

# FILM REVIEWS

## JFK

(Drama — Color)

A Warner Bros. release presented in association with Le Studio Canal Plus, Regency Enterprises and Alcor Films of an Ixtlan Corp. and A. Kitman Ho production. Produced by Ho, Oliver Stone. Executive producer, Arnon Milchan. Co-producer, Clayton Townsend. Directed by Stone. Screenplay, Stone, 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. Camera (DuArt color; Technicolor prints; Panavision widescreen), Robert Richardson; editors, Joe Hutshing, Pietro Scalia; additional editor, Hank Corwin; music, John Williams; production design, Victor Kempster; art direction, Derek R. Hill, Alan R. Tomkins; set design, Mary Finn; set decoration, Crispian Sallis; costume design, Marlene Stewart; sound (Dolby), Tod A. Maitland; associate producer-assistant director, Joseph Reidy; casting, Risa Bramon Garcia, Billy Hopkins, Heidi Levitt. Reviewed at Skywalker Sound, Santa Monica, Dec. 12, 1991. MPAA Rating: R. Running time: 189 min.

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  
Susie Cox ..... Laurie Metcalf  
Al Oser ..... Gary Grubbs  
Dean Andrews ..... John Candy  
Jack Martin ..... Jack Lemmon  
Sen. Russell Long ..... Walter Matthau  
Guy Bannister ..... Ed Asner

Colonel X ..... Donald Sutherland  
Willie O'Keefe ..... Kevin Bacon  
Jack Ruby ..... Brian Doyle-Murray  
Rose Cheramie ..... Sally Kirkland  
Marina Oswald ..... Beata Pozniak  
Bill Newman ..... Vincent D'Onofrio  
Carlos Bringuier ..... Tony Plana  
Leopoldo ..... Tomas Milian  
Earl Warren ..... Jim Garrison

**A** rebuke to official history and a challenge to continue investigating the crime of the century, Oliver Stone's "JFK" is electric, muckraking filmmaking. This massive, never-boring political thriller, which most closely resembles Costa-Gavras' "Z" in style and impact, lays out just about every shred of evidence yet uncovered for the conspiracy-theory argument surrounding the assassination of President John F. Kennedy. Pic's contentious p.o.v. and agitated manner will stimulate an enormous amount of thought and fresh debate, as well as printed opinion pro and con, assuring the Warner Bros. release a high profile even beyond that guaranteed by names Oliver Stone and Kevin Costner.

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## JFK

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With a recent Gallup poll indicating that 73% of Americans believe that Lee Harvey Oswald did not act alone in killing Kennedy, Stone is apparently playing to an already converted audience that should readily lap up his dramatically presented documentation. The Warren Report is treated as a cover-up, a myth against which the director, for lack of hard answers that may never be provided, is proposing a myth of his own.

Working in a complex, jumbled style that mixes widescreen, archival footage, TV clips, black-and-white, slow motion, docudrama re-creations, time jumps, repeated actions from various viewpoints, still photos, the Zapruder film and any other technique at hand, Stone uses the sum of conspiracy theory points made by New Orleans District Attorney Jim Garrison and others since to suggest as strongly as possible that Oswald was, as he claimed before he



Kevin Kline, left, and Danny Glover interact in a scene from Lawrence and Meg Kasdan's "Grand Canyon."

was killed, "a patsy."

Film will be attacked by establishment mouthpieces and others for its biases, for being unbalanced, and there is no doubt that Stone's customary zeal, crushed idealism and sense of personal betrayal by the government get the better of him here and there. But even if he barks up the wrong tree at times, few films have the advantage of such a fascinating subject or provoke so many potent questions.

Collaborating on the jam-packed script with journalist Zachary Sklar, Stone bracingly launches his epic with President Eisenhower's farewell warning about the dangers of the military-industrial complex, then zips through a six-minute docu recap of the Kennedy era.

Arriving at Nov. 22, 1963, action cuts to New Orleans, where a wide variety of people are shown reacting to the broadcast news of the shooting in Dallas. A fair number of these Southerners take the

news positively, and Stone begins to introduce the type of individuals who had reasons to resent or hate the young, liberal president.

