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Some we remember, some we forget: The collective memory of assassinated U.S. Presidents in the modern age

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Abstract & Keywords

"Some We Remember, Some We Forget" is a historical study of the modern cultural memory of the four assassinated US presidents, Abraham Lincoln, James Garfield, William McKinley, and John F. Kennedy. The study first provides narrative accounts of each president's assassination, aftermath of the event, and the lasting cultural impact from a modern perspective. Key points include differences between the memorialization of Lincoln and Kennedy and the relative lack of memorialization of Garfield and McKinley. These accounts are followed by analytical sections regarding the current awareness and collective memory of each president's death, offering arguments as to why the amount of awareness between Lincoln and Kennedy's deaths and Garfield and McKinley's is so stark. The first section "Material Remnants" examines physically lasting reminders of each president. The second section, "Non Material Remnants," is broken up in subsections. The first, "Sudden Shocks and Interminable Infections," concludes that because Lincoln and Kennedy died almost immediately after being shot, their deaths had a greater sociological impact on the American public, than Garfield's and McKinley's delayed deaths, which allowed for more adequate preparation. Subsection two, "Presidential Performance and Assassin Appeal," argues that the policies and surrounding events of the Lincoln and Kennedy presidencies had more lasting impact on the American public and that the personal characteristics of the assassins played a role in how each assassination is recalled. The third subsection, "Ritual Rites and Martyred Men," compares the funeral ceremonies and language used in remembrance of each assassinated president, concluding that Lincoln and Kennedy's funerals more publicly available, and that post-mortem orations and writings regarding these two painted them as martyrs, a well-regarded archetype in cultural memory. The final subsection, "Conspiracy and Closure," argues that Kennedy's assassination in particular left Americans with a lack of conclusions leading to a lasting desire to find answers.

Keywords: US Presidents, Assassination, Memory, Abraham Lincoln, John F. Kennedy, James Garfield, William McKinley

Course Information

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SOME WE REMEMBER, SOME WE FORGET:
The Collective Memory of Assassinated
U.S. Presidents in the Modern Age

by

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Introduction

The term “assassin” has a long standing history, dating back to the Crusades beginning in 1095 A.D.¹ Throughout history, assassinations of politicians have been a long standing fascination for students of history and the general public. For Americans, the notorious assassinations of Julius Caesar, Archduke Franz Ferdinand, and Mahatma Gandhi occurred far from home and remained distant, but four assassinations transpired as close to the heart of the United States as possible: within the office of the President. Despite the initially devastating impact that all four successful assassination attempts had on the nation, two of these presidents are remembered, brought up time after time in American culture, and two forgotten, obscured and lost. In a poll of over one thousand adults conducted by ABCNews.com in February 2000, “Honest Abe” Lincoln topped the list of selections for “greatest American president,” quickly followed by John F. Kennedy, only two percent lower.² Lincoln and Kennedy are two of the most iconic figures in American history, recognized by Americans who often struggle to name the current vice president, and linked by tragic common experience: assassination.³ Following the assassination of John F. Kennedy in 1963, almost immediate comparisons were made to the national icon Abraham Lincoln’s own death. However, no comparisons were drawn between the young, dead Kennedy and two other American presidents who fell victim to the assassin’s bullet. James Garfield and William McKinley, the 20th and 25th presidents were also shot, and killed, by mad men while in office, but are only shadows in the dusty annals of history for a great number of Americans. Very shortly after Kennedy was assassinated, the National Opinion

¹ Kevin M. McCarthy, "The Origin of Assassin," *American Speech* 48, no. 1/2 (Spring - Summer, 1973), 77-83, accessed November 22, 2014, <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3087895>.

² ABCNews.com, "Presidents and History," *PollingReport.com*, accessed September 31, 2014, <http://www.pollingreport.com/wh-hstry.htm>.

³ CBS News, "Many Americans History, Civics-Challenged: Poll," *CBSNews.Com*, March 22, 2011, accessed November 12, 2014, <http://www.cbsnews.com/news/many-americans-history-civics-challenged-poll/>.

Research Center (NORC) at the University of Chicago conducted a study to gauge public reaction to the President's death. Among the many questions posed to 1,384 randomly selected Americans, one question regarded the presidents killed other than Kennedy. Though "91 per cent named Lincoln," only "62 per cent named McKinley, and 47 per cent named Garfield." Authors of the study also noted that the numbers for the awareness of McKinley and Garfield may have reflected an artificially "high level of knowledge" due to the "effects of mass media, to which the public was so heavily exposed" in the days after Kennedy's death.⁴ Today, McKinley and Garfield, perhaps even more popular in their lifetimes than the idolized Kennedy or Lincoln, are among the dead and forgotten, excluded from collective memory. This study attempts to answer a simple question: Why?

The answer is not so simple. First, the study of collective memory seeks to discover how and why we "remember, forget, or re-appropriate the knowledge of the social past."⁵ Made up of the trends and similarities in the memory of individuals, analysis of collective memory focuses on the general consensus of a group of people in response to specific events. In this case, the events are the assassinations of four US presidents and the group modern Americans. Modern Americans, however, could not possibly directly *remember* the death of Lincoln, McKinley, or Garfield, all over a century deceased, and only those now over the age of 50 could personally recall Kennedy's assassination. Because of this, much of the memory referred to in this instance lies in what has been passed down and used to create "memories" of historical events. Traces of the past can be separated into two different categories: the material and the non-material. Items

⁴ Paul B. Sheatsley and Jacob J. Feldman, "A National Survey on Public Reactions and Behavior," in *The Kennedy Assassination and the American Public ; Social Communication in Crisis*, eds. Bradey S. Greenberg and Edwin B. Parker, (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1965), 156.

⁵ Dario Paez, Nekane Basabe and Jose Luis Gonzalez, "Social Processes Amd Collective Memory: A Cross-Cultural Approach to Remembering Political Events," in *Collective Memory of Political Events: Social Psychological Perspectives*, eds. James W. Pennebaker, Darío Páez and Bernard Rimé (Mahwah, N.J.: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 1997), 148.

left behind by an event itself, like the Carcano rifle belonging to Lee Harvey Oswald or John Wilkes Booth's thorax, and their prolonged preservation speak volumes about the perceived significance at the time of the event, as well as the continuing value assigned to the event. Being able to see remnants or interact with them, as in the case of museums and memorials, we are allowed to construct an individual version of past events based on our experiences. Non-material remains are printed accounts in newspapers or books, oral histories and narratives, even the movies and television programs we watch. The nature of a historical event and the nuances of its telling and retelling can substantially impact how we think of the past and what we categorize as significant.

This examination of American collective memory (and collective amnesia) regarding Lincoln, Garfield, McKinley, and Kennedy, begins with an overview of the events surrounding each president's assassination, its aftermath, and the remaining material and social legacy of each. These summaries are followed by an in-depth comparison of the elements most effecting collective memory of the presidents. The first category of elements, material remnants, contrasts the memorialization, preservation, and lingering physical presence of Lincoln and Kennedy with those of Garfield and McKinley. The second category, non-material remnants, analyzes the nature of each event in terms of the non-tangible, beginning with the cause and immediacy of each president's death following the shot fired by the assassin and the speed of public communication and awareness of the assassination. This is followed by comparison of the achievements and traits of each president, their successors, and their assassins, as well as the effects of their funerary rites on the rhetoric of their legacies. Finally, the ultimate closure, or lack thereof, in regard to each assassination is evaluated. While Abraham Lincoln and John F. Kennedy remain vibrant cultural icons in the spotlight of American memory due to the remnants

of material and non-material culture preserved and reiterated since their tragic ends, James Garfield and William McKinley are left to lurk in the footnotes of history, tragically devoid of lasting public identities.

SECTION 1: OVERVIEW

Lincoln

"Now he belongs to the ages."
~ Secretary of War Edwin M. Stanton, April 15, 1865⁶

"Don't know the manners of good society, eh? Well, I guess I know enough to turn you inside out, old gal — you sockdologizing old man-trap!"⁷ Actor Harry Hawke delivered the nonsensical punchline of "Our American Cousin" from the stage of Ford's Theater as a Washington D.C. audience of close to 1,700 theater goers erupted with laughter. At the same moment, from the back of the theater, a well-timed gunshot from a .44-caliber, single shot Derringer pistol rang out. It was 10:13 pm on Black Friday, April 14, 1865. The bullet found its mark, penetrating the skull of the 56 year old President of the United States, Abraham Lincoln. Bold Confederate-loving actor-turned-assassin, John Wilkes Booth, tumbled from the balcony, getting momentarily caught in the festive American flag bunting hung in the President's honor to land on the stage. Brandishing a bloody dagger, Booth, theatrical to the last, cried out in Latin "Sic Semper Tyrannis" ("Thus always to tyrants.") The laughter ceased quickly as the audience

⁶ Due to varying accounts of the scene around Lincoln's deathbed, there is controversy over whether General Edwin Stanton used the word "ages" or "angels"; See Adam Gopnik, "ANGELS AND AGES; Annals of Biography," *The New Yorker*, May 28, 2007, page 30, for more details about the origin and controversy surrounding the phrase.

⁷ Tom Taylor, *Our American Cousin*, Project Gutenberg E-Book ed. (Project Gutenberg, 1869).

took note of Lincoln, now bleeding, head drooped forward in the theater rocking chair within the special presidential box. Whipped into a frenzy, cries for revenge rang out as Laura Keene, an actress in the play, and others, including Dr. Charles Leale, US Army surgeon, attended to the President. Keene, holding Lincoln's head in her lap, was quickly covered in blood. "Even then," one passerby later remarked, "I could fancy the relic hunter, plying his vocation, and imbuing his ready handkerchief in clotted blood that he might preserve, exhibit, and mayhap peddle his gruesome trophy!"⁸ This event was one for the history books.

Lincoln was soon transported from the theater to a boarding house belonging to William Petersen across the street. As statesmen, doctors, friends, and acquaintances gathered around the dying president, tensions ran high. A mere 6 days after the surrender of the Confederate forces at Appomattox Court House, few had readjusted to the idea of the Union including both the loyal North and the rebel South as the devastating Civil War, the first and last in the nation's history, came to a close. The most powerful president the country had yet seen, Commander in Chief through the bloodiest conflict ever fought on American soil, was now struggling to breathe, lying diagonally across the Petersen's too short bed. While Lincoln struggled for air, many Union and Confederate soldiers were still in the fields struggling themselves to come to grips with the ending of the war. Many were still armed for battle, but would fight only if it was called for. Though no one was really ready to recommence war, the assassination had the potential to once again stir passions. For this reason, news of the assassination was summarily repressed within both the Union and Confederate armies, fearing a rekindling of hostility.⁹ Even after the capture

⁸John Creahan, *The Life of Laura Keene Actress, Artist, Manager, and Scholar* (Philadelphia: Rodgers Publishing Company, 1897), 254.

⁹William Hanchett, *The Lincoln Murder Conspiracies: Being an Account of the Hatred Felt by Many Americans for President Abraham Lincoln during the Civil War And the First Complete Examination and Refutation of the Many Theories, Hypotheses, and Speculations Put Forward since 1865 Concerning those Presumed to have Aided, Abetted, Controlled, Or Directed the Murderous Act of John Wilkes Booth in Ford's Theater the Night of April 14, 1865*, (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1983), 59-60.

of Booth and his co-conspirators, a reward of “one hundred thousand dollars” was offered by President Andrew Johnson “for the arrest of Jefferson Davis,” the former President of the Confederate States of America, believed to have “incited, concerted, and procured” Lincoln’s assassination.¹⁰ Though Davis had no part in the plot to kill Lincoln, he feared Northern retribution noting that though he “certainly [had] no special regard for Mr. Lincoln... I fear [his death] will be disastrous for our people and I regret it.”¹¹ Other Confederate supporters, of course, did not share the same sentiment. Days after the assassination, the *New York Times* announced that the local “Metropolitan police and police justices [were] determined to close the loud mouthed rebels in [their] midst” by administering fines of up to \$1,000 or sentences for six months in jail.¹² Despite this, Booth soon became “Our Brutus” to Southerners, compared to the romanticized Roman assassin of Julius Caesar, a connection he had hoped to draw as indicated in his own writing. As an actor, Booth had a dramatic panache, and had been well recognized in the North and South prior to the war. After the assassination, there was little question that Booth had fired the shot that would later kill Lincoln, and that he was also connected to the attack on the life of Secretary of State William Seward on the same evening by Lewis Powell, though whether or not these two were involved in a larger conspiracy organized by the Confederate government was unclear.

After receiving the fatal shot to the head, Lincoln did not die instantly. From the Peterson’s boarding house, Secretary of War Edwin Stanton confirmed to one military general that at three in the morning, nearly five hours after Booth’s pistol was fired, “The President still

¹⁰ Andrew Johnson, *The Papers of Andrew Johnson*, ed. LeRoy P. Graf, Ralph W. Haskins, and Paul H. Bergeron, Vol. 8, (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1967), 15-16.

