

The Kennedy Dynasty Posting for Week 6 *The Kennedy Women*

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With one or two notable exceptions, all of the women who married Kennedy men were masters of what contemporary psychologists call “denial.” The all-too-human tendency to block out and refuse to acknowledge unpleasant aspects of reality characterizes most of the women we will be discussing today, and must have caused them deep sorrow. The “See no evil, hear no evil, speak no evil” strategy for living only works to a point. Eventually one must wake up and realize that presenting a false, rosy façade to the world may keep the charade going, but it can’t kill the inner anguish. Knowing that at a fundamental level your husband doesn’t respect you would have to result in despair .

At least, this is how most of us who live in a more prosaic world than the Kennedys would likely respond. But perhaps the ordinary assumptions of life simply don’t apply when you live in such rarefied air. While most of us would feel deeply wounded if we knew our spouses cheated constantly, that when attending a social event one couldn’t be sure that your husband might not sneak off for a quick tryst with the hostess, or that one’s life partner had a deeper connection with his mistress than he did with his wife—all that would have to weigh heavily on the soul.

But perhaps these assumptions don’t apply to “Kennedy Nation,” as Rose once described the clan. Maybe Rose, Jackie, Ethel, and Joan knew *exactly* what they were getting into when they married, and were satisfied with the bargain. After all, the *quid pro quo* for putting up with the endless shenanigans was pretty sweet: fabulous wealth, endless travel to exotic places, the finest blooded horses, vacationing in English

aristocrats' manor homes, meetings with heads of state, the Pope, Hollywood celebrities, etc. "It's good to be queen." So maybe these women—all well-educated, pampered young ladies from wealthy backgrounds—made an unspoken pact, and were simply upholding their end of the deal by looking away when their husbands came home with lipstick on their collars. We should make no mistake: these were not helpless naifs.

Each woman devised a coping strategy. When Joe's infidelities became too egregious, Rose would decamp to Paris for a month of wild spending, with Joe's accountants in Boston picking up the bills. While Jack was romping in his harem, Jackie would go for a Mediterranean cruise with the rich and famous. If Ted was off with a comely intern, Joan would get drunk. Many sociologists have observed that the upper crust looks upon marriage quite differently than the rest of us. At the highest levels, a marriage may look more like a business merger than a cuddly, romantic fantasy. "What's love got to do with it?" as Tina Turner once said. A bargain is a bargain, and the Kennedy women may have felt that they did quite well for themselves. It may not look appealing, but can we really judge?

The exception to this rather dreary picture is to be found in the Ur-Kennedy woman, Bridget Murphy. The poor Irish lass who came to America in steerage married an ordinary immigrant laborer, and through dint of incredible hard work and shrewd business acumen managed to raise a family, educate her only son, Patrick Joseph, and founded one of America's most powerful dynasties. Bridget will be the focal point of this final lecture.