

INSTANT GREATNESS
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“Until then (the day of his death) no one would have claimed
he was a great President. It was uncertain even if
time would prove him a good President.”

The quote is from a column by Vernon Royster, reporter and feature writer for the *Wall Street Journal*, commenting on the quarrel over the new Kennedy biography. Although Kennedy admirers might not now admit, it was certainly true that by the fall of 1963 President Kennedy’s political troubles were growing, much of the public enthusiasm for his administration had lessened, and signs of tarnish were beginning to appear on the Image.

The Kennedy Administration’s absorption with publicity and image-making had developed naturally out of the successful promotional campaign waged by the family and its fortune which transformed an attractive political lightweight from Junior Senator into President. The promotional techniques of the Madison Avenue sell continued in full force throughout his time in office.

The dramatic circumstances attending the President’s tragic death were such that the family and his followers, already captive by their own propaganda and thoroughly adept at pressagentry, apparently could not resist the temptation to seize the opportunity to canonize him. At the same time, it was uncomfortable to observe the immediate and frenzied efforts toward commemoration set into motion within hours of the assassination. It was difficult then to reconcile such calculating activity with the expected (and displayed) numbness of deep emotion and profound grief. From accounts available in new and previous writings, it almost seems that the grab for immortality took precedence over sorrow—as if all concerned were intent primarily on establishing instant greatness and nailing down a place in history for the Image that had been their chief preoccupation.

Since the time of his death, the constant and untiring efforts of the Kennedys to perpetuate the memory of John Kennedy have left unturned no stone and have missed no occasion to ensure his memorialization; in the words of Mr. Royster, “. . . to glorify him as such a man that never was.” Centers and monuments have been dedicated, mountains renamed, airports rechristened, geography altered, and the Eternal Flame burns brightly. Their efforts have been remarkably successful. It is as if the local high school All-American, injured permanently as a freshman footballer, had been installed in the Hall of Fame along with Thorpe and Grange. The myth has almost become reality, nationally and internationally.

And yet, the lingering doubts remain. The extra effort of the Kennedy idolaters belies their faith, denies their conviction. The shoddy controversy between his widow, the family, the hand-picked biographer, and the publishers (all friendly to his memory)

reflects only their own uncertainty and half-sincerity. Their ghoulish attempts “to reap a harvest from the dead” is a reflection also on the caliber of a President’s heirs.

(c) *The Bulletin of the Muscogee County (Georgia) Medical Society*, "The Doctors' Lounge, Feb 1967, Vol. XIII No.2, p.19