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Life after John F. Kennedy: The Rhetorical Creation of Jackie Kennedy's Cultural Authority in the Camelot Myth

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Life after John F. Kennedy: The Rhetorical Creation of Jackie Kennedy’s Cultural Authority in the Camelot Myth

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Life after John F. Kennedy: The Rhetorical Creation of Jackie Kennedy’s Cultural Authority in the Camelot Myth

By

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Submitted to the Department of Communication Arts and Theatre in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the Degree of Bachelor of Arts

I hereby recognize and pledge to fulfill my responsibilities, as defined in the Honor Code, and to maintain the integrity of both myself and the College as a whole.

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Introduction

The Kennedy family has been seen as the first and only ‘royal’ First Family to ever grace the Oval Office. John F. Kennedy and his wife Jackie Kennedy brought a certain type of elegance that enhanced the way the White House was viewed by the public. The American people loved the Kennedy’s in a way that no other presidential family had been admired. For example, even when Kennedy arrived to campaign in a politically divided Texas, “the small number of protesters were far outnumbered by the enthusiastic yells and cheers of supporters who had come to catch a glimpse of America’s royal couple” (Blaine 170). The memory of this particular family has been held in high esteem since John’ F. Kennedys run for the Democratic nominee in the late 1950’s. There were several aspects that aided Kennedy’s image in quest for the White House. Two of his own published and critically acclaimed literary works along with a moving piece on his heroism at war allowed the stepping stones for Kennedy to create an image of himself in his favor. The name ‘Kennedy’ was a well-known name that served JFK and the family well for years to come prior to his attempt for president. John F. Kennedy possessed a certain type of ease when it came to winning over the public’s opinion of him and used that to propel himself to the highest office in the nation.

Both John F. Kennedy and Jackie Kennedy Onassis have been treated well by history considering they each had done controversial things before and during their time in office. This myth became all-encompassing that it overlooked these transgressions for not just JFK but for Jackie Kennedy too.

“The President’s widow, too, is remembered within the framework of the Camelot myth that she promoted days after her husband’s assassination. A 1993 Chicago Sun Times
article entitled ‘Onassis Remains a ‘Royal’ Figure for Americans’ succinctly captured how popular culture regularly portrayed the former First Lady” (Brigance 6). This statement by author Linda Czuba Brigance displays simply how powerful this myth is how it is able to withstand any seemingly detrimental controversies.

It is with this ease and charisma that the thirty-fifth President of the United States caught my attention. There is an apparent dissonance between this idealized perfect president America adoringly remembers and a different man that occupies that title. It is remarkable that President John F. Kennedy holds a high approval rating posthumously that does not compare to the work done in those 1,000 days in office that were cut short. Kennedy is seen as leading the way for the Civil Rights Movement, however he failed to make any major changes that would actually assist African Americans in their quest for equal rights. Kennedy is seen as the man who stopped the world from engaging in a missile crisis, yet he failed to tell the world how he really solved the event. Thinking this over, how is it possible that a man whose secrets were discovered after his assassination is still able to maintain a near perfect image. I chose to look at the Kennedy image to gain an understanding of how and why his image sustains high popularity considering every wrongdoing he committed before and during his time serving in the office. After learning about Jackie Kennedy’s role in the creation of the Camelot myth, my interest peaked wondering how the nation remembers what one person said versus what multiple scholars and critics have claimed.

A project involving any aspect of the Kennedy family has many areas of interest that it could look at; however this project will be looking at Jackie Kennedy’s creation of her cultural authority which then allowed her to create the myth of Camelot. Furthermore, this project will seek to understand the importance of the reiteration of the myth along with Jackie Kennedy’s
image in magazine articles after 30 years have passed and how they reaffirm her cultural authority. It is important to look at this specific aspect of Jackie Kennedy to understand how a person with cultural authority can construe the public’s perception of who a person really is; especially is that person occupies arguably the most important role for America.

My project that focuses on the rhetorical creation of Camelot and the creation of Jackie Kennedy’s cultural authority is significant to the field of communication because it is important to understand how images can play a persuasive role in remembering positive attributes while forgetting negative ones. One of the main concepts I will be discussing in my project will be narrative storytelling and how Jackie Kennedy used this concept in order to protect and preserve her husband’s positive image for the American people throughout the ages. It is thus important to recognize how specific people create their cultural authority and how that authority thus shapes our understanding of specific events.

My first chapter will discuss previous literature written by scholars examining the connection between John F. Kennedy, Jackie Kennedy, and the Camelot myth. First, this chapter will be examining how scholars discussed the groundwork laid by John F. Kennedy and his family to create an image that captured the nation. Then this chapter will look at how this image, with the help of technological advances helped secure his place in society while overlooking his discrepancies during his time in office. Finally, this chapter discusses scholars’ views of the importance of John F. Kennedy’s image and explaining the impact Jackie Kennedy’s interview in Life magazine had. Scholars believe the interview was used to cover up reports stating Kennedy was not the man the public believed him to be.

In addition, I will be using concepts from Barbra Zelizer in discussing Jackie Kennedy’s creation of her own cultural authority. While existing scholarship looks at the impact of the
Camelot myth, or Jackie’s role in its creation, none have looked at the rhetorical devices she used to assert her cultural authority in creating her husband’s final image. Using concepts of cultural authority, narrative storytelling, “being the first” and “being the only”, and finally collective memory, I will show how Jackie not only created her husband’s final image, but, how she created her own image which then allowed her to the narrator of her husband’s legacy.

In my second chapter, I will discuss the creation of John F. Kennedy’s image. I will be starting with his time serving in the Navy, moving on to his pre-presidential image, and finally his image in the White House. The chapter will also discuss how that image had an immense impact on the lives of the American public. Furthermore I will be discussing the side of Kennedy the family tried to obscure because it would damage any preexisting notions the people had for their president. Finally, this chapter will close by discussing the role in which Jackie Kennedy attempted (and as most would say succeeded) to conceal the negative images of her husband that were surfacing after his death. A week after the assassination, Jackie Kennedy made a legacy for her deceased husband in order to outshine any negative remarks that could damage his image without him being there to defend it.

My third and final chapter will first analyze the way Jackie Kennedy chooses specific stories from her history with John F. Kennedy to imply how their characteristics matched those of Camelot. Then I will discuss how her image had then given her the authority to create the myth in the first place. Next, I will be looking at magazine memorials after Jackie Kennedy’s death and interpreting how these issues reaffirmed her status as ultimate storyteller of her husband’s image. My texts will consist of first and foremost the interview Jackie Kennedy gave to author Theodore White in Life magazine. This interview was the beginning of an everlasting image for the Kennedy family. The importance of this instance cannot be looked at without
having an understanding of the motivation for its creation. Then I will be looking at memorial editions from Time magazine and Newsweek and how their reiteration of parts of the original story served to reinforce Jackie Kennedy’s original image from Life magazine and therefore reaffirming her cultural authority once again.
Chapter One: Literature Review and Concepts

Literature Review

This chapter will be looking at previous literature written by scholars that discuss aspects of John F. Kennedy, his wife Jackie Kennedy, and the myth of Camelot. Specifically, this chapter will cover what scholars are saying when examining John F. Kennedy and the obsession of his image and how his image would lay out the groundwork for the creation of Camelot. Next, this chapter will explore scholarship on Jackie Kennedy, the creator of the myth. The scholarship on Jackie entails looking at her not only as a person, but also seeing her as a symbol for what she stood for during her years as First Lady. Finally, this chapter will be reviewing scholarship surrounding the Camelot myth to explain how the myth has been looked at previous to this project. The ending of this chapter will define four concepts, cultural authority, narrative storytelling, “being the first” and “being the only”, and collective memory that will be used to analyze how Jackie Kennedy created her image and cultural authority to protect and preserve John F. Kennedy’s image after his death.

There is a vast amount of literature discussing multiple aspects of President John F. Kennedy during any stage of his life. Scholars’ literature has covered themes such as his political life, his personal life, and the assassination. This review will be focusing on two main themes, the image of John F. Kennedy and the role in which Jackie Kennedy played in the creation of the Camelot myth. Although there has been scholarship examining the Camelot myth and how previous groundwork for this myth was laid by Kennedy’s creation of his image, there has not been much written on the rhetorical construction and mass circulation of the myth. Therefore this review will also examine the implications these two themes have on one another that created the final result: Camelot.
Scholars agree that the creation of John F. Kennedy’s image was compiled from multiple occasions over time that allowed him to become the beloved public figure that he did. Brown (1988) explains why the deliberate use of the word image, in the case of JFK is important to understand. Brown states that an ‘image’ is created for a purpose of mass consumption (5) which is exactly what Kennedy used it for Hellmann (1997), Brown (1988), and White (2013) argue that Kennedy understood the implications his image served to the public and therefore made calculating moves in order to maintain his positive image with the people. White (2013) states “Kennedy was obsessed with how the press reported on him, spending a sizable chunk of every day devouring the major newspapers” (238). Scholarship pertaining to Kennedy’s image comes from looking at how his image was created and what purpose it served in the overall scheme of who he was. This information stems from academic disciplines that look at the effects of image and how it serves a larger purpose. This scholarship showcases that Kennedy was well aware of how his image portrayed to the public and the importance for ensuring its level of positivity.

