

Chiang Kai-shek's ultimately successful offensive against the commander of American forces there, General Joseph Stilwell. Alsop admits that "with full conviction" he suggested to Chiang and his advisers that they "declare General Stilwell persona non grata and blame him, in large measure, for China's fearful situation." Alsop also suggested General Albert C. Wedermeyer as Stilwell's replacement and drafted the telegram Chiang sent to Roosevelt expressing these sentiments, along with another from Vice-president Henry Wallace in support of the original from Chiang.

Following Chiang's defeat, however, Alsop became obsessed with the Communist takeover and soon professed to see the hand of Maoist manipulation behind every turn of events on the Asian mainland. This was particularly true of Vietnam.

A consistent critic of what he believed to be unconscionable weakness of the Eisenhower administration in the face of the ever-growing communist menace, Alsop demanded that U.S. forces be committed in support of the French. He compared the 1954 French defeat at Dienbienphu to the battle of Yorktown.

Once U.S. forces finally did enter the conflict, Alsop's inability to let go of his obsession eventually destroyed his effectiveness within the insider debate. His wildly optimistic reports of U.S. military progress there seemed ridiculous and pathetic in light of the gruesome reports of the reporters in the field. Alsop began predicting the enemy's imminent collapse as early as June 1964 and never let go. Following Tet, when much of the establishment was looking to extricate the nation from the Vietnam debacle, Alsop could only conclude that those who failed to support the war "had gone collectively insane." Should the United States withdraw, he promised, McCarthyism would run rampant and "the American future would hardly bear contemplation." In the war's aftermath, David Halberstam could write of the once-respected columnist that he had been "wrong in almost everything he said or wrote."

Alsop continued writing his column through 1974, but he had forfeited the

fear and respect he once engendered by his fanatical devotion to the failed war effort and the men who lied about it. While Alsop never apologized for his obsession with Vietnam and, indeed, carried it with him to his grave, he did become aware in his later years that he "could no longer understand what was happening in America, perhaps because I had finally become an old man, frozen in the viewpoints of the past."

It is safe to say, however, that for all of Alsop's arrogance and misguided passion, his mistakes were almost always honest ones. Judging by these memoirs, Washington is not likely to see another insider pundit with such dedication to his profession or with such verve and enthusiasm for his craft.

FOREVER AFTER

BY JON KATZ

Dead Elvis is not a journalistic book. It is, in a way, the antithesis of conventional journalism. Not a story, a chronicle, or a factual inquiry, it is a brooding, circuitous, idiosyncratic rumination from the other side of American life, the place where "serious" journalists rarely venture. Unwittingly, it serves as an

BY GREIL MARCUS
DOUBLEDAY, 233 PP. \$25

eerie argument for journalism to take that other, sometimes darker side of American life more seriously. It is useful reading for editors and producers struggling to come to terms with the mass defection of an audience distracted by music videos and VCRs, compact

*Jon Katz is a contributing editor to *CJR* and *Rolling Stone*. His second novel will be published in January.*



AP/WIDE WORLD



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Elvis emanations and JFK conspiracy theories: messages to the mainstream media

discs and interactive TV.

As the title suggests, *Dead Elvis* is not biography but "a book about what Elvis Presley has been up to in the past fourteen years since he died." In one of the best chapters — "Emanations, Sightings, Disappearances, and a Seance of Eighteen Mediums" — Marcus chronicles the appearances of the mythic fallen Presley in diverse and wondrous ways and places. "No one," he writes, "could have predicted the ubiquity, the playfulness, the perversity, the terror, and the fun of this, of Elvis Presley's second life, a great common conversation; sometimes a conversation between specters and fans, made out of songs, artwork, books, movies, dreams; sometimes more than anything cultural noise, the glossolalia of money, advertisements, tabloid headlines, bestsellers, urban legends...."

Journalism and popular culture have been on a collision course for years now, as movies, TV, and music increasingly take on, re-interpret, and sometimes re-invent issues and stories. Long after serious journalists concluded that they had taken the assassination of John F. Kennedy as far as they could, Oliver Stone's *J.F.K.* demonstrated that the story was very much alive and far from resolved for most Americans. Much of the mainstream media was enraged that a Hollywood producer would dare to encroach so wantonly on what it viewed as its turf — the presentation of a major story like the murder of a president. Stone's movie was, in fact, just what it seemed: a declaration of war against the news media and their methodology and value system. At the same time, his journalistic instincts seemed remarkable in at least one sense: he seemed to know that many Americans were waiting for a new version of the killing that spoke to their misgivings.