¹¹ Philip B. Kunhardt III, Peter W. Kunhardt and Peter W. Kunhardt Jr., eds., *Looking for Lincoln: The Making of an American Icon.*, (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2008), 56.

¹² "THE DEATH OF THE PRESIDENT," *Historic New York Times*, April 19, 1865, pg 2, ProQuest Digital Ed. accessed October 23, 2014, <http://search.proquest.com/docview/91950314?accountid=11789>.

breathes, but is quite insensible, as he has been ever since he was shot.”¹³ Struggling to take in air, Abraham Lincoln lay in agony until 7:22 a.m. when he was declared dead, the first American president to be taken by the assassin’s bullet. In an uncharacteristic display of emotion, Edwin Stanton was said to have muttered, “Now he belongs to the ages.”¹⁴ Stanton soon put the building, as well as Ford’s Theater, under the control of the federal government, using it as a center of operations for the manhunt for Lincoln’s killer and to protect all evidence from souvenir seekers.

Following Lincoln’s death, the outpouring of grief was like nothing before seen in the nation’s history. Immense funeral rites transformed Lincoln’s image from that of an ordinary man to that of a hero, a Christ-like martyr to the reunification of the United States. An elaborate “funeral train” was organized to travel from Washington D.C. to Springfield, Illinois, his body’s final resting place. It stopped for public viewing at eleven cities in six states along the route. Lincoln’s body was open for public display in numerous areas already assigned American significance, including Independence Hall in Pennsylvania, adding to the location’s historical prestige.¹⁵ Walt Whitman, poet, described the droves that visited Lincoln’s body along its tour as a “silent sea of faces,” the faces of Northerners, former slaves, a few former Confederates perhaps, and citizens from all walks of life.¹⁶ Historian Barry Schwartz argues that it was this extravagant funeral that transformed the national identity of Lincoln from a “mediocre man, flawed and more an object of sympathy than reverence” to “an extraordinary man, flawless and

¹³ William Stanton to John A Dix, April 15, 1865, quoted in James L. Swanson, *Manhunt: The Twelve-Day Chase for Lincoln's Killer*, 1st edition. ed. (New York: William Morrow, 2006), 121.

¹⁴ See Footnote 6.

¹⁵ Kunhardt, et al., 38-40.

¹⁶ Walt Whitman, *Drum-Taps (1865): And Sequel to Drum-Taps (1865-6)*, ed. Frederick DeWolfe Miller (Gainesville, FL.: Scholars' Facsimiles & Reprints, 1959), 5.

beloved by all.”¹⁷ Because mourning for Lincoln became a socially imposed duty, public opinion was strongly affected.

Along with the elaborate funeral train came ornately crafted sermons and eulogies which established Lincoln’s likeness to that of the most culturally and religiously ingrained historical martyr in the United States: Jesus Christ. Lincoln’s death on April 14, 1865, the Black Friday of that year, was only the first point of comparison between Lincoln and Christ. On April 16, Easter Sunday, Reverend C.B. Crane of Hartford, Connecticut, called Lincoln’s assassination “the after-type of the tragedy which was accomplished on the first Good Friday” or a near-copy of Christ’s crucifixion.¹⁸ Finally, Crane concluded in exaltations amounting to nearly thirty pages of text, that “Jesus Christ died for the world; Abraham Lincoln died for his country,” establishing Lincoln as a true martyr figure.¹⁹ Historian Ira Cardiff later produced a book examining the deification of Lincoln, which he termed “Lincoln hysteria,” and its strengthening over time.²⁰ Perhaps the most visual representation of the belief in Lincoln as a Christ figure is “The Apotheosis of Washington and Lincoln,” a popular postcard image first printed in 1865, which depicts an angelic George Washington embracing Lincoln amongst heavenly clouds while presenting him with a laurel wreath.²¹ Lincoln also stood for another heroic Biblical figure for the approximately four million slaves freed by the Thirteenth Amendment Lincoln had supported: Moses. Though former slave and orator, Frederick Douglass, questioned Lincoln’s motivation behind the emancipation of slaves in a commemorative speech given on the one year

¹⁷ Barry Schwartz, *Abraham Lincoln and the Forge of National Memory*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 49.

¹⁸ C. B. Crane, *Sermon on the Occasion on the Death of President Lincoln: Preached in the South Baptist Church, Hartford, Conn, April 16, 1865*, (Hartford: Press of Case, Lockwood, and Co, 1865), 6.

¹⁹ *Ibid.* 6.

²⁰ Ira D. Cardiff, *The Deification of Lincoln*, (Boston: The Christopher Publishing House, 1943); See also Barry Schwartz’s *Abraham Lincoln and the Forge of National Memory* and *Abraham Lincoln in the Post- Heroic Era*.

²¹ S.J. Ferris, *Washington & Lincoln (Apotheosis)*, 1865, Philadelphia: Phil. Pho. Co. [Photographic print], Library of Congress, accessed November 14, 2014, <http://www.loc.gov/pictures/item/98506771/>.

anniversary of the assassination, he still concluded that the assassination itself had created in the United States a “greater abhorrence of slavery and a deeper love for the great liberator” of the slaves.²² Lincoln, for many African Americans, became the “Great Emancipator,” a legendary symbol of freedom and change, though it is still unclear where the title originated.²³ Among the 112 slave narratives discussing Lincoln that were examined by historian Barry Schwartz, “43 percent define[d] him as a savior and liberator,” using biblical archetypes to define a man they could relate to perhaps more intimately than the archaic and far removed Jesus or Moses.²⁴

While Lincoln was made immortal following the assassination, so was his killer, John Wilkes Booth. Just as they had followed the mercurial Booth’s tumultuous acting career, the North followed Stanton’s dramatic twelve-day manhunt to track down Booth and his co-conspirators as the funeral train chugged on. While Lincoln’s funeral train was stopped before the public in Albany, New York, Booth was finally cornered in the tobacco barn at the Garrett Farm in Virginia. Though his co-conspirator and travel companion David Herold surrendered, Booth refused to go down without a fight and was ultimately shot by the eager Sergeant Boston Corbett (despite Stanton’s orders otherwise.) Booth, of course, was never tried for the offense of assassinating the president, but in the months that followed, his co-conspirators, and many of his acquaintances, were. People who were questioned- despite lack of involvement- included Edwin Booth, John’s more successful and Union supporting older brother, and the owner of the Ford’s Theater, John T. Ford.²⁵ Booth never had the chance to explain why he shot the president, though his partial diary was published and widely disseminated to the American public. Soon, Booth

²² Frederick Douglass, "Oration in Memory of Abraham Lincoln," in *Frederick Douglass: Selected Speeches and Writings*, ed. Philip S. Foner, (Chicago: Lawrence Hill, 1999), 616.

²³ Linda Wheeler, "A Civil War Mystery: Who Named Lincoln the 'Great Emancipator'?" *The Washington Post*, sec. D.C. EXTRA: A House Divided, May 17, 2001.

²⁴ Schwartz, *Abraham Lincoln and the Forge of National Memory*, 83.

²⁵ Nora Titone, *My Thoughts be Bloody: The Bitter Rivalry between Edwin and John Wilkes Booth that Led to an American Tragedy*, (New York: Free Press, 2010), 249; Swanson, *Manhunt*, 381.

was more famous dead than he ever was alive, and according to Lincoln scholar James L. Swanson, had “morphed from murderer of a president into fascinating anti-hero- the brooding, misguided, romantic, and tragic assassin.”²⁶

Today, Ford’s Theater and the Petersen House still stand, museums dedicated to the memory of the first presidential assassination in American history. From the day Lincoln was assassinated, the building was put to use following its initial lockdown by Edwin Stanton. Within two years, the building was to hold an archive of “rebel” documents, Civil War medical records, and, like its modern day purpose, a museum. This gallery, the Army Medical Museum, at one time held John Wilkes Booth’s vertebrae, shot through in his final standoff.²⁷ Located a two mile walk from the Lincoln Memorial, the nation’s most visited historic site, Ford’s Theater attracted over half a million visitors in 2013 and has had over 40 million visitors since recording began in 1936.²⁸ Now restored as a fully functioning theater, modern audience members continue to look upon the President’s Box, made to appear as it did the night Lincoln was assassinated, and gaze upon numerous assassination related relics. Lincolnites can also visit one of the other six National Parks Service parks or monuments dedicated to Abraham Lincoln specifically (not to mention the sites of many Civil War battlefields or even Mount Rushmore). They can also peruse one of the 8,398 titles with the keywords “Abraham Lincoln” designated in the Library of Congress online catalogs or even buy for a box of “Abraham Lincoln Bandages” at a gift shop with a bill printed with Lincoln’s face.

Visiting Lincoln’s Boyhood Home in Dale, Indiana in May of 2014, I began to count the number of times I had seen Lincoln’s heroic likeness in my life as I wandered through the woods

²⁶ Swanson, *Manhunt*, 382-383.

²⁷ Kunhardt, et al., 322.

²⁸ National Parks Service Visitor Use Statistics Office, *Ford's Theater NHS: Annual Park Recreation Visitation (1904 - Last Calendar Year)*, (National Parks Service, 2013).

he roamed as a child. Five dollar bills and penny upon penny, Steven Spielberg's recent film *Lincoln*, the bronze bust that watched over me at work, and trips to Springfield, Illinois, Fort Sumter, and the Lincoln Memorial danced before my eyes. After a few minutes, I realized I had seen more pictures, sculptures, and other images of Lincoln in my lifetime than I had of anyone I knew personally. His was, after all, the only face I could always find in my pocket.

Garfield

*“Old boy! Do you think my name will have a place in human history?” [Garfield asked.]
The colonel answered: “Yes, a grand one, but a grander place in human hearts.”
~Dr. Willard Bliss, The Story of President Garfield's Illness, 1881²⁹*

James A. Garfield had never really wanted to be president. Having served nine terms in the United States House of Representatives for the state of Ohio, Garfield and his constituents were content with his political position, though he feared his peers thought differently. In February, 1879, Garfield wrote in his diary. “I have so long and so often seen the evil effects of presidential fever upon my associates and friends that I am determined it shall not seize me,” he penned fervently, “for in almost ever[y] case it impairs if it does not destroy the usefulness of its victim.”³⁰ Garfield knew all too well the deadly diseases that infected the presidency, among them the threat of assassination. Writing to one Mr. Hudson who had expressed fears about threats against the President's life, Garfield stated that “Assassination can no more be guarded

²⁹ Doctor Willard Bliss, "THE STORY OF PRESIDENT GARFIELD'S ILLNESS," *Century Illustrated Magazine (1881-1906)* xxiii, no. 2 (1881), 304.

³⁰ James A. Garfield, "February 5, 1879," *The Diary of James A. Garfield*, ed. Harry James Brown (East Lansing, MI: Michigan State University, 1967), 177.

against than death by lightning.” Still, Garfield was unconcerned, concluding, “it is not best to worry about either.”³¹

Garfield was unguarded and unconcerned on July 2nd, 1881. At almost the four month mark in his presidency, Garfield had been given little time to make a large impact on U.S. government or policies, but had promised reform in civil rights and civil service. Garfield, receiving the rank of major general during the Civil War, was particularly supportive of African Americans, so much so that he is often deemed “ahead of his time” by historians.³² In his inaugural address in March, 1881, James Garfield called for the end of actions taken to prevent African Americans from voting, affirming that “there can be no permanent disfranchised peasantry in the United States.”³³ Additionally, ironically foreshadowing his untimely death, Garfield also promised to ask for regulation of federal civil service employment. This change would be “For the good of the service itself [and] for the protection of those who are entrusted with the appointing power,” but in the end, change came too late for Garfield himself.³⁴

Approaching the Baltimore and Potomac train station, Garfield had little reason to suspect the malicious plans of the avid office seeker, Charles Guiteau, and was looking forward to what promised to be an exciting trip. Garfield’s itinerary was to begin with travel to his alma mater, Williams College, in Massachusetts, then onto summer vacation at his Mentor farm in

³¹ James A. Garfield to John Sherman, November 16, 1880, “Extraordinary James Garfield Letter on Assassination: It Can No More Be Guarded Against Than Death By Lightning,” ed. Shapell Manuscript Foundation, accessed November 14, 2014, <http://www.shapell.org/manuscript.aspx?james-garfield-letter-on-assassinations>.

³² Janet Polodak, “President James A Garfield: Civil Rights Activist Ahead of His Time,” *The News-Herald-Digital Edition*, November 12, 2012, accessed November 11, 2014, <http://www.news-herald.com/general-news/20120812/president-james-a-garfield-civil-rights-activist-ahead-of-his-time-with-video>; “For the Briefest Time, President Garfield was an Inspiration,” *Washington Post- Digital Edition*, sec. The Post’s View, February 17, 2013, accessed October 10, 2014, http://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/for-the-briefest-time-president-garfield-was-an-inspiration/2013/02/17/ce9f6e6e-778b-11e2-aa12-e6cf1d31106b_story.html.