One important aspect of Kennedy’s image before and during his presidency is, as White (2013) and Hellmann (1997) state, the idea of heroism in crisis. There are three particularly times when scholars outline Kennedy’s heroism in crisis. First, scholars claim that this trope began on his return from the military where he saved his crew members after their PT-109 naval boat was destroyed. This event specifically would follow Kennedy throughout his entire career and help elevate his status to help him gain the presidency. The second time this trope is observed was when Kennedy addressed the American people during the Cuban Missile Crisis. During this event, Kennedy addressed the American public informing them of growing tensions between the U.S. and Russia. In the end, Kennedy’s status as a hero was reaffirmed when he managed to avoid nuclear conflict. Finally, scholars discuss the time in which Kennedy stood up for the Civil
Rights Movement addressing that change needed to be made. When Kennedy again addressed
the nation on this topic, he was seen as a hero for the African American community urging white
Americans to help aid the fight. These instances were crucial in maintaining the tough positive
image Kennedy made for the American people. Hellmann (1997) agrees with the use of this
trope when he asserts, “The popular hero known as John F. Kennedy was a product, an image
designed to both express and elicit desire. The object was constructed through a series of hero
tales that, told and retold, produced a politician as the hero of an unfolding mythology” (ix). As
shown by scholars, being the hero in crisis situations allowed Kennedy to create a persona for
him to assist the way people viewed him as their ‘hero’.

Scholars also argue that the technological advances of television also played a major role
in elevating the president’s status with the American people. Brown (1988) states, “JFK’s
candidacies for the Democratic presidential nomination and the presidency were largely
successful because of his masterful use of television… Kennedy himself declared… ‘We
couldn’t survive without TV’” (70). One instance that is highlighted in multiple forms of
literature is the presidential debates between then-Senator Kennedy and Vice President Richard
Kennedy projected an image of a candidate who was cool and collected, yet energetic and
dynamic” (126). White agrees with these assertions saying that on television, Nixon was no
match to Kennedy’s more attractive, more impressive image he gave off. Television was an
important aspect to Kennedy’s public image.

Although scholars describe Kennedy’s dedication to his image, they also argue that the
image was created in order to obscure who the real John F. Kennedy was. White (2013) states
“Of course Kennedy’s image was inevitably an inaccurate reflection of him – a simplification of
his attributes. The question is whether the divide between the reality and the image of the man was narrow or great” (244). Berry (1987) and Brown (1988) agree with this statement when Brown mentions that there was a “disturbing disparity between the private reality and public appearance of the JFK image” (96). These arguments conclude that there were two different John F. Kennedy’s, one he created for the public to adore, and the one with questionable morals.

Moreover, existing literature examining the creation of the myth of Camelot by Jackie Kennedy looks at some of the reasoning behind its inception. Hellmann (1997), White (2013), Brown (1988), and Blaine (2010) agree that the reason Jackie Kennedy gave the interview for Life magazine was in order to have her husband’s image remain intact despite her knowing his misdoings. Blaine (2010) states, “…Mrs. Kennedy now seemed obsessed with how her husband would be remembered in history. Journalists were already chronicling his accomplishments, along with his failings, and Jackie realized that it was important for her to tell her husband’s story, the way she wanted it to be told…” (304). Brigance (2003) agrees with this statement by discussing how rapidly the public accepted the myth even though there were discrepancies between Kennedy and his image. This literature is important to acknowledge showing how even after his death, the image of John F. Kennedy was still being manipulated.

Berry (1987) attests that the Kennedy family was strictly adamant on reviewing material that went out to the public both before and after the assassination of the late President Kennedy for fear of him being seen in a bad light. “Since he had befriended or impressed so many correspondents, Kennedy often had control over how reports were written (140). White (2013) agrees with Kennedy’s handling and oftentimes manipulation of the press stating “Journalists were not naïve about how Kennedy was attempting to influence media coverage, and some accused him of press management…” (238). After his death, scholars argue that the grip on
information being published about Kennedy grew tighter. When giving the interview about the assassination and her husband’s time in office, Jackie Kennedy wanted to make very clear that she was in charge of what was to be seen as John’s last image. White (2013) writes, “Historian Stephen Ambrose said of that Jackie Kennedy interview with White that ‘She certainly wanted to take control of history, and in many ways she managed to do so’” (239). This hold the Kennedy family had on history also extends to outside writers writing about their interactions Kennedy. According to White (2013) members of the family would demand to approve the work before publication, editing out any less than flattering interactions of the late president. One event even caused the Kennedy family to go to court to stop the publication from proceeding. (White 2013) Scholarship shows that protecting the everlasting positive image of President Kennedy has been a top priority of the family before and after the assassination.

Scholarship on Jackie looks at the bigger picture of the symbol she represented during her White House years. Scholars Natalie and Beasley’s work focuses on first ladies rhetoric and women’s portrayal and participation in journalism respectfully. The scholarship by Natalie (2004) and Maurine Beasley (2005) showcase the ways that Jackie Kennedy not only was the First Lady to JFK, but she was embodied as a symbol through her actions and what those actions represented to the larger public. Natalie and Beasley argue that there were several moments that created the figure of Jackie Kennedy and those moments are as Natalie (2004) states “fashion as persuasion, the White House restoration project, White House entertainment, the orchestration of President Kennedy’s funeral, and interpersonal diplomacy”. Beasley agrees by discussing the ways Jackie Kennedy “was a rhetorical object, and her ability to heighten the ethos of the Kennedy administration through her personal presentation is unmatched by any other first lady” (Natalle 247). Both authors argue the importance of these factors in the creation of the myth of
Camelot. Had Jackie Kennedy not represented the elegance she had, “JFK’s place in history would not have been so secure” (Beasley 74). The way Jackie was seen by the public before the creation of the Camelot myth is an important factor to how the myth is played out and remembered.

The themes of Kennedy’s image and the myth of Camelot created by Jackie Kennedy examine the ways in which they are impressed upon society throughout multiple works of literature. “Like her husband, she knew the power of a few carefully selected words” (Hellmann 145). Scholars agree that both John F. Kennedy and Jackie Kennedy knew the importance of creating and maintaining a well-received image. These two themes are important for understanding how Kennedy’s image was viewed by the public in contrast to the actual man Kennedy was and how that theme works together with Jackie’s myth of Camelot. Other scholars such as Chomsky(1993), White (2013) and Brigance (2003) have looked at the myth of Camelot as being an essential part of the Kennedy mystique to distort and overinflate his image. “Myth is an essential and fundamental way to ‘explain the past, make sense of the present and give mission to a future’, understanding the myths we adopt can provide insight into the attitudes and behaviors these scholars have identified” (Brigance 8). Brigance (2003) and Chomsky (1993) examine the way the myth “provides a social order” (Brigance 5) that has lead the American people to think about JFK within the lens of the myth instead of in terms of how the myth was created and gained authority, over other controversial scholarship, in terms to cover up JFK’s misdoings. This project will be using the previous literature to cover the lack of examining how to comprehend the rhetorical construction and Jackie’s creation of cultural authority over JFK’s image in the creation of the Camelot myth.
Concepts

Barbara Zelizer in her book Covering the Body: The Kennedy Assassination, the Media, and the Shaping of Collective Memory uses the concepts of cultural authority, collective memory, and narrative storytelling to understand how journalists were seen as credible sources by the public to tell the unfolding events during President Kennedy’s assassination. Zelizer uses these concepts, in addition to many more in order to describe how journalists were able to establish cultural authority which then led them to shape the way the assassination was written for generations to come. The concept of narrative storytelling allowed journalists to reinforce their cultural authority and legitimize their stories in American memory. While Zelizer focuses on journalists and their role in the Kennedy assassination, in this project, these concepts will be applied to Jackie Kennedy and her role as a cultural authority figure in the Camelot myth.

Cultural Authority

Cultural authority is “a source of codified knowledge, guiding individuals in appropriate standards of action” (Zelizer 2). The use of this authority is to create communities of people who have a common interest in a specific event (Zelizer 2). Zelizer uses this concept and applies it to journalists during the events of John F. Kennedy’s assassination. Due to the speed of the unfolding events on November 22, 1963 the public relied heavily on journalists to convey what was happening in Dallas. With the lack of any other means for gathering information, journalists remained the storytellers of the assassination. Journalists were the ones to write this piece of history forcing Americans to understand the dynamics of the assassination through the lens of journalists.
Zelizer’s concept shows how the public awarded authority to journalists as trusted members of the press to deliver as much information as possible as soon as possible. This concept of cultural authority applies to Jackie Kennedy and her role in the Camelot myth with comparable reasoning to Zelizer’s. Jackie Kennedy created her cultural authority surrounding the legacy of her husband’s memory; she was seen as the one to shape and inform the public of who her husband was by the American people. The cultural authority created by Jackie Kennedy can be seen in the Life magazine article where she uses her knowledge and persuasion to make the American people remember her husband the way she wanted him to be remembered.

