

'JFK,' 'Hook' Bring Out the

Emotions Surge at Re-Creation of Slaying

By DEBORAH STARR SEIBEL
SPECIAL TO THE TIMES

Loud, painful gasps filled the theater. It was almost as if the audience had never seen this stunning moment in history before, as if the entire 3-hour-and-7-minute movie hadn't been building to the point where the back of a President's head—captured on Abraham Zapruder's 8mm home movie—would be blown off in all its horrifying, larger-than-life detail.

Tears streamed down faces. Fists were clenched. No one shuffled. Nobody left to get popcorn.

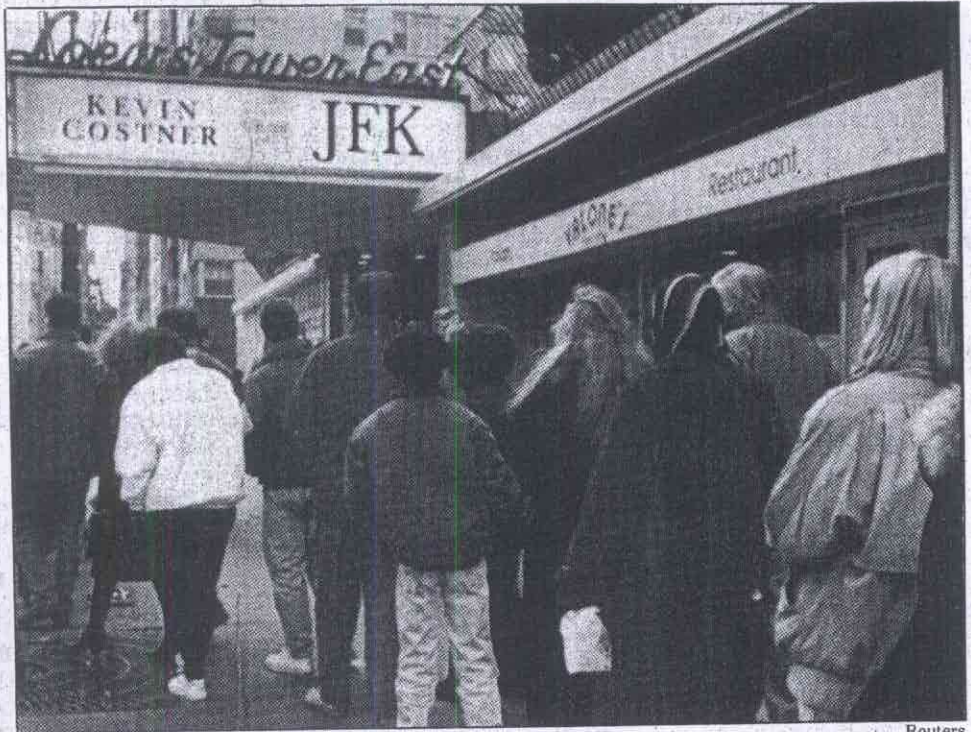
But as the credits rolled and the near-capacity, opening-day audience began to file out of AMC's Century 14 Theater in Century City on Friday, the pain evident on so many faces gave way to expressions of anger, frustration, confusion and tired resignation. There were no expressions of surprise.

Despite the film's startling premise that some of our highest government officials had decided to eliminate their own commander-in-chief, not one person said they were shocked by the conspiracy theory set forth in "JFK" by co-writer and director Oliver Stone about the assassination of John F. Kennedy in 1963.

"I was a freshman in college when it happened," said one woman in her 40s. "I thought the movie was wonderful because it's the first time you've seen such a public indictment of the United States government through the mass media. I don't think we're ever going to get over what happened until we start answering these questions."

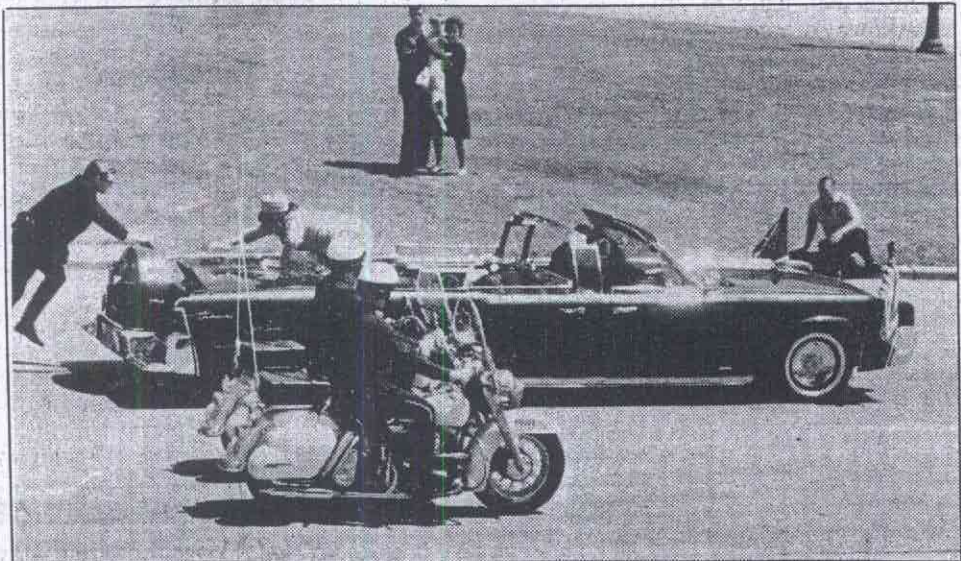
"It confirmed everything I'd always believed," said another woman, also in her 40s. "I think it should be required viewing for every person in America."

