

HOME TECH VIDEO

Life, Times and Assassination of J.F.K.

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Since director-writer Oliver Stone's "JFK" has become so controversial and popular—grossing more than \$50 million so far—video retailers have reported a surge in interest in videos about former President John F. Kennedy and his 1963 assassination.

Here's a guide to J.F.K. videos, all available for rent or sale in the \$10 to \$20 range.

The assassination videos:

- "Who Didn't Kill JFK" (3-G). Fascinating, 50-minute documentary challenging the authenticity of the back-yard 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" (VIEW). An often gripping overview of J.F.K., combining remembrances by people such as former President Gerald Ford and Coretta Scott King with assassination-related footage shot by a Dallas TV station, covering the period from his arrival in Dallas up to his funeral.

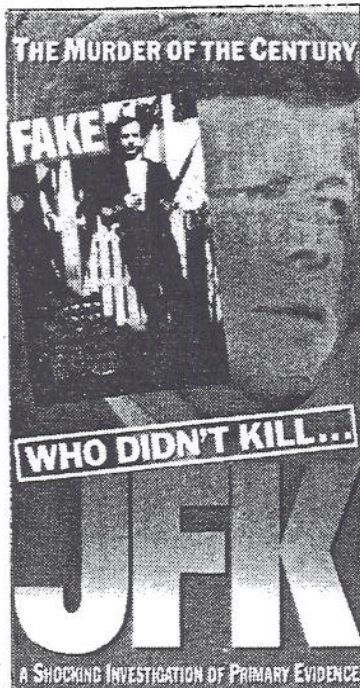
- "Reasonable Doubt: The Single Bullet Theory" (Kultur). Compelling hourlong documentary tackles the Warren Commission report, focusing on what facts were overlooked—maybe intentionally.

- "Best Evidence: The Research Video" (Rhino). Riveting half-hour video, hosted by David Lipton, takes a medical approach, charging doctoring of medical reports as well as pre-autopsy tampering with Kennedy's body.

- "Declassified: The Plot to Kill President Kennedy" (VidAmerica). In one intriguing hour, assembled by ex-CBS documentary filmmaker John Sharnik, it builds a strong case, using FBI and CIA files, that the mob orchestrated Kennedy's murder. Arguably the best of the assassination-theory videos.

- "Four Days in November" (MGM/UA). 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.

Please see JFK, F17



"Who Didn't Kill JFK" argues that pictures of Oswald were doctored; "The Video Album" offers Rose Kennedy reminiscing about J.F.K.

'JFK' Review in Washingtonian

Washingtonian magazine, which killed a favorable review of Oliver Stone's "JFK" last month only to see its movie critic resign in protest, will publish a favorable review of the film submitted by a new critic for its March editions, editor Jack A. Limpert said Thursday.

"I would agree with critics that an editor has no right to substitute his judgment [for theirs]," Limpert said. "I guess what I was reacting to was that Stone was selling this as journalism and as history when I thought it was bad journalism and bad history."

Limpert drew fire from film critics nationwide when he killed a capsule review of "JFK" submitted by Pat Dowell, who had written: "If you didn't already doubt the Warren Commission report, you will after seeing Oliver Stone's brilliantly crafted indictment of history as an official story." She gave it 3½ stars.

Her replacement, Jayne Blanchard, writes: "Oliver Stone's controversial rabble-rousing examination of the Kennedy assassination polarizes audiences—you either love it or hate it. But beyond Stone's manipulative style and heavy politics, there is excellent acting, led by Kevin Costner, a riveting detective story, and a reminder that democracy is a participatory sport." She also gave it 3½ stars.

"[Limpert] still doesn't like the film," Blanchard said, "and he doesn't think it is a fair and accurate depiction of Washington, but my review doesn't take sides, it judges the movie as a movie and is not the last word on assassination lore. He seems more comfortable with that."

—ROBERT W. WELKOS

JFK

Continued from F16

- "The Plot to Kill JFK: Rush to Judgment" (MPI). 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" (MPI). 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" (Key Video). J.F.K. isn't the major focus, but this absorbing, no-holds-barred, 71-minute BBC documentary from 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" (Vestron). An hourlong 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" (CBS-Fox). This is a made-for-video, 110-minute documentary based on CBS News footage, accentuating the positive. The accounts of Kennedy's 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" (Kodak). 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 J.F.K. remembered.

- "Life in Camelot: The Kennedy Years" (HBO). More fluff, this time made 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 '50s—particularly his courtship of Jackie and his senatorial campaign in Massachusetts.

- "The Speeches of John F. Kennedy" (MPI). 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" (Worldvision). Narrated by E.G. Marshall, this somewhat engaging, hourlong, 1984 documentary features excerpts from Kennedy press conferences, emphasizing his wit and illuminating his policies. It's valuable because it drums home the point that J.F.K. was the first president to use TV extensively.

- "The Kennedys" (MPI). 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" (Warner, 1973). This 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" (Starmaker Entertainment). This 278-minute, 1983 mini-series features Martin Sheen as J.F.K. and Blair Brown as Jackie. It's both an admirable summary of his presidency and decent drama. Sheen's J.F.K. imitation, however, sometimes borders on parody.

- "The Missiles of October" (MPI). Starring William Devane (as J.F.K.) 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" (Warner). 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" (Fries). 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.