



How does Kennedy's death affect our view of him?

On 22 November 1963 John Kennedy and his wife Jackie were visiting Dallas, Texas. As the presidential motorcade drove through the city, several shots rang out. An initial bullet, which wounded the president, was followed by a shot to the head. Kennedy died soon after.

The shocking circumstances of Kennedy's death played a role in shaping our views of his presidency. Writing in the painful period after the assassination, most authors agreed that the president had so much unfulfilled promise. Kennedy had many admirers because of his charm as well as his politics. During his 'thousand days' in the White House, he attracted the best and the brightest to work with him. His wife brought a sense of style to the position of First Lady. Their energy and purpose led people to compare the White House to Camelot, the glittering court in the legend of King Arthur. With Kennedy's death, people mourned the passing of a special moment in American history. Many observers felt that, had he lived, Kennedy would have become a great president.

People writing more recently about Kennedy have looked at the contradictions in his life and presidency. While he was portrayed in his election campaign as a healthy, sporty young man, in reality Kennedy suffered from Addison's disease and also took strong drugs for the pain of an old back injury. He had the image of a family man, but secretly had affairs with many women. His brother fought organised crime, but his family was alleged to have links with organised crime. His achievements were mixed, for example there was the failure of the Bay of Pigs invasion but the success of the nuclear test ban treaty. Historians have concluded that his few years in office were not long enough for him to achieve very much, although some of his policies were implemented by his successor, Lyndon Johnson.

At the same time, the assassination has been dramatised in books and movies, and conspiracy theories about who killed him have been reported in the news media. Whatever else Kennedy did in his lifetime, the manner of his death continues to influence how we remember him.

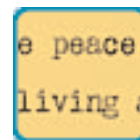
Examine these sources to find out more:



Photo after the shooting of Kennedy, 1963



Newspaper report on the Kennedy assassination



PM Harold Macmillan on President Kennedy