



ALL THE PRESIDENT'S GUNMEN:
Kevin Costner (right) and Jay O.
Sanders examine the view
from the Texas School
Book Depository in *JFK*

The Killing Field

Oliver Stone's *JFK* relies on conjecture to unravel the assassination of John F. Kennedy, but it also evokes—brilliantly—the dark mystery of Nov. 22, 1963. BY OWEN GLEIBERMAN

AS EVERYONE KNOWS by now, Oliver Stone's incendiary docudrama *JFK* (*R*) locates the American heart of darkness in a conspiracy to assassinate John F. Kennedy—a shadowy right-wing cabal that, according to Stone, encompassed the CIA, the FBI, the vice president, and a paranoid subculture of Southern anti-Communist fanatics. Stone's theories about how and why this conspiracy unfolded are fairly insidious, for he has little compunction about inventing details. When he demonstrates the unlikelihood of the "magic bullet" theory—the Warren Commission's hard-to-swallow finding that a single bullet caused a total of seven wounds in Kennedy and Texas Governor John Connally—he's on solid ground. But when he flashes an image of some anonymous operative actually planting the bullet on a hospital stretcher, it's just an overheated act of conjecture. Yet Stone's instincts as a filmmaker transcend his glibness as a moral inquisitor. The *JFK* assassination has a built-in pull (just listening to the theories is like getting sucked into a whirlpool), and the tabloid "revelations" laid out by *JFK* are feverishly immediate. If Stone hasn't exactly solved the Kennedy assassination, he has captured—with a dark cinematic flair that leaves you reeling—why it still looms like a sickening nightmare.

The killing of John F. Kennedy haunts us for two vastly different reasons. When that final bullet blasted open Kennedy's brain, in some dread-ridden way it almost seemed as if America itself had killed the President. Regardless of who (or how many whos) pulled the trigger, the simple fact that a leader so beloved could be struck down with such incongruous horror told us that we weren't the nation we thought we were, that beneath our lingering post-

war optimism lay demons and madness.

But the assassination also haunts us perceptually. Our fascination with the tragedy might have faded long ago were it not for the 8 mm home movie shot that day in Dealey Plaza by dress manufacturer Abraham Zapruder. Without that footage, we wouldn't expect to know who killed Kennedy; it would all seem

distant, hopeless, part of the pre-media-culture past. But because of the Zapruder film, which allows us, visually, to relive the assassination, we feel as if we should have the answer, as if the clues were right before us, waiting to yield the truth. The essential mystery of the *JFK* assassination—not simply the welter of facts we don't know, but *the very*

TRIPLE MONIKERS

What's in Three Names?

WHATEVER HAPPENED TO simple names? Names like Cher and Charo? Faster than you can say Jamie Lee Curtis a roster of three-monikered thespians has arrived, and it's getting harder and harder to tell one long-named lass from the other. Here, some career highlights to help audiences get it straight once and for all. ♦ **Mary-Louise Parker** and **Mary Stuart Masterson** play best friends in *Fried Green Tomatoes*. Parker, 26, is the brunet with the hyphen. She garnered a best-actress Tony nomination for *Prelude to a Kiss* and is currently Kevin Kline's secretary in *Grand Canyon*. The fair-haired Masterson, 25, has a harder-edged charm. She was an appealing tomboy in *Some Kind of Wonderful* (1987), a vulnerable young wife in *Gardens of Stone* (1987), and she gave her baby to Glenn Close in *Immediate Family* (1989)... ♦ **Mary Elizabeth Mastrantonio**, 33, has got the big hair and the regal carriage. She made her film debut as Al Pacino's sister in 1983's *Scarface*. Recently, she captured the courtroom in *Class Action* and captivated Kevin Costner in *Robin Hood*... ♦ **Jennifer Jason Leigh**, 33, is the one with a penchant for grittier roles, such as the promiscuous teenager in 1982's *Fast Times at Ridgemont High*. Since then she's burned it up with not one, but two Baldwin brothers (Alec in *Miami Blues* and Billy in *Backdraft*), sold her body in *Last Exit to Brooklyn*, and is now starring as a narc-turned-junkie in *Rush*... ♦ **Penelope Ann Miller**, 27, exudes an all-American freshness yet she can flirt with the best of them. She rippled Schwarzenegger's muscles in *Kindergarten Cop*, danced with De Niro in *Awakenings*, and devoured doughnuts with Danny DeVito in *Other People's Money*... ♦ **Sarah Jessica Parker**, 26, and no relation to Mary-Louise, is a playful pixie with world-class locks. She got her start as the smart one on CBS' *Square Pegs*, has played an assistant D.A. on ABC's short-lived *Equal Justice*, and a ditzzy distraction for Steve Martin in last year's *L.A. Story*. Elly May Clampett, eat your heart out. —*Kate Meyers*



GIORGIO TAVANNA



RICHARD FLETCHER



DAVID LAUREN

HAIL MARYS:
Mary-Louise Parker, Mary Stuart Masterson, and Mary Elizabeth Mastrantonio

fact that we can never know—is at the heart of our obsession with the events of Nov. 22, 1963. That day disturbs our dreams because it seems to exist in some netherworld at the dawn of the media age. That day mocks our desire for certainty. It tells us that even in an era when everything is recorded, the more we see the less we know.

