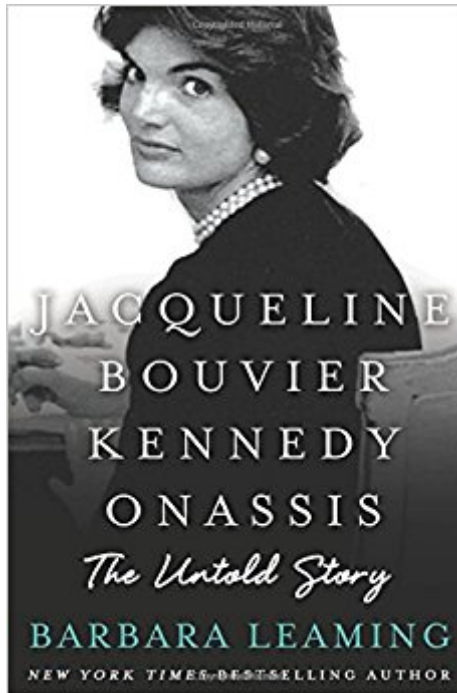




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Jacqueline Bouvier Kennedy Onassis: The Untold Story



Synopsis

The instant New York Times and USA Today bestseller! 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.

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Customer Reviews

“Provocative”. Recast in this light, Jackie's post-1963 actions make a new kind of sense. With a diagnosis of PTSD in mind, incidents once criticized as selfish or at least self-indulgent can be reassessed. • “An intimate and revealing

look at one of the 20th century's most remarkable--and misunderstood--women. [Kirkus Reviews](#) "Jacqueline Bouvier Kennedy Onassis provides suggestive evidence that her subject suffered from the clinical symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder, or PTSD, including flashbacks, insomnia, numbness, avoidance, fear, depression, and anger. Her documentation -- which includes Jackie's remarks to intimates, as well as her behavior -- is compelling. Interpreting the post-assassination life through the lens of PTSD turns out to be a fruitful way of making sense of Jackie's sometimes odd-seeming choices. [The Boston Globe](#) "Barbara Leaming offers a startling and fascinating look at Jackie's life. Sensitive and stylish, intimate and insightful. At once harrowing and humane, Jacqueline Bouvier Kennedy Onassis stands as a deeply moving narrative. [Richmond Times-Dispatch](#) "Both refreshing and uniquely insightful. [Maclean's](#) "Successfully provides a fresh perspective on the widow of assassinated U.S. president John F. Kennedy. Award-winning biographer Barbara Leaming's take on Kennedy Onassis is well-written and thoroughly researched. ... Leaming's new biography brings her back to life in an important new light. [Winnipeg Free Press](#) "Barbara Leaming makes a strong argument, based on original research, that Jackie suffered from Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) at a time before the condition had been diagnosed. [Bookpage](#)

PTSD & JACKIE KENNEDY by Barbara Leaming Our country is in the midst of a national crisis over PTSD. Great numbers of veterans of the Iraq and Afghanistan wars have returned suffering from post-traumatic stress disorder. Yet our society still understands very little about what PTSD is and the suffering it causes to those who live with it. Jackie Kennedy's experience of PTSD is at the heart of my new biography, *Jacqueline Bouvier Kennedy Onassis: The Untold Story*. It is the reason I decided to write the book. The story of Jackie's 31 year struggle with PTSD that I was able to detail and document--much of it seen from Jackie's own perspective, often in her own heartbreaking words--affords us an important chance to see up close and in vivid detail just what PTSD means to someone who has had a traumatic experience. It is also in a real sense a remarkable story of survival, the story of someone fighting for her sanity when no one understood what was wrong, when she was repeatedly under assault by society, and when the trauma was repeated. Importantly, this is also a story which puts a name and face we know to the overwhelming reality of the suffering of someone afflicted with post-traumatic stress disorder. Moreover, her trauma was also a national trauma, a trauma we all witnessed--the

assassination of JFK in which Jackie was soaked in her husband's blood and brains. Jackie Kennedy spent decades in the public eye, but it now becomes frighteningly clear how little we understood of what we saw. It is time to set the record straight. Jackie's story is both important history and a history for our time. Of all the books I've written none has meant more to me in emotional terms and none has made me feel more acutely the responsibility I have in writing it--a responsibility not just to my subject herself but to those who are suffering from PTSD.