³³ James A. Garfield, “Inaugural Address, March 4, 1881,” *The American Presidency Project*, accessed October 25, 2014, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=25823>.

³⁴ *Ibid.*

Ohio, away from the stifling Washington D.C. season.³⁵ Though he had no formal body guard, Garfield was accompanied by James G. Blaine, Secretary of State, Robert Todd Lincoln, Abraham Lincoln's son and Secretary of War, and his sons, James and Harry.

Charles Guiteau, however, had deadlier plans for the President and wanted everyone to know about them, pre-writing confession letters to the Secretary of State and brother of Civil War General William Tecumseh Sherman, John Sherman, the White House, and to the *New York Herald*, with which he attached a copy of his book, hoping for publication. Guiteau, always an opportunist, had for months sought an appointment from the President, among them diplomatic positions as representative to Austria, Italy, or France. So many times had Guiteau visited the President's office along with the throngs of other office seekers that he became a familiar face around the State Department, especially with Secretary of State James Blaine. After constant pestering for office, Blaine finally lost his nerve with Guiteau, proclaiming "Never speak to me again on the Paris consulship as long as you live!"³⁶

Ever politically determined, Guiteau eventually found what he later deemed his God-given political mission: to kill the President of the United States and reunite the Republican Party, which was at this time split into Stalwarts and Half-Breeds over issues of party patronage. As Garfield entered a waiting room at the train station, two shots rang out. Though the first bullet simply grazed the President, the second lodged itself into the right side of his back. These bullets had been issued from a .44 caliber British Bulldog in the hands of Charles Guiteau.³⁷ In minutes, Garfield lay in a puddle of blood and vomit on the train station floor as the station erupted with activity. Guiteau was caught almost instantly by a station ticket taker and put up no

³⁵ Allan Peskin, *Garfield: A Biography* (Kent, Ohio: Kent State University Press, 1978), 595.

³⁶ Candice Millard, *Destiny of the Republic: A Tale of Madness, Medicine and the Murder of a President*, (New York: Doubleday, 2011), 108.

³⁷ Kenneth D. Ackerman, *Dark Horse: The Surprise Election and Political Murder of President James A. Garfield*, (New York: Carroll & Graf Publishers, 2003), 355.

fight as he was handed over to the police. All around, witnesses feared for Garfield and Robert Todd Lincoln, once again watching a President suffer at the hands of an assassin, muttered “My God, how many hours of sorrow have I passed in this town.”³⁸ The station devolved into chaos.

Garfield was still alive long after the bullets had hit him, but his prospects, according to the doctors that had rushed to his side, were not good. Despite this, Garfield lived on for another near eleven weeks as the nation watched for updates with bated breath. However, there was much debate about what to tell the public. “Many harsh criticisms . . . were made concerning the roseate statements which the bulletins gave of the President’s condition,” wrote attending physician, Dr. Robert Reyburn.³⁹ These bulletins were widely publicized in newspapers, often read by Garfield himself, and the lead physician, Dr. Willard Bliss, hoped to keep the President optimistic about his own condition.⁴⁰ Dr. Bliss may also have been attempting to save face, as ultimately, it was not Guiteau’s shot which killed the President. Instead, it was the actions of Garfield’s doctors which led to his ultimate demise. Following standard medical practices of the time, doctors probed the open wound, with gloveless and unwashed hands, in search of the bullet. Dr. Reyburn deemed the subsequent infection “septicemia,” a condition caused by bacteria and resulting in high fever, sweating, vomiting, and other symptoms.⁴¹ Reyburn described not only the President’s condition, but the now disturbing medical procedures followed to treat him. Among the innovative (yet mostly ineffective) means of preserving the President were the first rudimentary air conditioner and the “induction balance,” a new-fangled metal

³⁸ "A GREAT NATION IN GRIEF," *Historic New York Times*, July 3, 1881, accessed October 27, 2014, <http://search.proquest.com.er.lib.k-state.edu/docview/93945517?accountid=11789>.

³⁹ Robert Reyburn, *Clinical History of the Case of President James A Garfield*, Reprinted in the *Journal of the American Medical Association*, (Chicago: American Medical Association, 1894).

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 19.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 17.

detector type device created by Alexander Graham Bell.⁴² In addition to these tactics, several drainage tubes were also placed in Garfield's back to remove infected pus, but to no avail.

In the meantime, Charles Guiteau was held in District Jail, awaiting trial until the President recovered, or died, as each would lead to a different charge and final sentence. The President had been removed by a special train to one of his favorite locations near the sea in New Jersey. After nearly four months, James Garfield died on September 19, 1881, no longer to be "Strangulatus Pro Republica," or "tortured for the republic," a grim joke Garfield had made to his doctors early in his incapacitation.⁴³ Guiteau's dramatic trial commenced immediately following Garfield's death. Charged with murder, Guiteau claimed that it was all justified, divinely and politically. Claiming to be a "Christian man" and "agent of the Deity," Guiteau even took credit for the infection that ultimately claimed Garfield's life, arguing that "the Deity allowed the Doctors to finish my work gradually, because he wanted to prepare the people for the change."⁴⁴ Additionally, Guiteau claimed a second, political motivation for firing at Garfield. In his letter to Sherman, Guiteau proudly proclaimed, "I am a Stalwart of the Stalwarts," a faction of the divided Republican party, of which Chester Arthur, Vice President, was a part.⁴⁵ Though the idea of an inner-governmental conspiracy to kill the president orchestrated by the Stalwarts circulated in public gossip, it was never given much credence, by Garfield himself or

⁴² Ackerman, *Dark Horse*, 418.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, 135.

⁴⁴ *United States v. Guiteau*, 1 Mackey 498, (D.C. Cir. 1882), under title "Excerpts from the Trial Transcript: Cross-Examination of Charles Guiteau," ed. Douglas Linder, (Kansas City: University of Kansas City-Missouri Law Faculty Projects, 2010), accessed October 30, 2014, <http://law2.umkc.edu/faculty/projects/ftrials/guiteau/guiteautranscript.html>; *Ibid.*, under title "Guiteau's Address to the Jury (Summation)."

⁴⁵ Charles Guiteau to John Sherman, July 2, 1881, under title "Note Written by Charles Guiteau to General Sherman for Release on Day of Assassination," ed. Douglas Linder, (Kansas City: University of Kansas City-Missouri Law Faculty Projects, 2010), accessed October 30, 2014, <http://law2.umkc.edu/faculty/projects/ftrials/guiteau/guiteaunotetosherman.html>.

anyone else.⁴⁶ “Contrary to events following the Lincoln assassination,” the House Select Committee on Assassination’s report regarding the assassination of a later president verified, “no theories of possible conspiracy surfaced in the wake of Garfield's slaying.”⁴⁷ At the conclusion of the theatrical trial, Judge Walter Cox addressed Charles Guiteau directly. “You will be hanged by the neck until you are dead,” Cox announced, “And may the Lord have mercy on your soul.” Guiteau maintained his bold belief in his justification in killing the President to the last, replying, “And may God have mercy on your soul... God Almighty will curse every man who has had anything to do with this act.”⁴⁸ He walked to the gallows singing: “I am going to the Lord/ I saved my party and my land/Glory hallelujah!”⁴⁹

Garfield’s funeral was elaborate and held in Cleveland, Ohio, though could not hold a candle to the public reach of Lincoln’s funeral train stops. Just as they had for Lincoln, poets and writers declared Garfield a martyr and hero, but not with the same fervor. They could appreciate him for his character, but not his actions in office. Historian Allan Peskin wrote in his comprehensive biography of James Garfield that “the tremendous outpouring of grief and adulation occasioned by his death could not be long sustained and gave way in due course to indifference.”⁵⁰ Unlike abolitionist John Brown, whose soul went marching on though he lay a-

⁴⁶ Millard, *Destiny*, 164-179.

⁴⁷ Select Committee on Assassinations of the U.S. House of Representatives, “Findings in the Assassination of President John F. Kennedy in Dallas, Tex., November 22, 1963” in *Report of the Select Committee on Assassinations of the U.S. House of Representatives* (Washington, D.C.: United States Government Printing Office, 1979), 23.

⁴⁸ *United States v. Guiteau*, 1 Mackey 498, (D.C. Cir. 1882), under title “The Charles Guiteau Trial Sentencing,” ed. Douglas Linder, (Kansas City: University of Kansas City-Missouri Law Faculty Projects, 2010), accessed October 31, 2014, <http://law2.umkc.edu/faculty/projects/ftrials/guiteau/guiteautranscriptsentence.html>.

⁴⁹ *Ibid*, under title “Charles Guiteau: The Prisoner’s Last Words,” accessed October 29, 2014, <http://law2.umkc.edu/faculty/projects/ftrials/guiteau/guiteaulastwords.html>.

⁵⁰ Peskin, *Garfield*, 611.

mouldering in the grave, a poet lamenting Garfield's death asked why one so "true and brave" would "moulder to dust in the silent grave."⁵¹

The Baltimore and Potomac Railway Station initially had a marker indicating the location of the assassination. In December, 1881, the Pennsylvania Railroad Company provided funding for a marble plaque to be hung on the wall of the waiting room in which Garfield was shot in commemoration, along with a bronze star placed on the floor where Garfield had stood.⁵² Soon, these were removed after a small fire in the station in 1897, though people had complained about the markers prior, not wanting to be "reminded of the great crime every time they had occasion to take a train or to enter the waiting room."⁵³ President Theodore Roosevelt later ordered the building be demolished, without Congressional consent, and in 1941 the site was selected for what remains now as the West Building of the National Gallery of Art. There, no marker has been placed in commemoration. Along with lack of designation at the actual site of the assassination, other relics of the assassination are also lost to the annals of time. The assassin's pistol, which Guiteau may have chosen specifically because "it would look better" on display, went missing almost as soon as the police obtained it and wasn't recovered until 1897, around 16 years after the assassination.⁵⁴ Though it did reside in the Smithsonian for several years, it has subsequently been misplaced, causing author Sarah Vowell to comment on her

⁵¹J. G. De Styak, "The Summons," in *The Poets' Tributes to Garfield; a Collection of Many Memorial Poems, with Portrait and Biography*, ed. Moses King (Cambridge, MA: M. King, 1882), 164.

⁵² Steven, "The Unmarked Site of the July 2, 1881 Assassination of President Garfield," July 1, 2012, *Civil War Washington DC Blog*, 2012, accessed October 13, 2014, <http://civilwarwashingtondc1861-1865.blogspot.com/2012/07/unmarked-site-of-july-2-1881.html>.

⁵³ "TOPICS OF THE TIMES," *Historic New York Times*, Mar 20, 1897, accessed November 1, 2014, <http://search.proquest.com.er.lib.k-state.edu/docview/95546987?accountid=11789>.

⁵⁴ *United States v. Guiteau*, 1 Mackey 498, (D.C. Cir. 1882), under title "Excerpts from the Trial Transcript: Cross-Examination of Charles Guiteau," ed. Douglas Linder, (Kansas City: University of Kansas City-Missouri Law Faculty Projects, 2010), accessed October 29, 2014, <http://law2.umkc.edu/faculty/projects/ftrials/guiteau/guiteautranscript.html>; "GUILTEAU'S PISTOL FOUND," *New York Times*, Oct 8, 1897, accessed October 30, 2014, <http://search.proquest.com.er.lib.k-state.edu/docview/95518946?accountid=11789>.

nationwide “assassination vacation” that “Garfield stuff wasn’t as obsessively cared for as Lincoln Mementos.”⁵⁵

Though President William McKinley twenty years later asserted that Garfield was a man whose “priceless memories [would] remain ... forever and forever,” Garfield, along with his successor, Chester Arthur, soon became among those author Thomas Wolfe called “lost Americans.”⁵⁶ “Their gravely vacant and bewhiskered faces mixed, melted, swam together in the depths of a past intangible, immeasurable, and unknowable,” he wrote in 1934. “For who was Garfield, martyred man, and who had seen him in the streets of life? Who could believe that his footfalls ever sounded on lonely pavement?”⁵⁷ I emailed Dr. Todd Arrington, the Chief of Interpretation and Education at the James A. Garfield National Historic Site in Mentor, Ohio, where Garfield was ultimately laid to rest. I asked what, if anything, the average patron to the site knew about Garfield coming in and why he had become so “lost” in our cultural memory. “Most [people who visit] know he had a beard,” he replied. “His unfortunate timing-being one of those bearded, post-Civil War Republicans that even college textbooks sometimes misidentify [is] responsible for him being lumped into Wolfe's ‘lost Americans.’ This is a shame.”⁵⁸ I would have to agree.

McKinley

“If there is a personal immortality before him, let us also rejoice that there is an immortality and memory in the hearts of a large and ever growing people who, through the ages to come, the generations that are yet to be, will look back upon his life, upon its nobility and purity, and service to

⁵⁵ Sarah Vowell, *Assassination Vacation* (New York: Simon & Schuster Paperbacks, 2005), 165.

