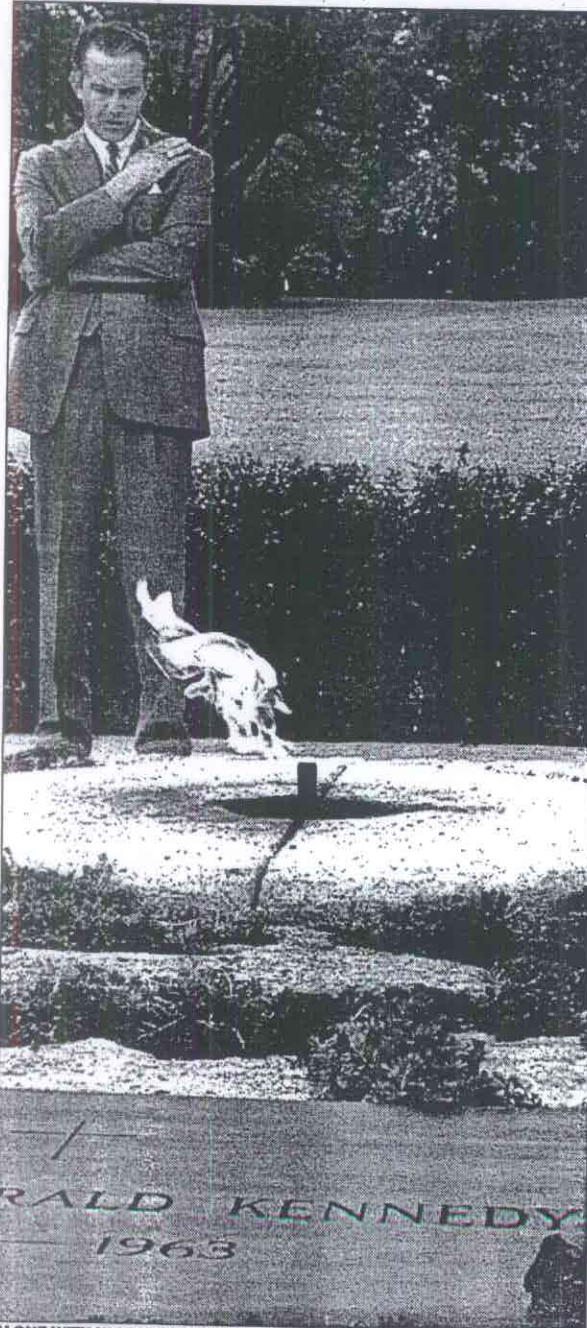


FRIDAY

EXTRA

'JFK'

Stone has field day with conspiracy theory



ALONE WITH HIS THOUGHTS? Kevin Costner as New Orleans District Attorney Jim Garrison pauses at President John F. Kennedy's grave in Arlington.

★★★

JFK. Kevin Costner, Kevin Bacon. Directed by Oliver Stone. At Loews Paramount, Tower East, Village Theater VI, Chelsea Cinemas. Running time: 188 mins. Rated R.

JFK SHOULD PROBABLY carry a warning label, something like "Believe at your own risk."

Movies, as you know, can be highly persuasive, and Oliver Stone's cram course in assassination conspiracy theory is potent stuff.

While it would be foolish to cast Stone as just a dangerous provocateur, his quasi documentary should be viewed with healthy skepticism. The movie more or less implies that the buck may have even stopped at the White House office of then President Lyndon Johnson — that even LBJ may have been part of a vast coverup.

Stone freely admits he made some alterations in historical fact for dramatic effect in the same way, as he puts it, that "Shakespeare shaped 'Henry V.'" But his explosive muck-raking thriller, which re-investigates the crime of the century with the breathless urgency of a tabloid TV show, is brilliantly shaped.

The Dallas crime scene is revisited with haunting effect. Possible evidence is reshaped in kaleidoscopic fragments of images in an amazing feat of stylistic daring that few film makers would ever attempt. Black-and-white newsreel footage is combined so seamlessly with black-and-white and full-color dramatic re-creations of various critical events that only the most alert viewer will be able to tell reality from docudrama.

Most chilling of all is the amazingly authentic restaging of the confused autopsy proceedings. One is bombarded with alarming tidbits, disturbing discrepancies and obviously wild assertions — all presented at rapid-fire speed by actors who seem to believe they are being paid by the word.

The whole movie seems to be hyper-ventilating as it directs its indignation against the CIA, the FBI, the military, big business, the Dallas police and the media. Stone is already under attack for making a truth-seeking hero out of Jim Garrison. As New Orleans district attorney, Garrison took on the Washington establishment by charging that Clay Shaw, a local well-connected businessman, was a possible participant in a right-wing fascist conspiracy that plotted to rid the country

of President John F. Kennedy because he was supposedly soft on communism. The charges didn't stick and the trial was generally dismissed as a fiasco.

The real Garrison has been described as a flamboyant and garrulous man. Stone has cast the low-key and mostly monotone Kevin Costner in the role. The director uses Costner's understated earnestness and his public image as an all-American icon to transform Garrison into the traditional white-bread stand-up guy, a true Capra-esque hero. In his lengthy summation speech at the trial (in reality, Garrison let the assistant district attorney do the summing-up), Costner chokes with emotion just like Jimmy Stewart's Mr. Smith.



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What could be called "Mr. Garrison Accuses Washington" begins with a telling segment from President Dwight Eisenhower's farewell address, in which he warned of the possibly dangerous influence of the "military-industrial complex." That sets up Stone's pet theory, that JFK was the victim of a shadowy group of generals and other highly placed warmongers who feared he would pull out of Vietnam.

The movie scoffs at the "magic-bullet" theory that allowed the Warren Commission to conclude that Lee Harvey Oswald was the lone assassin, with Garrison demonstrating the seemingly impossible trajectory the bullet would have had to take. Oswald himself is unofficially exonerated; the movie suggests he was just "the sacrificial lamb."

The famous Zapruder film, the 8-mm home movie of the assassination, is replayed in all its horror. Stone doesn't miss any opportunity to reinforce his case. There's even a glimpse of a motto carved into the Pentagon walls that reads "Study the past."

The movie is bolstered by a first-rate cast. Joe Pesci is unnerving as the jumpy, creepy-looking David Ferrie. Kevin Bacon is properly slimy as a fascist hustler. Tommy Lee Jones conveys Shaw's air of superiority.

The movie's constant badgering may make you feel as if you've been subjected to a brainwashing session. But no one can accuse Stone of a lack of nerve. Even if you dismiss the movie as just the paranoid delusions of a raving Hollywood megalomaniac, Stone deserves high marks for his superior craftsmanship and his bold attempt to refuel the debate on the most troubling murder mystery in this country's history.