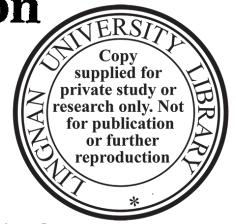


# JFK and Dark Tourism: a fascination with assassination

Malcolm Foley & J. John Lennon



## **Abstract**

*This paper sets out to explore the phenomenon that the authors have entitled Dark Tourism and to analyse evidence of its existence in the context of sites associated with the life and death of the former US President, John F. Kennedy (JFK). These sites present front-line staff, curators, and development bodies with dilemmas concerning legitimacy of presentation/representation and lead to questions about the, often cited, educational mission of such attractions. The media has had a central role in the development of this phenomenon and documentation and illustration via news and film has been central to much of the interpretation of JFK and the Kennedys. This paper considers media fascination with this subject and examines exploitation of this interest at three, contrasting sites.*

Dark tourism is positioned at the cross-roads of the recent history of inhuman acts and the representation of these in news and film media. Interpretations of such events and their commercial development or exploitation are central to consideration of this area.

An event like the Holocaust has been widely represented in media such as newsreels, novels, television, film and more recently on an ever increasing collection of internet sites and World-Wide Web pages. The events of the Holocaust are now interpreted for visitors at a number of places throughout the world, including the sites of former concentration camps in both western and eastern Europe, in Israel and most recently in Washington DC. Notably, the US Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington is receiving record numbers of visitors, well in excess of original projections. Meanwhile at the sites themselves debates rage over the legitimacy of preservation or demolition of the real structures and buildings and the format and models of interpretation to adopt.

Dark Tourism is the term adopted by the authors for these phenomena which encompass the presentation and consumption (by visitors) of real and commodified death and disaster sites. These visitors may have been motivated to undertake a visit by a desire to experience the reality behind the media images and/or by a personal association with inhumanity. The phenomena raise ethical issues over the status and nature of objects, the extent of their interpretation, the appropriate political and managerial response and the nature of the experience as perceived by visitors, victims (and their relatives) and local residents. The possibilities for exploitation of a 'dark' event and the period within which issues of taste prevail over economic considerations are complex and culturally specific, both for host and visitor communities. The public debate over the potential use of 25 Cromwell Street, Gloucester, home of Frederick and Rosemary West, is a good example of controversy surrounding interpretation at such sites. A memorial, interpretive site, or demolition are all possibilities being debated. The problem of how to interpret (if at all) a site of multiple atrocity is not new for local

## **Keywords**

JF Kennedy  
Dallas  
Tourism  
Death

authorities and administrators. In Dallas, following the assassination of John F Kennedy in 1963, public authorities faced a similar dilemma. Indeed the issues surrounding the interpretation of JFK in the USA form a useful foundation for initial reflection on the phenomenon of Dark Tourism.

In many cases the development of museums and tourist attractions may systematically ignore elements of popular culture which can supply motivations for tourism and which can, in part, focus on negative or macabre aspects of human interest. Rojek alluded to the phenomenon of 'fatal attractions' and, more particularly, death spots which he described as:

...commercial developments of grave sites and sites in which celebrities or large numbers of people have met with sudden and violent deaths.<sup>1</sup>

Such 'dark' attractions are of great significance in our culture and offer sensation and spectacle for the visitor or tourist. As Berman noted:

Catastrophes are transformed into lucrative opportunities for redevelopment and renewal.<sup>2</sup>

Locations cited by Rojek include national and metropolitan cemeteries, Cholame (the site of James Dean's fatal car crash) and Graceland, home of Elvis Presley. The method by which some of these locations are developed as tourist attractions to offer the visitor an experience that is different to that of everyday life is systematised and socially organised. In this way the tourist gaze is both constructed and developed.<sup>3</sup>

This type of cultural tourism, which the authors have entitled dark or tragic tourism, is an intrinsic part of the post-modern world. The simulation of experiences, the critical importance of reproduction and duplication and the centrality of media and technology are characteristically present in any examination of these locations. Thus the contemporary context for dark tourism is that of post-modernism. These simulations and repetitive forms including the procession of James Dean fans, dressed in period costume, in authentic 1949 Mercedes and 1950's Fords, which takes place on the exact time, date and at the precise location of his death, are symptomatic of this phenomenon. This process of projecting oneself into a simulation of reality is furthered through audio-visual media blurring distinction of the imagined and the real in a number of other locations. Rapidly advancing internet technology and the wide access has radically increased the availability of information, images, media display, film footage etc.

Gravity and reverence are not always characteristic of such attractions and activities. Jim Morrison's grave (former singer with The Doors rock band) in Père La Chaise Cemetery questions the Victorian bourgeois cultural view of the cemetery as a place of dignity and respect. Now tourists rather than mourners visit and undertake cemetery tours. This is a phenomenon that is well developed in the USA and in both Washington and Los Angeles there are good examples of the changing designation of such sites to convey tourism or leisure significance. Such treatments can be contrasted with the Death Park located in the Philippines, a respectful interpretation of graves and a celebration of the sites of

1. C. Rojek. *Ways of Escape - Modern Transportations in Leisure and Travel*. London: Macmillan, 1990, p.136 and see particularly pp.136-145.

