

WHY WE MOURN

BY ARTHUR M. SCHLESINGER

The writer, a key adviser to President John F. Kennedy, is the author of *A Thousand Days: John F. Kennedy in the White House*, winner of the Pulitzer Prize.

NEW YORK — She was a woman of fierce independence. Of course she was famously beautiful and elegant, and she fascinated and enchanted her age. But one recalls above all the quiet but implacable determination, amid the uncontrollable blazes of publicity, to live her own life.

Her father, Black Jack Bouvier, was a swashbuckler. Her mother was a very proper society matron. She was brought up at a time — the 1940s — and in a place — Newport — where young ladies were taught to conceal their intelligence lest it frighten young men away.

She observed the conventions, but underneath a shy exterior developed cool judgment of people and an ironical slant on life.

In the early 1950s, she met another ironist, John Fitzgerald Kennedy. Their marriage was a notable moment in the social history of the United States: At last the Irish were accepted in Newport.

Jacqueline Kennedy took to her new political life more easily than her Newport friends expected. Like her husband, she was an idealist without illusions. She came

to like politicians and their free and easy talk, and she came rather to like campaigning. Bursting upon the electorate in 1960, the handsome couple seemed the embodiment of youth, and rather daring in a nation ruled by tired old men.

She added more than decoration. Jack Kennedy always sought her assessments of people, and sometimes asked her to carry out confidential missions. When, for example, he wanted to talk to John Kenneth Galbraith and me, but did not want to disquiet his possessive and overworked campaign staff, Jacqueline would make the call and set up the meeting.

Once her husband had been elected President, she wondered how she could best play her role as presidential wife (she detested the term First Lady, regarding it as undemocratic). Her expertise lay in the arts, and her aim was to use the White House to honor artistic achievement.

Soon Casals, Stravinsky, Robert Frost, Isaiah Berlin and Leonard Bernstein were presidential guests.

Jackie saw the White House as a possession of the American people, and she very efficiently organized a redecoration and re-furnishing designed to renew the historical continuities.

To those of us on the White House staff, the Kennedys appeared an affectionate couple, delighting in each other and their

JACQUELINE KENNEDY . . .

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Arthur Schlesinger

two attractive children. No one can know the inwardness of a marriage, but despite latter-day tales of women parading through the White House, their marriage seemed increasingly close. The President could be a solicitous husband. I remember his asking me, after the loss of their third child, whether I could get Adlai Stevenson to send a note of condolence: "Jackie is very fond of Adlai, and hasn't heard a word

from him."

Then came Dallas. In the dark weeks and months afterward, Jacqueline and her brother-in-law, Robert, were drawn together in grief. He became the protective element in her life. Seeking privacy for her children and for herself, she moved to New York and began a new career as an editor in a publishing house, a job for which her critical eye and flawless taste admirably equipped her.

She was proud of Robert Kennedy in his opposition to the war in Vietnam, but hated it when he decided to run for president. "They will do to him what they did to Jack," she said in March 1968. In June, "they" did as she predicted. Three months later, seeking a new protection, she married Aristotle Onassis.

After Onassis died, Jacqueline returned to her quiet, highly disciplined life: winter in New York; riding in New Jersey or Virginia in spring and autumn; summer in Martha's Vineyard. An excellent mother, she raised unspoiled children and taught them how to elude the paparazzi. Both are lawyers; Caroline has co-authored a book on the Bill of Rights and has three children of her own.

In her middle years, Jacqueline was more fascinating than ever. She always had the seductive habit of giving undivided attention to the person with whom she was

talking. Her humor gleamed, and her zest for life never flagged. She was a great reader and loved the theater.

She followed politics and remained an ardent, liberal Democrat to the end. In 1992 she acquired a new friend in Hillary Rodham Clinton. They lunched together a couple of times during the campaign, hit it off at once, and kept in close touch thereafter.

The illness struck unexpectedly last December. Doctors diagnosed it as lymphoma in January. She seemed cheery and hopeful, perhaps to keep up the spirits of her friends. "I feel it is a kind of hubris," she told me. "I have always been proud of keeping so fit. I swim, and I jog, and I do my push-ups, and walk around the reservoir, and I gave up smoking 40 years ago — and now this suddenly happens."

She laughed as she talked. Chemotherapy, she added, was not too bad; she could read a book while it was administered. The doctors said that in 50 percent of cases lymphoma could be stabilized.

She bore the last ordeal with characteristic gallantry, and with never a word of complaint. She died as she lived, in grace and in dignity.

She will be remembered as the American woman at her best: brave, disciplined, ironical, imperturbable, with a vivid sense of the potentiality and the sadness of life.