

POPULAR VIDEOS

In the Wake of 'JFK': There Are Videos, Too

By Dennis Hunt

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Since director-writer Oliver Stone's "JFK" has become so controversial and popular, retailers have reported a surge in interest in videos about former President Kennedy and his 1963 assassination.

Here's a guide to JFK videos, all available for rent or sale.

The assassination videos:

- **"Who Didn't Kill JFK."** Fascinating 50-minute documentary challenging the authenticity of the backyard photos of Lee Harvey Oswald posing with a rifle. It argues, like Stone's film, that the photos were doctored — without speculating on culprits.

- **"JFK: The Day the Nation Cried."** An often-gripping overview of JFK, combining remembrances by people such as Gerald Ford and Coretta King with assassination-related footage taken by a Dallas television station, covering the period from his arrival in Dallas to his funeral.

- **"Reasonable Doubt: The Single Bullet**

Theory." Compelling hour-long documentary tackles the Warren Commission report, focusing on what facts were overlooked — maybe intentionally.

- **"Best Evidence: The Research Video."** Riveting half-hour video, hosted by David Lipton, takes a medical approach, charging that medical reports were altered and Kennedy's body was tampered with before the autopsy.

- **"Declassified: The Plot to Kill President Kennedy."** In one intriguing hour, former CBS documentary filmmaker John Sharnik uses FBI and CIA files to build a case that the mob orchestrated Kennedy's murder. Arguably the best of the assassination-theory videos.

- **"Four Days in November."** David Wolper and Mel Stuart's 1964, two-hour documentary about the assassination and its aftermath is still one of the most thorough, harrowing accounts of that tragedy. Offers revealing glimpses of Oswald and his killer, Jack Ruby.

- **"The Plot to Kill JFK: Rush to Judgment."** Based on the book by Mark Lane, this one-hour, 1965 documentary, slow in spots and spellbinding in others, argues that the Warren Commission's probe was more of a cover-up of a conspiracy than an investigation.

- **"The Two Kennedys."** A 115-minute documentary contending that the Kennedy brothers were murdered via a conspiracy spearheaded by the likes of the mob and oil barons. Holds your interest, but it's not as exciting as its theme and point of view would suggest.

- **"Marilyn: Say Goodbye to the President."** JFK isn't the major focus, but this absorbing, 71-minute BBC documentary released in 1985 is a must-see. It probes Marilyn Monroe's affairs with John and Bobby Kennedy while charging that those liaisons were shadowed both by the Mafia and Teamsters leader Jimmy Hoffa, a bitter Kennedy enemy.

The videos about Kennedy's life and White House years:

- **"JFK Remembered."** An hour-long ABC News documentary, hosted by Peter Jennings, focusing on Kennedy's White House days. Laced with interviews of politicians, historians and friends, it's an informative, balanced analysis of the key political events of his administration.

- **"John F. Kennedy: The Commemorative Video Album."** This is a made-for-video, 110-minute documentary based on CBS News footage, accentuating the positive. The accounts of Kennedy's



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presidency and assassination are presented more vividly in other videos, but this offers Rose Kennedy reminiscing about her son's boyhood.

● **"The Life and Times of John F. Kennedy."** Narrated by Cliff Robertson, this hour documentary might have been called "Saint John." It's pleasant, folksy fluff, the way friends and family would like JFK remembered.

● **"Life in Camelot: The Kennedy Years."** More fluff, this time made by HBO in conjunction with Life magazine, making use of its photo archives. The most interesting footage in this one-hour documentary deals with Kennedy in the '50, particularly his courtship of Jackie and his senatorial campaign in Massachusetts.

● **"The Speeches of John F. Kennedy."** This one-hour sampling of his campaign and presidential speeches, some quite stirring, gives you a good feel for the Kennedy charisma and for his political ideology.

● **"Thank You, Mr. President."** Narrated by E.G. Marshall, this fairly engaging, hour-long, 1984 documentary features excerpts from JFK press conferences, emphasizing his wit and illuminating his policies. It's valuable because it drums home the point that Kennedy was the first president to use TV extensively.

● **"The Kennedys."** Aided by rare footage, narrator Cliff Robertson presents a thorough, entertaining, 100-minute

history of the Kennedy clan, going all the way back to Ireland in the mid-1800s.

The fictional dramas:

● **"Executive Action."** This 1973 semi-documentary effort, starring Burt Lancaster and Robert Ryan, tries to be a thriller but, due to director David Miller's snail-pacing, lacks any charge. Co-written by assassination theorist Mark Lane, it blames the murder on rich right-wingers.

● **"Kennedy: The Presidential Years."** This 278-minute, 1983 mini-series features Martin Sheen as JFK and Blair Brown as Jackie. It's both an admirable summary of his presidency and decent drama. Sheen's JFK imitation, however, sometimes borders on parody.

● **"The Missiles of October."** Starring William Devane (as JFK) and Martin Sheen (this time playing Bobby), this 1974, 155-minute TV movie is a surprisingly taut dramatization of the 1962 Cuban missile crisis.

● **"PT 109."** An excessively long 1963 drama starring Cliff Robertson, it chronicles Kennedy's heroics as a PT boat commander in the Pacific during World War II. Routine war movie with Kennedy portrayed as insufferably noble.

● **"LBJ: The Early Years."** Kennedy is just a background figure in this 96-minute account of Lyndon Johnson's life before he became president. Randy Quaid gives one of the best performances of his career as Johnson — who, in the Oliver Stone movie, is mentioned as a possible conspirator.