“Being the first” and “Being the only”

Jackie Kennedy’s cultural authority can also be reaffirmed in the concepts of “being the first” and “being the only”. Zelizer uses these concepts to describe the lengths journalists went to stand out from other journalists reporting the same information. There were several ways in which this could happen. Journalist could receive special notions if they fell under the categories of “being the first”, “being the only”, and finally, “being the best”; however only the first two will be applied to this project. In the concept of “being the first”, Zelizer describes that “these circumstances gave journalists the opportunity to implement a series of ‘first’ in covering the story. Authority was assumed to have derived from such coverage” (75). Zelizer uses this concept to describe the ways journalists would strategically beat out other journalists to have their news station be the first to announce any breaking news during the assassination. This concept will be attributed to Jackie Kennedy’s interview with Life magazine through understanding how she was the first one to make a personal comment to the public on the death of her husband. Additionally, this concept will apply to the ways Jackie Kennedy asserts herself
in rank of being first by attempting to overshadow anyone who had come out before her interview. Jackie Kennedy positions herself as the first person the American people think of when recollecting images of John F. Kennedy over anyone else who has spoken out about her deceased husband.

The other concept that will reinforce Jackie Kennedy’s cultural authority is the interview with Life magazine in what Zelizer terms “being the only”. Zelizer uses this concept to describe the ways in which journalists affirmed their status in the journalistic field by being the only one with breaking news. “Stories of ‘being the only’ celebrated the tales and practices of certain reporters and news organizations over others…. Nevertheless, the reporters who initially confirmed the report were accorded special stature” (Zelizer 83). Additionally, these stories are awarded the temporary status of ‘being the only’ because it is only a matter of time for another news source to produce the same information (Zelizer 83). However, the repetition of breaking news following the original story gives credence to the journalist who got the story out first (Zelizer 83). “Being the only” will apply to Jackie Kennedy’s interview because this was the only interview she gave to the press following her husband’s death. The myth of Camelot, created by Jackie Kennedy, is thus reaffirmed by the multiple articles that came after the release of this issue of Life.

**Narrative Storytelling**

An important aspect of Jackie Kennedy’s interview was the way she used the concept of narrative to tell the story of the time she spent with her husband before his untimely death to reinforce the Camelot myth. Zelizer explains that journalists used the concept of narrative in their stories as way for them to be seen as having the authority and right to tell the assassination
story. “The ability of journalist to establish themselves as authoritative spokesperson for the assassination story was predicted on their use of narrative in deliberate and strategic ways” (Zelizer 32). Zelizer argues that journalists used the concept of narrative to persuade the American public that the stories they were producing were legitimate and true. The concept of narrative applies to Theodore White and Jackie Kennedy due to the way she embeds her personal credentials as wife and mother, through his stylistic devices in the article. This combination therefore structures her as knowledgeable of who John F. Kennedy was as a person, to strengthen her stance as a cultural authoritative figure. Both White and Kennedy are key parts of the unfolding of the Camelot story because it is the combination of the stories, told by Jackie Kennedy, and the way they are told, by White, that reinforces their reasoning for being able to tell the story to begin with.

Collective Memory

The combination of these concepts effects the last concept that this project will use when analyzing Jackie Kennedy’s role in the creation of the Camelot myth; collective memory. Collective memory is “the vessel of codified knowledge across time and space, collective memory reflects a reshaping of the practices through which people construct themselves as cultural authorities” (Zelizer 4). Zelizer uses the connection between the concepts to explain how journalists became a specific group that emerged in the wake of the assassination based on their own agenda to shape the way the public viewed their authority in this event. The concept of collective memory will be applied to Jackie Kennedy in the memorial editions that were published after her death. These editions reuse parts of the original Life magazine article to reaffirm and remember the image Jackie and White had created. By reusing parts of the Life
magazine article, Jackie’s image and thus her cultural authority in the memorial editions confirm the original image and authority created by White. Additionally, it is important to look at the time periods her authority surfaces and resurfaces in connection to the Camelot myth.

Jackie Kennedy’s interview with Life magazine had a profound effect on the way the American people chose to remember who John F. Kennedy was as a person and as a president. The theories used by Barbara Zelizer will be used in this project to understand how Jackie Kennedy created her cultural authority through the concept of narrative storytelling to shape the collective memory of the American people.
Chapter Two: The Road to Camelot

Jacqueline Kennedy, also known as Jackie Kennedy, has been captured throughout history as the woman in the blood-stained pink suit with her infamous pillbox hat. Before the assassination, Jackie Kennedy had captured the hearts of the American people through her sense of fashion, glamour, and worldly knowledge among other things. A week after the assassination of her husband, the 35th President of the United States of America John Fitzgerald Kennedy, Jackie Kennedy set out to change the way the American people would forever remember her husband. In a historical interview with Theodore White, Jackie describes the events of the day leading up to the assassination. Throughout this interview, the readers not only gain an understanding of who John F. Kennedy was as a person through Jackie’s perspective, but they also received a glimpse of who Jackie Kennedy was as well.

This chapter will be looking at the history behind the creation of John F. Kennedy’s image before and during his time in office. However, the overall purpose of this chapter will be to examine how Jackie Kennedy used this groundwork laid by John F. Kennedy and his family to ingrain one final positive image of her husband after his death. After the assassination, reports began surfacing about the wrongdoings and moral questionings of John F. Kennedy during his presidency. Through Jackie Kennedy’s workings, this image, forever known as Camelot, is used as an attempt to overshadow any critics’ or historians’ negative reports about the downfalls of his presidency that began surfacing after his death. Finally, this chapter will discuss the several texts this project will use to analyze exactly how Jackie Kennedy was able to create and sustain her image and cultural authority that then allowed her to create the myth of Camelot.
Kennedy’s Image

The image of the thirty-fifth President of the United States, John Fitzgerald Kennedy was constructed very early in his life through his family’s name and wealth. The Kennedy family was a well-known family in the Massachusetts area because of John’s grandfather, John F. “Honey Fitz” Fitzgerald, the mayor of Boston and also by his father, Joseph P. Kennedy the former United States Ambassador to the United Kingdom (Hersh). John F. Kennedy would soon follow in their footsteps in politics starting as a Navy hero, moving onto a young Senator, and ending in the highest office of presidency. The public adored Kennedy throughout his days in office due to the production of a specific image he portrayed as the young, charismatic, family man. However after his death, there was a race against time to obtain all of the incriminating documents of President Kennedy and his questionable actions during his days in office (Hersh).

Kennedy’s image was further perpetuated through society upon his return from the service after his heroic act at sea. The character of John F. Kennedy that is well-known came about during his days in the navy, long before his days as a politician. One of the main narratives surrounding Kennedy as a presidential candidate was his heroic act when his PT 109 boat was destroyed in World War II (Hellmann 1997). In this incident, an injured Kennedy pulled one of his fellow men while swimming through shark infested waters to safety. When they returned to the United States, John Hersey wrote an article for The New Yorker describing the events that transpired after the crash. This article swept and inspired the nation, making Kennedy a hero. “Hersey’s ‘Survival’ produces John F. Kennedy as a hero, but not in the sense of a model person seen as performing great exploits; the hero of Hersey’s narrative is rather a youth who has enormous bravery and energy but who is transformed by chastening experience. More complexly, the production of Kennedy as hero begins in his transformation into the narrative
sense of that term, the protagonist or main character of the story with whom the reader is positioned to identify. As a true-life ‘character’ Kennedy then walks off the page into the text of a political production in the media age” (Hellmann 1997 61).

Hersey’s story helped create a young war hero that would eventually use this heroic tale to elevate his status even higher. In order to circulate publicity for the published article, Kennedy’s father bought many copies to catch the attention of the public. The overall effect would allow the young Kennedy to be a recognizable name in the Senate which would help him in the future when he would run for a seat. “Hersey’s article would continue to be essential as Kennedy and his collaborators developed his image on the journey toward the White House” (Hellmann 37). After returning from the Navy and the tragic death of his older brother, Kennedy would ultimately seek a position in the Senate to fulfill his father’s dreams of a son in politics. This heroic tale would help create an ethos for Kennedy that would win him a seat in the Senate from 1952 until he ran in the presidential election in 1960.