2. M. Berman. *All That is Solid Melts into Air*. London: Verso, 1983, p.95.

3. Urry offers an analysis of the 'tourist gaze' based upon a number of criteria. Firstly, the place to be visited must be differentiated in some aspects from experiences conventionally assumed in the daily life of tourists. Another dimension of the extraordinary may be the recognition and interpretation of signs which form part of an established context of tourism related objects. Lastly, an apparently ordinary object can be given singularity because of local signage authenticating its distinctiveness. See J. Urry, *The Tourist Gaze*. London: Sage, 1990.

4. Palmer offers a lengthy discussion of many aspects of mortality and how practices differ world-wide in relation to death. See G. Palmer, *Death: the trip of a lifetime*, San Francisco: Harper, 1993.

5. The view of Baudrillard on the critical importance of repetition in defining reality is made even more pertinent via an internet search wherein a typical return for a search on the Kennedy Assassination will yield some 8216 web sites. Writings on the assassination, conspiracy theories and endless video clips evidence the fascination with the event. Typical of the products on offer is *Secrets of a Homicide*, a computer recreation of the JFK assassination which provides a range of digitally recreated sequences detailing the JFK assassination and entry of the bullet from some eighteen different perspectives provided in a 3D specialist Research edition video tape. See J. Baudrillard, *Simulations*, New York: Semiotext, 1983, and *Secrets of a Homicide* <http://www.rust.net/~dmyers/jfk/index.htm>

6. Useful discussion of key visual memory triggers is given by S. Knapp, *Collective Memory and the Actual Past*, New York: Representations, 1989.

7. T. White, *America in Search of Itself*, New York: Warner, 1982, p.174.

typical graves and mausoleums. Clearly this is a culturally specific example which contrasts sharply with other South East Asian treatments such as the infamous Precious Gold Mountain and Happy Peace Garden, Taiwan, which is much closer in operation to the commercial exploitation found in the USA and Western Europe.<sup>4</sup>

The treatment of John F. Kennedy provides the focus for an exploitation of different forms of cultural tourism pertaining to dark events in the USA.

### **JFK: Fascination and Interpretation**

The Kennedy phenomenon can be seen both as a media product and a result of the availability of global news communication at the time of the assassination. The enduring fascination with the death of the former president posed problems with the need to represent both his life and death. The form of representation currently utilised was examined at three sites in the US:

- The New Museum at the John F. Kennedy Library, Boston, Massachusetts
- 'The Sixth Floor, John F Kennedy and the Memory of a Nation', Dallas, Texas
- Arlington National Cemetery, Arlington, Virginia

The interpretation and re-telling of events surrounding Kennedy's death have shaped perceptions of reality. In projecting visitors into the past, reality has been replaced with omnipresent simulation and commodification. Thus the real is confined in pure repetition.<sup>5</sup>

Central to the interpretation of Kennedy's life, and particularly his death, are pictorial repetitions of such key images as the assassinations of JFK and Lee Harvey Oswald, Jacqueline Kennedy in mourning at the funeral, John (Jnr) Kennedy's salute, the riderless horse, the Walter Cronkite (CBS) news flash intimating the shooting and the eternal flame at Arlington. Such images have become international markers of collective memory and trigger shared social dispositions relating personal life to the date and time of the assassination.<sup>6</sup> In both the New Museum in Boston and the Sixth Floor in Dallas, media are used as the key basis for interpretation. The multiplicity of roles for media in the Kennedy story, contextualising, telling, promoting and recollecting are central mechanisms in his life. Known as the 'television president' he is believed to have had one of the earliest grasps of the political importance of that medium. From the initial 'great debate' with Nixon, through the regular live televised news conferences to his ultimatum on US television demanding that Russian missiles be removed from Cuba, he showed an early mastery of TV. Consequently many exhibits utilise footage from the critical events of Kennedy's lifetime. Television and film are also clearly linked with the assassination and are central to its retelling and interpretation. As White noted:

Television was at the centre of the shock. With its indelible images, information, immediacy, repetition and close-ups, it served to define the tragedy for the public.<sup>7</sup>

In the USA, television had rapidly grown as a critically important medium for news and by the 1960s some 88 per cent of all homes owned television sets. Key events where media had an important role included the fateful weekend JFK was assassinated, from the point of the shooting to the scenes outside the hospital,

Johnson's swearing-in, the murder of Lee Harvey Oswald, and the Kennedy funeral. Central and notable in the media coverage was the death itself which offered a spectacle of televisual images defining the reality of that weekend for many viewers. The viewing of the funeral itself constituted the heaviest day of TV viewing in the USA to that date with some 93 per cent of TV-equipped households watching the funeral procession to Arlington National Cemetery.<sup>8</sup> These images which constituted '...touches of pure television'<sup>9</sup> have been utilised heavily in both of the attractions examined in Dallas and Boston. The media image of JFK is an enduring one of this period in US history. Within thirty-six months of the assassination more than two hundred books were published pertaining to the tragedy. They have been joined by a further one thousand books, periodical articles, television retrospectives, more than twelve newsletters, and a number of booksellers now specialising in assassination literature. Indeed novels and film treatments such as the *Parallax View*, *Executive Action* and *JFK* have all contrived to feed the growing interests in the events of the Kennedy death.<sup>10</sup>