⁵⁶ Murat Halsted, *The Illustrious Life of William McKinley our Martyred President*, (Chicago: 1901), 258.

⁵⁷ Thomas Wolfe, "The Four Lost Men," in *The Four Lost Men: The Previously Unpublished Long Version, Including the Original Short Story*, ed. Arlyn Bruccoli and Matthew J. Bruccoli (Charleston, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 2008), 110.

⁵⁸ Todd Arrington, email message to author, October 30, 2014.

*humanity and thank God for it.”~ Address of Bishop Edward Gayer Andrews at the Funeral Service of President William McKinley, September 17, 1901*⁵⁹

The “Rainbow City” of the 1901 Pan-American Exposition in Buffalo, New York was a sight to see, attracting around 8 million visitors to marvel at new technology and more. Among these visitors were William McKinley, President of the United States, and Leon Czolgosz, a Polish- American anarchist. McKinley was there for a number of reasons, but most of all to give an address to the American people, or at least the near 116,000 Americans attending the fair that day.⁶⁰ The speech called for international commercial cooperation, essential to the nation at the height of its imperialist movement, in the form of a “friendly rivalry,” claiming that “though commercial competitors we are, commercial enemies we must not be.”⁶¹ President McKinley’s first term was rife with domestic and international controversy. At home, debates raged over bi-metalism, or whether or not to mix silver into the money supply with gold. McKinley opposed bi-metalism and supported the “gold standard,” while others, like the dynamic William Jennings Bryan, refused to allow mankind and the labor class to be crucified “upon a cross of gold.”⁶² Abroad, the lesser remembered Spanish- American War was fought over Cuba beginning in 1898, two years into McKinley’s first term. Initially, William McKinley was hesitant to enter the war, proclaiming to U.S. Senator Charles Fairbanks that though he did “not care for the property that [would] be destroyed nor the money that [would] be expended,” the “thought of the human

⁵⁹ Edward Gayer Andrews, "Address of Bishop Gayer at Funeral Services of President William McKinley, Tuesday, September 17, 1901," in *Edward Gayer Andrews: A Bishop of the Methodist Episcopal Church*, ed. Francis J. McConnell, (New York: Eaton and Maines, 1902).

⁶⁰ Scott Miller, *The President and the Assassin: McKinley, Terror, and Empire at the Dawn of the American Century*, (New York: Random House, 2011), 4.

⁶¹ William McKinley, "The Last Speech of William McKinley, Delivered at the Pan-American Exposition at Buffalo, September 5, 1901," in *The Last Speech of William McKinley* (Washington DC: Government Printing Office, 1904), 12.

⁶² William Jennings Bryan, *The Cross of Gold: Speech Delivered before the National Democratic Convention at Chicago, July 9, 1896*, ed. Robert W. Cherny (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1996).

suffering” overwhelmed him.⁶³ McKinley’s Vice President, the pugnacious Theodore Roosevelt, as well as public opinion following the explosion of the *U.S.S. Maine* off the coast of Havana, pushed the President to become involved. It was this conflict that became the rise to fame for Roosevelt and his legendary Rough Riders and ultimately resulted in Spain ceding Puerto Rico and Guam to the United States. Spain was also to free Cuba and sell the Philippines to the U.S.⁶⁴ Though the results were positive to some, including Secretary of State John Hay, who called the whole affair a “splendid little war,” others, like Mark Twain boldly decried the war as having “debauched America's honor and blackened her face before the world.”⁶⁵ In addition to all of these new American acquisitions came the annexation of Hawaii. The Pan- American Exposition, whose exhibits displayed the culture and achievements of the United States and their brethren in the Western Hemisphere, sought to bring together these lands which had been recently in conflict. However, some historians claim that the fair was also a not so subtle display of the superiority of white America, a racial statement warning foreign “others” not to challenge the societal hierarchy.⁶⁶

A day after giving his speech on the need for improving American diplomatic relations, William McKinley returned to cater to the adoring American public with a well-oiled crowd-pleaser: the McKinley handshake. As the most popular president since Abraham Lincoln, the crowds came out in droves to the Exposition’s Temple of Music for the one-on-one interactions the President loved, to the dismay of his body guards.⁶⁷ The Secret Service was not yet in place to protect the president, but McKinley’s informal guards were at the fair in force. Agents George

⁶³ Kevin Phillips, *William McKinley*, (New York: Times Books, 2003), 36.

⁶⁴ "The Spanish-American War, 1898," US Dept. of State, The Office of the Historian, accessed October 25, 2014, <https://history.state.gov/milestones/1866-1898/spanish-american-war>'.

⁶⁵ Mark Twain, "To the Person Sitting in Darkness," *The North American Review* 172, no. 531 (Feb., 1901), 174.

⁶⁶ See Sarah Vowell, *Assassination Vacation*, 195 and Robert W. Rydell, *All the World's a Fair: Visions of Empire at American International Expositions, 1876-1916*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), 127-153.

⁶⁷ Miller, *The President and the Assassin*, 4.

Foster, Samuel Ireland, and others surrounded the President as he greeted fair-goers.⁶⁸

McKinley's handshake at the "rate of fifty a minute" was said to be "humorous" but alluring to one observer: "The hand goes out straight for you, there is a good warm pressure of the palm, a quick drop, a jerk forward and the thing is over...It is the grip of a man of flesh and blood and of a sympathetic soul."⁶⁹

Leon Czolgosz however was not at the fair for a wholesome handshake when he offered what appeared to be a bandaged hand to the President. Beneath this makeshift bandage was not a wound, but a weapon. Two shots were fired at 4:07 pm into William McKinley's abdomen from Leon Czolgosz's .32 caliber Iver Johnson revolver.⁷⁰ Within instants, the President's bodyguards had their hands on the assassin, who claimed Czolgosz muttered "I done my duty."⁷¹ It was a duty, Czolgosz later asserted, to communism and to his beloved inspiration, Emma Goldman, the outspoken and bespectacled anarchist who was blamed for many of the increasingly radical actions taken by anarchists of the day.⁷² Similar actions by anarchists had taken place in Europe prior to the McKinley shooting, so much so that for people of the time "'anarchist' and 'assassin'" became "almost synonymous," inherently linked in the minds of Americans around the turn of the century.⁷³ "It was not for an instant credited that Czolgosz had acted alone," commented one historian, and a witch hunt across the nation for any and all anarchists began, none questioned more than Goldman.⁷⁴ Goldman denied any direct connection to the assassin, but also pointed out traits of Czolgosz that made him heroic in her eyes and more monstrous to the majority of

⁶⁸ Margaret Leech, *In the Days of McKinley*, (New York: Harper, 1959), 591.

⁶⁹ Halsted, *The Illustrious Life*, 428-430.

⁷⁰ Eric Rauchway, *Murdering McKinley: The Making of Theodore Roosevelt's America*, (New York: Hill and Wang, 2003), 1.

⁷¹ Miller, *The President and the Assassin*, 310.

⁷² Rauchway, *Murdering McKinley*, 88-89.

⁷³ Michael Gray-Fow, "Assassination before Assassins: A Discussion Paper," *Law, Crime and History* 3, 3, (Winter 2014), 42.

⁷⁴ Leech, *In the Days of McKinley*, 597.

white, capitalist Americans than the romantic John Wilkes Booth or the over-confident to the point of ridiculousness Charles Guiteau could ever have been.

Czolgosz was a member of the poor working class, his parents immigrants from Poland, raised on the American dream that never came true. Most of all, Czolgosz was a “foreign” American citizen, of slightly darker complexion than the Anglo-Saxon stock, and an anarchist. It was because “the impossible [had] happened, that even America [had] given birth to the man who struck down the king of the republic,” explained Goldman, that Americans had “lost their heads, and [shouted] vengeance upon anarchists.”⁷⁵ Though Czolgosz deemed himself a nobody (often going by the pseudonym “Neiman,” German for “nobody”), he stood for the largely impoverished labor classes composed of immigrants to the United States.⁷⁶ Czolgosz was painted as a cold blooded killer by the middle and upper white classes, an enemy of democracy which needed to be quashed and immediately. Czolgosz was found guilty in a brief trial after much debate about his sanity and was subsequently sentenced to death by an early rendition of the electric chair. Czolgosz’s last words, which affirmed his intent to shoot the president for the betterment of the “good working people,” were quickly followed by electrocution forty five days after McKinley’s death.⁷⁷ Historian John Milton Cooper Jr. noted that “the speed of the Czolgosz trial played a very important part in getting the assassination behind us,” avoiding the media circuses that had followed Booth’s manhunt and Guiteau’s trial. “Czolgosz reminds me of other presidential assassins or would-be assassins like Lee Harvey Oswald ... a kind of strange, loner,

⁷⁵ Emma Goldman, ed., *The Tragedy at Buffalo*, Kindle Edition ed. (Amazon Digital Services, Inc.: 1901).

⁷⁶ *Murder at the Fair: The Assassination of President McKinley*, video (New York, NY: A&E Television Networks, 2006), 9:10.

⁷⁷ Rauchway, *Murdering McKinley*, 53.

alienated individual,” continued Cooper, “looking for a chance somehow to mark, to make a mark, on history.”⁷⁸ Czolgosz, however, never made such a lasting mark.

Like Garfield, McKinley had not died suddenly, but lived for eight days after Czolgosz had taken his shots. Like James Garfield’s doctors, gloves were not used when probing for the bullet that had penetrated McKinley’s stomach. The first bullet had barely grazed the President, falling to the floor as doctors attempted to undress him to attend to the second, more serious, wound. This bullet was located so deep within the President’s stomach that Dr. Matthew D. Mann was unable to find it, especially due to McKinley’s bulk. Believing that he could live with the bullet inside of him, Dr. Mann sewed the wound shut.⁷⁹ Though an early X-ray machine which may have located the bullet had been sent over by Thomas Edison, Dr. Mann refused to use it as he believed it would do more harm than good. The nation kept their eyes on the newspapers for information about the President’s condition. McKinley was no doubt familiar with the infection that finally killed him, after serving in the Civil War where the leading cause of death was disease. One such disease was gangrene, a bacterial disease resulting from an infected wound. Necrosis, the death of a large amount of tissue often caused by infections like gangrene, overtook the President on September 14, 1901.⁸⁰

The nation mourned the death of the popular William McKinley as a funeral train brought him back from Buffalo to Washington D.C., on to his final resting place in Canton, Ohio. When his funeral was held in Canton, “All activities of the nation suddenly ceased for the space of five minutes... that they might turn undisturbed to the contemplation of its martyred President,” but

⁷⁸ *Murder at the Fair: The Assassination of President McKinley*, 32:50.

⁷⁹ Miller, *The President and the Assassin*, 314.

⁸⁰ Lloyd Vernon Briggs, *The Manner of Man that Kills*, (Boston: R.G. Badger, 1921), 240.

after those five minutes, the speed of the nation recommenced.⁸¹ Dying in peacetime and not in the midst of any major conflict, McKinley was appropriately mourned, though hardly regarded a martyr to the status Lincoln had been, and was soon disregarded. McKinley's shoes were filled by his magnetic Vice President, Theodore Roosevelt, whose iconic face now looms down beside Abraham Lincoln's from South Dakota's Mount Rushmore. "Roosevelt was so much the incarnation of a modern president, so charismatic, so much a man of new media, so that McKinley very quickly got lost," historian Micheal McGerr explained. "It wasn't fair, but he got lost."⁸²

Today in Buffalo, New York, the buildings of the Pan American Exposition of 1901 are long gone, made to be torn down. All that remains is the New York State building, now used as the Buffalo Historical Museum, and a small rock plaque in the street median on Fordham Drive which reads "In the Pan-American Temple of Music which covered this spot, President McKinley was fatally shot Sept. 6, 1901." Searching out the location, author Sarah Vowell noted, "you would miss it if you weren't looking for it."⁸³ There are no museums in Buffalo with William McKinley anywhere in the name, but the Theodore Roosevelt Inauguration National Historic Site, supported by the National Parks Service, stands between North and Allen Streets. This museum, along with Buffalo's History Museum, the Smithsonian, and the National Archives, contains pieces of McKinley memorabilia. McKinley artifacts are so widely spread that they are often disregarded by the public, simply an aside next to other more substantial collections.

⁸¹ *The McKinley Memorial Eulogies and Orations: to Which are Added, President McKinley's Last and Greatest Speech and President Roosevelt's Proclamation of that Speech as his Policy*, (New York: Winthrop Press, c1901), 13.

⁸² *Murder at the Fair: The Assassination of President McKinley*, 0:30.

⁸³ Vowell, *Assassination Vacation*, 193.