After serving eight years in the Senate, Kennedy began his race in seeking the Democratic nomination for the 1960 presidential election. The young Senator from Massachusetts found himself up against Republican nominee former Vice President Richard Nixon. Judith Trent, Robert V. Friedenberg, and Robert E. Denton Jr. believe that the technological advances of television were one of the main reasons Kennedy won the presidency over Nixon. “…When television was first used during the 1952 primary campaigns, it contributed to the growth of public interest” (1997 51). With the growth of public interest, and the amount of homes now possessing a television, Kennedy was able to capture the hearts of the public with his charisma in ways that other politicians before him could not. This helped enable him to secure his victory for president.
Kennedy possessed a certain charm and charisma that portrayed well through television whereas Nixon had the opposite effect. After watching Nixon’s performance, many people saw him as an untrustworthy, ‘shifty’ man; qualities not fitted to be president (Kallina Jr.). After the debates, those who watched on the television believed Kennedy to be the winner but those who listened to the debates on the radio believed Nixon to be the winner. That November, Kennedy won the presidency by one of the smallest margins in history, approximately 118,000 votes. The image Kennedy created and portrayed on television helped him win over the public and win over the White House.

Once in the White House, President Kennedy was well aware of how his image played into him obtaining and maintaining this position of presidency. “Kennedy carefully controlled the production of photographs to ensure that he was always presented as the character he had chosen to play” (Hellmann 132). Kennedy ensured that he was never seen photographed in an unflattering setting or seen doing anything other than presidential or family business. These images were used to construct him and his family as the “All-American” family which helped maintain his popular image. Kennedy was very protective of his image and the image of his family members. “Jackie pulled out her sunglasses from her small handbag and put them on. The president looked at her and shook her head. “Jackie, take those off,” the president said, slightly irritated. “The people have come to see you” (Hellmann 202). He always wanted to appear to be reachable to his adoring people. In this instance when Jackie put on her glasses, John did not want her to appear to be above those who came out to see them. John F. Kennedy’s image was immensely important to him and maintaining a high popularity with the American public meant that he would go to any lengths to seem as personable as possible. These lengths would serve him well after his assassination with the help of his widow, Jackie Kennedy.
The Fateful Day: November 22, 1963

Starting out as a normal day, November 22, 1963 turned into one that would be remembered throughout the ages. While campaigning in Dallas Texas for the 1964 presidential election, President Kennedy along with his wife Jackie, governor of Texas John Connally, and his wife were riding along in a motorcade when two shots were fired fatally hitting the president. Less than an hour later, at one o’clock in the afternoon central time zone, President Kennedy was pronounced dead after being hit by two bullets, one entering through the shoulder and exiting through the throat and the fatal shot to the head. The world was in shock and awe at the fact that they not could watch the events unfold from video footage with the technological advances of television, but they also witnessed the murder of their president. This profound traumatic moment would leave a scar on the American people for decades to come. With the creation of his image, there was also a creation of a special bond between the president and his people.

“Kennedy had made skillful use of the media of mass communication to promote the appearance of intimacy between himself and the public, and his death was felt as a personal loss by millions of Americans…” (Brown 3). This loss affected the American public in a way as if they knew the president personally and openly mourned the loss of their Commander-in-Chief.

A study done by Bradburn and Feldman discuss public apathy and grief after the assassination. The purpose of this study was for two reasons: “to specify the exact nature of the response to the assassination- what it was and particularly, what it was not...” and secondly “examine the differences in the reactions of several groups in order to find out which parts of the population reacted the most intensely” (275). The population for this study consisted of approximately 200 white suburban Americans in Washington D.C. and approximately 200 suburban African Americans in the Detroit area (275). The study concluded that those
demographics that are seen as more apathetic- African Americans, women, less educated white Americans- showed a deeper reaction to the assassination than other demographics. However, looking on a national scale, one of the sections that was measured was labeled “Felt the loss of someone very close and dear” and 61% of the nation agreed to it (54% of the subjects from Washington and 57% of the subjects from Detroit agreed with this statement as well). This study shows that over half of Americans felt as if they had personally lost someone during the assassination of JFK.

After the assassination there were many reports and conspiracy theories surrounding the tragic events of November 22, 1963. Some of these reports discussed the things Kennedy handled well while in office, while also discussing the potentially harmful things he did. On one hand, “after the assassination there was a collective desire to remember JFK well- to see him as a principled president…” (White 2013). People wanted to remember the Commander-in-Chief well after his death; however, some people were looking at a more realistic view of JFK’s presidency. “The magical aspect of the New Frontier was located, by contrast, in its style and sophisticated attitude rather than in its concrete achievements” (Piersen 2013). While some members of the public were split on how to view their fallen leader, most wanted to remember him as a martyr for everything his image stood for. The American people were distraught and confused with the loss of their president and with the surfacing of conflicting messages they did not know how to handle this information. With all of these reports surfacing, Jackie took her husband’s legacy and was determined to have him remembered the way she believed he deserved to be.

“After the incredible outpouring of emotion from around the world, Mrs. Kennedy now seemed obsessed with how her husband would be remembered in history. Journalists
were already chronicling his accomplishments, along with his failings, in an effort to condense his life into the space available in a few column inches, and Jackie realized that it was important for her to tell her husband’s story, the way she wanted it to be told…” (Blaine).

Jackie Kennedy wanted her husband’s legacy to be remembered by the public with a positive ending and therefore created the myth of Camelot. With the myth in place, “Kennedy was symbolically elevated into the pantheon of life-affirming heroes cut down by life-defying forces of darkness…” (Brown 41). The myth created by Jackie helped her husband’s image in a way that nothing else could. Jackie wanted to ensure that any negative reports of her husband would be met and overshadowed by the positive image that became known as Camelot.

*The Hidden Person in John F. Kennedy*

Just like any other American family, the Kennedy’s had their secrets, except theirs proved more difficult to keep due to their elevated societal status. Some of the controversial topics of Kennedy’s wrongdoings include the 1960 presidential election, his health, and his extramarital affairs. The real man known as John F. Kennedy and his secrets only came to be known after his death when reports surfaced explaining and detailing problematic interactions with the then-president. The image of the wholesome family man Kennedy constructed for the population started to crumble. With the help and dedication of Jackie Kennedy, John F. Kennedy was able to uphold a positive image even with all of his misdoings while in office.

Many of the misconducts done by President Kennedy can be found documented by author and award winning investigative reporter Seymour Hersh in his book *The Dark Side of Camelot*. Some of the topics covered in this book are the illegal activity conducted by John F.
Kennedy and Joseph P. Kennedy during the election for the Democratic nomination and eventually the presidential election. Moreover, Hersh discusses Kennedy’s health as a concern that began in his childhood that he would have to endure and overcome for the rest of his life. Finally, Kennedy’s drug use was a common concern stemming from his health issues to other paraphernalia due to the time period of the 1960s. All of these threats to Kennedy’s image began surfacing after his death that could have proved fatal to the image he created if it was not for the help of Jackie Kennedy and her myth of Camelot after the assassination.

West Virginia was the prominent state Hersh focuses on to describe the rigged election during the primaries against Hubert Humphrey. “West Virginia thus became the ultimate battleground for the Democratic nomination, and the Kennedys threw every family member and prominent friend they had, and many dollars, at defeating Humphrey” (Hersh 1997 95). The Kennedy family and company was determined to have John elected as president by any means necessary and if that resulted in bribery, the family would easily comply. With the close polling numbers for the Democratic nominee, Kennedy had to ensure his victory in the state of West Virginia to clinch the nomination from Senator Hubert Humphrey to continue his pursuit for presidency. After a shocking victory in the West Virginia primaries, Senator Humphrey withdrew his bid for president leaving Kennedy the unlikely victor and allowing him to continue his path to the White House.

Results of the 1960 presidential election were also highly contested because of a narrow victory for President Kennedy over former Vice President Richard Nixon. Kennedy had managed to overtake Nixon by approximately 118,000 votes out of 68 million (Hersh 132). Further evidence has shown that the election was rigged in Kennedy’s favor by the help of mafia members close to the Kennedy family. “Joseph Kennedy and [Sam] Giancana had reached an
extraordinary understanding months earlier about Mafia help in the 1960 presidential election” (Hersh 300). Kennedy could not have mustered enough votes to win the election himself and therefore needed all the help he could get from the members of organized crime.

Kennedy’s health was also a cause for concern that was hidden from the American people for decades. Ever since he was a child, Kennedy spent most of his time in the hospital reading; where he found his love for British literature and history books (Hellman 12). These genres of books influenced the way in which Kennedy approached his lifestyle and political beliefs. As he aged, the illnesses stuck with him. “At least half of the days he spent on this earth were days of intense physical pain. He had scarlet fever when he was very young, and serious back trouble when he was older” (Kennedy 9). In the 1940’s, he was diagnosed with Addison’s disease which left his immune system defenseless. He would have to receive cortisol shots for the rest of his life in order to boost his immune system to an acceptable level.