Any story of JFK and review of his presidency will inevitably be affected by these repeated images. Television and film have shaped the memory of those events rather than historical data alone. As Connally noted:

I don't think the time has come when history will really look at the Kennedy administration with a realistic eye. And how could we? When you see a beautiful little girl kneeling with her hand on her father's coffin, when you see a handsome little boy standing with a military salute by his slain father, how can you feel anything but the utmost sympathy? It's a scene of pathos, of remorse, of tragedy, and that's the way we now view President Kennedy.<sup>11</sup>

Cultural authority is herein defined through the narrative pictorial images clouding historical reality. This process of what Weber called 'rhetorical legitimisation' illustrates how the purveyors of this 'history/story' legitimate themselves by the stories they tell in discourse with the public. The extent to which replication of this process occurs in tourist attractions covering the presidency and assassination of JFK will be considered in the next section of the paper.

### **JFK and the Tourist: Boston, Dallas and Washington**

The findings and discussion that follow are based upon an examination of the treatment of JFK in the following locations:

- The New Museum at the JFK Library, Boston Massachusetts
- The Sixth Floor, Dallas Texas
- The Eternal Flame, Arlington National Cemetery, Arlington Virginia

The authors visited all the sites and undertook participant observation. Interviews were conducted with representatives of local tourist authorities, museum operators, management and staff. Where appropriate, local media were examined.

These attractions represent varying approaches to interpreting JFK, the presidency and the assassination. The New Museum at the JFK Library, Boston is very much an educational and research centre incorporating a museum which, as its promotional material describes:

8. Neilson Company, 'TV Responses to the Death of a President', cited in *World Listened and Watched: a special report on broadcasting*, 2 December, 1963.

9. For further examination see *Broadcast Magazine* Comments on Coverage: Well Done 2 December, 1963, p. 50.

10. See for example M. Lane & D. Freed, *Executive Action*, 1973, and L. Singer, *Parallax View*, 1973, which have both been made into films; *JFK* the celebrated treatment of the Kennedy assassination by Oliver Stone (which was based primarily on: J. Garrison, *On the Trail of Assassins*, 1988; J. Marrs, *Crossfire*, 1989; and J. Newman, *Kennedy and Vietnam*, 1992) caused considerable controversy and served to reignite passions some twenty eight years after the event of the assassination. Furthermore films centring on related individuals continue to be developed e.g. *Libra*, 1993 – a film about Lee Harvey Oswald, and *Ruby*, 1992 – a film centring on Jack Ruby.

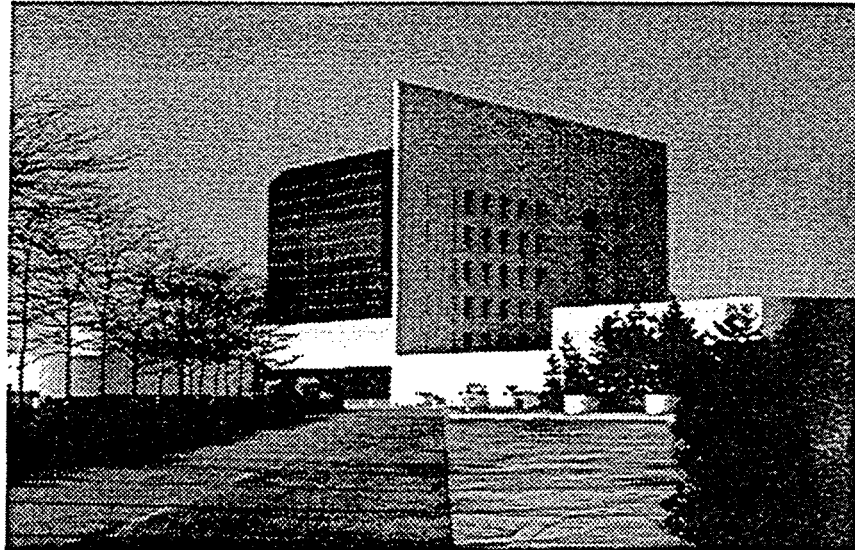
11. This is an excerpt from J. Connally discussing the 25th Anniversary of JFK's Assassination on Nightline on ABC News, quoted in B. Zelizer, *Covering the Body – the Kennedy assassination, the media and the shaping of collective memory*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992, p.186.

12. Excerpt from John F Kennedy Library, *The New Museum of John F Kennedy Library*, Columbia Point, Boston, MA 02125, p.2.

...portrays the life of John F Kennedy, traces the career of his brother Robert F Kennedy, and illustrates the nature of the office of the President of the United States.<sup>12</sup>

This is a paid entrance attraction incorporating a treatment of the presidency via a trip around a simulated White House layout. The library houses extensive presidential archives which are also open to the public. Essentially this is a museum celebrating the achievement and the life of JFK. There is little in-depth coverage of the alleged darker side of the President's character, administrative failings or weaknesses. Interpretation is offered in the context of the Kennedy times. For example, the 1960 election trail is interpreted through shop-fronts of the 1950s and the development of the Peace Corps is covered through a representation of a White House room incorporating video archive material. Indeed newsreel and TV footage are central to interpretation at this site. In each of the simulated White House rooms and at other locations there are screens located as a primary element of exhibition space. Artefacts and objects on display are not authenticated and it is difficult to know, for example, whether the desk in the oval office is that at which JFK sat, or is merely a replica. For a traditional museum in the UK such authentication would be of considerable importance but in this museum it is secondary to the use of television and newsreel footage which construct

*Figure 1. The New Museum at the JFK Library, Boston*



the 'reality'. Small screens are used to show television clips in an attempt to give the impression that contemporary viewers would have had when watching their own TVs. The fabric of memory is framed by the TV set. Furthermore, the central role of the media in generating the Kennedy myth is clearly reinforced.

