



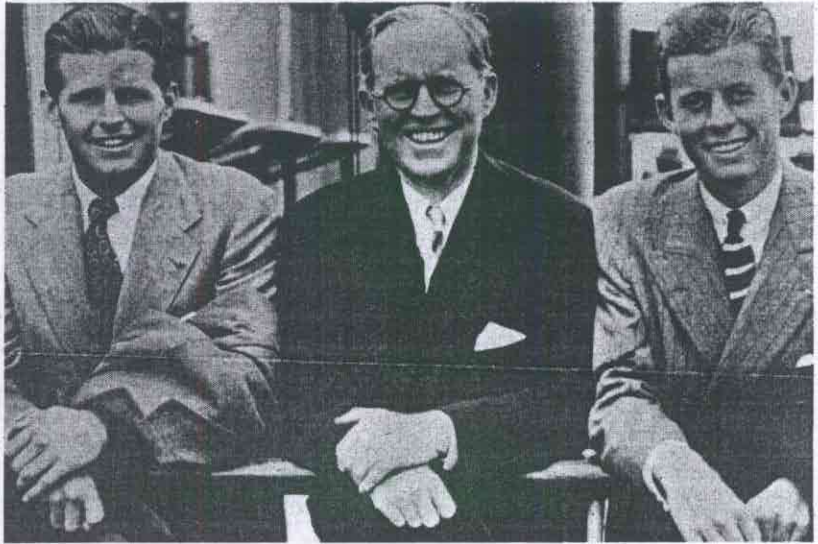
LEADERS

# How Long Shall We Mourn for

By Mick Farren

November 22, 1993, is the thirtieth anniversary of the assassination of John Fitzgerald Kennedy and the third decade of an almost unprecedented world obsession. The memory of JFK and the globally shared shock of his murder refuses to dim or diminish, or show any signs of settling into the comfortable distance of history. Our fallen king remains a continuous fountainhead of obsessive fascination and conspiracy theorizing has been elevated to the level of a multimedia art form. He makes profits for movie studios, moves books for Random House, and provides hard copy for *A Current Affair*.

To mark this thirtieth year since the gunfire in Dealey Plaza, PBS alone devotes four and a half hours to Kennedy TV programming, including a special three-hour edition of *Frontline* — "Who Was Lee Harvey Oswald?" The Zapruder film rolls yet again, and the black riderless horse follows the caisson, clearly indicating that a generation is still unwilling to face the fact that we may go to our own



Joseph P. Kennedy (center), Joe Jr. (left), and John F. Kennedy

deaths frustrated, never having learned the truth behind the most traumatic event of our lives.

In the past, I've done my share of conspiracy buffing, but I feel that this thirty-year mark has to be the moment to come out and admit that I can longer care who killed the president. I will always know in my gut that Lee Oswald was never, in a million years, the lone-nut gunman, and that Jack Ruby, in an equal timespan, was

never the lone-nut avenger. I suspect that this is something I share with a majority of marginally rational people. I even have a personal favorite on the menu of conspiracy scenarios (entropy and chaos as laid out in Don DeLillo's novel *Libra* — but I suspect I favor it more because it reinforces my own warped perceptions than because I actually believe it).

What I can no longer allow myself to care

# Camelot?

about is putting faces to the ghost gunmen on the grassy knoll or names to their shadowy paymasters. By this time, the primary conspirators and their hired triggers are either elderly or dead. I have always figured that the hit team themselves were dead by Christmas 1963. With all the witnesses that were greased, I doubt that the shooters were allowed to live. I know that, if there was a conspiracy, J. Edgar Hoover must have known, but, mercifully, Hoover is gone and the secret is buried deep in his lingerie drawer.

Oliver Stone asked us to consider who benefited, but who ultimately did benefit? Lyndon Johnson? Johnson got to be president, but he ended up nailed through the history book to a war that ripped him "like a hailstorm on a Texas highway." The military industrial complex? Sure, they made their billions, but they also suffered the humiliation of defeat at the hands of Ho Chi Minh's peasant army. Whodunit is now little more than a mental contortion. No one will ever be brought to justice.

