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be quite volatile, perhaps the Valentine Museum provided a "safe place" for public reflection and discussion of this tangled history. Perhaps an ongoing role for the museum is to provide a site where Richmonders of all backgrounds can meet on common ground and discuss social and cultural issues that affect them all. If so, the Valentine will have expanded well beyond the range of traditional local history museums and become a vital public institution.

The work of Jewell, Kimball, and others at the Valentine Museum exemplifies the idea that exhibitions can be more than singular events at their particular institutions. Exhibitions can be part of what John Wuo-Tei Chin of the New York Chinatown History Project terms a "dialogic" social process in which members of various publics come together to interact and perhaps to understand better a shared culture and past. When a museum endeavors to step beyond the traditional role of presenter to engage its public in reinterpretation, we see more clearly that exhibitions take place within a social context that shapes the final import of the exhibition within a unique frame. That social context of culture and memory, agitation and conflict, may determine far more of the ultimate meaning of any individual exhibition than the specifics of the exhibition itself. If an exhibition can contribute to greater self-awareness and greater understanding of others, the public role of the museum is enlarged and it becomes a vital social center. With the sequence of Afro-American exhibitions in general but with the "Jim Crow" exhibition in particular, the Valentine has succeeded in reaching beyond the traditional confines of local history and contributed to a wider social dialogue.

Fath Davis Ruffins
National Museum of American History

"The Sixth Floor: John F. Kennedy and the Memory of a Nation." Dallas County Historical Foundation, 411 Elm St., Dallas, TX 75202–3301.

Permanent exhibition, opened Feb. 20, 1989, Su–F 10–6, Sa 10–7; exhibition and audio tour, adults $6, seniors $5, youth $4; exhibition only, adults $4, seniors $3, youth $2, children under six free. 8,800 sq. ft. Bob Hays, executive director; Conover Hunt, project director; Staples & Charles, Ltd., exhibit designers; Cynthia S. Mondell and Allen Mondell, producers and directors, films; Antenna Theatre, Inc., audio tour; Eugene George, American Institute of Architects, restoration architect.

The Sixth Floor: John F. Kennedy and the Memory of a Nation. By Conover Hunt. (Dallas: Dallas County Historical Foundation, 1989. 62 pp. Paper, $2.95.)

The Sixth Floor: John F. Kennedy and the Memory of a Nation. Prod. by Media Projects, 1989. 45 mins. (Dallas County Historical Foundation, 411 Elm St., Dallas, TX 75202–3301. $19.95.)

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schoolgirl being rushed along with the other students through the hallway, a flurry of white blouses and plaid skirts, into church to pray for the wounded president. But another part, the adult who thinks and writes about history, was mightily curious to see if and how anyone could succeed in creating a museum exhibit on the sixth floor of the former Texas School Book Depository in Dallas. Official investigators determined that it was here that Lee Harvey Oswald fired the shots that wounded Texas governor John B. Connally and killed President John F. Kennedy on November 22, 1963.

In 1963 a private textbook brokerage firm, the Texas School Book Depository Company, occupied the unimposing seven-story building at 411 Elm Street that had been constructed in 1901 by the Southern Rock Island Plow Company. In the early 1970s the warehouse was purchased by a Nashville, Tennessee, promoter who planned to convert it into a commercial attraction. An arsonist set fire to the building, but it was saved. The property reverted to the Dallas family who had owned the building since the 1930s. Potential buyers proposed razing the structure, but the City of Dallas refused to issue a demolition permit. Dallas County purchased the building in 1977, renovated five floors, and moved their offices into the first two floors of the renamed Dallas County Administration Building.

The county received planning funds from the National Endowment for the Humanities in 1979 and brought together a group of scholars to determine the best use for the sixth floor. High visitor interest in the assassination site helped convince the humanities panel to recommend that the county create a permanent historical exhibition on the life, death, and legacy of John F. Kennedy. In 1983 a nonprofit educational organization, the Dallas County Historical Foundation, was incorporated to plan and manage the exhibition. Three and one-half million dollars in private monies were raised for the project, and the exhibition was opened to the public on Presidents' Day, February 20, 1989.

Visitors to the exhibition enter the building on the first level. A small multipurpose area accommodates the "airport" security system through which all entrants and their cameras, purses, and bags must pass, the bookstore, and the audiotape pick-up. Spacious new elevators take visitors directly from the first to the sixth floor.

The first impression of the exhibition space is a large gray warehouse-like room. Light gray paint covers the brick walls, and a gray commercial carpet is over the concrete floor. To the credit of the planners, the interior of the building, itself an artifact, has been tidied up but not camouflaged. One of the most colorful panels in the entire exhibition is the first, which attempts to recall for visitors part of the cultural milieu of the early 1960s and the Kennedy presidency. Chubby Checker sings "The Twist" as visitors are reminded via books and movie posters that *Guns of August*, *The Feminine Mystique*, and *The Fire Next Time* topped the bestseller list and that *Breakfast at Tiffany's*, *Lilies of the Field*, *Psycho*, and *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf*? were popular with moviegoers. Color television, clothes dryers, and air conditioning were innovations for most American consumers, and there were only about 4,200 computers in use in the United States in 1963.