Why do so many people cling to conspiracies? Or look for Elvis at their local gas station? And why does the press not help answer these questions? Many of America's best journalists remain clustered in Manhattan and around the White House, interviewing spokespeople and lobbyists, not the people who believe Oliver Stone or see Elvis waiting tables in malls. It's too bad — there seem to be lots of them.

Dead Elvis is a kick, a trip to the funhouse that makes up America's most striking modern contribution to the world: popular culture. The book makes clearer what drives people to gather at their kitchen tables all over America and lobby for Presley postal stamp images. It sends a message to the mainstream media as well: don't be so quick to leave JFK conspiracy theorists and the Presley legacy to the checkout-line browsers and their salacious media. In their preoccupation with weighty responsibilities, the media seem to be flirting with self-destructive elitism. Alive or dead, Elvis Presley is a big story, by any conventional journalistic definition. In Marcus's book, America is a different country — strange, obsessed, haunted — from the one we see on the front pages of *The Washington Post* or the *Los Angeles Times*.

THEY MARRIED FOR MONEY

BY JANE CIABATTARI

Once upon a time (on July 14, 1989, to be exact), in the business-friendly kingdom of Delaware, a chancery court judge blessed the merger that created Time Warner.

On the way to the altar, this pairing was legally challenged (by Paramount). But the Delaware judge had been convinced that Time Inc.'s "transcendent aim" had not been to establish a "vertically integrated entertainment organization," or to become a more global enterprise, but to preserve its independence and distinctive culture. "This culture appears in part to be pride in the history of the firm — notably *Time* magazine and its role in American life — and in part a managerial philosophy and distinctive structure that is intended to protect journalistic integrity from pressure from the business side of the enterprise," wrote Judge William T. Allen at the time.

In the two years-plus since the marriage, Dick Munro, the Time Inc. c.e.o. who helped make the match, has waltzed into a multimillionaire's early retirement as planned, but otherwise the romance has soured. Ross, who ended up with a humongous personal profit (nearly \$200 million in compensation, plus 1.8 million new stock options at \$150 a share) and control of the merged corporate board, has not been able to attract the expected support from Wall Street, which was leery of a company burdened with \$11.4 billion in debt. And his treatment for prostate cancer

Jane Ciabattari is the author of Winning Moves, a survival guide for those undergoing corporate shakeups, and a contributing editor at Parade.

has brought the succession question to a head. In February, Ross engineered the unceremonious axing of Time Inc. c.e.o. Nick Nicholas, his co-c.e.o. and heir apparent, in what was dubbed a Gorbachev-like coup (Nicholas was skiing in Vail).

So much for Greed Era corporate fairy tales. More interesting now is Richard Clurman's book on the personalities and machinations behind what he calls Time Warner's "interfaith corporate marriage." Clurman, who spent twenty years working at Time Inc., occasionally loses his objectivity and lapses into the tone of a betrayed true believer ("It's a wonder — no, a mark of professionalism — that under severe personal pocketbook stress the staffs of

BY RICHARD M. CLURMAN
SIMON & SCHUSTER, 349 PP. \$23

Time's magazines got anything right," he writes of the uncertain period of the Paramount takeover bid, which affected some 21,000 employee stockholders). But for the most part, his play-by-play is dramatic and revealing.

For instance, there's the confidential Armstrong Report, commissioned by the Warner board after two close Ross aides were hit with charges of racketeering, bribery, and fraud in connection with the Westchester Premier Theatre. Warner had invested \$250,000 in the theater stock, and received a purported \$220,000 cash kickback. Warner advanced \$700,000 in legal fees to defend one Warner executive, Clurman writes, who "agreed secretly to tape-record a conversation with Ross for the prosecutor. But even more secretly he warned Ross of the trap in advance." After pleading guilty he resigned, but kept his \$7.5 million in Warner stock in a plea bargain. The Armstrong Report also revealed that investigators looking into Steve Ross's management of the company found that he had for years kept a "secret briefcase" stuffed with tens of thousands of dollars in cash in his closet. Ross would not admit to this office stash until the fourth interview and then claimed it was gambling winnings (which he admitted he never