



Jacqueline Bouvier Kennedy Onassis: The Untold Story

Barbara Leaming

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The untold story of how one woman's life was changed forever in a matter of seconds by a horrific trauma.

Barbara Leaming's extraordinary and deeply sensitive biography is the first book to document Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis' brutal, lonely and valiant thirty-one year struggle with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) that followed JFK's assassination.

Here is the woman as she has never been seen before. In heartrending detail, we witness a struggle that unfolded at times before our own eyes, but which we failed to understand.

Leaming's biography also makes clear the pattern of Jackie's life as a whole. We see how a spirited young woman's rejection of a predictable life led her to John F. Kennedy and the White House, how she sought to reconcile the conflicts of her marriage and the role she was to play, and how the trauma of her husband's murder which left her soaked in his blood and brains led her to seek a very different kind of life from the one she'd previously sought.

A life story that has been scrutinized countless times, seen here for the first time as the serious and important story that it is. A story for our times at a moment when we as a nation need more than ever to understand the impact of trauma.

Jacqueline Bouvier Kennedy Onassis: The Untold Story Details

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From Reader Review Jacqueline Bouvier Kennedy Onassis: The Untold Story for online ebook

Shannon says

I can't get this book off my mind. Prior to reading it, I knew two things about Jackie O.: 1. She was married to JFK. 2. She was a fashion icon. I feel slightly embarrassed that that is all I knew about her, but I'm a few too many decades removed from the assassination and I was only 7 when she died. I have no living memory of her or, obviously, JFK. I also grew up in the conservative south. The Kennedy family isn't worshiped here like it is in New England.

With those things said, I found the book mesmerizing. The first half of the book recapped Jackie's life up until 11/22/63. It was interesting to read about her head debutante days, her schooling, her broken family, and her desire to marry someone adventurous—not boring and predictable. Enter Jack. I guess I knew more about Jackie than the two things listed above. I knew that her husband was a womanizer. I just didn't realize how much so until reading this book (Mr. President had girls lined up all over the globe). Jackie apparently knew of his philandering but that aspect of their marriage, and really the personal dynamics of their marriage in general, is never explored. Her relationships with RFK, Bob McNamara, and LBJ were more flushed out and detailed than her relationship with her first husband.

The book took a dark turn once the assassination occurred in Jackie's young life. Both the assassination and the days following were described in disturbing detail. Putting myself in Jackie's blood stained shoes both during that time and the decades that followed was a gut wrenching experience as a reader. Barbara Leaming's main aim, for better or worse, was to highlight the PTSD Jackie experienced the rest of her life (before PTSD was a recognized medical condition), and she did a powerful job of conveying the anguish Jackie went through. I could feel how scared she was for her own life and (somewhat) understand the decisions she made out of self-preservation.

I recommend this book if you are interested in a different take on Jackie O, PTSD, or the Kennedys. I'd recommend reading a different biography of Jackie if you don't know anything about her. Since I didn't know much going in, this book left me with a rather cold impression of her which I believe is attributable to Leaming's focus on Jackie's PTSD. Regardless of that, the book kept me enthralled and gave me historical and psychological perspectives I didn't have prior to reading.

Lynn says

This was an interesting account of Jackie Kennedy Onassis' life. It tries to be a serious telling of her life while including many gossipy tidbits that one would find in a trashy biography. The author tries to put JKO's post assassination behavior through a filter of PTSD, either explaining or excusing her life choices with this "diagnosis." Some of it fits, and some of her actions are that of a spoiled, entitled selfish woman, tragedy aside. There are times when you are reading about what JKO went through, and you feel overwhelming compassion; other times you just want to roll your eyes and say "Suck it up, Buttercup!"

I'm not sure the author is qualified to diagnose JKO with PTSD, but it makes for an interesting theory and an interesting read; much different from many of the other JKO bios out there. Many things are glossed over in order to keep on track with the PTSD theme. For instance, her kids are hardly mentioned and she is portrayed as a very distant, almost cold mother. Sometimes you wonder where the author comes up with some of her information, but it's all documented in the back.

If you like reading about the Kennedys and especially about Jackie, you'll probably like this book. It's an

interesting perspective if nothing else.