The Sixth Floor – John F Kennedy and the Memory of a Nation, Dallas, Texas provides another perspective on JFK which will, of course, remain synonymous with his assassination. This is described as a visitor centre, was developed by the

Dallas County Historical Foundation<sup>13</sup> and is a paid attraction located in the former Texas School Book Depository. The sixth floor of this building is the location from which Lee Harvey Oswald is alleged to have fired at the Kennedy motorcade. The visitor centre summarises the arguments for development as follows:

It was created to meet the widespread visitor demand for information and understanding about a tragic but important event ... documentary films and interpretive displays help those who remember come to grips with a powerful memory, and educate younger audiences about the meaning of an unforgettable chapter in American history.<sup>14</sup>



Figure 2. The Sixth Floor, Dallas, Texas

This '...permanent historical display on the life, death and legacy of President Kennedy'<sup>15</sup> opened in 1989 and is operated as a non-profit-making organisation. It is located in the Dealey Plaza district which, in 1993, was designated as a National Historical Landmark District. This means the site has been given formal designation by the federal government of the United States as being of outstanding historical significance. The site is officially marked very close to the point of the assassination in the ground on the north side of Elm Street (see Figure 3).

The Sixth Floor press release notes:

This location makes the plaque easily visible for the majority of visitors and allows for photography ...<sup>16</sup>

The plaque's wording is curiously circumspect in recording that this is a site commemorating the assassination of a President of the USA. The plaque simply states the following:

Dealey Plaza  
has been designated a  
National Historical Landmark.  
This site possesses national significance  
in commemorating the history of the  
United States of America  
1993  
National Park Service  
United States Department of the Interior<sup>17</sup>

In 1994, some 420,863 visitors came to see The Sixth Floor Museum, which made this Dallas's number one paid tourist attraction for the third year in succession.<sup>18</sup>

13. Dallas County Historical Foundation *The Sixth Floor, John F Kennedy and the Memory of a Nation*, Dallas, Texas, 1989.

14. *Op. cit.* p. 2.

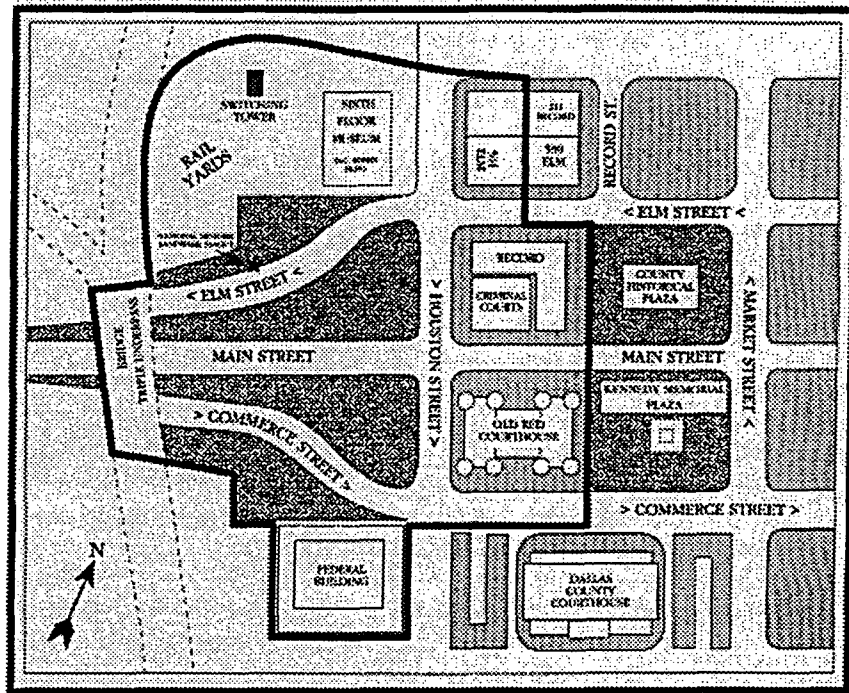
15. Dallas County Historical Foundation, *History and the Significance of the Landmark District*. The Sixth Floor Press Release, Dallas, Texas, 1994, p.5.

16. Dallas County Historical Foundation. *Dealey Plaza – National Historic Landmark Factsheet*. The Sixth Floor Press Release. Dallas, Texas 1994, p 2.

17. *Ibid.* p.2.

18. Dallas County Historical Foundation. *The Sixth Floor Museum Records Banner Year*. The Sixth Floor Press Release, Dallas, Texas, 1994.

