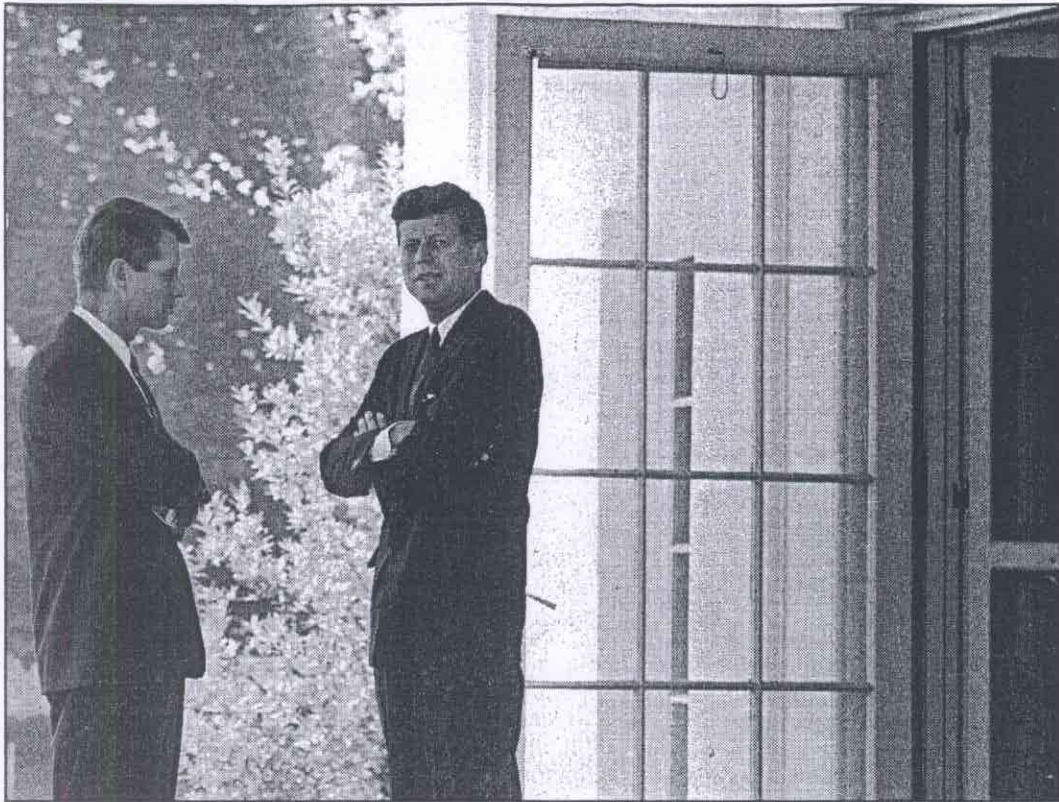
What came in the years afterward made the Kennedy assassination seem a true watershed, abrupt end of a brief era of peace and promise, final curtain for the 1950s.

“It’s no accident that the first nostalgic film of that era, ‘American Graffiti,’ was set in 1962,” Rora-baugh, 47, says. “And it ends with the main character, Curt, going off to college because he admires Kennedy so much. That really captures the sensibility then.”

Furies seem to have been unleashed by the Kennedy killing, with more deaths and more traumas soon-to-follow: Vietnam. Other



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File photo

Robert Kennedy and President John F. Kennedy confer outside the White House in the early 1960s. Both brothers were to fall to assassins' bullets within five years of each other.

assassinations. Cities aflame. Rebellion in the streets.

Jon Bridgman, another University of Washington history professor, had flown to San Francisco to attend the 1963 football game between Stanford, his alma mater, and Cal. He was picking up a rental car in the city with his father when a man rushed in and said Kennedy had been shot.

Bridgman, then 33, looked across the street to a school playground filled with exuberant children, still unaware of the events unfolding in Dallas.

And Bridgman immediately turned to his father and uttered these prophetic words: "Those children will never live in the same world again."

Conspiracy theories fill holes in probe

● Many trying to understand the assassination still feel they weren't given the truth.

By SARA FRITZ
Los Angeles Times

WASHINGTON — Ever since 1966, when Mark Lane wrote "Rush to Judgment," the first commercially successful book critical of the Warren Commission's investigation into the assassination of President Kennedy, people of all political bents have launched their own theories.

In the 30 years since the wrenching national tragedy, countless books have been published and numerous lives devoted to studying the evidence.

But most of these efforts — like Oliver Stone's "JFK," which was based partly on the largely discredited investigation of the late New Orleans District Attorney Jim Garrison — have themselves been vulnerable to criticism that they twisted the facts to prove a conspiracy.

Typical of the way in which conspiracy theorists thrive on the flaws of the Warren Commission report is the claim by Randolph H. Robertson, a Nashville radiologist, that post-mortem X-rays of Kennedy's skull show a second bullet wound.

At the request of the Kennedy family, the commission did not publish autopsy photographs of the late president. Then-Chief Justice Earl Warren, the panel's chairman and the only commissioner who viewed the photos, concluded that they were too gruesome for the public to see.

Instead, the Warren Commission report included a sketch based on the autopsy surgeon's recollections.

Inaccuracies in that sketch have been at the heart of many challenges to the commission findings, including Robertson's opinion that the shots that hit Kennedy came from two different directions.

David W. Belin, a former staff attorney who has been the most outspoken among defenders of the Warren Commission, says that the panel's "biggest mistake was to yield to the desires of the Kennedy family that the autopsy photos be kept out of the public domain."

James H. Johnston, who studied the case in 1976, thinks he has found in CIA documents evidence of a Castro-inspired plot to assassinate Kennedy: a photograph taken in Mexico City of a Cuban-born American, Gilberto Policarpo Lopez, who is believed to have been in Dallas on Nov. 22 and to have fled to Cuba five days later. To Johnston, the evidence supports the theory that Castro had several designated hit men in the United States.

Likewise, John M. Newman, an Army major who teaches history at the University of Maryland and has reviewed all the CIA files that have been released so far, claims to have found evidence that the CIA was paying far closer attention to Oswald's activities before the assassination than was acknowledged at the time. He contends his findings contribute to the view that the CIA had something to hide.

And PBS' "Frontline," which conducted an extensive probe in preparing a three-hour, 30th anniversary program, found an old photo showing Oswald in the company of David Ferrie, a man who figures in many conspiracy theories because of his ties to the anti-Castro movement and to Carlos Marcello, the New Orleans Mafia leader.



John F. Kennedy Jr., 3, salutes the casket of his father. His sister, Caroline, and his mother, Jacqueline, stand beside him. Edward and Robert Kennedy are in the background.

Associated Press



Associated Press

Lyndon B. Johnson is sworn in as president aboard the presidential plane at Dallas, with Jacqueline Kennedy at his side in her blood-stained pink suit.



Associated Press

Lee Harvey Oswald is shot and killed by Jack Ruby, right, at a Dallas police station on Nov. 24, 1963, two days after the assassination.