Dolores says

This book is the first to explain how Jackie Kennedy fought posttraumatic stress disorder for thirty-one years. In 1964 there wasn't even a name for what she was enduring....not until 1980 was it included in the American Psychiatric Association's official manual of mental disorders. As time went by she finally got some control over the terrifying memories and, when asked what she considered her greatest achievement, she replied: "I think it is that after going through a rather difficult time, I consider myself comparatively sane. I am proud of that."

The first part of the story, covering her rather complicated family, early life, "fairy tale" marriage (with its many problems), and her transformation into a unique First Lady was very interesting. I learned many things I didn't know before, and the whole book was engrossing. I think many people judged her harshly over the years, not understanding the gravity of her condition....I am so glad she was finally able to attain a peaceful and fulfilling life. I recommend this book highly.

Wanda says

All her life Jackie had been a very proud woman and believed she should have things exactly as she wanted them. Life promised to be perfect after marrying John F Kennedy as she settled in comfortably with the Kennedy family. But two weeks after the honeymoon, perfection was only a memory. Years later, when Jackie thought about her early-married life, she remembered the velocity above everything else. "Life with him was just so fast." JFK never stopped moving forward, but was always going on to something higher. And his health issues always shadowed their life. His back problems were very serious and always present, but the president learned to live gracefully with his pain. And then there were his sexual habits. Jackie had been told about this issue before the marriage, but failed to comprehend how serious it really was. Because of this she suffered a great deal of humiliation. Jackie was confronted with the same question over and over during the course of their marriage. "What shall I do?"

Jackie grappled with tragedy and unbearable events all through her life and suffered from PTSD. There is a sadness that filters throughout the book as the writer takes us through that horrific day in Dallas, with the assassination of the president, and also his brother's assassination, RFK, in 1968. It continues on with many more events, including Jackie's marriage to Aristotle Onassis, and finally ends with her battle with lymphoma and death in 1994.

I have always been fascinated with Jacqueline Kennedy and think of her as being the epitome of elegance and grace. She experienced many devastating losses, but somehow always persevered.

The author's style of writing is in great detail – much of it I found interesting, but much that I could've done without. But she certainly did her homework – the book was well researched. However, I would have liked more information on the children, Caroline and John, but that part of Jackie's life was just briefly touched on. I also thought the last number of years in her life were rushed through.

But, all in all, this was a very informative read and I highly recommend it. My rating is 4 stars.

Olariu says

cam de 3,5. scrisa usor comercial, ma asteptam la maui multa documentare si date/interviuri/fragmente din viata acestei femei si a primului ei sot. finalul abrupt, rece, fara emotie ...

Jean says

This is Barbara Leaming's third Kennedy biography. The first third of the book recycles considerable material from the first biography minus the dubious theories. Learning's major fault as a biographer is her tendency to mind read. In this biography learning has considerable documentation from a variety of sources. The author details after the assassination how Bobby Kennedy and Lyndon Johnson sought to comfort her and to use her politically.

The main or key thrust of Leaming's book is her claim that Jackie had PTSD (post-traumatic stress disorder). She documents the clinical symptoms including flashbacks, insomnia, numbness, avoidance, fear, depression and anger. The author also points out that the condition was not medically recognized until 1980. The author claims Jackie fought her way back to good mental health through her work in publishing and her contributions to land mark preservation. The author documents that Jackie's Sister Lee Radziwell told that Bobby Kennedy's assassination triggered a recurrence of the PTSD in Jackie. When the British poet Stephen Spender asked in 1980, about her greatest achievement, she told him, "I think it is that after going through a rather difficult time, I consider myself comparatively sane, I am proud of that."

One of the iconic women of the 20th century, Jackie Kennedy, is such an interesting story and how her life and that of the country was dramatically changed on the terrible day in Dallas. According to the author Jackie spent the rest of her life attempting to heal from that horrific day in Dallas. I read this as an audio book downloaded from Audible. Eliza Foss did a good job narrating the book.

