

THE COLLINS REPORT

By Monica Collins

JFK: The too-much-TV-airtime theory

Who would have ever thought Hollywood's giddiest race, the Oscar nomination sweepstakes, would prolong TV's obsession with the grim legacy that is the Kennedy assassination? But then again, it takes so very little, it seems, to stimulate the tube to Camelot frenzy, as "JFK" director **Oliver Stone** so well knows. This week's nominations announcement produced the latest blip: speculation about how the politics of the conservative motion picture academy influenced the film's Oscar chances.

But Oscar's waltz with the Kennedy conundrum is just the latest fling TV's taken with Stone's assassination ruminations. And I for one wish the dance would come to an end. Kennedy is becoming a TV cottage industry. I watch the endless parade of conflicting Camelot programming and wonder: can it have any collective purpose?

This week alone, PBS's *Nova*, jumps into the act with its "Who Shot President Kennedy?" airing Feb. 25 at 8 P.M. (ET). Cable's Arts & Entertainment Network presents an entire week of JFK-related

programming with a five-part presentation of "The Trial of Lee Harvey Oswald," shown from Feb. 24 through Feb. 28 at 10 P.M. (ET). An original documentary, "Who Killed JFK? On the Trail of the Conspiracies," caps off A&E's Kennedy week on



Kevin Costner in Oliver Stone's controversial "JFK."

Feb. 28 at 9 P.M. (ET). In the special, anchor **Bill Kurtis** will interview—you guessed it—Oliver Stone.

Kennedy gets ratings. When it presented an hour-long investigation into the Kennedy assassination theories, CBS's *48 Hours* scored the highest numbers in the show's history. But I think it has been

more than conspiracy parlor games that's maintained Kennedy's high TV profile through the intervening decades. JFK-mania might reflect a sense of wanting to complete an unfinished moment in our history, according to historian **Doris Kearns Goodwin**.

"From then on, there was a turn in the direction of the country. We had Vietnam, Nixon, Watergate, the end of hope and optimism. That's why there is an obsession with going back to this moment."

And back again, and again, with an indefatigable Oliver Stone as the tour guide. Has his relentless "JFK" publicity campaign beaten the Kennedy fascination out of me? Almost, but as tired as I am of Stone's drone, I'm glad to hear that among Kennedy cognoscenti there's a belief that the "JFK" juggernaut may actually revitalize the felled leader's charisma. "In terms of Stone's movie, the portrait of JFK is a very positive one," says Kearns Goodwin. The film, she says, posits that Kennedy "was taking us in a direction that got misturned. I suppose the Kennedy family would think that the extensive interest creates a portrait of somebody special who was cut down early. It lets that living legend live on in another generation."

And in another generation of TV reflections.