

Costner couldn't keep his promise

He told wife he'd take time off, but 'JFK' came along

By Joyce J. Perico
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WHAT "JFK" director Oliver Stone wanted from Kevin Costner in the role of former New Orleans District Attorney Jim Garrison was more than a movie star. He needed an image of believability, and with Costner he figured that was part of the package.

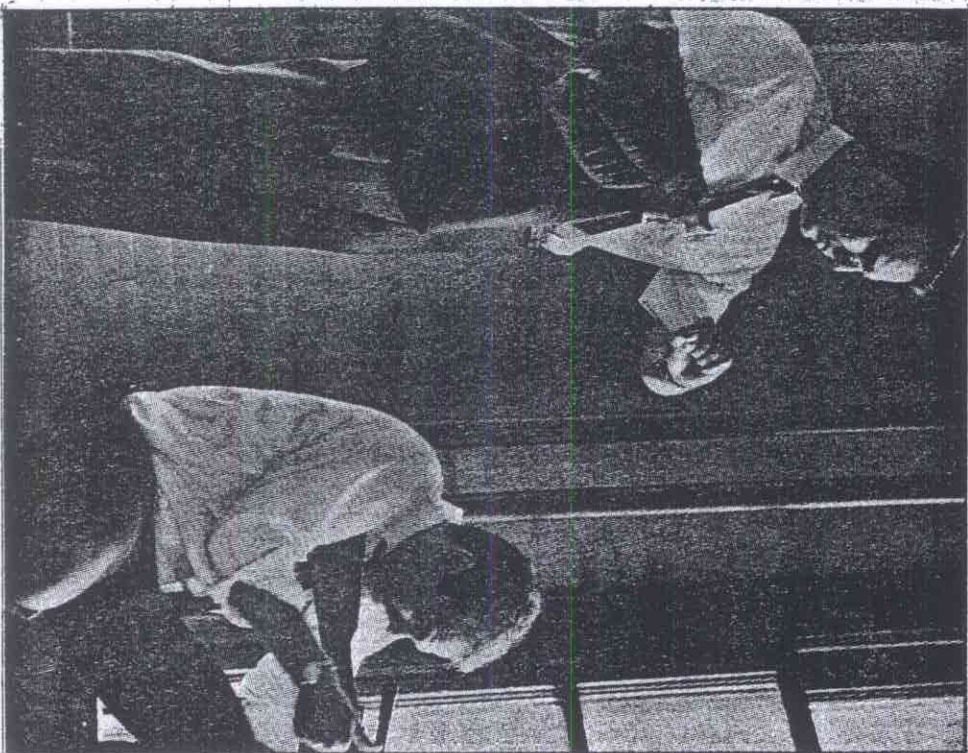
Costner, with his laconic, all-American appeal, didn't want the controversial role of the man who had unsuccessfully prosecuted businessman Clay Shaw for being part of an assassination conspiracy. Reportedly, Harrison Ford and Mel Gibson had declined as well. But Stone was insistent.

"I promised my wife I was going to take some time off," says Costner. "Then Oliver sent me this 'JFK' script which was hard to understand and made you think. The information was dense and I was tired, so I passed."

Stone crossed the Atlantic to meet Costner on the set of "Robin Hood," but Costner still wasn't convinced he could say the lofty lines Stone wrote for him.

The actor also didn't feel he could even approach his wife with the prospect of plunging into yet another movie after he had promised her time alone. But it was she who finally persuaded him to take the role.

"I'm not immune to the contro-



Kevin Costner, left, as the district attorney and Jay O. Sanders as his chief investigator in "JFK"

versy around Jim Garrison, but we weren't making a biography," Costner insists. "If we were, maybe I wouldn't be making this movie. But there are a lot of sides to him.

"He still comes off fairly heroic (in the film), and I played him as

such."

Known more for his charisma than his theatrical expertise, Costner admits he worried that he wouldn't be able to do the memory work that a crucial courtroom summation scene would require.

Running some eight minutes on screen, it originally stretched to 11 and took a day and a half to film. In the middle of it, as Costner-Garrison quietly details the contradictions and inconsistencies in the Warren Commission's single-bullet, lone-assassin theory, his voice breaks. It is a moment that was not scripted.

"The weight of the speech just got so heavy," Costner explains. "It didn't seem foolish at all."

An Oscar-winning director for "Dances With Wolves," Costner took the brunt of the criticism when he overrode friend and director Kevin Reynolds during the filming of "Robin Hood: Prince of Thieves." He still smarts from criticism of the simplicity of "Dances With Wolves."

"Dances With Wolves" was just one fictional story of the West. It was a very human, romantic look at things," he says. "I was surprised at why people attacked it, calling it 'Kevin's Gate.' I was not surprised that people liked it.

"I'm always surprised when journalists editorialize and it gets mean, like they did with 'Robin Hood.'"

"I knew it was a good, entertaining movie. I was under no illusions it was anything else. It was flawed, but I didn't feel vindicated when it made \$170 million. I only felt vindicated in my own sensibilities."

Professing that he doesn't have "as thick a skin as people imagine," Costner, who has to be one of the most bankable stars in the industry, moans, "I'd take 10 percent of what I make if I could throw away all the bad reviews. It would be a great deal."