Michelle says

The US changed in an instant when President John F. Kennedy (1917-1963) was assassinated on November 22, 1963 in Dallas Texas. Our nation would never be the same, as we deeply mourned the loss of our 35th president. Americans felt sorrow for his widow, yet Jackie wasn't really the focus, until this revelatory new book: "Jacqueline Bouvier Kennedy Onassis: The Untold Story" authored by historian/scholar Barbara Leaming.

In 1963 PTSD was simply known as "shell shock", the condition described the minds of returning veterans impacted by the shock, horror/terror of war. In 1980 PTSD was added to the DSM by the American Psychiatric Association. Today, much more is known and recognized about PTSD, Leaming suggests that Jackie was likely affected with the disorder following JFK's assassination.

It was unclear how Jackie would ever get past the tragic memory recall of holding JFK's shattered head in her lap. There were no grief counselors available, nor did she visit a therapist. People appointed Jackie as a

national heroine, standing vigils in the winter cold. Jackie had no desire to be a public figure, and resented the public praise/attention of her conduct, wishing to be left alone. Traffic and people clogged the streets, tour busses arrived, over 10,000 people visited JFK's grave at Arlington National Cemetery daily. Jackie was counseled/consoled by Father McSorley- (he recorded their talks in his diary, which came to light in 2003 with the publication of another Kennedy book). The magnitude of her grief was profound, she questioned him about suicide, even praising the death of Marilyn Monroe: who escaped her misery. "Was it wrong to pray to die?" she asked. Jackie felt she may have been able to save JFK, if only she had known. No amount of vodka could ease her grief.

Unable to participate in the Manchester tape recorded interviews, Bobby usually represented her, at least at first. Jackie had to recall the assassination multiple times over for official interviews. In 1964 she would meet with the Warren Commission for historical documentation, this was a grueling process. The true nature of their marriage, JFK's extramarital affairs, were known only to select insiders. Jackie would protect JFK's sterling public image, she may have felt it was in her best interest to do so. Unflattering things and facts were carefully covered up.

Every negative preconceived idea/notion of Jackie being regarded as a reserved uppity snob, caring only about her privacy is challenged. Her 1968 marriage to Aristotle Onassis, the public judgment and harsh criticism must be reconsidered. Barbara Leaming illustrates Jackie's humanity in a way that hasn't been previously considered. This is a meaningful and important book, the story beautifully written like a novel.

Louise says

While the blurbs and reviews of the book say it's about Jackie Kennedy's PTSD, this is less than ½ of the book. It is a more general emotional biography of Jacqueline Bouvier Kennedy Onassis.

There is a good description of Jackie and her family's unique social position. Her mother's second marriage brought her standing but no wealth. Author, Barbara Leaming, shows how dating, flirting and false relationships were the norm at this time as girls hid their talents and subordinated their interests to boys. The author shows how Jackie did this with Jack. She did not show him that her knowledge of French history was greater than his and arranged it so that he would have to come to her.

She gave up a beau offering a stable but boring life, for Jack Kennedy who showed all the signs of excitement to come. Little did Jackie know what was in store. She was chosen not for love, but because she had poise, style, the right religion and enough pedigree to fill the bill.

The marriage is characterized by emotional abuse. New, to me, in this story is Jack's serious attraction to a 21 year old Gunilla von Post, whom he travels to Sweden to visit not long after the wedding. JFK is constantly on the prowl, leaving Jackie to cover for herself and for him when he leaves formal social events for trysts. He is not present often and when together, she is an asset more than a wife. A lot of hurt for Jackie preceded the awful day in Dallas.

The latter half of the book shows her reaction to the tragedy inclusive of why she wore the blood stained Chanel suit (a "line for line copy" says Leaming) all the way from Dallas to Washington. Jackie's obsession with the Manchester book (The Death of a President: November 1963) shows her need to control the tragedy and her relations with Bobby Kennedy were the need to share it with some also suffering from loss. There are examples of anger, depression and irrationality.

I always figured she married Onassis for protection for her children, but it does not appear that they are part of her life. Leaming only shows that she was seeking safety for herself. At one point she even requests less secret service protection for Carolyn and John. There is a good description of the Onassis marriage and how it did and didn't provide what she needed and what it meant for both parties.