This, far more than any cooked-up, all-encompassing conspiracy theory, is the true subject of *JFK*. The movie is about the way we see the assassination, about the way it lives inside our minds. Stone keeps returning to that day in Dallas. He creates a spectacular layered effect, interpolating bits of the Zapruder film with a half-dozen styles of grainy staged footage, each with its own distinctive "reality." Parts of *JFK* play like a documentary we've miraculously entered. Stone weaves such a heady tapestry of detail—fleeting interviews with bystanders; pinpoint analyses of how many bullets could have been fired, and from where; shots of the street, of the grassy knoll, of people waiting for Kennedy to arrive (after a while, we start to recognize them)—that we feel as if we're right there, on that day. Stone turns the assassination into a purely existential event, and that makes its horror all the greater. The atmosphere of impotence and invisible doom—the sense of a nation about to crack open—is overwhelming.

All of which leads to the question ... who done it? Stone has framed *JFK* as a classic cover-up thriller, like *Z* (1969) or *All the President's Men* (1976). His hero is New Orleans district attorney Jim Garrison (Kevin Costner), who in the mid-'60s came to believe that Lee Harvey Oswald had links to a local anti-Castro cult and, as a result, launched a savvy but reckless inquiry into the assassination. The real Garrison was a cocky troublemaker who, many say, had a way of coming up with theories and bending the facts to fit them. Stone turns him into a white knight, with Costner doing a Southern-gentleman variation on Eliot Ness. This Garrison, though, isn't really meant to be a three-dimensional figure. In *JFK*, he's our guide through the jungle—through the cascade of witnesses, flashbacks, and voluminous information that Stone compresses

into a dizzying stream of consciousness.

The movie unfolds on twin dramatic tiers. There are the Dealey Plaza scenes, which pass by in a kind of floating technological dream. And there is Garrison's investigation into the kinky right-wing subculture of New Orleans, where he pursues the leads of such characters as the hairless mercenary pilot David Ferrie (Joe Pesci) and the suavely effete businessman Clay Shaw (Tommy Lee Jones). Curiously, the movie never really makes a connection between the two levels. When Garrison, desperate to get his evidence heard in public, puts Shaw on trial, viewers may wonder what, exactly, Shaw is being accused of. Knowing Lee Harvey Oswald? Being a member of the CIA? (That hardly connects him to JFK.)

The plot doesn't really make sense; it's just a dramatic frame on which Stone can hang the various conspiracy theories. Yet when it comes to dramatizing those theories (the proverbial what-might-have-been), his filmmaking is so supple and alive, his obsession with the visual aspect of history so electrifying, that *JFK* practically roots itself in your imagination. The movie's most dramatic moment is Garrison's replaying in court of the Zapruder film. For this is what every Kennedy-assassination conspiracy theory—and, indeed, Stone's movie—finally comes down to: a man

riding in a car, struck by a bullet, his head shooting off to the left (hence a second gunman aiming from the knoll). Beneath its labyrinthine paranoia, *JFK* says: Here was the true tragedy of Nov. 22, 1963—the day America stopped believing its own eyes. **A-**

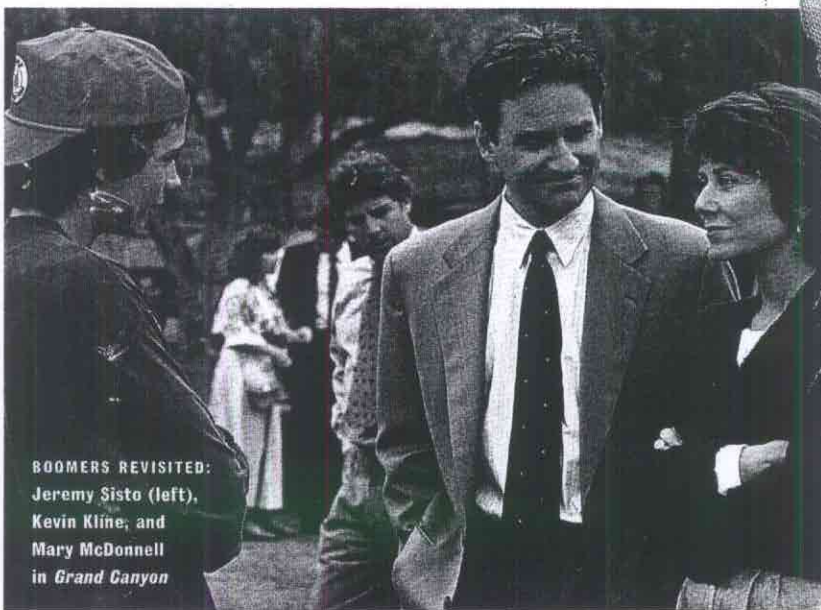
The Bigger Chill

GRAND CANYON

Kevin Kline, Mary McDonnell

(Directed by Lawrence Kasdan, R)

IN HINDSIGHT, Lawrence Kasdan's *The Big Chill* (1983) was the original *thirtysomething*. With a fresh satirical eye, Kasdan caught the plight of baby boomers who had ridden the wave of the '60s and then discovered—to their dismay and delight—that life's truest adventure lay within the folds of the middle-class existence they thought they'd rejected. Those who saw the movie as Kasdan's slick renunciation of counterculture values were being silly. For, of course, the transition from the '60s to the '80s wasn't simply about ex-hippies suddenly deciding to make a lot of money. It was about the call of biology itself, about counterculture refugees growing older and realizing that they wanted children, families, stability—the home-and-hearth values that are really



BOOMERS REVISITED:
Jeremy Sisto (left),
Kevin Kline, and
Mary McDonnell
in *Grand Canyon*