My father visited McKinley's presidential library, museum, and monument on a business trip to Canton, Ohio and later told me his impressions. "The monument was nice," he said of the large domed mausoleum where McKinley was laid to rest with his wife, "but it is kind of surrounded by a public park. People were milling around and walking their dogs and things. There were very few of us, touristy people, who seemed interested in the dead president there."⁸⁴ This was not uncommon, he was told by a staff member: "Teddy Roosevelt was thought to be larger than life," an affable man's man, while McKinley, with this cold white stone monument, was less accessible. Dad sent me a postcard of William McKinley's memorial crypt, emblazoned with a sadly ironic McKinley quote: "'That's all a man can hope for during his lifetime — to set an example — and when he is dead, to be an inspiration for history." Now, writes historian and political commentator Kevin Phillips, McKinley is one of those "near-great Presidents," great in his time, but now forgotten.⁸⁵

Kennedy

"A man may die, nations may rise and fall, but an idea lives on. Ideas have endurance without death."— John F. Kennedy's remarks at the opening of a USIA Transmitter in Greenville, N.C., February 8, 1963⁸⁶

In seconds, Abraham Zapruder, a dress maker and Russian immigrant, became famous for producing the most watched and most controversial home movie of all time. Zapruder was close to not bringing his camera to work with him on November 22, 1963, but was convinced by his secretary that with a location so close to the Presidential parade down Dallas' Dealey Plaza, it

⁸⁴ Marshall Claxton (father of the author) in communication with the author, September 2014.

⁸⁵ Phillips, *William McKinley*, 157.

⁸⁶ John F. Kennedy, "Remarks Recorded for the Opening of a USIA Transmitter at Greenville, North Carolina," ed. Gerhard Peters and John T. Woolley, *The American Presidency Project*, February 8, 1963, accessed September 22, 2014, <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/?pid=9551>.

would be foolish not to.⁸⁷ John F. Kennedy had come to Dallas, a city whose relationship with the Democratic Party had consistently been shaky, in order to campaign for reelection in 1964. When Adlai Stevenson, ambassador to the U.N. and twice presidential nominee for the Democratic Party visited Dallas less than a month prior to Kennedy, virulent protesters managed to strike him with one of their signs and to spit on him.⁸⁸ Though the relationship between the party and the city had often bordered on hostile, it was nearly unthinkable that he wouldn't make it out of Dallas alive. "John Kennedy," communications studies scholar, Wilbur Schramm, remarked, "was the epitome of youth, health, and vigor... a life and immortality symbol."⁸⁹ A man like this simply could not die, especially when such heightened security measures were taken.

Kennedy's presidency had been rocky up to the point of his trip in Dallas, enough for one journalist to contend later that "John F. Kennedy was probably the worst American president of the previous century," spending his time in office "stumbling from crisis to fiasco."⁹⁰ Kennedy's presidency began with the failed Bay of Pigs initiative in Cuba, which was followed by a rapid escalation of the ongoing Cold War with the Soviet Union. This escalation had resulted, fortunately for Kennedy, with successful negotiation of the Cuban Missile Crisis. Still, contended Kennedy scholar Robert Dallek, Kennedy's presidency was not terribly historical or memorable and "hardly [measured] up to the administrations of Washington, Lincoln, and FDR,

⁸⁷ Warren Commission, Testimony of Abraham Zapruder, Volume 7 Cong., 1964, 571, accessed November 12, 2014, <http://www.jfk-assassination.de/warren/wch/vol7/page571.php>.

⁸⁸ Stephen Fagin, *Assassination and Commemoration: JFK, Dallas, and the Sixth Floor Museum at Dealey Plaza*, ed. Edward T. Linenthal, (Norman, OK: University of Oklahoma Press, 2013), 23.

⁸⁹ Wilbur Schramm, "Communication in Crisis," in *The Kennedy Assassination and the American Public ; Social Communication in Crisis*, eds. Bradey S. Greenberg and Edwin B. Parker (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1965), 3.

⁹⁰ Thomas Ricks, "Was John F. Kennedy the Flat-Out Absolute Worst U.S. President of the 20th Century?" *Foreignpolicy.Com* (July 15, 2011), accessed November 13, 2014, http://ricks.foreignpolicy.com/posts/2011/07/15/was_john_f_kennedy_the_flat_out_absolute_worst_us_president_of_the_20th_century.

our most notable presidents.”⁹¹ Rather than maintaining an entirely successful presidential career for the present, Kennedy served instead as a hope for a better tomorrow. At the time of his trip to Dallas, Kennedy’s approval ratings were at the lowest point they had been in his entire presidency. A Gallup poll placed his approval at 58%.⁹² Despite his presidential shortcomings, the attractive John F. Kennedy, along with his wife, Jacqueline Kennedy, better known in the press as Jackie, were media darlings. The first president to really harness the power of television and mass media, Kennedy and his family were among the most recognizable faces in America. Kennedy, according to one scholar, “was the first of a new kind of media candidate flashed daily into our consciousness... and as such he had managed to stir the aspirations and excite millions of people.”⁹³

Kennedy was in the public spotlight on November 22, 1963, as residents of Dallas gathered to see the President in his 1961 Lincoln Continental convertible. Turning from Houston Street onto Elm, gunshots pierced the air and the multitudes were stunned as Kennedy was hit passing between the Texas School Book Depository building and the Grassy Knoll at Dealey Plaza. Jackie Kennedy reached for the pieces of Kennedy’s skull and brain which had landed on the trunk of the car as Zapruder’s camera continued to gather gruesome still frame images of the event.⁹⁴ Kennedy was dead in an instant. The crowd of parade goers became frantic. “Immediately, people started jumping and running and some were throwing their kids down,” explained newspaper reporter Hugh Aynesworth later. “Not knowing where the shots really originated, you didn’t know which way to run or how to protect yourself... It was just total

⁹¹ Robert Dallek, *An Unfinished Life: John F. Kennedy, 1917-1963*, (Boston: Little, Brown, and Co, 2003), 700.

⁹² Jeffrey M. Jones, “History Usually Kinder to Ex-Presidents,” Politics ed. (Gallup Inc., 2013), accessed November 12, 2014, <http://www.gallup.com/poll/162044/history-usually-kinder-presidents.aspx>

⁹³ Joseph P. Berry, *John F. Kennedy and the Media: The First Television President*, (Lanham: University Press of America, 1987), 25.

⁹⁴ Vincent Bugliosi, *Reclaiming History: The Assassination of President John F. Kennedy*, (New York: W.W. Norton & Co, 2007), 42.

chaos!”⁹⁵ No one could identify conclusively where the shots had come from, but soon eyewitnesses began to look toward the southeast corner window on the sixth floor of the Texas School Book Depository. “I noticed two Negro men [in the Depository] in a window straining to see directly above them, and my eyes followed right on up to the window above them,” Robert Jackson, a local newspaper photographer testified before the Warren Commission, a group composed of high ranking members from all branches of the U.S. government, as it investigated the events of the assassination. “I saw the rifle or what looked like a rifle... I guess I saw... as it was drawn fairly slowly back into the building.”⁹⁶ Testimony varied regarding the number of shots and their origin, but soon, as the presidential car sped toward Parkland Memorial Hospital, policeman Marion Baker entered the Depository with the building’s manager, Roy Truly. According to the Warren Commission, it was upon reaching the second floor landing that the two men caught sight of a building employee and “loner,” as his co-workers deemed him. Lee Harvey Oswald was attempting to leave the building, a full bottle of Coke from the cafeteria in hand.⁹⁷ Less than an hour after Kennedy had been shot, J.D. Tippit became the “only the third Dallas policeman in a decade to die in the line of fire,” and Oswald was apprehended as the only suspect in the killing.⁹⁸ Later in the evening, a second charge was brought against Oswald: The assassination of the President.

Lee Harvey Oswald was an ex-Marine and highly critical of the United States. Oswald was a bold Communist (or, in his words, “a true Karl Marxist”), but according to his Russian immigrant wife, Marina, he had “once observed that eliminating [Kennedy] would do no good

⁹⁵ Larry A. Sneed, *No More Silence: An Oral History of the Assassination of President Kennedy*, (Denton, TX.: University of North Texas Press, 1998), 23.

⁹⁶ Warren Commission United States, *The Official Warren Commission Report on the Assassination of President John F. Kennedy*, ed. Doubleday and Company, (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1964), 77.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 24.

⁹⁸ Gerald L. Posner, *Case Closed: Lee Harvey Oswald and the Assassination of JFK*, 1st Anchor Books edition, (New York: Anchor Books, 2003), 3.

because the American system was so devised that the man who took his place would continue the same policy.”⁹⁹ Oswald had grown up all over the United States and from an early age had trouble with others. Later a witness before the Warren Commission, Dr. Renatus Hartogs, a clinical psychiatrist at Youth Home, had treated Oswald under court-order in 1953. When Dr. Hartogs asked if he preferred the company of males or females, Oswald replied “I dislike everybody.”¹⁰⁰ Interrogated by police, chief investigating officer Will Fritz showed Oswald a map of the area around the site of the assassination that officers had discovered in his home that included several X’s, one on the Texas School Book Depository. “I put a lot of marks on that map,” replied Oswald, “I was looking for a job and marked the places where they were interviewing.”¹⁰¹ Oswald never once admitted to assassinating the president or killing Officer Tippit, but, despite his hatred for the American legal system, continually asked for the right of legal counsel before giving statements. His name had already been in the media as the primary suspect in Kennedy’s assassination and two days following the death of the President, it was confirmed that Oswald would never receive legal representation, a trial, or a court-sanctified death sentence. While being transferred from the police station to the county jail with an armored car waiting on the street, Oswald was surrounded by reporters as an NBC News crew live broadcast the scene to the nation. Cameraman George Phenix of the local KRLD television station also had his camera running: “I had Oswald centered in my viewfinder when – *ka-bam...* Ruby’s gun went off, and it was really loud.”¹⁰²

⁹⁹Bugliosi, *Reclaiming History*, 260; Jim Bishop, *The Day Kennedy was Shot* (New York: Funk & Wagnalls, 1968), 140.

¹⁰⁰ Posner, *Case Closed*, 13.

¹⁰¹ Bugliosi, *Reclaiming History*, 262.

¹⁰² George Phenix, "Moving with the Story," in *When the News Went Live: Dallas 1963*, ed. Robert Huffaker, (Lanham, MD.: TaylorTrade Pub, 2004), 101.

Jack Ruby, owner of the local Carousel Club, was tackled to the ground, the gun that he had used to shoot Oswald pushed out of his hands. In a public reaction survey conducted and completed by the National Opinion Research Center (NORC) little more than a week after Kennedy's death, only 6 percent of the 1,384 Americans surveyed reported that they had the "very deepest... Hope the man who killed [Kennedy] would be shot down or lynched."¹⁰³ Ruby was, apparently, one of this minority and a key factor in creating one of the many pieces included in the multitude of Kennedy assassination conspiracies. Ruby appeared eager to gloat that he had shot Oswald. When escorted into jail, Detective Barnard Clardy approached as Ruby exclaimed, "I'm Jack Ruby. Don't you know me? Don't you know me?"¹⁰⁴ Though seemingly an over-zealous attention seeker, like Charles Guiteau, looking for praise for the murder of a national enemy, others contended that the entire affair may have been a cover up for a deeper conspiracy. Ruby was eventually sentenced to death, despite what he verbally considered a valiant act, but was reduced to insanity and died of lung cancer by 1967.

The conspiracy theories regarding the Kennedy assassination continue to permeate public discussion, especially regarding the parties involved and the number of shooters. Many of these theories arose from the findings of the House Select Committee on Assassinations, concluding that the initial federal investigation conducted by the Warren Commission was messy and based on improper data and methodology. The committee also offered alternative conclusions, among them the claim that there were multiple gunmen on November 22, 1963. In a 2013 Gallup Poll which randomly surveyed 1,039 American adults, 61% believed the multiple-shooter theory, down from 81% in 2001.¹⁰⁵ Another shooter, according to the theory based somewhat in

¹⁰³ Sheatsley and Feldman, "A National Survey on Public Reactions and Behavior," 156.

¹⁰⁴ Posner, *Case Closed*, 396.

¹⁰⁵ Art Swift, *Majority in U.S. Still Believe JFK Killed in a Conspiracy*, Politics ed. Gallup, Inc., 2013, accessed November 13, 2014, <http://www.gallup.com/poll/165893/majority-believe-jfk-killed-conspiracy.aspx>.

eyewitness accounts and other forensic data, may have taken aim from the “Grassy Knoll,” a phrase coined by United Press International White House correspondent Merriman Smith for the small swelling of ground in Dealey Plaza.¹⁰⁶ Without firm testimony from Oswald, many also speculate that Oswald may have been a simple scapegoat for a number of entities. The same 2013 Gallup Poll concluded that of the sixty percent of surveyed Americans that believed in a larger conspiracy. The top suspicions included the assassination’s connection to the mafia or gang related organizations, the federal government, the CIA, or Fidel Castro.¹⁰⁷ Some questions regarding Kennedy’s assassination can never be answered.

