



A Very Private Woman: The Life and Unsolved Murder of Presidential Mistress Mary Meyer

By Nina Burleigh

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In 1964, Mary Pinchot Meyer, the beautiful, rebellious, and intelligent ex-wife of a top CIA official, was killed on a quiet Georgetown towpath near her home. Mary Meyer was a secret mistress of President John F. Kennedy, whom she had known since private school days, and after her death, reports that she had kept a diary set off a tense search by her brother-in-law, newsman Ben Bradlee, and CIA spymaster James Jesus Angleton. But the only suspect in her murder was acquitted, and today her life and death are still a source of intense speculation, as Nina Burleigh reveals in her widely praised book, the first to examine this haunting story.

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Editorial Review

Amazon.com Review

On October 12, 1964, socialite Mary Meyer was shot to death along a wooded path where she was taking her afternoon walk. Ordinarily such a crime wouldn't attract the attention of the CIA's head of counterintelligence, but Meyer was no ordinary Washington socialite. Born into a wealthy, bohemian family in Northeastern Pennsylvania, Meyer studied at Vassar, worked as a journalist during World War II, married--and later divorced--a war hero, became a proto-feminist, experimented with drugs, and had an affair with John F. Kennedy. When Meyer decided to try LSD, she didn't get it from some random dealer and trip in the park. Instead she turned to Timothy Leary himself--and, evidence suggests, she might have eventually shared her stash with the President of the United States.

Shortly after Meyer was found dead, her diaries were spirited away: her brother-in-law, Ben Bradlee, turned the documents over to the aforementioned CIA official, James Jesus Angleton, believing that it was in her, and others', best interest that her secrets die with her. *A Very Private Woman* pieces together some of these secrets, and hints at many more. It's a compelling story not only of a woman who lived at the edges of power, influence, and history, but who lived in and was buffeted by some of the most significant cultural changes of the second half of the 20th century. --*Lisa Higgins*

From Publishers Weekly

This past July, freelance journalist Burleigh confessed, in the pages of *Mirabella*, to playing footsie with Clinton on Air Force One. Later, in a *Washington Post* story, she publicly offered to fellate the president "to thank him for keeping abortion legal." Contrast this with the politesse of Burleigh's subject, Mary Meyer, who was able to conduct an affair with President Kennedy and still get invited to dinner by Jackie. If Burleigh didn't learn discretion from her study, she still does an admirable job of conveying both the restrictive milieu of official Washington in the 1950s and early '60s (at least where women were concerned) and the personality of one woman who was, for a time, able to dictate the terms of her own life. She was born Mary Pinchot to a prominent Pennsylvania family in 1920 and, after attending Vassar, married Cord Meyer, a natural politician who resigned himself to a life behind the scenes. Burleigh repeats allegations, first published over 20 years ago, that Mary Meyer turned JFK on to marijuana and quite possibly LSD. Other notables in the book include abstract artist Ken Noland, who was Mary's lover; CIA counterintelligence chief James Angleton; acid guru Timothy Leary; and Mary's brother-in-law, *Washington Post* editor Ben Bradlee, who was instrumental in destroying Mary's diary after her 1964 murder. Though the title bills Mary's murder as "unsolved," Burleigh is forced to conclude that the man brought to trial, Raymond Crump, is the likeliest suspect and was acquitted because a spirited defense caught the prosecution off guard. Despite the absence of new information on the conspiracy front, Burleigh's biography is an excellent study of both its subject and its time.

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From Library Journal

How times have changed. The media are full of stories about President Clinton's private life, and reporters now dig into the lives of everyone in the White House. One of President Kennedy's romantic attachments was with Mary Pinchot Meyer, a CIA wife and the sister-in-law of the *Washington Post*'s Ben Bradlee, who lived a glamorous life in Georgetown. For a short period, she was a good friend of both President and Mrs. Kennedy. About a year after Kennedy's assassination, though, she was murdered herself, and a vagrant man was charged but acquitted. Burleigh, who has written for the *Washington Post* and *Time*, tries hard to find a

conspiracy, but it's all conjecture. We are left with a book about a moderately interesting woman who was romantically involved with President Kennedy and who was murdered after his death. Mary Meyer led a private life, and Burleigh should have left it that way. Not recommended. ASandra K. Lindheimer, Middlesex Law Lib., Cambridge, MA

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