One of the other main health ailments was his back. During the 1950’s he had to have two back surgeries where one almost proved fatal due to his strained immune system from Addison’s disease. This diagnosis of Addison’s disease was especially detrimental for Kennedy during these surgeries because he was almost unable to fight off any of the infections that he obtained. Moreover, “in 1951…he became ill. We flew to the military hospital in Okinawa and he had a temperature of over 106 degrees. They didn’t think he would live” (Kennedy 10).

Despite having to hide all of these ailments, Kennedy projected the picture of health, “Those who knew him well would know he was suffering only because his face was a little whiter, the lines around his eyes were a little deeper, his words a little sharper. Those who did not know him well detected nothing” (Kennedy 10.) The American people were unaware of the vast illnesses that plagued President Kennedy and therefore believed he was perfectly healthy.
The extramarital affairs were highly problematic for President Kennedy for several reasons. Not only did it put his health at risk, but at times he put the nation’s security at risk. “The sheer number of Kennedy’s sexual partners, and the recklessness of his use of them, escalated throughout his presidency…. The women…would be brought to Kennedy’s office or his private quarters without any prior Secret Service knowledge or clearance” (Hersh 10 1997). “Jack Kennedy’s womanizing had repeatedly put his career at risk. But until now the potential loss has always been his. The affair with Exner posed a much broader danger: to the well-being of the nation’s security” (Hersh 317). One of the women he is believed to have had an affair with was believed to be a spy with possible connections to East Germany. During this time when the Berlin Wall was still standing, a breach of confidentially could have been proven to be unimaginable for the American people as well as those seeking refuge from the Communist ruling.

*The Effects of Camelot*

Camelot and its mythical connotations that came with it were used in order to cover up some of President Kennedy’s qualities that were not as positive as would be expected for a man of his status. One week after the assassination, John F. Kennedy’s wife, Jackie Kennedy gave an interview to Theodore White from Life magazine about her husband and her husband’s time in office. In this interview, Jackie equated her husband’s time spent in office to the mythical kingdom of Camelot via the musical version focusing on song lyrics. In this article she said: “after the assassination, something kept repeating itself in her mind, over and over like a broken record, a line from a song in Camelot, a musical comedy then playing on Broadway. Jack had loved the musical about the Knights of the Round Table, and in the theme song he particularly
liked the line at the end that went: Don’t let it be forgot, that once there was a spot, for one brief shining moment that was known as Camelot. She wanted to make sure that the point was clear to the writer, so she added, ‘There’ll be great presidents again- and the Johnsons are wonderful, they’ve been wonderful to me- but there’ll never be another Camelot again’” (305).

This interview then helped the American people come to terms over the loss of their Commander-in-Chief. It also allowed Kennedy’s memory as president to remain positive to all of those that either supported him or even opposed him. There was also a hidden motivation for Jackie’s actions in creating this myth. When John F. Kennedy was assassinated, there were reports coming out that were threatening the image Kennedy had fought so hard to create. She used this myth as a constant reminder that there will never be another great presidency such as her husband’s.

John F. Kennedy may have done many wrong things in his lifetime and as president, but creating and continuing his image the way Jackie did may have been one of the greatest things she could have done. Even with the negative events of Kennedy’s life that began surfacing after his assassination, the image of a charming, youthful president has been held in high esteem ever since because of the work Jackie had done in the Life magazine article.

“In the decades following his death, historians have ranked Kennedy as a president only somewhat above average. Yet Kennedy was enormously popular during his time in office, and that popularity has grown with each succeeding president who has tried to supplant him in the national consciousness….“ (Hellmann 1997 131).

Despite all of his wrongdoings as president, John F. Kennedy’s memory has been able to live on in a positive light due to the rhetorical myth created by his wife Jackie. The image that was created before the assassination and all of the misconducts during his presidency were necessary
for Jackie to make a stance to solidify in the hearts of Americans that they truly lost a hero before his time.

Life with Jackie Kennedy: Texts

This project’s main text will be the interview in Life magazine given by Jackie Kennedy one week after the assassination of her husband. The article will be used to understand and analyze how Jackie Kennedy created her cultural authority to be able to tell her husband’s legacy the way she believed it should be told. When Jackie Kennedy took it upon herself to create her husband’s legacy, she wrote history in a way that attempted to cover up all John F. Kennedy’s negatives in hopes of leaving her husband in a favorable light. Additionally, this project will look at several other articles from memorial editions of Newsweek and Time Magazine that discussed the Camelot myth. These texts are going to be used to show how Jackie Kennedy’s cultural authority still continues to reinforce the myth she had created decades later. The combination of the Life magazine interview with the mentions of Camelot years later in Newsweek, and Time Magazine will give a better understanding how and why Jackie felt the need to create authority over other sources to impact the way the nation viewed their fallen president. These specific texts are significant to review because they discuss and reprint specific aspects from the original Life magazine that confirm Jackie Kennedy’s place as storyteller in the Camelot myth. The timing of the release of these issues coincides with the timing of Jackie Kennedy’s death, a time when the American people felt they lost their final connection to a time period of elegance. There have been other magazines and media outlets that have reprinted parts of the White article; however to keep the purpose of this review confined while also showcasing the importance of the retellings I narrowed my texts to two sources. Both of these outlets have a
subscriber base that would be able to reach most of the country. That is therefore important because it will show how Jackie’s cultural authority has been reaffirmed for the American population.
Chapter 3: The Creation of Jackie Kennedy’s Authority

John F. Kennedy served at the 35th President of the United States from 1961-1963, spending approximately 1,000 in office. During his time in the Oval Office, he was able to capture the hearts and admiration of the American people through his good looks, quick wit, and charming personality. Even more so, the people fell in love with the image he portrayed to the country. The creation of this image led to a ‘parasocial’ relationship, which is a one directional relationship, where the nation felt personally connected to the president (Brown 3). This ‘parasocial’ relationship followed Kennedy to his death with the clear upset from the country on how to move on without him (Brown 3). Despite many of the major setbacks and questionable actions made by Kennedy, he was able to maintain his popular status among the people. Before his death, John F. Kennedy made major cognizant efforts, especially with the media to preserve his place in America’s heart.

One fateful day in Dallas changed the course of history. On November 22, 1963 John F. Kennedy was shot and killed on a re-election campaign trip through Dallas. The world was heartbroken and looking for ways to cope with the loss of their Commander-in-Chief. In efforts to help America handle the loss they took so personally and conflicting reports that contradicted his image, Jackie Kennedy gave the nation a way to remember JFK and the way they felt during the time of his presidency. In an interview given to Life magazine a week after the assassination of her husband, Jackie Kennedy spoke of the way her husband affected the American people. Creating the myth of Camelot gave Americans a name they could use to refer to the feeling her husband’s administration gave to them. The construction of the Camelot myth brought back the images and feelings of hope and change the Kennedy administration gave the nation. In the myth of Camelot, she solely created a way to ensure her husband’s place in history remained a positive
one. What was discussed in this interview, and the way it was discussed, gave Jackie Kennedy the cultural authority to shape the country’s perception and lasting memory of John F. Kennedy.

This chapter will use the concepts and background information from the previous chapters to analyze the ways in which Jackie Kennedy obtained cultural authority through her first interview in Life magazine. Her use of multiple rhetorical devices enabled her to solidify her authority as storyteller. Additionally this project will be looking at how her authority is reaffirmed in the reprints and mentioning of the myth in different magazines. The main focus of this analysis will be the interview Jackie Kennedy gave to Life magazine that was published on December 3rd 1963. To show how this myth has remained prevalent to U.S. politics and culture, other magazine articles from different time periods will be viewed and how they continue to reinforce the main myth created by Jackie Kennedy in 1963.

*Jackie Kennedy and Cultural Authority*

In the midst of the confusion due to the fast pace of the assassination weekend, the country was unsure of who to look to for answers on how to cope with the events. There were going to be multiple sources coming forward discussing JFK’s best qualities but there were also going to be sources coming forward scrutinizing every detail essentially showing the worst in him. Since maintaining a positive image was an important aspect to both John and Jackie Kennedy, Jackie came forward and grabbed the attention of the population through her Life interview. By doing so, she was had created her cultural authority in order to direct the American public how to feel during this uncertain time. Cultural authority is “a source of codified knowledge, guiding individuals in appropriate standards of action” (Zelizer 2). Zelizer means that cultural authority is a way in which the person with the authority influences an audience to
act or react to an event. Jackie created her cultural authority through many ways, one of them being through personalizing the situation. Jackie Kennedy used this intimate moment as well as many others as a way to reinforce her status as the authority of John F. Kennedy’s image.