Rather than seeking all of the answers regarding whether or not her husband’s killer was part of a larger conspiracy, Jacqueline Kennedy spent the days after the shooting preparing for the elaborate funeral ceremony that would take place in Washington D.C. Jackie insured that her husband’s funeral would be reminiscent of the first assassinated president and by then a revered martyr figure, Abraham Lincoln.¹⁰⁸ By doing this, Mrs. Kennedy firmly cemented the connection already being drawn by newspaper cartoonists, like Lloyd Ostendorf of the *Dayton Journal-Herald* in Ohio or Jim Berryman of the *Washington Star* in Washington D.C.¹⁰⁹ Another series of “curious coincidences” was published in *TIME* magazine in 1964, including that both John Wilkes Booth and Lee Harvey Oswald had names comprised of three parts and fifteen letters, among other comparisons.¹¹⁰ Recalling Lincoln’s memory, as well as emphasizing the youth and vigor of Kennedy, the nation was prompted to tune in to and even participate in the funeral. Broadcast live to television sets all across the nation, a massive number Americans collectively

¹⁰⁶ Gary Mack, "The Man Who Named the Grassy Knoll," John McAdams and Sixth Floor Museum, accessed November 14, 2014, http://mcadams.posc.mu.edu/gk_name.htm.

¹⁰⁷ Swift, *Majority in U.S. Still Believe JFK Killed in a Conspiracy*.

¹⁰⁸ Dallek, *An Unfinished Life*, 696.

¹⁰⁹ Raymond B. Rajski, *A Nation Grieved; the Kennedy Assassination in Editorial Cartoons* (Rutland, Vt.: C. E. Tuttle Co, 1967), 38, 107.

¹¹⁰ "A Compendium of Curious Coincidences.(The Nation; HISTORICAL NOTES)." *Time* 84, no. 8 (1964), 23.

watched the proceedings. In New York, one study found that “90 per cent of sets tuned in at one time to the funeral procession” within the locality analyzed.¹¹¹ Kennedy was buried in Arlington National Cemetery, where an Eternal Flame still burns in his honor. Kennedy quickly became a martyr, not to some lofty cause, but to the horrors of the American public. Depicted sometimes as a holy, Christ-like martyr, the rhetoric applied to Kennedy was generally more related to saints and medieval imagery. He had reigned over an idyllic empire, according to Jackie Kennedy, who first compared her husband to the legendary King Arthur. “There will be great presidents again,” she remarked to journalist Theodore White of *Life* magazine, “but there will never be another Camelot.”¹¹² The image of Camelot reiterated the youth and vitality President Kennedy had been known for, and reminded the nation of his young wife and family, soon objects of sympathy. In the NORC survey conducted during the week after the assassination, 61 per cent of participants indicated that the “very deepest feeling” they held about Kennedy’s death was feeling “so sorry for [Kennedy’s] wife and children.”¹¹³ The Camelot mythos also created a legacy of hope, justice, and change to be adhered to by Kennedy’s successor, Lyndon B. Johnson. Though reforms made by Johnson in the war against poverty and in implementing what was deemed the “Great Society” should not only be attributed only to his predecessor, Johnson’s use of Kennedy’s legacy in pushing these reforms through Congress cannot be denied.¹¹⁴

Today, the Texas School Book Depository still stands across from Dealey Plaza. Though plans for the building were difficult to conceptualize according to Stephen Fagin, an employee of Sixth Floor Museum and author of 2013 book, *Assassination and Commemoration*, the museum

¹¹¹ Schramm, "Communication in Crisis," 24.

¹¹² James Pieresen, "How Jackie Kennedy Invented the Camelot Legend After JFK’s Death," *The Daily Beast Digital News*, November 12, 2013, accessed November 14, 2014, <http://www.thedailybeast.com/articles/2013/11/12/how-jackie-kennedy-invented-the-camelot-legend-after-jfk-s-death.html>

¹¹³ Sheatsley and Feldman, “A National Survey on Public Reactions and Behavior,” 156.

¹¹⁴ Dallek, *An Unfinished Life*, 708.

contains records of innumerable oral and print accounts of the event, as well as a chilling recreation of Lee Harvey Oswald's "Sniper's Nest." Despite the controversy over the killer and conspiracy theories in relation to the assassin, the museum attempts to balance varying accounts and does so as successfully as it can. Despite the controversy over Kennedy's death, wrote Fagin, "there will always be more to the story of the Kennedy assassination, and more to the story of Dealey Plaza and Dallas, than the question of conspiracy." What is really important, he continued, is the way that "history imprints its mark on the nation's psyche and moves people in profound and often unexpected ways."¹¹⁵

Leaving the museum on a visit to Dallas in 2010, I glanced at the visitor's book, which asked museum goers to write down reactions to the museum and memories of the assassination. Having none personally, I let the woman my grandparent's age, who had finished the audio tour right behind me, take the pen. I wondered if this woman's story was similar to my great-aunt Donna's version of the event. "I still remember where I was standing, at work, when we received the word about the shooting," she told me. "Unforgettable event... Everyone in the bank froze and didn't move or say anything for a minute or two."¹¹⁶ A few moments later, I stood across the street on the Grassy Knoll and looked up at the Depository's sixth floor window and back down to Elm Street. Focused on the bright white X in the middle lane, marking the place where Kennedy had lost his life, I noticed how strange it was, though perhaps only a coincidence, that cars always missed running over the X. I caught a glimpse of the woman who had apparently finished her recollection gazing at the same spot, exiting the museum. Her eyes were still brimming with tears, almost fifty years after Kennedy had passed.

¹¹⁵ Fagin, *Assassination and Commemoration: JFK, Dallas, and the Sixth Floor Museum at Dealey Plaza*, 173.

¹¹⁶ Donna Conner (relative of author), in communication with author, November 22, 2014.

SECTION 2: ANALYSIS

Material Remnants

Museums, Memorabilia, and Memorials

When someone we are close to passes away, many of us hold on to mementos, items often of sentimental importance, to remind us of a certain individual. In remembering presidents past, Americans as a collective have often sought to do the same. According to Elizabeth Hallam and Jenny Hockey, authors of *Death, Memory, and Material Culture*, “materials... may be assigned status for viewing in public domains as an aspect of national cultural heritage” in a number of different ways, including museums.¹¹⁷ Objects in the standard history museum and museums themselves allow us to keep the past alive and accessible, especially when displaying objects used in the daily lives of past actors. “‘Remembered events occurring before an individual’s birth are not stored in the mind,” pointed out historian Schwartz, but in “museums, libraries... monuments, statues... and relics,” and by viewing these items, museum goers are able to more easily piece together their own mental image of the past to create a form of historical knowledge and “memory.”¹¹⁸ The museums and collections displaying artifacts related to the lives (and deaths) of each of the assassinated presidents vary drastically and dramatically influence the way that modern Americans create memories pertaining to each one.

Lincoln memorabilia, for example, has historically been meticulously preserved and held in various museums across the United States, generally highlighted for its significance. Lincoln’s

¹¹⁷ Elizabeth Hallam and Jenny Hockey, *Death, Memory, and Material Culture* (Oxford, New York: Berg, 2001), 8.

¹¹⁸ Schwartz, *Abraham Lincoln and the Forge of National Memory*, 9.

stovepipe hat, for one, is one of the “most treasured artifacts” belonging to the Smithsonian’s National Museum of American History in Washington D.C., one of the nation’s most visited museums.¹¹⁹ Ford’s Theater and the Petersen House, the locations of Lincoln’s last hours, are also within a short distance in the historically rooted metropolis. One can stand near the President’s Box and virtually relive the day that Lincoln was killed. Memory scholar and historian Frances Yates wrote about the importance of place (or “loci”) in memory of historical events, arguing that being able to assign an idea to a particular physical space would further preserve the memory of events that occurred there.¹²⁰ The spaces where Lincoln walked still exist, made to reflect the décor of his day, as tourists walk the same, although refurbished, floors. His personal items are also preserved, so believing that Lincoln once lived and reconstructing a personal memory of what his life was made up of is not so difficult. All of these spaces and more, including one of America’s most iconic national spaces, the Lincoln Memorial, are dedicated to the life and death of the nation’s 16th president and serve as physical reminders of Lincoln’s legacy that cannot as easily be lost or erased as non-physical remnants. In much the same way, John F. Kennedy’s legacy has been kept alive through the maintenance of physical memorabilia relating to himself, as well as his wife and family. Many of these items are displayed in his presidential library in Boston and the Sixth Floor Museum in Dallas and are as easily accessible to the public as physical sites, like his memorial and Dealey Plaza in Dallas, and his grave in Arlington National Cemetery.

James Garfield and William McKinley, however, have not been so lucky. The buildings in which they were targeted by assassins are now completely demolished with little to no recognition that anything of significance ever happened at the location. Looking to museums

¹¹⁹ Smithsonian National Museum of American History, “Treasures of American History,” Smithsonian Institution, accessed November 12, 2014, <http://americanhistory.si.edu/treasures/introduction>.

¹²⁰ Frances Amelia Yates, *The Art of Memory* (Chicago: Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1966).

commemorating the two, both are primarily recognized in Ohio, the home state of each and far from the nation's historical epicenter in Washington D.C. Additionally, the displays of memorabilia relating to each of these presidents and their tragic deaths is distorted. Many McKinley assassination artifacts are held in a museum dedicated specifically to Teddy Roosevelt's inauguration, implying that the more important event to recall was Roosevelt's rise to the nation's top office, not McKinley's tragic removal from it. Many important physical reminders of Garfield's death, especially Charles Guiteau's pistol, are lost or not readily accessible and suffering from what Hallam and Hockey call a "social death."¹²¹ Additionally, both have national monuments, but these lack the effect of Lincoln's memorial or John F. Kennedy's gravesite, focal points within their localities. McKinley's national monument in Ohio is far from the center of any well-traveled tourist town and Garfield's national memorial, though in D.C., is a single statue off of the National Mall in the center of a traffic circle. The statue has become a part of Hallam and Hockey's category of memorials made "virtually 'invisible' as a result of habitual viewing and therefore marginal in longer term processes of memory maintenance."¹²² Amidst a myriad of statues and memorials, including what author Vowell called Ulysses S. Grant's "sprawling plaza of praise" right across the street, Garfield is lost in the hustle and bustle of D.C. life.¹²³

Non-Material Remnants

Sudden Shocks and Interminable Infections

¹²¹ Hallam and Hockey, *Death, Memory, and Material Culture*, 8.

¹²² *Ibid.* 8.

¹²³ Vowell, *Assassination Vacation*, 179.

John F. Kennedy was gone the instant the bullet reached him and in less than thirty minutes, before he was formally pronounced dead, more than half of the country knew he had been fatally shot.¹²⁴ Shocked and aware of the crisis, the nation as a whole suffered an unexpected and immediate blow. Lincoln's assassination, much like Kennedy's, evoked a similar reaction to the death of the president only a few hours after Booth's weapon had been fired, though due to the speed of communication, was not as immediate of a national shock. Still, the immediacy of each president's death after being shot did not allow the nation a time to react and prepare itself for the aftermath. On top of that, in both instances many Americans also felt personally involved with the president's fate. In Abraham Lincoln's case, personal connections were based on Lincoln's role as Commander in Chief throughout the Civil War, a conflict that in some way effected or had effected every American by April 1865. Had he not been involved in the bloodiest internal conflict the United States has ever experienced as a nation, argued Lincoln historian Schwartz, "his death would have been less traumatic."¹²⁵ Lincoln was a household name in the North and South, condemned or respected for his role in the conflict, and as a result, his sudden death, the first presidential death by the bullet of an assassin, hit close to home.

Americans felt close to Kennedy too, seeing him live from their couches on their living room televisions sets, attractive, young, and vibrant. So personally related to Kennedy was the nation that 45 per cent of those initially polled by NORC had the "very deepest feeling" that they had experienced "the death of someone very close and dear" following the assassination.¹²⁶ George Gaskell and Daniel Wright, scholars and observers of American events from the U.K., paid particular attention to the way that sharing memories of the Kennedy assassination not only reinforced the lasting personal memory of the event, but also brought Americans together as a

¹²⁴ Schramm, "Communication in Crisis," 4.

¹²⁵ Schwartz, *Abraham Lincoln and the Forge of National Memory*, 61.

¹²⁶ Sheatsley and Feldman, "A National Survey on Public Reactions and Behavior," 156.

nation.¹²⁷ Repetition of “where were you” type stories and oral histories solidified memories for those that still remember the events of November 1963 and often continue to provide an avenue for the creation of memory for those today that were too young to remember or not yet born.

