

— In Memoriam —

College Joins Nation In Mourning

National Reaction

By DR. RIDGEWAY F. SHINN

In the last hours, all Americans have been absorbed in the drama of death. We have hung on endless words from radio and television sets; we have searched newspapers for details; we have knelt down in prayer. For, in an incredible and bizarre manner, John F. Kennedy was assassinated on Friday afternoon, November 22, in Dallas, Texas.

The opening act of the drama ran according to the script. Time, with 1964 on the horizon, for a presidential jaunt to strengthen party ties and loyalties in Texas. Speeches, hand-shaking, airplane hops to keep appointments, the President of the United States visible to as many Texans as possible, a motorcade through Dallas! Applause and cheers! And then, a sudden interruption by an unknown actor, not in the cast. The sniper and a shot that hit its mark. And within minutes, the finality of death.

Suddenly, the stillness and the hush of the final act became apparent. The central figure with his zest, vigor, rationality, and youth was removed from the American scene. Instead, a catafalque with a casket in the East Room of the White House and then in the rotunda of the Capitol to be visited by crowds who could not comprehend how all this came to pass. "In Latin America (or south-east Asia or the Balkans or the Communist bloc), of course, you expect presidents to get shot. But not in our civilized, affluent, and secure United States." And the silent crowds with puzzled expression posed the nagging question, "Why?"

Now, we have all witnessed this drama of death. And we do remain puzzled about its meaning. I know that no words can, at this moment, make clear the meaning of this tragedy. Thus, I can only offer some reflections; a gripping drama always causes one to probe his own mind and conscience.

The drama of the last days has been a visible reminder to us of the irrational tendency of humanity. This is, apparently, an eternal tendency. We are apt to forget this in the busy-ness of our lives. And yet this tragic year of 1963 has furnished us with two indelible reminders: the bombing of a church in Birmingham in which little girls, because they happened to be in church, lost their lives; the assassination of the President. Neither of these tragedies could possibly solve the issue that the perpetrator envisaged. For irrational violence does not offer solutions. Someone has commented, rightly, that man, at any time, exists only one generation away from irrational barbarism!

Or again, this drama is a sharp reminder that death awaits each of us. All men die,



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and, in death, all men are equal. Death is inescapable and, with minor exceptions, no man may choose the time, place, or mode of his death. He can only respond as humanly and as gallantly as possible.

Perhaps this sudden tragedy may inject a needful mood and an abiding sense of compassion in the American people. I am continually terrified by the many times and the many ways in which I feel a lack of compassion: our sense of superiority over the other peoples of the world; our compulsive acquisitiveness; our unwillingness to cope with the grave issues of our day—education, economic growth, housing, simple justice—unless there is some personal pay-off; our reluctance to stamp out evil; our silence. We desperately need a compassionate people.

There is also the possibility that through this death we may come to see life more clearly. In death, the deceased person

is mute, removed, and detached; it is those who survive who must perceive those issues and purposes to which they must be loyal if they are to honor their loved one's memory. And, in this case, the immediate survivors include not only Mrs. Kennedy and two young children but also all Americans. May we use this occasion to search our minds and our souls, to find again those dreams and purposes which have sustained Americans in the past, and, in honor of John F. Kennedy, rededicate ourselves to justice, honor, rationality, equal opportunity for all persons in all things, and, above all, courage to do the right in spite of the odds.

If we can reflect upon this drama of death and learn something more about ourselves and the reasons for our being, then this death need not have been in vain. Changed behavior can redeem blatant irrationality.

Shock — Disbelief

Our President is dead. A world that is no stranger to hatred and fanaticism has been shocked into disbelief by the cruelty and senselessness of his death — for our President was murdered.

Even in our grief it is possible to realize what has come to pass because of this horrible, vile crime. Our country has lost its President, but the free world has lost its leader at a time when it can ill afford the loss.

When the first news of John Kennedy's assassination reached us, we held onto hope. It is impossible, we thought, that he should die. It could not happen here, in our time, in our country. But it did. Our President had been murdered.

It seems incongruous that affairs of state must go on as if nothing had happened. It seems incredible that since early Fri-

"The president has been shot." Such was the nature of the cry heard on the Rhode Island College campus at approximately 1:50 p.m. on Friday afternoon, November 22.

Incredibility and bewildering confusion written on their faces, students and professors filed into two o'clock classes. Available radios were turned on, and as the truth of the rumor became increasingly clear, the audio-visual department made available the television sets to broadcast closed circuit classes at the College.

Students and faculty members not in class filled the already overflowing classrooms containing T.V. sets. Adjoining doors to classrooms were thrown open and the volume on the sets was turned up in full so that the crowds of students standing in the corridors could hear. In the cafeteria and in the library, in the student center and in the gym, in the Administration Building and in Craig-Lee and Alger Halls people gathered to hear the news, with shock and disbelief on their faces, and hope in their hearts. Many people cried, and most people prayed in the words of their own faith. One teacher taught her two o'clock class, not because she didn't care, but rather because this was the best way she knew to pray. Many, like one French professor, simply put down chalk and walked out of the classroom, tears in their eyes. And then it was confirmed. "The President is dead."

With the words of the con-

Defies Comment

The horror of the violent death of the President defies comment even among college and university professors whose principal function is articulation. Nothing can be said at this point to supplement the numerous expressions of grief already expressed by public leaders and private citizens throughout the nation and the world. Yet, the special concern of the President for intellectual and cultural excellence—revealed in his public policy and in his personal life—must not go unnoticed by the intellectual community. President Kennedy's respect for intelligence in public life was a Periclean shower on the American community; his systematic effort to increase the intellectual and cultural resources of the nation was an integral part of his presidential vision. John Fitzgerald Kennedy inspired the confidence of the intellectual community by using the prestige of the presidency to promote intellectual and cultural values.

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Campus Reaction

firmation still ringing in their ears and piercing their hearts, teachers and students left their vantage points around radios and T.V.'s, each to seek comfort in his own way. Most were alone, walking aimlessly. Small knots of students stood along the campus walks, sat on benches or on patio walls, heads bowed in silent prayer, eyes staring off into space, bewildered, stunned, confused. The campus was silent, and the silence was the silence of deep grief, mourning, and the ceaseless questions "How?" and "Why?" In Roberts Hall a lone secretary sat typing, tears running down her cheeks.

The American flag, which had been taken down a little before three o'clock, as is the custom on campus, was re-raised to half-mast by a group of saddened and determined students. At three o'clock the silence was broken by the mournful funeral toll of the bells in the tower of Roberts Hall, a toll which lasted for one hour.

Students and faculty alike left campus early. And if to re-enforce the awful truth, before the last radio was turned off, a Roman Catholic priest intoned the traditional prayer for the dead: "May the souls of the faithful departed, through the mercy of God, rest in peace, Amen." President John Fitzgerald Kennedy was dead.