"I want to say," said a 34-year-old man, "that if this movie forces the government to reopen the files on the Kennedy assassination, then Oliver Stone has done a public service."



Reuters

Viewers, above, lining up to see "JFK" in Manhattan's Upper Eastside, have various reactions to the film but some are reconsidering conspiracy theories. Below, the assassination as re-enacted in Oliver Stone's controversial movie.



Those reactions were repeated at theaters across the country during the weekend. An informal survey by The Times turned up numerous filmgoers who reported finding "JFK" very per-

suasive and only a few who questioned its conclusions.

"I thought for a long time that Lee Oswald acted on his own. But this
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MOVIEGOERS

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picture made me change my mind," said Jay Underwood, 68, who saw the film Saturday in San Diego.

Ben Simon, 29, a Laguna Beach real estate salesman who saw the movie at the Edwards Newport Cinemas in Newport Beach on Saturday, came out feeling more supportive of reopening the investigation by the Warren Commission, which concluded that Kennedy had been killed by a lone gunman, Lee Harvey Oswald.

"In the past," he explained, "I always felt that it would be a waste of taxpayers' money—it's over, leave the family alone. But I no longer feel that way. . . . You see something like this and it makes you think that anything's possible."

Suzanne Updegraff, 37, was a fourth-grader in a Dallas elementary school when she heard that President Kennedy had been shot less than 10 miles away. Updegraff, who now lives in New Jersey as an executive with a printing company, saw "JFK" Saturday afternoon while visiting relatives in Anderson, Ind.

"It was a wonderful movie, and I

believe it totally," she said. "The Zapruder film was so amazing, proving, beyond a doubt, that at least one shot came from the grassy knoll. I thought it was a very believable movie."

Her husband came away with a different feeling, however.

"I thought it was a cheap shot," said Sherman J. Updegraff, 42, a financial sales representative. "I thought the film put forth a lot of ideas that play upon the emotions. There was no convincing evidence that tied everything together."

"[Skone] brought out a lot of concepts and ideas that have been expounded on in the press and the media for the last 25 years. . . . none of which have been proved or disproved. It appears to me that Hollywood, once again, has brought forth something that expounds upon only one man's ideas, and, in this case, it's Oliver Stone."

Ken Foster, 29, a commercial account representative at a bank in Dallas, was about a year old when the President was shot not far from his parents' home. He saw the movie Saturday afternoon and said it raised "a lot of questions."

"Much of it was startling information I just hadn't known before," he said. "To hear that maybe the

Dallas police were involved, the Mafia, the FBI, the CIA. . . . Did the government think we just wouldn't care what was happening and that they, above all, were the higher power? I thought, more than anything, the movie was very disturbing."

Jeffrey Ryan, a 24-year-old teacher who lives in Irvine, said that he found much of the material in "JFK" "basically common knowledge. It was pretty credible. Lots of cloaks and daggers, but in this day and age, no surprises. It [political assassination] happens all over the world, a lot of times by the CIA. I don't see why this would be any different. It perturbs me, but that's the way the world is. You try and make do."

Dan O'Mahony, 24, a record distributor in Costa Mesa, expressed admiration for the film because "it keeps this sort of Big Brother concept in the foreground, because it's a very real thing. I don't think we understand 5% of what our government actually does or how they make their money. It's good to see artists coming out and stating that, somewhat defiantly."

At AMC's Century 14 Theater in Century City on Friday afternoon, the audience was almost exclusively people older than 30. But, Saturday afternoon at the same theater, in the midst of the last-weekend before-Christmas shopping crowds, there was another practically sold-out showing to an audience that included a handful of children.

Among them was 8-year-old Jody Castro, a Los Angeles third grader. When asked if the movie had frightened him, he said, "No. I just thought of it like it was a mystery. I just felt that they were trying to figure out who murdered John F. Kennedy."

But 10-year-old Janelle Castro, Jody's sister, was disturbed by the movie. "It was a little scary. Before the movie, people just told me that Oswald killed him. But, after you see it, you have to believe something different."

The children's father, Joel Castro, an attorney, said that he had brought his children because "I wanted them to see what happened."

"If in fact Oliver Stone has done a factual scenario," he said, "then it is extremely disturbing, to say the least. It's certainly changed my opinion. I assumed the Warren Commission was accurate. The 'magic bullet' [the bullet said to have caused seven different wounds in Kennedy and Gov. John Connally] is unbelievable. You come away from a film like this feeling very ignorant, because you assume you knew everything there was from reading all the news accounts, and it turns out you really knew very little."

Contributing to this article were Times staff writer Michael Granberry in San Diego and freelance writers Nancy Churnin in San Diego and Tom McQueney in Orange County.

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