Armed with these bits of cultural history, visitors turn to Kennedy—his success

at gaining the party's nomination in 1960 over Hubert H. Humphrey and Lyndon B. Johnson, his main Democratic opponents, and his narrow defeat of Republican Richard M. Nixon in the general election. Much of the remainder of this early section concerns the challenges that Kennedy faced as president: "Turmoil at Home" addresses the civil rights movement and reactions of extremist groups to Kennedy's policies; "Economic and Social Programs" considers the president's actions on trade and taxes as well as his new social programs designed to improve health, education, and housing and his international programs, the Peace Corps and the Alliance for Progress; "The Red Threat" deals with the attempted invasion at the Bay of Pigs and the Cuban missile crisis; and "The Space Race" looks at Kennedy's commitment to speeding up American exploration of space and resulting technological advances in a variety of fields. The exhibit deals squarely with JFK's accomplishments and does not glorify what he did or what he might have done. The political issues are punctuated with smaller vignettes on the Kennedy family, the marriage of Senator Kennedy and Jacqueline Lee Bouvier, and the "style" of the Kennedy White House. Near the end of this section, the exhibition planners have placed a small-screen television where a six-minute video presentation focuses on "The Presidency."

The exhibition has a great deal of information to convey and yet avoids the pitfalls of wordiness. The panel text and photographs, the video images and narration, and the audiotape vary the format of the information. And all three contribute to conveying effectively the international, national, and local perspectives on the Kennedy years.

The next section of the exhibit deals with Kennedy's controversial trip to Texas in November 1963; it was aimed at healing the rift between liberal and conservative Texas Democrats and garnering support for the 1964 presidential campaign. Twenty-six hundred supporters had managed to purchase tickets to a sellout luncheon at the Dallas Trade Mart, and nearly 250,000 people turned out to welcome and catch a glimpse of the president and First Lady unencumbered by the glass bubble on the motorcade route. Nevertheless, the Kennedy entourage, having stopped in San Antonio, Houston, and Fort Worth, arrived in Dallas amid protests. The city had voted Republican in the 1960 election and, as the exhibit states, "Small extremist groups were active in the community." On November 22, a group of conservative businessmen had taken out a full-page ad in a local newspaper criticizing President Kennedy's policies. A copy of this page is one of the few objects in the "Trip to Texas" segment of the exhibition. A five-minute video also titled "The Trip to Texas" offers visitors new images and reinforces the panel text.

Until this point, white panels have served as the background for the black-lettered text and for the black-and-white photographs. But in the small area that documents the shooting, a dark background heralds the event. On two opposite walls a series of seven small black-and-white photographs are displayed. One of the labels reads "12:30 PM Witness Mary Woorman took a Polaroid photograph as a bullet struck President Kennedy's head." A middle board presents a blown-up photograph of the moment. Passing through this area, visitors listen to the voices of

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Lee Harvey Oswald's perch in the sixth floor of the Texas School Book Depository Company building. Photo by Art Beaulieu. *Courtesy of The Color Place.*

James "Ike" Altgens, a witness standing in nearby Dealey Plaza, and Officer Bobby Hargis, who rode next to the presidential limousine as part of the Dallas police motorcycle escort, as they recount their experiences.

As visitors leave this area, the audiotape begins to record how the news was transmitted to the country and the world. Artifacts include an Associated Press ticker tape machine of a type used in 1963 and an early ticker tape report of the shooting and the command, "Stay off this wire. All of you. Keep off!" Visitors can view through glass walls a sniper's perch with stacks of book boxes in the location from which Oswald allegedly fired. By standing in front of the outside windows (protected by clear acrylic) adjacent to the perch and listening to the audiotape, visitors can follow the path of Kennedy's motorcade as it passed between the depository and Dealey Plaza and see its approximate location when the fatal shots were fired.

The exhibition pace quickens as the narrative recounts the rush to Parkland Hospital, the search for the gunman, the arrest of a new School Book Depository employee named Lee Harvey Oswald, and the swearing-in of Lyndon Baines Johnson as president of the United States. The narrative is accomplished by means of the audiotape, black-and-white photographs, and a five-minute video entitled "The Crisis Hours." The complex events after Kennedy died are effectively conveyed to the crowds that gather in this area by a large time line delineating what happened

in Washington, D.C., as the country mourned its loss and what happened in Dallas as the investigation progressed.

