

THE MYTH OF CAMELOT

By Rebecca Hodge

Whether or not Camelot existed is unknown. What is certain is that the myth of Camelot has influenced society, stretching back to the medieval era.



To learn more about the potential truth behind the King Arthur legends, please watch the above TED Ed video.

Camelot is, essentially, a political fantasy. In the myths of Camelot there are few of the complexities of medieval times: no collecting taxes, appointing judges, employing lawyers, working on manufacturing or trade. Yet is immensely vibrant, acting as an escapist idea that has come up again and again in Western culture from Lord Tennyson to the Star Wars films. Notably, it was a fantasy present during the early development of Western administrative states.

In the musical, Mordred describes Arthur's "Seven Deadly Virtues": courage, purity, humility, diligence, charity, honesty, and fidelity. His round table represents equality and democracy. All these ideals are at the core of the Camelot myth and echo throughout political history, including what we consider our current American values.

*ARTHUR'S "SEVEN DEADLY VIRTUES":
COURAGE, PURITY, HUMILITY,
DILIGENCE, CHARITY, HONESTY, AND
FIDELITY*

Nowadays, Camelot is most associated with the Kennedy Era. The Lerner and Loewe musical premiered in 1960, and the film adaptation in 1967. John F. Kennedy himself was said to love the musical, and Jackie Kennedy pushed to connect his time as president to the myth of Camelot. "One brief shining moment" captured the hope and glamour of the Kennedy administration, rooted by a flawed but fully good man at the center of it all.

Camelot contrasts a problematic present with an idealized past that we can somehow return to. Though the myth ends in tragedy, with the destruction of Camelot, it also ends in hope: the story is told once again, Camelot is remembered. Even in a dreary present, there once was Camelot with all its goodness, virtue, and equality - and maybe, somehow, we can return to it.

Sources: *Beyond Camelot: Rethinking Politics and Law for the Modern State* by Edward L. Rubin, "The 'Reel' Arthur: Politics and Truth Claims in 'Camelot, Excalibur, and King Arthur'" by Roberta Davidson