There are some big holes in the story. There is more about Jack Kennedy's back and health problems than about Jackie's relationship with her children. How did she explain the tragedy to them? How did they respond to her grief and she to theirs? Leaming says the Warren Commission's bullet theory was "certainly was not how she remembered it". If she addressed this in her testimony why was it ignored? There is a one line mention of "a moment" (my quotes) with John Warnecke who designed the JFK grave site. Was this unguarded moment or something common for her in this period? The post Onassis life is given short shrift given that it is longer than the two marriages together. We do not know who she thinks killed her husband, and who she thinks she needs protection from.

In the end, there is a quote, fascinating on many levels. She tells her son that if his father were to return she might "send him away". There is no context, especially since we know nothing of her relationship with John, Jr. Was she finally able to feel the hurt of her husband's many affairs and their sham marriage? Or did she merely mean if she could do it all over, she'd marry someone else to avoid the tragedy? How do we know she said this (it is not footnoted) and if she did, why would she say this to a son who lost his father before he could know him? Leaming has some comments on how this relates to PTSD, but they are not clear. I think quote is more relevant to the mother -son relationship, whatever it may be.

Despite the gaps, the book is absorbing. It succeeds in defining the emotions and violence of this period. Standing in Jackie's shoes we re-experience 3 assassinations of key leaders and the Vietnam War which tore families and friendships apart. I don't know of another book that attempts to give an emotional history like this. Books like Bush or Obama on the Couch give a psychological profile and show how it can predict decisions and leadership style. In this book the author is going for something deeper and more difficult, the story of how a trauma shapes a psychology and a life.

Dana Burda says

Cartea scriitoarei americane Barbara Leaming, specialistă în scrierea biografiilor personalităților artistice și politice, intitulată atât de sugestiv " Jacqueline Bouvier Kennedy Onassis / Povestea nespuse" a apărut în anul 2016 la editura Corint / Istorie în traducerea lui Lidia Grădinaru și cu o prefață de istoricul Diana Mandache. Este una dintre cele mai bune și interesante cărți dedicate soției președintelui J.F. Kennedy, a epocii cuprinse între 1945 și începutul anilor 90, o carte care merită să fie citită atât de iubitorii de istorie cât și de publicul larg. Filmul atât de bine nominalizat la premiile Oscar din februarie 2017 și intitulat " Jackie" are ca bază cartea Barbarei Leaming. Recenzia cărții o puteți găsi pe situl Literatura pe tocuri.

Tracy says

This book was very difficult to finish! The editing was some of the worse I have ever seen! The run-on sentences are so long they actually should be paragraphs! I had to re-read sections many times to try to figure out what point the author is making!

Outside of the awful editing, the authors theory that Mrs.Kennedy suffered from PTSD is probably very accurate. It sure puts to shame all of the trashy tabloids, articles and books criticising her and mocking her behaviour and choices for the past 50+ years! It absolutely explains many of her choices that so many mocked her for after the tragic loss of her husband. I believe this theory will stop those who judge her with mocking and contempt and instead give light to compassion and empathy for a woman who lead a nation through one of its darkest hours!

Linda Lawrance says

The fact that it took me 4 (otherwise very busy) months to finish this book belies my great enjoyment in reading it. One always tends to hesitate to use words like 'enjoy' when the subject matter is as harrowing as this at times was although it is undoubtedly a compelling read.

I have always been drawn to Jacqueline Bouvier Kennedy Onassis; her style, her fame, her mystique and her steadfast commitment to doing things her own way, although I have to admit that I had, over the years, given little thought to the emotions and feelings of this woman.

Oh, like countless others I admired her strength at JFK's funeral but I had never until this book, considered her suffering from what we now know as PTSD. Never thought of what it was actually like to be in the midst of the horror and bloodshed of Dallas or of the torment of second guessing her actions, of the "if only's" that would haunt her for decades to come. I never understood her reasoning for going from being Mrs John F Kennedy, beloved and admired widow of the slain president and torch bearer for "Camelot ", to being the virtually despised Mrs Aristotle Onassis. Never considered that her tendency toward reclusiveness could be to avoid triggers for the waking nightmares that were the legacy of Dallas.