Figure 3. Dealey Plaza  
National Historic  
Landmark District



19. Dallas County  
Historical Foundation,  
*The Sixth Floor: John F  
Kennedy and the Memory  
of a Nation*, Dallas,  
Texas; 1989, p.1.

The Sixth Floor comprises 9,000 square feet of exhibition space on the sixth level of the former Texas School Book Depository building. Upwards of four hundred photographs, six documentary films (heavily based on contemporary TV coverage) and a range of artefacts and displays are grouped to chronicle the events from the early 1960s through the assassination and on to the legacy. Publicity for *The Sixth Floor* notes that 'No original evidence is on display; all materials in this exhibition are suitable for family viewing',<sup>19</sup> presumably a reference to the fact that the exhibition does not include some of the most graphic images from the famous Zapruder film. Yet two 'evidential' areas associated with Lee Harvey Oswald have been reconstructed (see Figure 4). These constitute:

1. The corner window – a re-creation of the window area from where the assassin's bullet was allegedly fired. The window remains permanently 'open'.
2. The corner staircase – a reconstruction of where the sniper allegedly left the building and where the rifle was discovered.

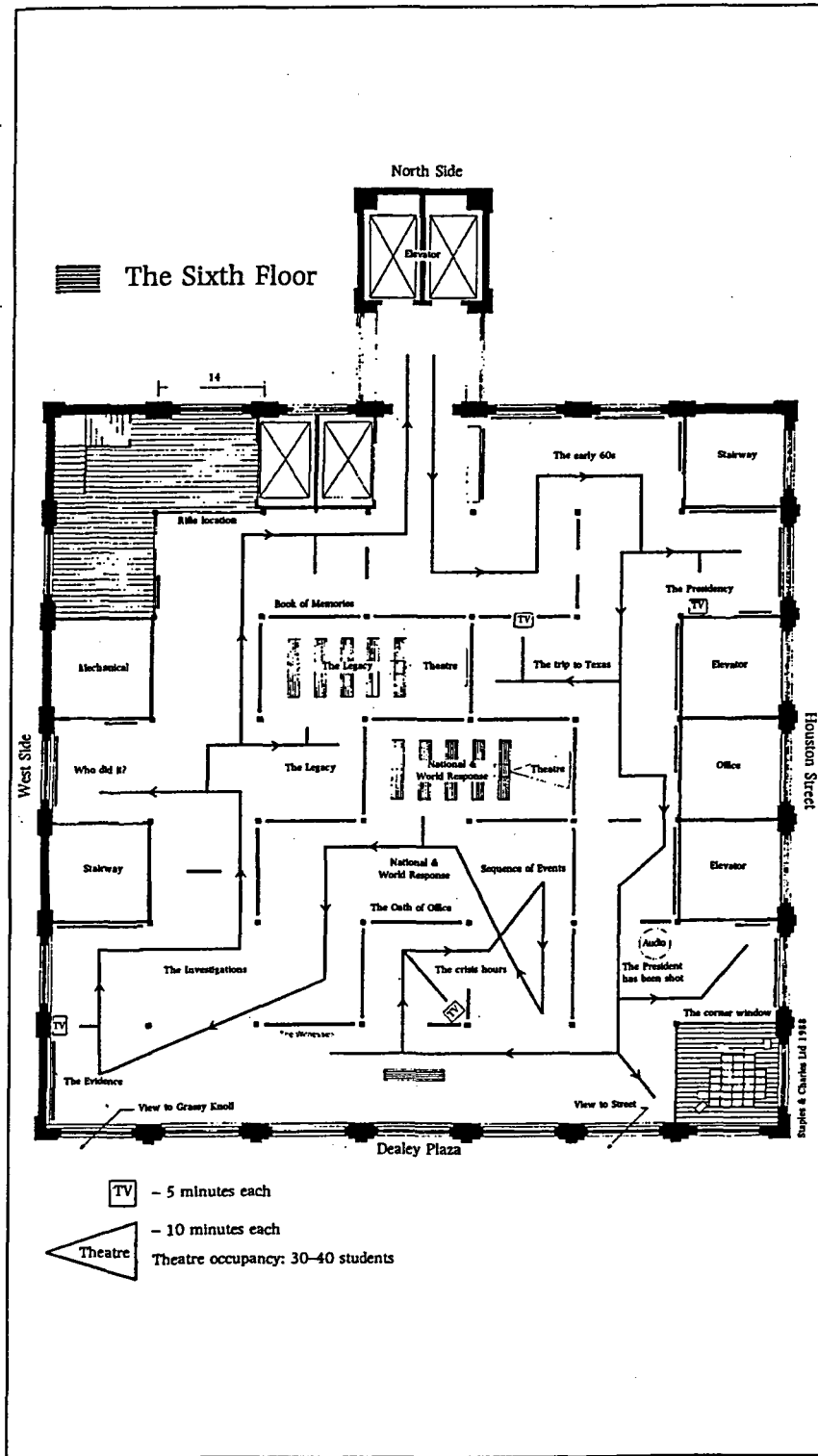
In this way the visitor is projected into the authenticated reality of that period on the day of the assassination.

Recognising the relatively controversial nature of this educational exhibition, the Sixth Floor PR Department has produced a set of questions and answers to justify the development with a reference to JFK's own words in the following context:

'Question: Wouldn't it be better just to leave the subject alone?