_Narrative and Jackie Kennedy_

The narrative form can take on many aspects depending on how the storyteller wishes to direct their story. The three ways of telling a story to maintain cultural authority are synecdoche, omission, and personalization. For the interview, Jackie’s style tended to personalize the story to remind the public how close she was to John F. Kennedy were, therefore verifying her place to tell the story. These personal stories include the morning of the assassination, comparing the trip to Dallas to other campaigning trips they have taken together, along with several others, and finally ending with the story that created the myth; a moment they oftentimes shared in the bedroom listening to the record player. The interview discusses multiple moments during the day of the assassination through the memory and perspective of Jackie Kennedy to elicit emotions from the readers. “It is thus no surprise that narrators might use a broad range of narrative and stylistic devices to uphold their own status and prestige” (Zelizer 33). Jackie Kennedy crafts the interview to determine how she should be seen as the one who knows John F. Kennedy best; and that is through personal stories.

In the article, author Theodore White revisits moments before the assassination through Jackie’s perspective.

“Narrative brings these images together in meaningful ways, lending unity, temporal and spatial sequencing, and form. Narratives that persist today bear collective authority.
Equally important, they have lent stature to the people who inscribed them in collective consciousness” (Zelizer 5).

For example, White begins the interview with, “She remembers how hot the sun was in Dallas, and the crowds- greater and wilder than in Mexico or Vienna. The sun was blinding, streaming down; yet she could not put on sunglasses for she had to wave to the crowd” (White). In this instance, White has compared the trip Jackie was on to previous trips she had taken with John F. Kennedy to show how they had traveled together for political agendas before. With this previous knowledge she would have a sense of who he was during these events. Additionally, by using Jackie’s memory for comparing past events to the fateful campaign trip in Dallas, the reader is able to have an understanding that Jackie Kennedy knew what her husband stood for and why he believed in particular issues the way he did. Therefore, with this knowledge from previous campaign rallies and speeches, she would be able to speak on behalf of his character with accuracy. With stories arising after JFK’s death concerning how he handled some of the political events during his presidency, Jackie, who as the narrative states was by his side through most of it, would be able to assert her stance over those who were not there with him. Since she is reminding the public that she was with him on these trips, she was seen to have the power to deny or confirm anything other authors could say.

After the shooting, White transports the reader to a moment of Jackie in the hospital reminiscing of a peculiar moment earlier that day as she was getting off the plane in Dallas. “She remembers the roses. Three times that day in Texas they had greeted her with the bouquet of yellow roses of Texas. Only, in Dallas they had given her red roses. She remembers thinking, how funny- red roses for me; and then the car was full of blood and red roses” (White). Red roses are used to symbolize the love between two people and by paralleling the roses to the blood
in the car; the reader is reminded of the bond shared between Jackie and John F. Kennedy, and how that bond was ripped apart in just seconds. Jackie had loved, adored, and respected her husband to the moment he died, and now the site of his murder is where she shared her last loving memory with him. This moment is significant to Jackie’s cultural authority because in this article, she is trying to remove and cover up bad memories of JFK and replace them with happier ones. In this instance, she parallels the flowers to represent the good in JFK and the blood to represent the bad in him to show both sides of who JFK was. He had his good parts and his bad parts, but what Jackie Kennedy does is to try and leave them with an overall good impression.

The combination of the narrative given by Jackie Kennedy and the stylistic devices used by White are important for several reasons. The way White retells Jackie’s story implies that after the assassination, she was looking back at events of the day and should have realized something was out of place. This reflective way of thinking is used to prime the reader later on to think of Kennedy’s administration through its past. The Camelot myth was applied to Kennedy’s administration, after his death and now readers are supposed to use that same reflective thinking Jackie had used with the roses, for the connection between Kennedy and Camelot. Readers are now supposed to pick past events; typically positive ones; that stood out to them and fit them into the myth that Jackie had created.

*Jackie’s Roles*

White then brings the reader insight as to why Jackie would not leave her husband’s body after the shooting. In the hospital, Jackie Kennedy refused to change out of her blood-stained clothes, refused to take medication to dull her senses after the trauma she had just experienced, and
refused to leave her husband’s body for any reason. In the article, Jackie Kennedy recalls to White:

“All through the night they tried to separate him from her, to sedate her, and take care of her- and she would not let them. She wanted to be with him. She remembered that Jack had said of his father, when his father suffered a stroke, that he could not live like that. Don’t let that happen to me, he had said, when I have to go” (White).

The last two sentences of this quote written by White and given by Jackie exhibits another intimate moment between husband and wife. Only someone who has a relationship as close as one between a husband and wife would know how to react in a situation concerning life and death.

Additionally, this quote showcases one of JFK’s biggest fears of being seen as anything other than a healthy person. Joseph Kennedy, John’s father, could not completely rehabilitate to his once healthy lifestyle after the stroke. This instance reminded JFK of his often sickly childhood where he spent most of his time in a hospital. For the rest of his life, JFK produced a healthy image of himself in order to cover up for the shortcomings of his illnesses. When Jackie says the line, “he could not live like that” what she means is, he could not be remembered like that. When his time of death was to come, he did not want to leave the world suffering the same way he suffered when he came into the world. Through the myth of Camelot, Jackie ensure to have his final image to be one of strength, health, and vigor; a final cover up for his illnesses. Since reports were surfacing after his death about his health conditions that most of the public was unaware of, Jackie Kennedy’s work with the myth of Camelot would overshadow anything that appeared. Once again, Jackie Kennedy reveals an instant that could only be shared between
her and John F. Kennedy. In this moment, Jackie discloses her knowledge of how her husband wanted her to best handle the situation if he ever found himself on the cusp of death.

Retelling the moments when Jackie refused to leave John F. Kennedy after they arrived at the hospital showed to the readers her loyalty to him; until death did they part. At this point, Jackie Kennedy had sat next to and witnessed the murder of her husband being left with nothing but a blood splattered pink suit. During this time, she put being with her deceased husband over her own needs. This reminds the reader that despite any reports that might surface about the status of their marriage, Jackie Kennedy was with her husband through the worst of it and she would continue to be there for him no matter who tries to tear them apart. In this situation, the ‘them’ she is referring to is the doctors and Secret Service agents; however, metaphorically the ‘them’ she is speaking about is the media and reporters. If Jackie is willing to stay by John F. Kennedy’s side after having been treated the way she was, then the American people should stand by his side overlooking his wrongdoings. This moment reinforced Jackie Kennedy’s authority because she was willing to withstand her own emotions for the betterment of being with her husband. She stood by him for the worst of it and refused to let him suffer by himself and for that reason, the country should follow Jackie Kennedy’s lead and stand with their fallen president as well. During this recollection, Jackie is positioned as a loyal, loving wife which then works to establish why the story she created with White should be heard over others.

After retelling the events of the assassination through Jackie Kennedy’s perspective, White brings the readers to another intimate thought she has in the hospital after John F. Kennedy was pronounced dead. In this instant, Jackie Kennedy recalls the need to give something to her deceased husband for him to hold on to. Before stating what she actually left
her husband, both her and White remind the readers the personal loss that both Jackie and John F. Kennedy just encountered shortly before his assassination: the death of their son Patrick.

“Now in her hand she was holding a gold St. Christopher’s medal. She had given him a St. Christopher’s medal when they were married; but when Patrick died this summer, they had wanted to put something in the coffin with Patrick that was from them both; and so he had put in the St. Christopher’s medal. Then he asked her to give him a new one to mark their 10th wedding anniversary, a month after Patrick’s death. He was carrying it when he died and she found it” (White).

Through reminding the readers about suffering the death of their child together, Jackie is reminding the public that they survived one of the most tragic things that could happen to a couple; and they did it together. No one else understands the extent of the heartache Jackie and John F. Kennedy went through during those 48 hours their child remained alive all while knowing he was not going to survive. This story is used to remind readers the role Jackie Kennedy played as a mother. “Jackie considered her primary roles in the following order: mother, wife and public figure” (Natalle 245). In the retelling of this particular moment by White, Jackie’s cultural authority is once again reaffirmed as her position as protector and the intentions she has within that role since she already knows how to handle tragic events after the loss of their son.

Reminding the reader of the role Jackie Kennedy had played as mother was another significant aspect to shaping and creating her cultural authority. This reminder can be seen in the portion of the story where the emphasis is on the “gold St. Christopher’s medal” (White). St. Christopher is the saint of travelers and those who possess an artifact with Saint Christopher on it are supposed to be protected from any hardships they may encounter on their journey. As a
mother, one of the main characteristics brought to mind is the protective stance they take when it comes to their family. In this story, the sense of protectiveness could be seen when first discussing Patrick and ending with discussing John F. Kennedy. Jackie uses this protective stance to assert her cultural authority for telling the story of her husband’s legacy. She was trying to be protective of him before his assassination by giving him the St. Christopher’s medal, and now she was being protective of his image after his assassination by giving him the myth of Camelot.

