

Conspiracy Theory Wins Converts

Movie-goers Say 'JFK' Inspires Doubts That Oswald Acted Alone

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It has all the glitter of Hollywood, critics who deride it as conspiracy-theory fiction, and a director intent on raising questions about one of the darkest moments in recent American history.

And in the Washington area over the holiday, it had fans who believed what it says is true about the assassination of President John Fitzgerald Kennedy.

"I came out of the movie feeling different about the government," said Russell Reed, 21, flushed after coming out of a theater in Herndon yesterday.

"It's deep."

Reed had spent the afternoon captivated by the movie "JFK," which offers a dazzling, cosmic theory of who was behind the assassination of the president on Nov. 22, 1963, including the CIA, the Mafia,

the Army and even Kennedy's vice president, Lyndon B. Johnson.

In some two dozen interviews at three area theaters yesterday and on New Year's Eve, people coming out of the movie made it clear they believe the film's elaborate theories, even though critics including former president Gerald R. Ford Jr. as well as historians and journalists of the 1960s blast the three-hour movie as a far-fetched, conspiracy-theory fantasy.

For many of those interviewed, "JFK" sparked remarkably dark opinions about what the U.S. government is capable of doing. Many said they would be surprised if the movie weren't true.

"I really see what the movie said could be possible," said Amanda Peel, 17, a senior at Walt Whitman High School in Montgomery County. "It really makes sense."

Isn't Amanda Peel's mother, a nursery school teacher, worried

that her daughter's view of history now will be warped by the movie?

"I believe that could have happened," said Ann Peel, standing outside the Uptown Theater in the District. "If there's a slight chance in a conspiracy and the government being involved it should come out . . . I think fear is what has kept this under wraps."

The movie tries to demolish the official finding that one confused young man named Lee Harvey Oswald shot Kennedy from a sixth-floor perch in a Dallas warehouse. He worked alone, the standard theories and history books say, and died without having told his story when he was gunned down two days later.

Critics have had a romp with "JFK." While Stone claims the military-industrial complex had Kennedy killed because he was about to pull out of Vietnam, a number of historians and journalists say Ken-

See JFK, B5, Col. 3

over



BY LARRY MORRIS—THE WASHINGTON POST

John Kitts, left, and Teresa Blickenstaff after they saw "JFK" in Herndon.

Conspiracy Theory Wins Converts at 'JFK' Showings

JFK, From B1

nedly was a Cold Warrior who clearly favored continued U.S. support for the war.

Others say the movie relies almost completely on a bogus theory promoted through the years by a former New Orleans prosecutor, Jim Garrison. Garrison claims two New Orleans men conspired with Oswald to kill the president, even though the men were not in Dallas that day.

Despite such criticism, people such as David and Kathy Buell praise Stone for stirring up the mud. As far as they're concerned, Stone has done a good deed by raising questions, even if he doesn't have all the facts just right.

"I think it will get people talking and I think it should," said Kathy Buell, 34. "Too often we're blind sheep when it comes to what the government does . . . and that's not good."

The Buells said they can't stand the idea the government was involved in a conspiracy. And they hate the thought that key documents from a congressional investigation in the late 1970s are sealed until 2029, as the movie points out.

In that investigation, the House Assassination Committee found in 1978 that a conspiracy involving more than one gunman was likely.

"The government should unlock the documents and let people find out what is in the documents," said David Buell, 30, who runs a computer business in the District.

Buell said he went into the movie believing that Oswald was the killer, but now he has serious doubts. As for the ethics of Stone stretching accepted history to push a theory, Buell said, if it works to break information free, then so be it.

"He knows what he is doing," Buell said. "When you're playing against the system, everything is ethical."

Thomas Bailey, a safety consultant in Vienna, said he came out of

the movie a whole-hearted believer there was a conspiracy in Kennedy's death, likely involving the government. But he said few in the 1960s—before events such as the Vietnam War and Watergate jaded people's views of government—would have ever believed such things.

"Thirty years ago, we were more naive. I think the public has been informed," said Bailey, 50, who watched the movie yesterday at Tysons Corner. "We need to be aware of our government."

"The government is not all clean," said his wife, Susan Bailey, 48, who recalled walking toward her college dorm in Richmond when shopkeepers placed radios out in the street as Kennedy's shooting and death were announced.

Jennifer Welti, 41, saw the movie in Herndon yesterday, and years after she "bought the whole official story," she now looks at Kennedy's death through the prism of the film, she said.

Asked whether the intense crit-

icism of the movie bothered her, Welti said she is convinced the movie holds nuggets of truth about what really happened.

"If 50 percent is fiction, the other 50 percent should be looked at," she said. "It denies the whole fabric of what we believe our government to be about."

Some of those interviewed said they intend to look at the assassination more closely because of the movie.

"It makes a difference about what the government is about," said Rhonda Hill, 21, a theater student from Herndon. "It makes you doubt the government."

After emerging from a dark theater in Herndon, Teresa Blickenstaff, 34, a high school art teacher from Frederick, Md., said she felt ashamed after watching the movie.

"I find it almost embarrassing to be an American . . . I'd be surprised if it wasn't true," Blickenstaff said. "I want to investigate it further because I want to know. I want to find out the facts."