This is indeed the untold story of Jacqueline, well researched and told with sympathy and although I suspect she would be horrified at the world knowing so much about her, I for one am exceedingly glad that I do and I admire her and feel for her all the more because of it.

Laura says

I am glad that this book was cancelled for the book club, it is a very intense book about Jacqueline Bouvier Kennedy Onassis and her life with John F. Kennedy, before and after the Presidential assassination. I have read several books about her, but nothing quite like this. This book extensively digs into the assassination and the aftermath of her PTSD in the years that followed her until her death. This book really makes you feel empathetic to her and what she went through. I do like the authors research in the background of Jacqueline and the years that followed her. This book was hard to get through sometimes and I found myself tearing up during most of it. I could only imagine what she went through into seeing the love of her life getting assassinated. She was a National treasure, a clothing trendsetter, and a very beautiful woman. I highly recommend this book and think this book makes a wonderful addition to any library.

Caidyn (SEMI-HIATUS; BW Reviews; he/him/his) says

This review and others can be found on BW Book Reviews.

DNF at 61%

The untold story my ass.

Right away in this book, I really got a vibe that this was a sexist book. It immediately focused on Kennedy Onassis' love life. It didn't start with her childhood or talking to me about how rough her childhood was. It started with her as a teen, talking with a boy, and pretending not to understand a thing he was talking about. Then, it got into how sniping she was about those boys.

It literally only focused on her in relation to other men. What about her going to school? What about her studies since she did go to college? What about her going back to college? What about her work in the White House and things she stood for? What about how two of her kids died and what that did to her?

Not only that, but it took forever to get to the thesis that Leaming had about Jackie having PTSD. That's something I completely agree with, but if you're going to have a huge thesis, get to the point and only focus on information that pertains to that thesis. And even then, it was still about how other men used her for their political gain and not about how she dealt with the PTSD. Her alcoholism was barely mentioned, just a side mention that she used vodka to cope and moved on immediately.

In short, this book was super sucky. And I'm disappointed that this is my first time reading about her.

Elaine says

Thoroughly enjoyed this account of Jackie's life after the assassination of JFK. It was very insightful to be able to see how that horrible event affected her. Suffering from post traumatic stress disorder(PTSD) before the term was even known she attempted to soldier on. It is easy to criticise her and forget that she witnessed one of the most traumatic and horrific things imaginable. For someone that was always known to be a very private person, even putting assurances in place after her death not to have her private letters and writings published, this book delves quite deeply into her life and allows us to see the all too human and vulnerable side of a woman well known for her stoicism.

Socraticgadfly says

I know that more than a few psychologists and psychiatrists have made a forensic diagnosis of PTSD of Jackie O, and a few writers have discussed it in brief, but, to the best of my knowledge, this is the first book-length treatment of the idea, and a very good one.

The book focuses on the period from Jack's death to Bobby's, with some treatment of her marriage to Aristotle Onassis, then a brief wrap-up, and her childhood in front.

Several takeaways, related to but not limited to, the PTSD angle:

1. Her biological father, Black Jack Bouvier, was just as much a philanderer as JFK, and she knew it, by the time of prep school, even asking him if he'd bedded any of her classmates' moms. So, per the old adage about marriage, that men marry expecting their wives to stay the same and women marry expecting to change their husbands, with a dash of quasi-Freudian thought, did she marry Jack, subconsciously, if not consciously, hoping to "tame" him?

2. "Death of a President" author William Manchester apparently had PTSD himself, tho the term was not used at the time, from his WWII experience at Okinawa. (His military medical file mentions "scars on his brain" or similar, per the author.) He had not worked through it until his 1980 memoir, and Leaming makes a good case that, in writing this book, his crafting and narrative focus, and his interviews with Jackie, appear to be subconscious stirrings of his own PTSD.

3. Leaming discusses how Jackie also tried to navigate political tugs of war between RFK and LBJ, and how she really kind of liked LBJ, despite some ideas to the contrary.

3A. She really leaned on McNamara a lot during these years.

Anyway, that's enough of a sketch. It's a good book.
