



# Testimony of a Death: Thelma Todd: Mystery, Media and Myth in 1935 Los Angeles

*Patrick Jennings, Marshall Croddy*

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On a chilly Monday morning in 1935, a young maid opened the garage door of a Southern California seaside villa onto a grim scene. Her employer, a popular motion picture comedienne, lay dead in the front seat of her expensive automobile. Within hours, the news of Thelma Todd's death was making headlines throughout the nation. Was it murder, suicide, or accident? Cast against the background of Hollywood and Los Angeles, the film industry and the growing metropolis, her death baffled both the public and the investigating authorities. After numerous attempts to solve the mystery over the last eighty years, a powerful mythology remains, obscuring the facts of the case as well as the character of Thelma herself. For the first time, however, the mystery of Thelma Todd's death will unfold as it originally did in 1935. Not only does *Testimony of a Death* narrate the events of that December but it also explores the forces and personalities central to the tragedy. The book examines the various contexts of Todd's death, including the motion picture business in its Golden Age and the city of Los Angeles hovering on the verge of its greatness. It looks beyond the legends and distortions to the darker reality that lies beneath the myths.

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