What is also important is choosing this story over telling the story of the birth of their still-born child. Patrick’s death was only months before the assassination of John F. Kennedy and a month after their 10th wedding anniversary and would therefore conjure up the image of wife and mother that Jackie Kennedy had fought to keep private. The story of their still-born child happened far too early from the assassination for most Americans to remember and therefore the image of losing Patrick would be able to strike the hearts and sympathies of the people. White also retells this recollection in a specific way to prime the reader to remember the hardships Jackie and John F. Kennedy had suffered. With the death of Patrick, the public was reminded of the role of mother that Jackie had loved so much to inhabit. Now with the assassination, the nation was reminded that not only did Jackie lose children in her time together with John F. Kennedy, but she also had lost her husband, another person she was extremely close to.

The most important aspect in the interview is the creation of the Camelot myth by Jackie Kennedy because with the help from White, they together wrote how her husband would be remembered in history. This myth is what has been a constant connection to the Kennedy administration. Jackie Kennedy uses one of the most intimate details shared between a couple to
be the final reason as to why the American public should grant her cultural authority over the lasting memory of her husband over historians and critics: the bedroom.

“There was a thought, too, that was always with her…. ‘At night, before we’d go to sleep, Jack like to play some records; and the song he loved the most came at the very end of this record. The lines he loved to hear were: Don’t let it be forgot, that once there was a spot, for one brief shining moment that was known as Camelot” (White).

In this instant, Jackie shared with the public a moment that could only be shared with someone extremely close to the person. This is the final act Jackie Kennedy uses to assert her right to tell her husband’s memory because she is the only one who would know the most cherished details about him and therefore should be trusted to guide his place in history. There are specific words that Jackie Kennedy used in the interview to signify her close relationship to her deceased husband. To show this connection, she used the word “we’d” which emphasized the activities that they only did together. By showcasing that they have had close intimate moments together it reinforces Jackie Kennedy’s cultural authority to the public that JFK would only share some of his most cherished moments with only one other person: Jackie. The significance of the bedroom is important in telling the story of Camelot. Bedrooms are oftentimes seen as one of the most intimate places in the house shared between married couples. This intimacy is important to Jackie Kennedy’s cultural authority because it is used to emphasize the fact that there is absolutely no one else on the earth that knew John F. Kennedy the way Jackie did, and therefore she should be the one to tell his story through her knowledge and experiences with him.

Additionally, Jackie Kennedy becomes more specific in naming the things she knew he loved to do before going to bed. She starts out on a broad level knowing which record he loved to play the most. Then she moves more specifically, knowing which song he loved the most and
where it was in the lineup on the record. Finally, she solidifies her intricate knowledge of her husband by naming the specific line he loved to quote. This narrowing of specifics of his nighttime activity before bed shows the closeness of the couple; it represents certain knowledge that only one person would know, and in this case that person is Jackie. While many people could have known what his favorite record was or even his favorite song on that record was, Jackie Kennedy made a point to show the readers that she could pinpoint the exact lines he loved to listen to. Narrowing down her husband’s favorite record lyrics revealed that only someone immensely close to him could know his true intentions and therefore should be rewarded with telling his story after his death.

All of the stories leading up to Jackie’s creation of the Camelot myth showcased the bond between her and John F. Kennedy and everything she was willing to sacrifice and do for her husband. This is where she sets herself up to create her authority before creating Camelot. The last thing she was going to do for him was to leave him with a legacy that would be remembered throughout time. She exhibits that she has been with him through his death and is not about to leave him when the reports begin to turn away from John F. Kennedy’s favor.

The final effort Jackie Kennedy and Theodore White make in order to take attention away from other potential cultural authorities is at the end of the interview. The ending that will be remembered for decades after its creation was done by reminding the American people that it is time to put the past behind them and to look forward to the future. “She said it is time people paid attention to the new President and new First Lady. But she does not want them to forget John F. Kennedy or read of him only in dusty or bitter histories: For one brief shining moment there was Camelot” (White). However when Jackie shifts the focus to the future, she does this to overlook the reports that are showing the negative side of her husband and attempts
to have the public remember the good. She does not want her deceased husband to be remembered by the questionable actions he made while alive, instead she wants him to be remembered the way she believes he should be remembered, as king of Camelot. She attempts to shift the focus away from any surfacing reports to the new First Family in hopes of maintaining a positive image of her husband. Now that Jackie has established her cultural authority of being the only person to create the legend of her husband through all of her stories, she pushes the readers to use this information to listen to her and only to her. The readers are left with the final connection of remembering that Kennedy’s time in office was “one brief shining moment” that should not be forgot because there will never be another one like it.

Collectively Remembering Guinevere

Jackie Kennedy and Theodore White used her stories as what Zelizer describes, “a vessel of codified knowledge across time and space…” to show different moments she had experienced with John F. Kennedy to reinforce her authority in the final say of her husband’s image. As much as the Camelot myth is about John F. Kennedy’s image, it also works to reinforce Jackie Kennedy’s image and therefore her cultural authority. “Difficult as it may be to accept, the posthumous image of JFK reflected more the idealistic beliefs of Mrs. Kennedy than the practical political liberalism of the man himself” (Piereson). Although the reader is lead to believe the focus of the stories is used to identify Kennedy with the Camelot myth, the intention is to have the reader understand Jackie’s image that therefore impacted her authority to direct the story of her husband’s image.

Zelizer also mentions, “Collective memory is important for discussions of cultural authority because it allows for the emergence of patterns of authority over time”. Magazine and
newspaper editions that came out right after the assassination and memorial editions about Jackie Kennedy’s life reinforce the idea of Jackie’s authority over the Camelot myth. Her first image and thus her cultural authority are displayed first in the Life magazine article. Her image as well as her cultural authority is then reaffirmed in the memorial editions when they discuss and remember her first image.

Jackie Kennedy’s use of the narrative storytelling combine with Theodore White’s use of stylistic devices created their cultural authority that they then used to direct the nation’s feelings and memory of John F. Kennedy. Reports and stories began surfacing that could have proved detrimental to the image Kennedy had created during his lifetime until Jackie redirected the attention to the better moments of his presidency, ultimately covering any of his misdoings during office.

“Never mind that we now hear that the kingdom was flawed, the marriage was lousy and the hairdo was wigs and hairpieces. Jackie Kennedy remains a symbol of a time and place that will never be again. The aura of Camelot remains so strong that even 25 years after its end, it is almost impossible to separate the mythical Jackie from the reality” (Schwartz).

Schwartz demonstrates that the apparent effort and success from critics, historians, and scholars at exposing John F. Kennedy and his misconducts have seemingly been overshadowed by Jackie Kennedy and the Camelot myth. In accepting these facts yet also finding them unrelated to the topic, shows that Jackie was successful in creating her cultural authority.

Jackie Kennedy’s cultural authority and image are remembered in memorial editions about her life. Approximately 30 years after the assassination of President John F. Kennedy, his widow Jackie Kennedy passed away from non-Hodgkin’s lymphoma at the young age of 64. Due
to her status and the role she played during the traumatic events of November 22, 1963 Jackie Kennedy was an icon to the public. When she passed away, there were several memorial editions printed in major magazines and newspapers across the country discussing her life as well as her accomplishments. Newsweek, Time, and The New York Times have all printed stories pertaining to Jackie’s role in the creation of the myth of Camelot. These memorial editions resurfaced the creation of the myth further perpetuating and confirming Jackie Kennedy’s cultural authority in writing history.

Memorial Editions of Jackie Kennedy

Jackie Kennedy had created an image of and for herself through her stylistic ways of life. In addition to marrying a handsome then-senator turned president, Jackie’s status erupted overnight. The memorial editions were used as a way to reaffirm her image as well as her cultural authority for the myth she created for her husband. The rhetoric of Jackie Kennedy after her passing is one of adoration. Jackie Kennedy represented an era of elegance and grace that the world felt was gone after it had lost her.

“Jackie Kennedy symbolized- she was a connection to a time, to an old America in which standards were higher and clearer and elegance meant something, a time when elegance was a kind of statement, a way of dressing up the world, and so a generous act…. Few people get to symbolize the world, but she did, and the world is receding, and we know it and mourn that too” (Noonan 23).

These magazines showcase the best of Jackie Kennedy and all of the triumphs she brought to the White House during her years. As the Life magazine brought out images of Jackie as protective mother and loyal wife to create Jackie Kennedy’s original cultural authority, the
memorial editions use similar stories to continue to solidify her image which then in return solidified her authority over the Camelot myth once again.

Jackie Kennedy as Mother

One of the main images that Jackie Kennedy brought forward in the interview with Life magazine was the image of her being a protective mother. This can be seen in the story Jackie recollects of the loss of their son Patrick and the St. Christopher’s medal. In these memorial articles, they state the lengths Jackie would go to, to protect her family, especially her children. The reiteration of Jackie as a protective mother reminds the readers why she created the Camelot myth in the first place. This protective characteristics shows what Jackie would go to keep her husband’s image from being anything less than admirable.