**W**hat interests me far more is the way in which America continues to build what amounts to a twentieth-century Arthurian legend around the life and murder of Kennedy, regardless of whether he deserves it or not. We seem to have a real myth in the making, and it's starting to seem as though the word "Camelot" is now closer to the truth than was ever imagined by the journalist who coined it. As far as I'm concerned, this is far more worthy of fascination than the mundane question of who fired the shots.

The fall of Kennedy was the fall of trust and

hope, never to be recovered. That was how it felt to us kids, way back then on the threshold of The Beatles, Bob Dylan, and all the fun and games the sixties would bring. After the strait-jacket of the Eisenhower era, we suddenly had a president who seemed to be on the right side of the widening generation gap. With the Cuban missile crisis, we were taken to the nuclear brink, and then the president brought us back alive. Handsome, witty, and debonair, he became the repository of our dreams, and then suddenly he was dead. We knew instinctively that the Old Men of Power had killed him because too much of him belonged to us — the young. After that, we would never again be able to invest anything but the most qualified and wary faith in any politician.

In this death of hope personified, we have the classic makings of yet another variation of the most persistent folk legend, the one that encompasses King Arthur, and extends all the way back to The Fisher King of prehistory. The Golden Monarch, the living symbol of fertility, the potency of the land, is slain by his enemies and the world falls into a dark age of anger and confusion. Break out the drums and head for the woods; the mists of Avalon are suddenly blowing through the Global Village and beneath our sophisticated techno-surface, we appear to have a need for the power of ancient mythologizing.

One of the primary attributes of an enduring myth is that it's fixed and unassailable. This is certainly true of JFK. Despite the antics of Ted and the generation that followed, and despite enough literary attempts at brutal revisionism to stock a library, Kennedy adoration continues unabated and unquestioning. The truth is that Kennedy is now judged by a criterion other than that of mere political hindsight. Grant's drinking or FDR's duplicity may have tarnished

their images, but Kennedy's endures.

A lot of hopeful revisionists have attempted to bring down Kennedy through his womanizing, but all such efforts have fallen flat. More confirmation that, with JFK, we are now dealing with mythology and rules no longer apply? Certainly no one condemns a fertility god for screwing around, but take it a stage further. In legend, Kennedy is no longer significantly coupled with Jackie. Jackie, it would seem, renounced her place in legend as the living widow — if not in the moment that she fled, away from the body, over the trunk of the fateful limo, certainly when she did the pragmatic thing and married Onassis. Both acts were understandably human, but we appear to be dealing here with something that has become more than human. The legend now invests John Kennedy with a much more myth-friendly consort, no less than Marilyn Monroe, the equally doomed Twentieth Century Fertility Goddess. With Marilyn, the circle of unreality became closed and complete.

So there's the new JFK theory, for what it's worth. We may receive our information from electronic circuits, relay satellites, computer systems, and digital recordings, but we still unconsciously process the data through a filter of superstition and myth that is little different from that employed by our cave-dwelling or herd-following ancestors. Just as in life, JFK became an unreasonable repository for too many of our hopes and dreams, to the point where it may have killed him; in death, he has become the symbol of our disasters and disappointments, to the point where it has made him immortal.

To admit this may be considerably more healing than peering into a lot of fading photographs, looking for the killer.

(other, side too)

# Spectator

People and Places Making  
News in Los Angeles



**THE THIRTIETH ANNIVERSARY** of the assassination of **PRESIDENT KENNEDY** is next week, and the airwaves and newspapers are awash in Kennedy lore. A new



**Kennedy**

book by **RICHARD REEVES** of Pacific Palisades, husband of perennial political candidate **CATHY O'NEILL**, flies in the face of a number of recent negative biographies and fantasies about the Kennedy family. Reeves virtually ignores the frequently exploited sexual question and concentrates on the issues ... except to acknowledge that "some of the glamour of the Kennedys was faked or exaggerated."