

Event in history that
had lasting impact on
american culture (jfk
assasination)

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An event in history that had a lasting impact on American culture: the John F. Kennedy Assassination. On Friday 22nd November 1963 President John F. Kennedy flew into Dallas at the end of a two-day presidential visit to Texas. While traveling in a motorcade from his hotel to a lunch meeting at the Trade Mart Kennedy's car turned into Elm Street and several gunshots were heard. Two of them hit John F. Kennedy who slumped forward in his seat. (Kurtz: 2003, pp. 2-5) The moment was captured by a television crew and has become one of the most shocking and memorable scenes ever recorded live. A handsome president in the prime of his life, accompanied by his glamorous wife, was simply wiped out in front of a watching world. The most obvious immediate effect was extreme shock in all areas of American society and indeed across the world. This was quickly followed by a frantic criminal investigation which resulted in the arrest of gunman Lee Harvey Oswald. (Benson: 1993, p. 330) Due legal process was followed and it was found that this man had killed the president as a lone gunman. Some people have observed that Kennedy was in a special way "marked out for assassination." (Douglass: 2008, p. 220) The background of the Cold War, which encouraged a constant threat of nuclear war, along with secrecy and government subversion also played a part in allowing the events leading up to the assassination to occur. Douglass maintains that the Kennedy assassination proved that this approach has terrible consequences and should be rejected. Kennedy refused to go to war with Russia and reached out instead to seek help from Nikita Khrushchev in removing the threat of a nuclear holocaust from the whole world: "by turning to each other for help, they turned humanity toward the hope of a peaceful planet." (Douglass: 2008, p. 383)

This constellation of a president who seeks peaceful co-operation and a president who raises the possibility that there is a political motive behind the killing, and that this political aspect defines the impact of Kennedy's death. The truth is, however, that the Kennedy assassination has had an effect which is far more important than this: its impact was above all cultural, affecting the way that people see themselves and the world. Apart from the shock and horror that the assassination of president Kennedy caused at the time, there has been a raft of conspiracy theories which claim to explain what really happened, as opposed to the official version of events. These theories embrace a wide range of different ideologies and assume that many different groups or individuals set up the assassination, using Oswald only as a hired hit man. They variously place the blame on Cubans (both pro- and anti-Castro), a Vietnamese dimension, the mafia, labor bosses harmed by Kennedy's policies, the CIA, or military chiefs upset about Kennedy's softening of attitudes towards Russia. (Dallek: 2003, p. 699) It has even been suggested that internal political rivalries in the American government are at fault, with claims that Lyndon B. Johnson was the real mastermind who plotted to make Kennedy into a "patsy" who would be punished for the way that politics were going under his leadership. (Nelson: 210, p. 299) The fact that there are so many different conspiracy theories, books, documentaries and films on the assassination suggests that people still find it hard to come to terms with the event and it also suggests that there is no single convincing explanation for the assassination other than the official "lone gunman" finding. It is clear, however, that the tragic and sudden death of the President has elevated his status in the minds of later generations to the

point that he is revered and remembered much longer than perhaps he would have been if he had remained alive: “ When the Prince of Peace is martyred, no one wants to hear that he was not a prince and not particularly pacific.” (Kopkind: 1992, p. 40) John F. Kennedy was a serial adulterer and a moderately good president. He did make significant progress on the international front, but he did very little to further the civil rights movement struggling for equal rights for black men and women across America. It is questionable whether he would have had a successful second term. The importance of the event in world history is that it demonstrated in an explosive and dramatic way how even the most powerful men in history are mortal, and that nothing can be taken for granted. People remember him most of all because of the way they felt when they heard about or saw images of the assassination and it is this personal resonance that has had the greatest impact. References Benson, Michael. *Who’s Who in the JFK Assassination: an A-to-Z Encyclopedia*. New York: Citadel, 1993. Dallek, Robert. *An Unfinished Life: John F. Kennedy, 1917-1963*. New York: Little, Brown and Company, 2003. Douglas, James W. *JFK and the Unspeakable: Why He Died and Why It Matters*. New York: Touchstone, 2008. Kopkind, Andrew. “ JFK: The Myth.” *The Nation* 254 (2) (January 1992), pp. 40 ff. Kurtz, Michael L. *The JFK Assassination Debates: Lone Gunman versus Conspiracy*. Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2006. Nelson, Phillip F. *LBJ: The Mastermind of JFK’s Assassination*. Xlibris: 2010.