Answer: President Kennedy himself said that 'History is the memory of a nation'. History is poorly served by burying the past. New generations of Americans have grown up since 1963, and they have a right to learn more about this important event in their history. Despite the emotions that surround this event, there is a

Figure 4. Floor Plan of The Sixth Floor, Dallas, Texas





20. Dallas County Historical Foundation, *Questions and Answers*, The Sixth Floor Press Release, Dallas, Texas, 1994, p.1.

21. *Ibid.* p.2.

22. The actions of the family during this period are well documented in B. Zelizer, *Covering the Body – the Kennedy assassination, the media and the shaping of collective memory*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992.

23. Edward Kennedy quoted in R. Aguirre, 'Family Objections Won't Halt JFK Exhibit' *Dallas Times Herald*, 1988, p. 3.

24. The extent of the President's widow's involvement in the design and choice of architect is detailed in A. Reid, *I M Pei*, Boston: Bison Group, 1995.

25. The director's views on The Sixth Floor were available in full in state and in local press at the time. See, for example, Associated Press, 'Kennedy Friends Upset by Museum Plans', *Dallas Times Herald* 6.1.1988, p. 1.

26. This use of video, most particularly TV news of the time, once again makes explicit the attempts of the media personnel to legitimise themselves as the historians of the period. Through the film coverage of the assassination events in Dallas, the journalists attempt to give themselves credentials as the purveyors of the historical record. For further discussion see Zelizer, 1992 (op. cit.).

responsibility to face history squarely and to recount it accurately. Democratic societies are expected to interpret all of their history – the tragedies as well as the achievements.'<sup>20</sup>

The educative mission of the attraction is continually reiterated along with the historical significance of the location. This whole issue of justification development constitutes an on-going debate. Similar questions involving the views of the Kennedy family are also broached by the PR Department in the same fact sheet.

'Question: Has the Kennedy family been involved in this project?

Answer: Because the museum touches on a personal family tragedy, Dallas County Historical Foundation has never felt it appropriate to ask the Kennedys to become involved in this project or to comment on it'.<sup>21</sup>

More accurately, the Kennedy family have consistently sought to distance themselves from images of the president's death and to attempt to concentrate attention on an appraisal of JFK's life. Indeed the family boycotted certain public memorial services and by the 1970s had begun to avoid commemorative services.<sup>22</sup> Further they had called for national commemorations not on 22nd November (the date of the assassination) but on JFK's date of birth. Specifically commenting on this development, Senator Edward Kennedy has let it be known that the family were upset that the \$3.8M exhibit was being developed at all but that they would not attempt to halt the opening:

The family has taken the position that the only memorial should be The Kennedy Library (in Boston), with its outreach capabilities in terms of inspiring people to service.<sup>23</sup>

Here again the emphasis on education and the service ethic are reiterated. Indeed the direct involvement of Jacqueline Kennedy in the final choice of design and location of the JFK Library reinforces that commitment.<sup>24</sup> The director of the JFK Library in Boston condemned outright the idea of The Sixth Floor development as '...morbid or disgusting, or both'.<sup>25</sup>

Since opening in February 1989, The Sixth Floor has received numerous awards, most particularly for its use of video<sup>26</sup> and the quality of the museum. Yet support for the development was not immediate in Dallas. The future of the building had been in doubt up until 1977 when the county voted to purchase and renovate the building. Its potential for conventional usage was invariably problematical and the county commissioners looked to Dallas County Historical Commission and the Texas Historical Commission for guidance on development.<sup>27</sup> In the late 1970s Dallas's major tourist attractions were South Fork Ranch (of Dallas TV series fame) and Six Flags Over Texas (a large amusement park). The site of the assassination, although at this stage undeveloped, was still a major draw for visitors since, in many senses, Dallas was defined and identified internationally as the assassination site. The former Texas Book Depository building had remained virtually untouched since 1963 and the site remained practically anonymous, without indication or interpretation, until the development of the museum over the period 1983 to 1989 and the designation

of the site as a National Historical Landmark in 1993. The interpretive development was hotly debated within Texas at a local and state level over a period of eleven years until the project finally opened in 1989. Its success somewhat overshadows the JFK Library which, although twice as large, only barely exceeds The Sixth Floor in terms of visitor numbers. Indeed the success of the Sixth Floor as a tourist attraction was recognised early on by the Texas Department of Highways and Public Transportation. As the Department's spokesman noted:

...the memorial actually helps Dallas maintain its strong showing as the second most popular city in Texas ... The bottom line is that we've seen tourists stay in the West End district longer because of the exhibit.<sup>28</sup>

The commercial benefits of the development are mirrored on a smaller scale in the internal retail outlet which operates within The Sixth Floor. Approximately 18 sq.m. are devoted to the sale of books and Kennedy-related souvenirs. Key rings, pens and t-shirts are available for sale despite the original intent of the project director, Conover Hunt, who in 1988 commented that:

... there's no way that anything tacky is going to get into this bookstore...There will be no souvenirs coming out of this! it's just not appropriate.<sup>29</sup>