This is not a standard biography, nor, thank goodness, another account of all the scandals. It is primarily a study of the Kennedy marriage, the assassination, and JFK's struggle to overcome both experiences and to emerge a stronger woman, her own woman.....not an adjunct to a man....as a survivor. It begins tellingly with Jackie at 16 playing the demure, coquettish girl to a pompous older man (probably about 19) who is enlightening her about Petain and France, although she probably knew far more about the subject than he did. She is ready to step out into her adult world of high society but already knew that was not really the life she wanted. The first chapters of the book are about her early years as a deb, her boyfriends, and then her job at the Washington Herald, where she moved into an entirely different world and met JFK, as well as a couple of other men who were to influence her. The marriage is described in all its agony, humiliation, and heartbreak. There are details which I do not recall reading about previously: that two weeks after their "idyllic" honeymoon in Acapulco, JFK wanted her to return home while he stayed a couple of weeks more in California and home at that time was JFK's small bedroom in his parents' house. (Didn't they make plans before the wedding????) There was also the Swedish blonde with whom JFK made plans to see during his life threatening operation spinal operation and the slow recuperation. He even told her and her family that he would divorce Jackie to marry her. All in all, this intelligent, charming charismatic leader comes across as goatish (Leaming's word), thoughtless, unkind, and reprehensible. What is made evident is that Jackie, despite the trappings of wealth and fame, had a difficult life and experienced a number of humiliations, including that of her parents' divorce and acrimonious relations. JFK's pursuit of other women was just one more burden as well as the humiliating way his family and political cronies disparaged her for her "differences". The loss of two babies, plus an earlier miscarriage only compounded the grief and unhappiness. Leaming's interpretation of her life really begins with the aftermath of the assassination and Jackie's suffering which Leaming equates with PTSD. She recounts Jackie's continual reliving of those few bloody and traumatic seconds which changed her life, her nightmares, her reactions to noise and crowds, her drinking, her thoughts about suicide. All during this time, she also had to contend with LBJ's and

RFK's attempt to use her for political purposes. The debacle over the Manchester book is more evidence of Jackie's obsessive desire to be in control. With RFK's assassination, Jackie's feelings of desperation increased as the nightmares began again. Her marriage to Onassis was not so much for the money as for the safety and security she thought he could provide for her and her children. That marriage too ended in humiliation, despite the wealth she was able to obtain. After Onassis' death, Jackie began another stage of her life, perhaps the most successful and fulfilling of all, as an editor. Leaming sees this as the best evidence of her survival and ultimate victory over the trauma of the assassination. This was made possible by her ability to control her surroundings and her life. The tendency to be a control freak may have initially arisen out of her childhood unhappiness but it was given full range in the last years of her life when she had the money. In the end, of course, she could not control the cancer that finally defeated her. Whether or not the PTSD argument works medically or psychologically in Jackie's case, her experiences of constant flashbacks and nightmares, of depression, certainly have a similarity with those experiences of soldiers who have suffered trauma. When Ted White met with her and then wrote the famous "Camelot" article, what was never published were his notes from that hours-long interview when she relived the assassination over and over again. White was horrified by it all. She was still exhibiting the same type of memory years afterward. This is a fascinating and thoughtful study of a woman who still has a special place in American history and iconography. It is sympathetic but not fawning. Leaming does not depict Jackie as an innocent, sweet, saint but as a real woman with strengths and weaknesses, virtues and vices. She was intelligent and had meaningful friendships with men as disparate as Robert McNamara, Joseph Alsop, and Harold MacMillan (and these were friendships, not romances). Her letters to them and their replies are quoted, more evidence of her complexity and intelligence. I read this in two days because I simply could not put it down...a trite statement but true. It is a thoughtful and ultimately moving account of a woman who has been depicted in so many different ways. Leaming's interpretation is that she was ultimately a survivor and she quotes something Jackie said when asked about what she was most proud about in her life. Her response, more or less, was that she was someone who had lived through great difficulties but had emerged relatively sane.