Opposite Lincoln, Kennedy was also the most recently assassinated president in relation to modern Americans. The psychological dictates of primacy and recency, the concept that people are more likely to remember the first and last things they hear, see, or experience first coined by Hermann Ebbinghaus, supports both the lasting historical memories of Lincoln, the first assassinated president, and Kennedy, hopefully the last.¹²⁸

In comparison, Garfield and McKinley’s presidencies, lost between Lincoln’s and Kennedy’s, were relatively distant from most Americans. Though multitudes had flocked to the homes of both presidential candidates during their “Front Porch Campaigns,” personal connections to these presidents were much less widespread than associations with Lincoln or Kennedy. Lincoln and Kennedy had initiated or promised widespread reforms that had the potential to affect every American intimately. Garfield had no time to establish such plans for reform and McKinley’s reforms, though significant, did not influence the day to day life of the average citizen. The nature of their eventual deaths, both finally dying of infection resulting from the assassins’ bullets after extended periods of suffering, also played a role in public reaction. In the almost eleven weeks that led to Garfield’s death and the one week leading up to McKinley’s, the country, reading continual updates in newspapers, was able to brace itself for whatever the outcome might be and to prepare for a new president.¹²⁹ Hoping for the best, but also ready for

¹²⁷ George D. Gaskell and Daniel B. Wright, "Group Differences in Memory for a Political Event," in *Collective Memory of Political Events : Social Psychological Perspectives*, eds. James W. Pennebaker, Darío Páez and Bernard Rimé, (Mahwah, N.J.: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 1997), 175.

¹²⁸ A. J. Greene, C. Prepscius and W. B. Levy, "Primacy Versus Recency in a Quantitative Model: Activity is the Critical Distinction," *Learning & Memory* 7, no. 1 (January 2000), 48-57.

¹²⁹ Schwartz, *Abraham Lincoln and the Forge of National Memory*, 60.

the worst, Americans had time to gather their thoughts and emotions and to work through them in the days leading up to the final conclusions that Garfield and McKinley were dead. Braced for either outcome, the immediate reactions to each death and the lasting legacies of the finally passed presidents were softened.

Presidential Performance and Assassin Appeal

When studying human memory, timing is everything. Not only did the amount of time between the assassin's shot and the president's death play a role in forming the legacy of Lincoln, Garfield, McKinley, and Kennedy, so did the amount of time each had spent in office and what they had done with that time. James Garfield was cursed with the second shortest term in U.S. history after William Henry Harrison, dead within a month after taking the Oath of Office of pneumonia contracted after giving the longest inaugural speech in American history on his chilly, rainy inauguration day.¹³⁰ Garfield served around four months in office before Charles Guiteau shot him, so had little time to make any large policy changes or create lasting effects on the American government. This term also occurred within a period of American history that is rarely brought up in modern, everyday conversation. Historian Kenneth Ackerman put it well when he wrote that, "the busy twentieth and twenty-first centuries have made Garfield's era seem remote and irrelevant... not just forgotten but distorted for more than a century, buried, lost, and rarely thought about."¹³¹ Full of dramatic political battles, but no major physical skirmishes and without the flare of lastingly vivid visual media like that of television, Garfield and his successor, Chester Arthur, were all but doomed to obscurity.

¹³⁰ Library of Congress, "Harrison's Inauguration," Library of Congress, accessed November 16, 2014, <http://www.loc.gov/exhibits/treasures/trr072.html>.

¹³¹ Ackerman, *Dark Horse*, 452.

John F. Kennedy served the seventh shortest U.S. Presidential stint, at around two years and ten months into his first term when he was killed. A substantially greater time in office than Garfield allowed Kennedy to start the process of implementing his “New Frontier,” but not to finish it. Scholar Nico H. Fridja in her article “Commemorating,” emphasizes the impact that “unfinished business” has on the duration of the lasting memory of an individual. Kennedy’s “youthful appearance, good looks, charm, wit, and rhetorical idealism and hope” inspired Kennedy scholar Dallek to title his Kennedy biography *An Unfinished Life*, implying that the president was killed with a wealth of untapped potential.¹³² The death of Kennedy, the extinguishing of a national beacon of hope for the future, has thus unsurprisingly established a lasting place in American public memory, one proactively called upon by Lyndon Johnson, seeking to finish the work Kennedy started and move beyond.

War-time presidents William McKinley and Abraham Lincoln both made it into their second term as president before the fatal shots were fired, but achieved different levels of national remembrance. Though McKinley had been Commander in Chief when the Spanish-American War was waged, the conflict was distant for most Americans and remains even more so today. Lincoln, by comparison, was president during the Civil War, a conflict on American soil with lasting after effects that have played a substantial role in many events and conflicts to follow that have rocked the American psyche to its core. Not only did the trauma of the Civil War and Lincoln’s time in office shape a drastically different nation by itself, but further influenced the catastrophes of Andrew Johnson’s reconstruction era and the eventual triumphs of the Civil Right Movement a century later.

The failures and successes of each president’s successor also impact the differences in their places in American memory. Against Lincoln’s more lenient plans for Reconstruction after

¹³² Dallek, *An Unfinished Life*, 701.

the Civil War, Andrew Johnson and the Radical Republicans planned for a strict and harsh plan to reintegrate Confederate territories which became ultimately a political fiasco. Johnson became the first formally impeached president and was only not removed from office by a single vote. By comparison, Lincoln appeared a much better president to Johnson's contemporaries, and remained so to historians. Theodore Roosevelt, in contrast with the despised Johnson, is a beloved American icon, a rip-roaring Rough Rider and founder of the National Parks Service. With a bold and stand-out personality, Roosevelt's charisma eclipses memory of McKinley's presidency in collective memory.

In addition to the legacy of each assassinated president's successor, the personalities and legacy of the assassins themselves play a role in the staying power of their victims' ongoing places in public memory. John Wilkes Booth was high profile even at the time of the assassination, an attractive actor whose photograph was held in the locket of ladies all across the United States. Even now, Booth remains in the public eye, the contents of his pockets upon his capture displayed in a case at Ford's Theater, a short distance from the Library of Congress case that contains the effects from Lincoln's pockets when he died.¹³³ Booth has taken on a mystical quality in American memory, an almost forgivable and dreamy killer whose face was printed on banners along his escape route from Ford's Theater. "In comparison, the display of Lee Harvey Oswald banners in Dallas," wrote historian James Swanson, "would be obscene."¹³⁴ Lone, perhaps lunatic, shooters, Garfield and McKinley's killers, despite Guiteau's fervent wishes otherwise, have become lost in time, just like the presidents they killed. Lee Harvey Oswald, the potential assassin of Kennedy, however, implied something more sinister which continues to chill the hearts of Americans, especially in light of recent shootings by federal military men at

¹³³ Vowell, *Assassination Vacation*, 24.

¹³⁴ Swanson, *Manhunt*, 383.

Fort Hood and other similar occurrences. Oswald was a former Marine, under federal attention for years, but no one had noticed or acted on the obviously violent tendencies exhibited by Oswald prior to the death of Kennedy.¹³⁵ Notorious in his own right, the fact that no one detected Oswald's behavior left a lasting mark on American minds, more and more determined to try to prevent anything similar from happening again.

Ritual Rites and Martyred Men

Funerals, typical mourning rituals in Western nations, provide the final chance to wish a loved one farewell, to honor their memory, and to preserve their legacy. Funerals created personal memories for the multitudes of Americans who participated in the ritual mourning processes honoring the deaths of Abraham Lincoln and John F. Kennedy. Kennedy's funeral, consciously organized to mimic Lincoln's in decoration, also echoed Lincoln's funeral's public availability. As Lincoln's funeral train traveled across the North, the public mourned and were offered the opportunity to personally participate in the proceedings. Kennedy's funeral, likewise, could be watched by any American household with a television, allowing for participation and private mourning across the country. The funerals of James Garfield and William McKinley, despite being equally elaborate, if not more so, in decoration and pomp, were isolated from much of the American public. If away from the nation's capital or the president's respective homes in Ohio, the only way someone could learn about what had happened at the funeral was via the press, a much less personal or participatory experience. McKinley's funeral was filmed by Thomas Edison, and later replayed in

¹³⁵Larry J. Sabato, "The Never-Ending Replay of November 22, 1963," *Politico Magazine*, November 21, 2014, accessed November 23, 2014, <http://www.politico.com/magazine/story/2014/11/jfk-assassination-anniversary-113099.html#.VHDnIM15X9V>.

theaters across the country, but far after the fact and often for a price. This film was not as popular as a later filmed reenactment of his killer's execution.¹³⁶

In addition to the public nature of their funerals, post-humous transformations from men to martyrs in the press and media also elevated Lincoln and Kennedy's legacies to epic proportions. Lincoln was written and talked about in commemorative pieces, time after time, as the deliverer of the slaves and a martyr to racial tension and the advancement of civil rights in America. Lincoln's status rivaled that of religious icons, as his death was painted as a sort of tragic atonement for the sins and unholy deaths of the Civil War, wiping the slate clean for a new era of national unity. Any blame placed on Lincoln for the deaths resulting from the Civil War were essentially eradicated by the President's own death, almost too ideally timed in tandem with the Christian Holy Week of 1865. Kennedy became a Christ-like figure in death as well. Scholar James Piereson contended that "It follows that President Kennedy was a martyr, like Abraham Lincoln, to the great causes of civil rights and racial justice," at the height of the traditional Civil Rights Movement, but this is not the only factor that primed Kennedy for heightened martyr status.¹³⁷ Kennedy's death was not only the death of a single person, but the ideological hope of Camelot, and for many a loss of faith in the American government which was only exacerbated by the political scandals surrounding his successors.¹³⁸ Like Lincoln and Kennedy, Garfield and McKinley were often referred to as martyrs in their time, but this did not last. Even shortly after the assassination and death of James Garfield occurred, one *New York Times* reporter wrote that "his ultimate place in history will be far less exalted than that which he now holds in popular estimation."¹³⁹ This could also have been said of William McKinley, whose temporary martyr status was even criticized by some of his

¹³⁶ Rauchway, *Murdering McKinley*, 78-79; Vowell, *Assassination Vacation*, 213.

¹³⁷ James Piereson, "Making of a Martyr," *Claremont Review of Books*, (Fall 2013), 21.

¹³⁸ Peter D. Rosenstein, "A Loss of Innocence Came with JFK's Assassination," *Huffington Post*, sec. Politics, November 20, 2013, accessed November 21, 2014, http://www.huffingtonpost.com/peter-d-rosenstein/jfk-assassination_b_4309553.html.

¹³⁹ Millard, *Destiny of the Republic*, 248.

contemporaries, including fiery Temperance advocate Carrie Nation and philosopher and psychologist William James.¹⁴⁰

Conspiracy and Closure

One of our greatest desires as human beings is closure, a logical and rational reason for the occurrence of events. We seek this in our own lives and when reflecting on the past. Finding safety in stories structured with a clear introductory beginning, climactic middle, and decisive conclusion to tie up all loose ends and banish ambiguity, we hope that history will present itself the same way. In some cases, history does follow a traditional narrative structure, but more frequently, it does not, due to the inherent messiness of mankind and the continuation of its existence. The aftermath of the assassinations of James Garfield and William McKinley followed the expected trajectory of crime and punishment. Both Charles Guiteau and Leon Czolgosz were apprehended on site after firing at the president without any sort of elaborate manhunt and were promptly handed over to the American justice system. Any question that might have been asked about potential conspiracy was answered in public trials. Both Guiteau and Czolgosz confessed without hesitation that they alone had fired the fatal shots that took the presidents' lives and their stories were corroborated by numerous eye witnesses in each case. The verdicts of guilt and death sentences in each case were chosen by a jury standing as representatives of the entire nation, effectively allowing all of America to enforce retribution for the wrong doing of the assassins. New presidents took office and life went on, proof that the government system could work as it was intended as one chapter in American history closed and another opened. Guiteau's became the age old tale of an excessively determined man whose extreme ambition eventually got the best of him, like Dr. Frankenstein, killed by his own creation, or Macbeth,

¹⁴⁰ Rauchway, *Murdering McKinley*, 171.

undone by his attempts at glory. Czolgosz's tale was, according Sarah Vowell, "a Cinderella story... involving a wicked stepmother and grimy toil... except that this Cinderella doesn't so much marry the prince as shoot him in the stomach," resulting in a final, electrifying conclusion.¹⁴¹ With traditional narrative structures, the histories of the assassinations of Garfield and McKinley left no cliff-hangers to grab hold of the American imagination.

The assassinations of Abraham Lincoln and John F. Kennedy, however, were quite the opposite, like closely-followed melodramatic soap operas, cancelled before reaching irrefutable and all-encompassing conclusions. The events of Lincoln's death not only started with a conspiracy, but left room for more speculation even after John Wilkes Booth was killed by Boston Corbett while trapped inside of the burning Virginia barn.¹⁴² In the beginning, Booth was the ringleader of a conspiracy to kill not only Lincoln, but other high ranking government officials, including Secretary of State Seward and Vice President Johnson. After being caught, Booth was killed before he was able to confess to killing Lincoln or to stand trial, though his actions were confirmed by eye witnesses and by his personal diary. This diary however was not used in the conspiracy trial of Booth's alleged cohorts in 1865, and by the time it was rediscovered in 1867, had at least eighteen missing pages, if not more.¹⁴³ The conspiracy theories accusing even Vice President Andrew Johnson, Secretary of War Stanton, and the Catholic Church of masterminding the assassination are written about extensively by Lincoln assassination historian Edward Steers Jr.¹⁴⁴ There are many holes in the story of Lincoln's

¹⁴¹ Vowell, *Assassination Vacation*, 213.