In the May 30th Times magazine article, the readers are reminded the role of mother the Jackie had held above all else. The article recalls at the funeral “When the hearse rumbled past, she asked little John to salute his father. The nation saw her then as a mother, first and foremost” (Duffy 35). Reminding the readers of Jackie being a mother “first and foremost” is a way to recall the ways in which Jackie is positioned as a mother in White’s article. The role of seeing Jackie Kennedy as a mother first reminds the readers to look at the position Jackie possessed and why her story should be heard above everyone else’s. Jackie was a protective mother to her children, to her family, and finally to her husband’s image. As a mother we are supposed to trust that their guidance will set us on the right path. We often believe that mothers know best and we are not supposed to question a mother figure or her reasonings for doing what she does. Being seen as a mother, “first and foremost” by the country, reaffirmed that they should listen to Jackie Kennedy, and only Jackie Kennedy because she holds knowledge and intuition that only a mother can.
By having the role as mother be the first thing the nation links her to, reminds the nation of her protective stance on her family and how almost 30 years prior, she had given John F. Kennedy the protection his image severally needed. The connection between Jackie Kennedy and motherhood also takes on a new connotation when thinking about her role in the Camelot myth. Jackie Kennedy had created and nurtured something that would eventually take on a life of its own without help from her. In this sense, Jackie had taken on the role of mother in a different way by “giving birth” to the Camelot myth. She was protective of her family and now she was protective of the Camelot image which secured their place in history.

One final quote that truly emphasized and solidified Jackie’s cultural authority reminds the readers of how incredibly loyal she was to her family. “In her protectiveness of them can be found early signs of how vigilant and tough she could be when her family and values were at stake” (Duffy 34). After his assassination, John F. Kennedy’s image and character came into question with reports and theories surfacing that he was not the man he presented himself to be. Duffy reminds the readers of the time where Jackie had to protect her husband’s image and therefore resulted in the myth of Camelot. Since John F. Kennedy’s image was under attack after the assassination, this myth was Jackie’s last protective act for her slain husband.

All of these images of Jackie Kennedy as a mother in the memorial editions are used to remind readers of Jackie’s protective stance on her family. Jackie created her cultural authority in order to create the lasting positive image of her deceased husband. Her image as mother had a lasting effect on the way the nation viewed her and her attempts of saving her husband’s image. The recollections link back to the images of Jackie in White’s article that formulated her original image that created her cultural authority in the first place.
Jackie Kennedy as Wife

In addition to being seen as a mother, Jackie ranked being a wife as the second most important role she would ever have in her lifetime. Out of all the accomplishments Jackie completed in this role, none are comparable to the way she engaged with the media to protect her husband’s image. The creation of the Camelot myth is one that Jackie crafted in order to stand against any negative reports that began surfacing after her husband’s assassination.

In the May 30th issue of Time magazine, Peggy Noonan writes and chronicles Jackie Kennedy’s life. Without fail, Noonan mentions Jackie’s greatest creation for Jackie: the Camelot myth. “And she spoke of Camelot and gave the world an image of her husband that is still, for all the revelations of the past three decades, alive. She provided an image of herself too, perhaps more than she knew” (Noonan 27). Noonan describes the way Jackie used the Camelot myth as a way to create her husband’s final image to the world, but also as a way to establish her image which then lead to the creation of her cultural authority. Jackie’s image as loyal wife was important to solidify her reasoning for telling the Camelot story in the first place.

In a Times article discussing the achievements of Jackie Kennedy during the span of the assassination and the burial and one of her biggest achievements mentioned was never leaving John F. Kennedy especially after witnessing his murder. “But she knew what she had to do to fulfill her commitment to her husband, her children and her country. Her bright pink suit was soiled with blood and gray matter, but she would not change it or leave John F. Kennedy’s body” (Duffy 29). This statement reminds the readers of the ultimate time Jackie remained loyal to John F. Kennedy by never leaving his body thus symbolizing why the nation should never leave his side either.
On the surface, these stories, given by Jackie Kennedy, and retold by Theodore White gave readers an inside look of whom John F. Kennedy was as a person. However, these stories did more than paint a picture of JFK, they more importantly gave an image to Jackie Kennedy which then created her authority allowing her to tell the story of Camelot. With all of the surfacing reports after JFK’s assassination that did not align to the person the people thought he was, Jackie Kennedy stepped in to overshadow those messages with her own. With the association between Kennedy’s administration and Camelot being one of the first things that comes to Americans’ minds, Jackie was successful to cover up any reports that were less than flattering for her husband. Each story in the article served a purpose, and gave credence to Jackie as storyteller in its own way. The repetition of particular parts of the original story in memorial editions serve as a way to reinforce Jackie’s authority over time.
Conclusion

This project demonstrates the multiple ways in which Jackie Kennedy asserts herself and her image to create her cultural authority over the Camelot story in the Life magazine article. After the assassination of John F. Kennedy, reports began surfacing that proved harmful to the image JFK and his family had created over his lifetime. Jackie Kennedy needed to create her cultural authority in order for the American public to listen to her, and only her, over the reports surfacing about who John F. Kennedy really was. Without creating her cultural authority, the image of her husband would have been remembered in a way that was less than flattering. In addition, reports from the memorial editions after Jackie Kennedy passed away showcase how cultural authority can be reclaimed and reaffirmed even after time has passed. By analyzing Jackie Kennedy’s creation of cultural authority, and her need to express her side of the story showcases the importance of not just looking at where the story comes from, but who is telling the story in the first place and why.

It is imperative to understand how Jackie Kennedy created and used her cultural authority in ways that served her interests best. The example of Jackie Kennedy and her creation of the myth of Camelot leads into the bigger discussion on how history, something that is oftentimes thought of to be fixed, is ever fluid. The telling and retelling of history depends on the person granted with cultural authority because they are able to shape certain events to have them remembered in a specific framework in history. This revelation therefore shows that only half of history is ever told thus when new information is discovered, the ways in which the public remembers specific events shifts to match the new information.

Continuing this form of research on cultural authority is crucial in understanding how we understand the world around us. By allowing one person to be the sole contributor to writing
history, as this project has shown, we miss out on the other half of what is going on. If we look at Jackie Kennedy and Theodore White’s piece, we are only seeing the side of John F. Kennedy that they wanted us to see. However, by looking at this piece in addition to all of the scholarly research that contradicts what the Life magazine article is saying, we are able to receive a better full picture of who John F. Kennedy was as a person. This research can be linked back to Plato’s Allegory of the Cave which expresses the concern of a whole world we are unaware of because we lack the knowledge of anything from what we are used to (Plato). Once we free and educate ourselves, we come to know that there is more to the world than we think there is. We should always have a feeling of a constant need to look for the whole story, because that whole story shifts the way we understand the world around us.

These topics and concepts used in this project can be applied to many future areas of research. Everything we have ever been taught has been written or told by someone who created their authority to tell it. Any historical event can be looked at using the cultural authority lens. By using this way of thinking, we can gain an understanding of why certain events are told the way they are told. New information shifts the way we understand what is going on around us and it is important to make decisions based on all the information. Every story has a storyteller, and every storyteller has a reason to tell their side of the story.

There are several limitations that I came across when researching and writing this project. One of the limitations in this project is the focus on Jackie Kennedy rather than the focus being on Jackie Kennedy and Theodore White. Both narrator and author of the piece create their cultural authority by using the other one’s authority. Most of my focus serves to discuss Jackie’s authority in the article with few references as to why White is allowed to tell this story. Additionally, there should have been more scholarship discussing Jackie as a person and her role
in the Camelot myth rather than having the majority of the background work discuss JFK.

Finally, another limitation is that the project does not analyze every story Jackie retells in the Life magazine. There is still much to be known about how Jackie and White lay the groundwork for her image and without analyzing each story, we are still unable to know the full picture of who Jackie was and how each story structured her as an authoritative figure.

In addition to these limitations, this project also has its strengths. One of its main strengths is the way the analysis informs and pushes the reader to understand the importance of the stories discussed in the project. The analysis gives insight to the reader on how Jackie Kennedy and Theodore White position Jackie as the ultimate storyteller and creator of the Camelot myth. By analyzing each story and how it plays into the larger narrative, the reader is able to gain the knowledge on why Jackie decided she had to speak on behalf of her deceased husband. Additionally, this knowledge informs the reader why the American public ranked her first over scholars and historians writing about her husband.

Jackie Kennedy was a lady well before her time that was constantly pushing the limits and redefining the office of the First Lady. Too many people underestimated who she was based on the tone she chose to speak and from the clothes she wore. Not many people realized the intelligence and the persuasive devices she used all her life in order to get what she wanted. After the funeral she performed for the nation, Jackie gave one last thing to her husband. Although scholarship now informs us that the majority of Camelot was flawed, we will never “let it be forgot, that there was a spot, for one brief shining moment, that was known as Camelot”.
Works Cited