The familiar events of JFK's extraordinary life are told through the prism of PTSD, how those 8.5 seconds in the back of a Lincoln Continental changed her life forever. It's a compelling supposition, and makes moments in the former First Lady's life -- like her battles with William Manchester and lawsuit against Ron Gallella -- look less like willful fits of pique and more like a desperate attempt to

restore order to her shattered universe. I also appreciated how Ms. Leaming went all the way back to Jackie's adolescence and her youthful years as a career girl to put her post-Dallas life in sharper relief. For such a detailed study of the woman's life, I was surprised by omissions. First of all, none of her pre-Onassis romances are examined. How did she feel about Lord Harlech (beyond not wishing to marry him), John Warnecke and Ros Gilpatric (not even mentioned)? What was her relationship with her children like as they grew? How did she (a woman who came to value control over all) respond to her mother's Alzheimer's and her father's/sister's alcoholism? Was she terrified of the genetic component of these conditions, and the dangers they posed to her quest to control her fate? Those criticisms aside, I appreciate this portrait of a gallant lady, a woman who struggled to overcome the tragedy that threatened to define her.

It's impossible for anyone to understand what it must have been like for Jacqueline Kennedy to watch her husband's head shot off right in front of her - under the scorching scrutiny of the entire world watching. That PTSD, depression, suicidal depression - were not understood in 1963 as they are today. Nor were there the wide variety of therapies and medications that we have today available then. It was not at all uncommon for Catholic women of that time to speak to a priest in times of crisis. Nothing illustrated for me how inadequate people understood the impact of that kind of trauma than when members of the Kennedy family-- Bobby & Ethel - as well as others- felt that "Jackie just wasn't trying hard enough to get over it". That truly captures the perspective of the time, Bobby and Ethel were simply a product of their time, they were not being cruel- although seen through today's lenses, their views could, understandably, be seen as harsh. This book captures the trauma Jackie went through, the pain, suffering yet November 22, was not the end of it. As if that wasn't enough, the fear and anxiety she must have gone through as she realized her husband's disgusting behavior would be coming public knowledge - it is unimaginable how any mother, much less one who lived under the public microscope must have felt knowing there was nothing she could do to shield them from this humiliation. Bad enough she had to live with that shame while he was alive, now even worse - to watch her children shamed as well. The constant fear of violence confirmed as Martin Luther King was killed followed by her brother in law. I was sitting in the car with my parents, when I was about 14 & the radio announcer said Jackie Kennedy was going to marry Ari Onassis. And live in Greece. I had no idea who he was, but I was very aware of JFK's assassination & the assassination of RFK & I recall thinking : why wouldn't she want to go live someplace warm, sunny and far away from all this violence? Be safe. The understandable panic attacks, frantic world traveling to escape - only to come back & realize you couldn't runaway from what she was dealing

with. Continuing distrust of everyone, fear for safety of herself and children never stopped. But, the children grew up with none of the public tantrums & drunken antics so common to many of their cousins and other young celebrities today. They competed college, got advance degrees & became a credit to their mother and father. But, more than anything-they were the the final proof that their mother survived and survived In spite of it all.Jacqueline Kennedy was an American original. She was human, had her faults. But, conducted herself with grace and dignity throughout her life. You would never see her in public with low cut outfits, pants with more holes than fabric, disheveled, screaming at people - as is so common today. You would not see her on Oprah, Dr. Phil or giving interviews to People Magazine.She gave us dignity and class, grace under pressure. How sad her example of how to behave has become nearly extinct. Wonderful book.Breezie

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