Suspicious about aspects of Oswald's former residency in New Orleans, D.A. Garrison (Kevin Costner) begins delving into a mysterious netherworld of right-wing, anti-Castro homosexuals populated, most prominently, by the bewigged, hyper David Ferrie (Joe Pesci), suave businessman Clay Shaw (Tommy Lee Jones) and unpredictable hustler Willie O'Keefe (Kevin Bacon).

With the specter of Vietnam growing in the background and the Warren Report putting the official seal on the lone-assassin theory, Garrison persists. Numerous witnesses to curious aspects of the killing have died, tremendous inconsistencies crop up, strange ties emerge, the possibilities of CIA, FBI, mob or communist instigation surface, and Garrison begins to formulate the notion that the U.S. government itself, and specifically the military-industrial complex, initiated the killing.

If this sounds more like the stuff of documentaries, loaded with facts, history and theories, it is true that "JFK" trades more freely in the techniques of non-fiction filmmaking than just about any

feature this side of "The Battle of Algiers."

In fact, Stone's mixing of stylistic modes, which is designed to promote doubts and alternatives as well as to clarify, stands as an apt visual correlative to the confusion and mystery inherent in the material.

Where Stone takes this beyond the documentary, however, is in the film's fabulously rich parade of personalities. With superior character actors and a handful of stars portraying key secondary figures, the picture becomes an amazing collection of diverse types, from high government and military officials to criminals and lowlifes.

Key scene after key scene is brought vividly to life by an enormous number of first-rate performances that cumulatively sock over the script's many points.

Starting at the top, Stone uses Costner's Garrison as a sort of Capra-esque Everyman, a determined, sometimes misguided but essentially fair-minded fellow who just wants to get at the truth.

Costner may not resemble the real Garrison much, and Stone no doubts slides over many of the attorney's flaws, but the actor, in an appealingly low-key but forceful performance, nicely conveys the requisite grit, curiosity and fearlessness.

Particularly noteworthy in the huge cast are Joe Pesci as the volatile Ferrie; Tommy Lee Jones as the superbly smooth Clay Shaw; Laurie Metcalf, expertly reeling off pages of dialogue as Garrison's assistant D.A.; Gary Oldman as the creepily off-balance Oswald; Donald Sutherland in a hypnotic turn as the investigator's Deep Throat; Kevin Bacon as a trick of Shaw's who squeals; Brian Doyle-Murray as the crude Jack Ruby, a surprising John Candy as a hip adversary of the D.A.; Jack Lemmon as an informant; Ed Asner as a former FBI thug; and Michael Rooker and Jay O. Sanders as top assistants to Garrison.

Most conspicuous weaknesses come in the depiction of Garrison's home life and in the ideali-



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zation of President Kennedy himself.

As the investigator's wife, Sissy Spacek is stuck with almost nothing but nagging lines accusing her husband of caring more about the dead leader than about his family and complaining that his obsessive quest is driving them apart. All such scenes are conventionally portrayed and quickly forgotten once the political momentum picks up again.

It remains a matter of debate as to what Kennedy would have done about Southeast Asia had he lived, as well as how committed he was to civil rights and other liberal issues.

The film unambiguously insists that JFK had already decided to pull out of Vietnam if he won a second term, fully embraced the cause of blacks, wanted to back-track on nuclear weapons and end the Cold War.

In fact, it is these issues that Stone suggests brought him to fatal odds with the entrenched powers in Washington, notably the Pentagon, CIA, and J. Edgar Hoover, all of whom allegedly saw in Lyndon Johnson someone they knew would play ball.

All these notions have been batted around for years, but what gives "JFK" so much impact is that they are collected here in one place and assembled so dramatically.

Pic is filled with consummate technical achievements. Robert Richardson's cinematography further refines, with exciting results, the documentary-based style he and Stone initiated on "Salvador" and have pursued ever since.

Editors Joe Hutshing and Pietro Scalia had to organize mountains of footage and information from many sources, and they made it all work.

John Williams' score is atypical and properly troubling, while contributions of production designer Victor Kempster and his team, as well as costume designer Marlene Stewart, crucially add to the proper feel of time and place.

—Todd McCarthy