

The Exploitation Of Kennedy's Death

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WASHINGTON

"Lemme have one of the grave, too," the heavyset woman bellowed over her right shoulder.

With that, a long arm sprung out of the stock room. Dangling from the hand was a large, glossy print of President Kennedy's gravesite. The dollar cost of the seven-by-10-inch picture included a 70-cent profit for the news-stand concessionaire.

Three years after the assassination, the exploitation goes on. Occasionally with some taste but, more often, patently offensive Kennedy memorabilia continue to be, in the words of one vendor, "hot" selling souvenir items.

PAPER WEIGHTS

There are salt and pepper shakers, billfolds, key chains, plates, plaques and paper weights, cups and saucers, post cards, pillows and probably more to come.

Mrs. Jacqueline Kennedy still is subjected to the coarsest sort of treatment in pulp magazines week after week.

Unfortunately, there is nothing the Kennedy family can do to stop the morbid profiteering. A public figure, especially a President, is very much public property.

A spokesman for Mrs. Kennedy said the former First Lady has no policy or particular method for trying to stem the exploitation of the assassination.

"Legally, there is nothing that can be done," said Nancy Tuckerman, a staff assistant to Mrs. Kennedy.

\$2 MILLION A YEAR

Jack Epstein, the executive officer of one of the nation's biggest souvenir supply houses estimates that \$2 million a year is made from the various Kennedy items. His company, which only wholesales the items, makes over \$100,000 a year on Kennedy necromemorabilia.

Big Profit Made in Souvenirs

Sid Bernstein, a ranking executive of a New York firm, which claims to be the country's biggest souvenir company, refused to guess at annual profits to all such companies. He did say the Kennedy souvenirs constitute one percent of his firm's multi-million dollar business.

"In my 34 years in the business, I've never seen anything like it," Bernstein said. "Furthermore, I don't think it will stop while the Kennedy clan is active.

"Just ask me what single man has sold more souvenirs and I would tell you JFK," he added.

OBJECTIONS

The spokesmen for two other souvenir houses in New York said they don't carry the Kennedy items. Bob Rubenstein explained that his customers objected and Al Simon said he couldn't bring himself to "make money" on the President's death.

The production line for the Kennedy items spans the oceans from the United States to Japan and across the country from Texas to Washington.

A professional photographer in Dallas found himself in the business because of one picture he took the day of the assassination. But Francis Gothard's potential profits virtually vanished in front of his eyes when other people bought his picture for \$1, made their own prints and went into business for themselves.

That particular picture was brought back to Washington by a 70 year old res-

ident of the Old Soldiers Home here.

BEFORE SHOTS

The old soldier was in Dallas for an American Legion convention two years ago. He heard about the picture — which showed President and Mrs. Kennedy, Texas Gov. and Mrs. John Connally in the President's limousine shortly before the death shots were fired — and went to get a price estimate.

"He wanted too much money, \$35 a hundred," Isadore Krontz recalled. "Later, I found a man who sold me a negative of the same picture for \$50."

Back in Washington, the old soldier got a bunch of the pictures made (he wouldn't say how many), a vendor's license from the district government and went into business.

ONLY A DOLLAR

At first, Krontz thought the reporter wanted to go into the business, too. "I wouldn't sell you the negative for \$50. You know, don't you, that a negative can be made off the picture and the picture would only cost a dollar."

One of the old soldier's customers was the privately owned newstand in Washington's Statler Hilton Hotel. "Thousands and thousands of them, we've sold thousands and thousands of them," one of the salesladies at the stand said.

The suspicion of the newsstand manager was more typical of those in the business.

"Why are you asking so many questions. You going to sell them? You can't get any more of the gravesite anyway. I bought all the man had," Mrs. Anna Mae Hartzell said in quick succession.

A QUOTE

Besides the old soldier's picture, the newstand's manager sells the 10-by-seven-inch picture of

the Arlington gravesite, a picture postcard of the President and his family, and a four-sided color folder that includes a short biography of President Kennedy and one of his best remembered quotes.

Most of the Kennedy souvenirs — the plaques, plates, etc. — are manufactured, on order, by Japanese firms. The designs, however, originate in the United States and are jobbed out to Japanese factories because they can be made more cheaply there.

There is some disagreement about where the Kennedy items sell and whether they are popular only during tourist seasons.

Jack Epstein said they are most popular in Washington but still sell to a lesser degree in Baltimore, New York and parts of New England. This distributor maintains it is strictly a seasonal business.

CALIFORNIA, TOO

Sid Bernstein (the one who said his company is the country's largest) insisted the Kennedy items still sell along the East Coast, north of Virginia, in the midwestern states and in California.

All of the local distributors, those who supply drug stores, souvenir shops and the like, said the demand for Kennedy memorabilia still is very high, although it has tapered off somewhat in the last 18 months.

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