



Mrs. Kennedy: The Missing History of the Kennedy Years

By Barbara Leaming

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MRS. KENNEDY: *The Missing History of the Kennedy Years* is a poignant and deeply sympathetic account of Jacqueline Kennedy during the 1,000 days of the Kennedy presidency. Critically acclaimed biographer Barbara Leaming has -- with revelatory new eyewitness testimony, profoundly moving letters written by Jackie, minute-by-minute Secret Service records, and recently declassified top-secret documents -- crafted an astonishing portrait of a Jackie Kennedy the world has not previously known. Leaming's meticulous reportage illuminates the tumultuous day-to-day life of a young woman fighting for her survival, her marriage, and her husband's presidency. Its unique perspective on the very public Kennedy marriage during an extraordinary time in our nation's history is both riveting and shocking. Leaming's conviction that the Kennedys' private life cannot be understood outside the context of the presidency makes **MRS. KENNEDY** something much more than a portrait of a marriage. It is also, in important ways, the story of the Kennedy presidency, with a tremendous missing piece filled in. Leaming has produced not only the definitive account of the Kennedy marriage, but also a richly detailed and marvelously dramatic picture of John F. Kennedy and his administration as they have never been seen before.

Brilliantly researched, intellectually probing and far-reaching in scope, **MRS. KENNEDY** is a book that will forever change the way we think about both Jacqueline Kennedy and the man she loved.

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

Asserting that Jacqueline Kennedy's role in shaping her husband's presidency has been under-examined, Leaming (Katharine Hepburn) offers a corrective in this intimate look at a very private woman. Initially inclined to keep herself as much in the background as possible, says Leaming, Jacqueline Kennedy became an increasingly visible and vocal first lady as she realized how effective she could be as an image maker. It's in this capacity that Leaming convincingly depicts her as being instrumental in shaping the course of her husband's administration: charming, intuitive and socially savvy, she was clearly adept at recognizing precisely how to win over any given individual or audience, and to convince them to see her husband in a favorable light. While many world leaders, for example, were initially inclined to view John F. Kennedy as a playboy and an intellectual lightweight, Jackie skillfully massaged their perceptions until they began to take him more seriously and consequently to be much more responsive to his foreign policy agenda. But even as she worked hard on his behalf, Jack continually betrayed her with his legendary infidelities; the impact of this on Jackie's psyche is also a major theme here. Indeed, this is as much a psychological biography as a political one, and Leaming explores Jackie's complex and often painful inner life with subtlety and compassion. Unabashedly sympathetic toward her protagonist, Leaming provides a fascinating glimpse into the psychodynamics of one of the 20th century's most famous marriages, and her assertion that Jackie Kennedy deserves more credit than she's typically gotten for her husband's successes is persuasive. 32 pages b&w photos not seen by PW. (Nov.) Forecast: Leaming's bio of Katharine Hepburn was a bestseller, and one can predict generous sales for this title, which Leaming will promote in New York, Boston and Washington, D.C., including an appearance on the Today show.

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From Library Journal

Despite the welter of material on Jacqueline Kennedy, biographer Leaming has indeed produced an original and compelling portrait of Jackie as first lady. Leaming has plumbed primary sources heretofore unused (such as the letters of Harold Macmillan) and conducted interviews with sometime friends and associates, perhaps more willing to talk now that Jackie has died. Leaming makes a persuasive case for Jackie's substantive contribution as first lady in the role of diplomat. Jackie did the research and softened up visiting leaders, who then met the president already impressed with his administration. Leaming also explains Jackie's highly criticized absences from the White House: she was fleeing her husband's flagrant womanizing. Leaming's extensive documentation of his shameless conduct and his cruelty to his wife is breathtaking. (Her theories about why they married and why Jackie stood for such treatment are less dispositive.) The publisher plans a national publicity campaign. Public libraries should stock up, but they won't be able to meet the certain demand no matter how many copies they own. Cynthia Harrison, George Washington Univ., Washington, DC

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From Booklist

Since so many full-scale biographies have been written about Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis, it's not surprising that the focus seems to be turning to "niche biographies," which examine selected segments of Jackie's well-documented life in great detail. Leaming isolates the years Jackie spent as First Lady. Using Secret Service log notes, Leaming is able to track the Kennedys' movements virtually moment by moment, and she uses this

information to detail what Jackie Kennedy's daily life was like in the White House. But Leaming also has a theory about the Kennedy marriage, and much of the new information she has gathered, including correspondence between the Kennedys and British prime minister Harold Macmillan, is used to support that theory. Leaming feels that Jack molded his marital relationship after the relationship he had with his favorite sister, the late Kathleen; consequently, the Kennedys' marriage was destined to be more familial than sexual. Although it's true Jack Kennedy was close to Kathleen in ways similar to how he interacted with Jackie, there were also vast differences between the two women--Kathleen was secure and sunny; Jackie was not. Unfortunately, Leaming tends to ignore these differences. She has much to say about the importance of Jackie's triumphant trip to Paris, where the first lady saw world leaders succumb to the power of her personality. Emboldened by this success, Leaming argues, Jackie was able to return to Washington and virtually stage-manage Jack's presidency when it came to dealing with foreign leaders. This seems stretching it. But whether you buy completely into Leaming's theories or not, she has clearly done her research, and she tells a darn good story. *Ilene Cooper*

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Users Review

From reader reviews:

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