Commercial orientation extends to the development of corporate membership of The Sixth Floor and evening rental of the facility with corporate hospitality included.<sup>30</sup> The introduction of catering facilities is currently being debated. Commercial development has to be contrasted with the historical/educative mission which is the justification for development within Dallas and has been linked to the absolution of communal guilt, 'coming to terms' with history and an attempt to align Dallas with other sites of historical tragedy. As the project manager, Conover Hunt, noted:

... Dallas is joining other cities that have had to confront the problem of stewardship of a tragic part of history ... and like Washington DC, Pearl Harbour, Gettysburg and Manassas, Dallas has dealt with the demand for information by creating a prominent educational display for the public.<sup>31</sup>

Similar attempts at aligning The Sixth Floor with The Ford Theatre in Washington (the site of President Lincoln's assassination) and the Lorraine Motel in Memphis (the site of Martin Luther King's assassination) have been made by public policy-makers in the field.<sup>32</sup> Further this process of alignment was used by the chairman of Dallas Chamber of Commerce to absolve the city and the people of Dallas from any perceived communal guilt. An alignment of Adolf Hitler and Lee Harvey Oswald was made in an interview with the authors.

... throughout world history there have been people who have abused the power given to them by birthright, circumstance, economic wealth, who have imposed

27. See for example B. Minutaglia, 'Quiet Healers in Dallas', *Life Magazine*, 21 November, 1993, pp.22-28.

28. Quoted in M. Read, 'Kennedy Museum's Sixth Floor' *Dallas Times Herald*, 20 April 1991, p.A1.

29. *Ibid.* p.17.

30. Taken from an interview conducted by the authors with C.Price, 'Interview with Marketing Director The Sixth Floor', 14 Nov, 1994, Dallas, Texas.

31. Quoted in J. Collins, 'JFK Assassination Exhibit Nears Opening on The Sixth Floor', *Dallas Times Herald*, 20 May, 1989, p. 1.

32. In this case, Richard Sellars, National Parks' Service Historian and Chief of the National Park Service, South West Regional Cultural Resource Centre, Santa Fe, New Mexico, has compared The Sixth Floor development favourably with the \$8.8M project to renovate the Lorraine Motel (site of the assassination of Martin Luther King) and establish a National Civil Rights Centre in Birmingham, Alabama. Once again the process of comparison and peer alignment has emerged along with the historical/educative justification for the development of such dark attractions.

33. Taken from an interview conducted by the authors with R. Douglas, Chief Executive, Dallas Chamber of Commerce 15 November 1994.



Figure 5. John F Kennedy's Grave, Arlington, Washington

34. For greater elaboration see M. Foley & J. Lennon, War and Cultural Tourism in Berlin and London, paper presented at The Urban Environment: Tourism Conference September, 1995, South Bank University.

35. Quote taken from a recording of the Arlington National Cemetery Tour Bus Commentary Tour taken by the authors 9 November, 1994.

their will on other people whether it is a lone gunman like Lee Harvey Oswald or Adolf Hitler ... perhaps the two single most evil men of the twentieth century.<sup>33</sup>

In the context of the assassination, the attribution of blame to a lone gunman is, of course, a political statement rejecting any of the

conspiracy theories propounded in a number of books and films. To equate the actions of the (untried) Oswald with those of Adolf Hitler is, to say the least, unusual but fieldwork in Germany, Poland and the Czech Republic suggests that as tourism products, similarities can be drawn.<sup>34</sup>

Arlington National Cemetery, Arlington, Virginia – the site of Kennedy's grave where the eternal flame represents a further commodified attraction which has been commercially developed as a part of the Arlington National Cemetery tour. Notable on the tour are isolated stops built around the key burial sites of both John and Robert Kennedy, the Challenger space shuttle crew, the grave of Audie Murphy, etc. The Tourmobile bus was a chargeable narrative tour that took approximately 50 to 60 minutes and allowed tourists to disembark to explore specific grave sites and reboard the bus at a later stage.

An annotated map is distributed to all visitors on entry and is detailed below (see Figure 8). At the site of the eternal flame tourists are given an explicit instruction that they had:

...eight minutes for photographs and visits, the next tour bus will be along in approximately thirty minutes.<sup>35</sup>

What this led to was, essentially, a scramble to see the grave and have photographs taken at the site. Indeed this was perhaps the site at which the least reverential behaviour was experienced by the authors.

### Locations, Celebration and Reverence

In any comparison of the Kennedy sites clear differences in production (celebration of achievement in interpretation) and consumption were encountered. The diagram below shows the location of sites within a matrix which clearly places the grave site (the eternal flame) as that with the least reverential behaviour with the JFK Library clearly illustrating celebration of the life of JFK in a highly uncritical manner and generating reverential behaviour in connection with the assassination.

Figure 6. Matrix showing treatment of location in terms of production and consumption

PRODUCTION (celebration of achievement)		JFK Library
	Eternal Flame, Arlington	Sixth Floor, Dallas
CONSUMPTION (reverence of behaviour)		

The Sixth Floor, by comparison, encourages a reverential and respectful behaviour within a difficult subject, yet is far less celebratory in its interpretation.

