

Cover-to-cover JFK; artful dodging;

By Mark Feeney
GLOBE STAFF

Really now, what would have been different if Oswald - or whoever - had missed? We still would have gotten stuck in Vietnam. (Do you honestly think the same people who cooked up the "missile gap" and made a mania of toughness were about to let some runty guy like Ho Chi Minh make them look bad?) Barry Goldwater still would have gotten his clock cleaned in 1964. "The '60s" still would have happened; rock 'n' roll was already loose in the land, and the death of JFK was irrelevant to what drove the '60s - unprecedented affluence and the youthful demographic explosion. True, the civil rights movement would have had a harder time of it; but besides being an indictment of the Kennedy administration that fact further underscores the essential superfluousness of JFK's death. It was another assassination that resulted in a loss this country still hasn't recovered from: Do *you* remember where you were when you heard Martin Luther King had been killed?

Ah, but JFK's assassination is such great copy: all those good-looking people in Washington, all those weird-looking people in Dallas, and mystery and murder and glamour, too. What reader - what editor - can resist? Monday is the 30th anniversary of the assassination, and the newsstands have taken to looking like so many satellite facilities of the Kennedy Library. Getting a jump on the Kennedy competition, *US News* ran its cover story last week (Nov. 15). *Newsweek* (Nov. 22) goes with a comprehensive look at "The JFK Cover-Up." The cover-up wasn't of a conspiracy to kill Kennedy - *Newsweek* concludes there almost surely was none - but to conceal various mistakes officialdom made in the wake of Dallas - nothing new there. *Time* (Nov. 22) has JFK biographer Richard Reeves on the Kennedy mystique, today and keeper-of-the-flame Hugh Sidey reaching once again for the old Zippo; alas, writing that Kennedy's humor was "sly and wry" is, at this late date, kind of tired and mired. Further afield, *Ladies' Home Journal* has a special



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McEnroe's new racket

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commemorative issue on Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis (the source, lest we forget, via Teddy White in *Life*, of all the Camelot nonsense). **Film Comment** (November-December) screens some "Assassination Movies," and on its back page **The New Yorker** (Nov. 22) culls show-biz memoirs for accounts of where the likes of Sammy Davis Jr. and Mel Torme heard about Dallas. Someone must have thought this was a *really* clever idea. Someone was *really* wrong.

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Elsewhere in this *New Yorker*, Roger Angell has his annual World Series roundup, and Lawrence Wright talks to the three surviving sons of Jim Jones, the cult leader who oversaw the deaths of hundreds at Jonestown, in Guyana, 15 years ago. The intersection of that anniversary with the Branch Davidian episode in Waco earlier this year gives Wright's story a very spooky resonance. ... A pillar of *Time* back in the magazine's glory days was its formulaic use of inflated modifiers. Combining the grandeur of the Homeric epithet with the zip of Madison Avenue copywriting, it was a useful vehicle for Lucean slanting, i.e., people who walked picket lines tended to be "swarthy, hairy-palmed union leaders" and people who crossed them "clear-eyed, thoughtful industrialists." A few years ago *Spy* had great fun putting its own spin on the device – remember "bosomy dirty-book writer" Shirley Lord? – but it's not seen much in *Time* these days. This week's Milestones column has a classic, though: "Muppetish singer-actress" Pia Zadora who's separating. ... Under a headline of "Hetero Hero," Bill Weld gets the cover and quite the favorable write-

up in **The Advocate** (Nov. 16), the national gay biweekly.

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It's all very awkward. There's not much argument over Willem de Kooning being America's greatest living artist – maybe even the world's. He turns 90 this spring, and to celebrate the event the National Gallery has planned a landmark exhibition scheduled to open in May. Now it is not unknown for painters to live into ripe old age, Titian and Picasso being the two towering examples. Unfortunately, neither is it unknown for people of advanced years to lose their faculties. For some time de Kooning has suffered from Alzheimer's disease. This is where the awkwardness comes in – not to mention **Art & Auction** (November). Even though two conservators now oversee the painter's affairs, those affairs are complicated by the fact that de Koonings sell for millions of dollars. It's also complicated by who the conservators are: a daughter who was once implicated in a Hell's Angels drug deal and an attorney (John Eastman, Paul McCartney's brother-in-law) given to such winning statements as "First, we had to take care of Bill, literally clean him up." And it's especially complicated by the issue of at just what point did the painter conclusively descend into dementia. When are collectors paying seven figures for something in de Kooning's "late style" vs. something by someone lost in senility? For an art world that's become as predatory as Wall Street – and no less profit minded – these are pressing, and juicy, questions. "What hurts his reputation the most," sniffs an art dealer whose choosing to remain anonymous prevents one from saluting his unusual sensitivity, "is the

fact that he's still around." Those in search of a less grotesque side of the arts can turn to the selection of photos of pre-Columbian textiles a few pages later – gorgeous, glorious things – or read about tennis champion John McEnroe's decision to open a SoHo gallery. "It's not as different from tennis as you'd think. ... Now I'm on the other side, being a bit like a good manager – setting up the right tournaments, that sort of thing. I was used to having people kiss my you-know-what. Now I have to explain why someone *else* is difficult."

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No lack of Shaq this week. Like a loose ball, things are beginning to get out of hand. You've watched the commercials. You've heard the rap record. You may even have seen him play the occasional basketball game. Now Shaquille O'Neal's merry mug is on the cover of both **Rolling Stone** (Nov. 25) and **GQ** (November). "I got four versions of the smile," he tells Alan Richman in the latter. "I got the \$1 million, the \$2 million, the \$4.6 million and, if you're real good, the \$8.8 million." Real good, all right: Imagine how much more attention he'd be getting if he were a better center than Alonzo Mourning.

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Self-justification of the week. Rush Limbaugh on why he agreed to do the **Playboy** (December) Interview: "It is as that great man Jesus Christ said: 'You go to where the sinners are.' So here I am, in the pages of *Playboy*, attempting in what meager way I can to clean it up."