



JFK

Kevin Costner, Gary Oldman

Two things must immediately be said about director Oliver Stone's three-hour quasidocumentary on the assassination of President John F. Kennedy: It is a cunning, often mesmerizing piece of filmcraft and—make no mistake—it is propaganda, shot through with all the perils and pitfalls of that most troublesome genre.

Stone advances in *JFK* the theory that Kennedy was not killed by Lee Harvey Oswald, acting alone, as the Warren Commission ultimately determined. Rather, according to Stone, Kennedy was felled by a team of killers as part of a vast right-wing conspiracy fomented by the CIA, the FBI and the Pentagon in collusion with anti-Castro Cubans who hated Kennedy for his failure to fully support the aborted Bay of Pigs invasion. Oswald is thus reduced to the role of a "patsy" who may not even have fired a shot.

The reason for this violent covert action, Stone argues, was the fear that Kennedy planned to pull U.S. troops out of Vietnam—a threat to the U.S. "military-industrial complex" President Eisenhower warned of in his 1961 farewell address. In Stone's film, the

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solitary, heroic figure who seeks to crack this iron veil is Jim Garrison, the New Orleans district attorney who did indeed bring one Clay Shaw, a wealthy local businessman, to trial for conspiring with diverse right-wing zealots to assassinate the President on orders from above.

Stone has less a story to tell than a case to make. Unfortunately, he has chosen the path not of rational skepticism but of demonology. The garish accusations of the real Garrison got nowhere in court, and the media and the public in the main dismissed him as an ambitious crank. Not Stone. In *JFK*, Garrison, as played by the earnest Costner, is a populist patriot, an update of Gary Cooper in *Mr. Deeds Goes to Town*. Costner's Garrison brands the Warren Commission report a cover-up and concentrates his fire on its conclusion that Oswald (Oldman, in a nerve-jangled performance) acted alone.

To cite just two problems with Stone's speculations: Earl Warren, the liberal former Chief Justice of the Supreme Court, had been under attack for years by archconservatives: How did he then become their pawn? More specifically, *JFK* ignores the plain fact that Oswald owned the 6.5mm Mannlicher-Carcano rifle found at the assassination site and established by ballistics tests as the weapon that killed Kennedy and wounded Texas Gov. John Connally Jr.

Indisputably, the Warren report raised questions that may never be answered, and loose ends make people unhappy. This melancholy truth, though, no more argues for the Garrison/Stone conspiracy theory than gaps in Darwin's theory of evolution prove the literal interpretation of Genesis.

Moreover, Stone further weakens his thesis by using his camera to run a sort of three-card monte game with history, crosscutting dramatic narrative with real-life footage, to the point that fact and fiction become indistinguishable. These tactics lead Stone into a disastrous trap: Costner's ringing courtroom peroration as he sums up his case. It's forthright, forceful, wondrously eloquent—but where's the defense summation? In fact, the real Jim Garrison didn't make the prosecution's summation; the defense attorney perforated his proofless charges; and the jury found Shaw not guilty in less than an hour. Thus Garrison's political failure becomes Stone's cinematic failure, because *JFK* finally has nothing new to say and no place to go.

One critic has lauded Stone for "tenaciously seeking higher truth" despite his guile. That seems like commending a rogue cop for planting evidence on an unpopular suspect. That's not the way malefactors are called to account, not in this republic. In the end, Stone's *JFK* emerges less as the voice of the auteur in pursuit >



< JFK Kevin Costner as DA Jim Garrison makes his lengthy case—visually striking, but all the while your gorge rises as director Oliver Stone force-feeds you his grandiose (and often dubious) assertions.



of truth than the cry of the demagogue demanding that his deuces be declared wild. (R) ■ MARK GOODMAN

RUSH

Jason Patric, Jennifer Jason Leigh

There's a moment of relief about two thirds of the way through *Rush*, when director Lili Fini Zanuck flicks her camera away from the dark, drug-filled honky-tonks of the Texas oil coast and onto a construction site in a sunny middle-class suburb. It's akin to the calculated release that a light-hearted commercial provides during a made-for-TV movie in which everyone suffers from inoperable cancer.

But here the inoperable cancer is at work both in the sunlight and in the darkened dives; it is the rush of hard drugs, destined to destroy petty junkies, dealers and cops with equally malign indifference. Patric and Leigh play undercover narcs who, as they set

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◀ **RUSH** Narcs Jason Patric and Jennifer Jason Leigh get sucked into drug dealer Gregg Allman's web in Lili Fini Zanuck's relentless, realistic thriller.

their sights on a suspected local drug kingpin (played to a menacing turn by Gregg Allman), must buy illegal drugs and sometimes "fix up" themselves in order to win the confidence of the very dealers they're trying to derail.

It's a deadly game preordained to produce no winners. That's the point former undercover cop Kim Wozencraft made in her 1990 autobiographical book, which is underscored here by

Zanuck and cast. Patric defines the narc's skewered sense of obligation when he tells Leigh, "If somebody shoots your partner, you don't wait for the lawyers to sort things out." He and Leigh are painfully effective as they slide down into the pit of drug abuse. With a first-rate screenplay by Pete Dexter, *Rush* carries us, faintheadedly, through a nightmare world that scarcely seems to be on the same plan-

"PSST...IT'S NOT YOUR MOTHER'S TAMPON.™"