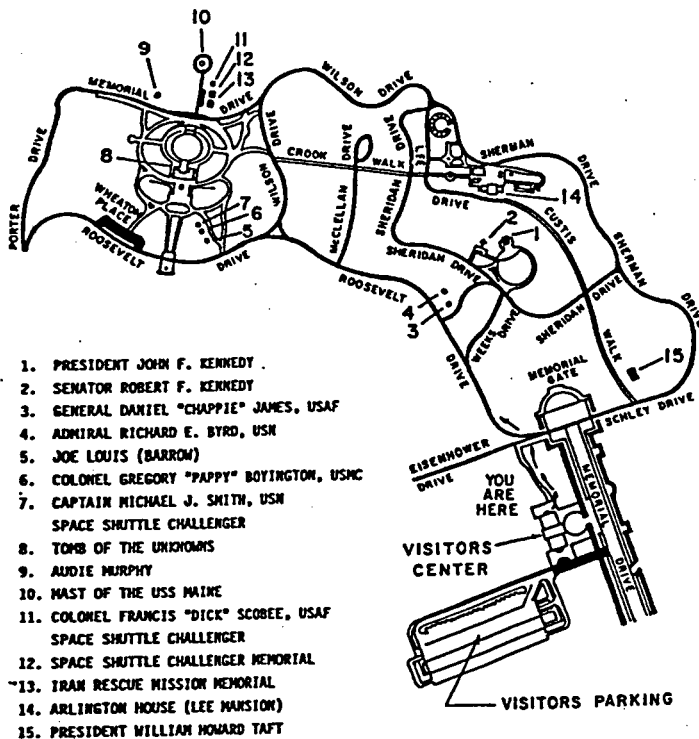
Inevitably, the grave site is different from the museum operations in Boston and Dallas which display and reflect a seemingly authoritative representation of JFK. Meaning and reality are conveyed by the writer or teller in both museums relying heavily on journalistic and televisual interpretation of the events of the presidency and the assassination. These authentic newsreels, assembled by curators and museum professionals, along with text provide and confer meaning. The television/film image is replayed as the historical reality yet the professionalism of the curator/museum professional is located in the context of a paid attraction in both cases. Financial imperatives and the need for economic efficiency drive the



Figure 7. Tourmobile Bus, Arlington National Cemetery

## ARLINGTON NATIONAL CEMETERY Walking Map

Figure 8. Visitors' Walking Map, Arlington National Cemetery



36. For further discussion see S. Walsh, *The Representation of the Past*, London: Routledge, 1992.

37. C. Rojek, *Ways of Seeing: modern transformations in leisure and travel*, Macmillan, 1993, p.170.

provision of elements such as retailing and catering. In this respect, the past, be it tragic or celebratory, is commodified in interpretation and becomes a site of commodity consumption. Commodification is well illustrated in the development of a logo for The Sixth Floor: a single red band amongst the other seven floors of the symbolic building.

Carefully, a Kennedy/assassination tag has been avoided in the corporate image. Yet this is clearly locating the recent past in the visitor attraction market place. The logo representation is utilised on merchandise throughout the retail outlet to establish identity and generate revenue. It is a corporate logo for a commercial operation.

The justifications for both museums are frequently cited as both popularity and educational mission. Yet popularity is no justification of acceptability and cannot be equated with quality. Similarly the educative mission of both attractions veers very closely towards spectacle.<sup>36</sup> Furthermore the heavy dependence upon newsreel for interpretive purposes reveals a fundamental difficulty of delineating education and entertainment/spectacle and an uncritical approach to history. The criteria of educational quality, critical insight and academic credibility were mainly cited by project directors, managers and curators as central to their missions. Yet what appears more likely is that the past is being manipulated and relabelled to convey a tourism/leisure orientation. Arlington National Cemetery, with its narrated bus tour and walking map, is a further example of this repositioning. As Rojek comments:

Bourgeois culture invented certain spaces and signs with an 'auratic' quality. The individual was required to relate to them with gravity, respect and sobriety. If the cemetery provides us with the ideal example it is because of its physical size in the landscape of modernity and its elective affinity with the sacred in bourgeois culture. Who, in bourgeois culture, would have dreamt of allowing the cemetery to become a tourist attraction?<sup>37</sup>

Figure 9. Corporate Logo and Main Entrance, The Sixth Floor, Dallas, Texas



This is part of the process of de-differentiation in post-modern culture. Urry<sup>38</sup> questions whether it is possible to develop a museum/heritage centre preserving any set of objects in a particular location anywhere in the world. Yet location has significance in historical, geographical and sociological contexts for the sites considered in this paper with perhaps the JFK Library's location in the Kennedy heartland of Boston, Massachusetts being the most tenuous. Museums such as The Sixth Floor strike associations with the past, a key historical figure of the twentieth century, and also with a darker aspect of tourism.

As the Marketing Director of The Sixth Floor, Dallas, Texas reflected on the nature of The Sixth Floor as a tourist attraction:

... no-one wants to come here and see, I hope, a re-hash enactment of the Kennedy assassination. They want to be able to experience it safely knowing that it's over and done, even though our particular box may not be very neat but it's in a package, and you can look at it, and you can feel it, but if it hurts too much it's not happening now so you can put those pieces back.<sup>39</sup>

38. J. Urry, *The Tourist Gaze*, Sage, 1990.

39. Interview with C. Price, 1994, op. cit.