The physical and emotional center of the exhibition is a small auditorium with a film, "The Nation and the World Respond." Within this space, which accommodates five benches and seats about twenty-five people, visitors linger. In the darkened room a ten-minute video surveys public and private grief over Kennedy's death. Without comment, the film effectively juxtaposes the events in the nation's capital surrounding the Kennedy funeral with those around the world. The film begins with a view of the Washington Monument and the caisson, then jumps to images of newsboys holding papers announcing the death of Kennedy with the Arc de Triomphe in the background. Next come Washington scenes of the caisson leaving the White House for a memorial service at the Capital. In the rotunda, Jacqueline Kennedy and daughter Caroline kneel at the coffin, and lines of people wait to pay their respects. The film shifts to memorials and processions held in other countries in Kennedy's honor. Back in Washington, Jackie Kennedy and John's brothers Robert and Edward, followed by world dignitaries, march to the funeral Mass in St. Matthew's Cathedral. Jackie and her children Caroline and John stand by as the casket proceeds, and John salutes his father. The motorcade moves to Arlington National Cemetery, the guns salute, "Taps" plays, and Jackie lights the eternal flame. There are few dry eyes by the end, and many people stay to view the film again.

Visitors then move to an area that addresses the investigations surrounding Kennedy's assassination. The section of the exhibit seems anticlimactic in many respects, and yet visitors fill the area. Panel boards and a six-minute film set forth in a clear and concise manner the findings of the various committees—Warren Commission, Rockefeller Commission, and House Select Commission on Assassinations, for example—and discuss the evidence and state the controversies. The summaries avoid none of the issues and deal effectively with the inconclusiveness of the committees' findings. The text posits the numerous conspiracy theories from the Soviet government and KGB to the Cuban government and to organized crime, among many others. Two decades of investigation are evaluated and controversies are presented in an understandable manner.

Exhibition planners do not embrace one particular view, nor do they posit any new theories. We learn that throughout the 1970s and 1980s, polls showed that few believed that Oswald had acted alone, and most favored the possibility of a plot. But despite these doubts about the assassination, almost 70 percent of people polled in 1983 did not want another government investigation. Recent revelations and future ones may change public opinion and "The Sixth Floor."

A very short section on "Presidential Assassinations" positioned near the end of the exhibit places the Kennedy assassination within an historical context by briefly discussing the assassinations of Abraham Lincoln, James A. Garfield, and William McKinley.

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In another small auditorium, a ten-minute film entitled "The Legacy" and narrated by Walter Cronkite tackles the difficulty of assessing a presidency cut short. Lyndon B. Johnson's pledge to "let us continue" saw the passage of many of Kennedy's major programs. Some of the bills passed during Johnson's terms, on civil rights, mass transportation, housing, and welfare, were those that Kennedy had initiated. Cronkite discusses how quickly Americans turned John F. Kennedy into legend and concludes that "the mythic stature of one whose promise [was] never realized will always remain unlimited."

As visitors leave the exhibition, they see a sign asking them to take the opportunity to write their comments in any one of the large scrapbooks. Veteran museum-goers will recognize the gesture of presenting lined guest book pages, but this is different. The notebooks invite visitors to record their personal messages: "Your reflections will assist future historians to interpret the meaning of this part of history to our nation and to the world." (Already-filled books are in the archives of the Dallas County Historical Foundation in Suite 120.) A sign asks viewers to contact the security personnel if they are interested in participating in the Dallas County Historical Foundation oral history project.

A review of the notebooks suggests that respondents from Texas, from other states, and from foreign countries are approximately equally represented. Younger writers express gratitude for the opportunity to learn about Kennedy; others recount the circumstances of their lives when they learned of the shooting; still others express their skepticism about the various commission findings and their belief that the truth about the assassination is not yet known. One visitor from Scotland wrote: "A bit morbid and disturbing to have the exhibit actually *on* the 6th floor." Another visitor: "A very touching exhibit, classily-done, although I wish it didn't have to be here at all." And I concur with Karl Martinez of Oregon: "You are to be complimented on the tasteful way in which you have presented a most terrible period in our history. I did not want to come, but now I am very glad that I did."

"The Sixth Floor: John F. Kennedy and the Memory of a Nation" has many strengths: the body of images (some from the Kennedy Library, Dorchester, Massachusetts), the concise text, the well-conceived and produced films and audio tour. The paucity of artifacts is understandable. The space has seventeen exposed windows and is plagued by humidity; in conservation terms, the building is a hostile environment that, in the words of the project director, "leaks like a sieve." Climate and lighting controls are in place, but they have not been brought up to museum standards. And given the nature of the commemorated event, what would we have the artifacts be?

Many fine museum exhibitions provoke visitors to think in new ways about artifacts, explore new ideas, and make original observations about the interaction of people and the material world. While "The Sixth Floor" does not accomplish these goals, it achieves its own. The exhibition presents some thirty years of cultural history, reviews the accomplishments of one man, and explores the collective memory

of a nation that must deal with hope followed too soon by disappointment. It does so without bathos. One might question the idea of the exhibition at all, but for the annual 275,000 visitors, the intelligent exhibition meets some powerful need to learn, to remember, and, as the exhibition planners hope, to heal.

Cynthia A. Brandimarte
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Austin, Texas