¹⁴² Swanson, *Manhunt*, 329-340.

¹⁴³ Edward Steers Jr., *Lincoln Legends: Myths, Hoaxes, and Confabulations Associated with our Greatest President* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2007), 188.

¹⁴⁴ For more, see Edward Steers Jr.'s books *Lincoln Legends: Myths, Hoaxes, and Confabulations Associated with our Greatest President* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2007) or *Blood on the Moon: The Assassination of Abraham Lincoln* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2005).

assassination, but with the passing of time, these questions have been superseded by the even more conspiracy ridden assassination of John F. Kennedy.

A majority of Americans to this day don't believe in the initial story of the Kennedy assassination presented by the federal government's Warren Commission in 1964 and the follow up investigation conducted by the House Select Committee on Assassinations seems to present more questions than answers. Lee Harvey Oswald, though charged with Kennedy's assassination, like Booth, was shot before he could confess or stand trial, but unlike Booth, there were no eyewitnesses or documents that could conclusively verify Oswald as the clear killer. On top of that, Jack Ruby's killing Oswald was also far more suspicious than Corbett's killing of Booth, who might have died trapped in the burning barn or committed suicide, with or without Corbett. Speculations arose as to how many shooters had been in Dealey Plaza on November 22, 1963, which eye witnesses told the right story, and what evidence had been tampered with or fabricated. On top of that, assuming that Oswald did shoot Kennedy but was put up to it, the public questioned the masterminds behind the assassination. According to attorney and author Vincent Bugliosi, whose intensive investigation and ponderous 1,632-page book on the Kennedy assassination (sans citation pages) cannot clear the mysteries of the president's death, stated that "42 groups, 82 assassins and 214 people" have been accused of being a part of a conspiracy by those doubting the lone-gunman theory.¹⁴⁵ With more uncertainties than resolutions still beleaguering the many Americans who were alive when Kennedy was shot, along with the generations which have grown up watching the History Channel's endless stream of Kennedy conspiracy documentaries or have visited Barnes and Noble's history section to note that almost

¹⁴⁵Thom Patterson, "One JFK Conspiracy Theory that could be True," *CNN.Com*, sec. U.S.: The Sixties, November 18, 2013, accessed November 22, 2014, <http://edition.cnn.com/2013/11/16/us/jfk-assassination-conspiracy-theories-debunked/>.

every fifth book (at least) was about the assassination, it is likely that the mystery of the Kennedy assassination won't fade any time soon.

Conclusion

In the end, four American presidents have been left dead by assassination. Two were from Ohio, three fought to preserve Union, and two were born in a log cabin. Three had children and two mourned the loss of a child while in the White House. All four left behind a wife, the highest office in the United States government, and a legacy, but only two were elevated in memoriam into the upper echelons of American history. Two were left behind and forgotten as time passed. In the instants that the assassins' bullets first hit Abraham Lincoln, James Garfield, William McKinley, and John F. Kennedy, all four were, in that isolated moment in time, equals. They were the most important man in sight to onlookers for that split second of impact, but as each bullet took a separate and unique path, their stories diverged.

The first to fall, Abraham Lincoln's death reserved his seat next to George Washington in the hall of American legends, transforming the modest man from a controversial Civil War president into a larger-than-life hero belonging to the ages, the angels, and the annals of history. There is no knowing what might have occurred if Lincoln had survived Booth's attack, but historians have speculated many scenarios. "Had Lincoln lived," stated Pennsylvania politician John W. Frazier in 1909, "[Reconstruction,] the crusade against American civilization would never have taken place to blight the pages of American history."¹⁴⁶ Though Reconstruction would likely have been vastly different, others have gone as far as to consider the influence legal ramifications of Lincoln's wartime blockade and suspension of Habeus Corpus may have had on

¹⁴⁶ John W. Frazier, *If Lincoln had Lived*, (Indiana: Indiana State Library, 1909), 3.

the Presidency, perhaps even resulting in the first presidential impeachment.¹⁴⁷ What we can know, however is that Lincoln's death served as a final, tragic result of the Civil War, closing out an era of tumult and strife and creating a unifying national icon who would never be forgotten.

The death of James Garfield could perhaps have been just as impactful as Lincoln's, but without time in the White House to make major changes in government or in the everyday lives of American citizens and his long-lasting suffering that allowed the nation to prepare itself for a shift in politics, Garfield's legacy was buried. Though we don't often consider the lasting influence that Garfield's death had on the nation, its effect continues to mold politics and the Presidency today. After Chester Arthur, political opponent of Garfield, Stalwart, and staunch patronage-system advocate, had watched his predecessor deteriorate as a result of an attack by a zealous office seeker who had hoped to take advantage of patronage, Arthur's political stance changed dramatically. Upon being elected as President, Arthur threw his support behind the Pendleton Civil Service Act, a bill that would reform the process of selecting government officials to be based on merit over simply being well connected. Garfield also left behind a dream of full and enforceable enfranchisement for African Americans and others deprived of their right to vote. Without Garfield, these issues did not come to a head until the 1950s and 60s Civil Rights Movement, when Jim Crow laws were at long last addressed by the federal government.

William McKinley also left his mark on America in death. Tragically buried in time most by the speed and lack of conspiracy within his killer's trial and by Theodore Roosevelt's charismatic and bold ascension to the presidency, the impact of McKinley's death cannot be denied. Some could argue that his biggest legacy is now chiseled in stone between Jefferson and Lincoln on the side of a cliff in South Dakota, but the 25th president left more behind than a

¹⁴⁷ NPR Staff, *Abraham Lincoln 'Impeached.'* *Wait, what?*, Stephen Carter, Radio Transcript, 2012 National Public Radio, accessed November 23, 2014, <http://www.npr.org/2012/07/07/156212913/abraham-lincoln-impeached-wait-what>.

rough-riding, bespectacled, and unflinchingly confident successor. First, many of Roosevelt's major diplomatic achievements as president came from conditions in progress during the McKinley administration. Additionally, after McKinley was killed, the issue of presidential protection came to the forefront. Though Abraham Lincoln had signed the "Secret Service" into law in 1865, their primary goal at the time was to deal with counterfeiters, not to protect the federal government's highest officials, and Garfield's assassination hadn't changed that. Following the McKinley assassination however, Congress suggested an expansion of the Secret Service to also guard the president's safety. Since then, the Service has successfully prevented countless attempts and potential attempts on the lives of American presidents, undoubtedly changing the course of history many times over.

John F. Kennedy is remembered as the most recent, and hopefully last, American president to fall victim to assassination. His intimate connection to the media, his youth, and his idealism, still directly recalled by many Americans, keep his legacy alive, as do the myriad of questions associated with Lee Harvey Oswald, Jack Ruby, and the true cause of Kennedy's death in Dallas. Lyndon Johnson was able to use Kennedy's legacy to garner support for many important civil rights and economic reforms in the government. Kennedy's death, considered a "watershed moment" by author Stephen King and countless others, had an even greater effect on the minds of the American public.¹⁴⁸ Citizens began to question not only what happened on November 22, 1963, but the United States government and most of all, themselves. Among the many other assassinations of the era, Kennedy's was the jolt that caused a majority of Americans take notice of the tumultuous social climate of their nation. When Rolling Stones member Mick Jagger "shouted out who killed the Kennedys?" in the popular 1968 rock song "Sympathy for the Devil," his answer epitomized the most troubling concept to come out of the assassination that

¹⁴⁸ Stephen King, *11/22/63: A Novel*, (New York: New York : Scribner, 2011).

Americans have yet to forget. “After all,” he chanted, highlighting the darker reality behind the American Dream held so dear, “It was you and me.”¹⁴⁹

In death, as in life, Abraham Lincoln, James Garfield, William McKinley, and John F. Kennedy continue serve important roles in the history of America. Americans tend to fixate on the first and the last to be assassinated, but all four men have made America what it is today and none should be disregarded. Though some we remember and some we forget, each changed the course of America’s history and deserve, if not a plaque honoring their death or their face on our currency, a gesture of thanks for the ultimate sacrifices they made for our nation.

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Haley Claxton

Kirmser Undergraduate Research Award Submission: Reflective Essay

“History, after all,” wrote President John F. Kennedy, “is the memory of a nation.” This national memory was the inspiration for both my study of History at K-State and the topic for my project, “Some We Remember, Some We Forget: The Collective Memory of Assassinated U.S. Presidents in the Modern Age.” The idea first came about when I was in high school. Taking Advance Placement United States History, I was surprised that I had never heard of half of the presidents that had been assassinated. Of the four presidents removed from office by assassination, Abraham Lincoln, James Garfield, William McKinley, and John F. Kennedy, the only books I knew of, or monuments I had visited, were dedicated to the first and the last of them. I asked my teacher if I could write my final paper about the existence of this phenomenon. He laughed, telling me, “You could write a BOOK about that!” I ended up writing that paper about the memory of Lincoln’s assassination, but kept the overall idea in mind, looking for a way to limit the project’s scope while incorporating all four presidents and applying the project to my coursework. Last Fall, I finally received the opportunity to research the topic for my University Honors project.

To narrow the concept, I started with an outline of characteristics I wanted to focus on regarding how each assassination maintained, or lost, its place in American memory. Among them were categories like “Material Remains,” like artifacts, museums, or memorials related to the events, or “Conspiracy” around each assassination. Because the project required a widely varied array of sources, I used many information organizing methods. The most helpful method was using RefWorks software, provided on the Hale Library webpage, to categorize sources and save their citation information. I also took notes, and for book sources, used a tabs to mark information. Initially, I did not have a system for using the tabs, but after realizing that I was

using so many that it was difficult to navigate, I used different colored tabs to designate each president and marked them with the outline category. I also continually updated my outline to reflect discoveries. One of my favorite finds, that significantly impacted my project, was Sarah Vowell's *Assassination Vacation*. Vowell offers informational background related to her trips to sites associated with Lincoln, Garfield, and McKinley in a colloquial, often humorous, way. Because I feel that history, so important to our national identity, is often ignored because people find it "boring," I wanted my project's style, like Vowell's book, to be engaging and relevant to an audience wider than academia.

In conducting research, I utilized many resources the Library had to offer. Along with the organizational utility of RefWorks, the SearchIt! search engine provided many digital resources, including scholarly and primary source newspaper articles, as well as links to related videos and images. I also relied extensively on the Library's online catalog to find sources within its collections. Books retrieved from Hale, as well as from Inter Library Loan (ILL), provided the most valuable secondary resources. From these resources, I also found that their bibliographies and citations were beneficial to double-checking facts. Especially when researching Kennedy's assassination, which has inspired countless works of various levels of reliability and bias, tracing information to the root became necessary. Using citations, I was often able to access authors' sources from the Library's collections or through ILL. Along with fact checking, I also had to remain focused on my objectives for the paper to determine which resources would be the most relevant. My goal was not to focus only on facts, but on the way that facts and their reinterpretations impacted memory. Continually focusing on relevant information proved to be one of the most difficult, and ultimately, most rewarding, elements of completing the project.

Along with primary print and digital resources, the most impactful primary resources I utilized were social media communications, subject experts, and personal observations. Because my project dealt with modern public memory, I reached out to research librarians who currently worked at historical sites associated with each assassination, including Ford's Theater, Garfield and McKinley's presidential libraries, and the Sixth Floor Museum. Though I only heard back from two sites, I also asked countless friends and family members and K-State faculty members about the JFK assassination and their personal recollections of it (if they had any), as well as their interactions with historical sites in the US related to assassinations or level of knowledge about each assassination. Though few conversations were formally included in the final version of my project, each allowed me to make personal determinations about how the public viewed presidential assassinations.

At first, it was difficult to gather information on Garfield and McKinley, as relatively few secondary source books or scholarly works have been produced about them and primary resources were often difficult to access. Still, by manipulating search terms in databases, so as not to get a big orange cat every time I searched "Garfield+Newspaper" for example, the process was much more reasonable. Additionally, using bibliographies of the few books that had been published about both assassinations helped to open up new sources to look into.

In completing this project, I learned more than I ever could have imagined. I gained both new skills in how to analyze and interpret resources through print and digital platforms, and learned how to take advantage of the many resources that Hale Library has to offer. However, the most essential things I learned were about my country, about my peers, and about myself. Tracing the stories of Abraham Lincoln, James Garfield, William McKinley, and John F. Kennedy from their assassinations to the present, I discovered for myself the values of American

society that establish why we remember, or forget. I completed the project in hopes that Americans might someday recognize the forgotten assassinated presidents, Garfield and McKinley, for their sacrifices too.

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