

# When Everything Amounts to Nothing, in a Hyperbo

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corporations profiting from the Vietnam War, members of the Federal Bureau of Investigation, the Central Intelligence Agency, the Secret Service and, by clever indirection, even President Lyndon B. Johnson, Kennedy's Vice President.

Acting in concert with them or at their behest, though in ways that remain undetermined, are ultra-right-wing fanatics represented in the movie by Clay Shaw (Tommy Lee Jones), some unidentified Cuban exiles and a former F.B.I. man named Guy Bannister (Ed Asner). Also involved are various fringe types like David Ferrie (Joe Pesci), a pilot for hire; the small-time mobster Jack Ruby (Brian Doyle Murray), and Oswald (Gary Oldman), whose place in the conspiracy has become utterly mysterious by the time the movie ends.

"J. F. K." begins with a promise of intrigue and revelation, though it soon becomes clear that Mr. Stone is Fiber McGee opening the door to an overstuffed closet. He is buried under all the facts, contradictory testimony, hearsay and conjecture that he would pack into the movie.

What is fact and what isn't is not always easy to tell. Though one char-

## A soundtrack layered like strudel with dialogue, music and noise.

acter is officially listed as having committed suicide, the movie allows us to see him being forced to take lethal pills. This is not speculation. Anything shown in a movie tends to be taken as truth.

The movie sees everything through the bespectacled eyes of the tireless Jim. "J. F. K." suffers with him when the Donna Reed character, Jim's wife, Liz (Sissy Spacek), says, "Honestly, I think sometimes you care more about John Kennedy than you do your own family!"

Jim has missed a luncheon at Antoine's with Liz and the children. Some things, such as Presidential assassinations, require terrible sacrifices from those who would investigate them.

"J. F. K." is suitably aghast when Jim goes to the Lincoln Memorial in Washington to meet a man who iden-

tifies himself only as X (Donald Sutherland) but who is obviously high in the military-industrial complex. X is the one who, in a very long omnibus sort of monologue accompanied by images that jump all over the world, suggests that Jim check into the participation in the conspiracy of everyone who stood to gain from Kennedy's death.

Says Jim in his golly-gee-whiz manner, "I never realized that Kennedy was so dangerous to the Establishment!"

The movie rushes frantically on, its unsubstantiated data accumulating while Jim becomes a victim of a caustic press and a vicious, self-serving Establishment. Little by little Mr. Stone seems to identify Jim with John Kennedy. When X says of the conspiracy, "It's as old as the Crucifixion," it suddenly appears that the film maker would elevate Jim and John to an even higher pantheon.

By the time "J. F. K." reaches the Clay Shaw trial, most uninformed members of the movie audience will be exhausted and bored. The movie, which is simultaneously arrogant and timorous, has been unable to separate the important material from the merely colorful. After a certain point, audience interest tunes out. It's a jumble.

### J. F. K.

Directed by Oliver Stone; screenplay by Mr. Stone and Zachary Sklar, based on the books "On the Trail of the Assassins" by Jim Garrison and "Crossfire: The Plot That Killed Kennedy" by Jim Marrs; director of photography, Robert Richardson; edited by Joe Hutshing and Pietro Scalia; production designer, Victor Kempster; music by John Williams; produced by A. Kitman Ho and Mr. Stone. Running time: 188 minutes. This film is rated R.

Jim Garrison	Kevin Costner
Liz Garrison	Sissy Spacek
David Ferrie	Joe Pesci
Clay Shaw	Tommy Lee Jones
Lee Harvey Oswald	Gary Oldman
Lou Ivon	Jay O. Sanders
Bill Broussard	Michael Rooker
Jack Martin	Jack Lemmon
Senator Russell B. Long	Walter Matthau
Colonel X	Donald Sutherland
Willie O'Keefe	Kevin Bacon
Guy Bannister	Edward Asner
Jack Ruby	Brian Doyle Murray

"J. F. K." rivets in the manner that was intended in two sequences: its presentation of the evidence about the number of bullets fired at the Kennedy motorcade and its presentation of the so-called Zapruder film, the record of the assassination itself. But even in these latter sequences, the movie remains an undifferentiat-

ed mix of real and staged material.

Mr. Stone's hyperbolic style of film making is familiar: lots of short, often hysterical scenes tumbling one after another, backed by a soundtrack that is layered, strudel-like, with noises, dialogue, music, more noises, more dialogue. It works better in "Born on the Fourth of July" and "The Doors" than it does here, in a movie that means to be a sober reflection on history suppressed.

Some of the performances are good, all by actors who get on and off fairly fast: Mr. Jones, Mr. Pesci, Mr. Asner, Jack Lemmon (as a feckless crony of one of the New Orleans suspects) and Kevin Bacon, who plays a male hustler.

When Walter Matthau turns up for a brief, not especially rewarding turn as Senator Russell B. Long, "J. F. K." looks less as if it had been cast in the accepted way than subscribed to, like a worthy cause. The cause may well be worthy; the film fails it.

"J. F. K." is rated R (Under 17



Sissy Spacek

requires accompanying parent or adult guardian). It has some scenes of violence and bloodshed and a good deal of vulgar language.