

# John F. Kennedy and the film *JFK*

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# Introduction

In this presentation I will give a brief introduction to...

1. the career of filmmaker Oliver Stone,
2. the US president John F. Kennedy,
3. the assassination of John F. Kennedy,
4. and Oliver Stone's film about that assassination, *JFK*.

Oliver Stone has had a very long career, and the JFK assassination is a very complex story, so keep in mind that this is a very simplified introduction to these topics.



# Oliver Stone (I)

Oliver Stone (born in 1946) is an American film director, producer, and screenwriter. Stone won an Academy Award for Best Adapted Screenplay as writer of *Midnight Express* (1978). He later wrote the screenplay for *Scarface* (1983), starring Al Pacino.

Stone achieved prominence as writer and director of the war drama *Platoon* (1986), which won Academy Awards for Best Director and Best Picture. *Platoon* was the first in a trilogy of films based on the Vietnam War, in which Stone served as a soldier. He continued the series with...

*Born on the Fourth of July* (1989) and *Heaven & Earth* (1993).

Stone made another trilogy based on the lives of American presidents:

*JFK* (1991), *Nixon* (1995), and *W.* (2008).



# Oliver Stone (2)

- Many of Stone's films focus on controversial American political issues of the late 20th century. In recent years, he has become well-known also for his documentary series *Untold History of the United States*, produced with historian Peter Kuznick.
- Some critics accuse Stone of promoting conspiracy theories, misrepresenting historical events, and being anti-American, but other critics love his films because they are more than entertainment. They educate audiences and force them to consider the serious issues of the times they are living through.

# The official explanation of the assassination

- JFK was killed during his visit to Dallas, Texas, on November 22, 1963. He was beginning his campaign for re-election the next year, so he felt it was necessary to begin visiting various American cities. He arrived in Dallas by airplane then traveled into the city via a motorcade, in a *Ford Lincoln* convertible (open top) car. The fact that President *Lincoln* was assassinated in the *Ford* Theater is one of many uncanny connections between the two assassinations.
- The US government's investigation (not a criminal trial) concluded that only one person, Lee Harvey Oswald, shot the president. This investigation concluded that he shot a rifle from the 6<sup>th</sup> floor window of the Texas School Book Depository as JFK's motorcade drove through Dealey Plaza in Dallas.
- This official version states that Oswald was a lonely, isolated, mentally unstable man who acted by himself, with no help from anyone else. He was allegedly motivated by his love of communism and his hatred of JFK, or perhaps his hatred of both communism and JFK.

# The official explanation still stands

- The official explanation is still upheld by the *New York Times*, the *Washington Post*, and other sources that millions of people rely on as authoritative, such as *Wikipedia*.
- These trusted sources of information describe all alternative explanations as “conspiracy theories,” which is a term that suggests that alternative theories do not need to be considered seriously. This expression was invented by the CIA after the JFK assassination.
- An investigation done by the US Congress in the late 1970s concluded that there was substantial evidence of a conspiracy in the assassination of JFK, but it did not provide a detailed explanation of who was involved in the conspiracy.
- Surveys of American public opinion have shown that most Americans do not believe that Oswald acted by himself. Many believe he was not even guilty of firing a shot at the president.

# ***JFK*: the film made in 1991**

- JFK is a 1991 historical drama that is based on unofficial historical investigations of the murder of President Kennedy. The film follows New Orleans district attorney Jim Garrison in the years 1968-1969 as he builds a case against New Orleans businessman Clay Shaw for his alleged participation in a conspiracy to assassinate Kennedy.
- The film was a drama with some fictionalized scenes, but it was based on the non-fiction books
  - *On the Trail of the Assassins* (1988) by Jim Garrison and on
  - *Crossfire: The Plot That Killed Kennedy* (1989) by Jim Marrs.

# Reactions to the film *JFK*

- Upon the film's release, many major American newspapers published editorials accusing Stone of reporting false information, including the film's implication that Kennedy's vice president, Lyndon B. Johnson, was an accomplice after the fact in a *coup d'état*. Stone and his defenders claimed that the CIA was obviously feeding information to these American journalists.
- Despite the controversy, *JFK* received critical praise and was extremely successful financially.

# **Suspicious elements (1): Oswald said, “I’m a patsy.”**

- 1. Oswald was a former soldier who had been trained by the US military to speak Russian. He was obviously a spy.**
- 2. Oswald had many personal connections to people in the FBI, CIA, organized crime, and the military.**
- 3. It seems that he was sent to Russia as a spy for the United States. He went there under cover, pretending to be a communist.**
- 4. When Oswald came back to America from Russia, he was helped by many people who had connections to the CIA, FBI and the military.**
- 5. There were “fake Oswalds” seen in various places in the weeks before the assassination. These fakes drew attention to themselves and identified themselves loudly as Lee Oswald.**

# **Suspicious elements (2): Witnesses**

- 1. Witnesses in Dealey Plaza said they saw gun smoke and heard gun shots from more than one place.**
- 2. Witnesses said they saw suspicious people around Dealey Plaza, not only in the book depository building.**
- 3. Oswald was accused of shooting a police officer after he left Dealey Plaza, but witnesses saw two men shoot that police officer, and they said neither of them looked like Oswald.**
- 4. Witnesses in the book depository said Oswald was on the 2<sup>nd</sup> floor, not the 6<sup>th</sup> floor, at the time of the killing.**

# **Suspicious elements (3): Failure of Security**

- 1. Many of the usual protections of the president did not function that day. The normal protocol was missing.**
- 2. The motorcade slowed down during the shooting. There were not enough Secret Service agents, and the ones who were there reacted slowly, against their training to cover the president immediately if gun shots are heard. Vice president Johnson, however, was protected in this correct way.**
- 3. The route of the motorcade was changed a few days before the visit.**
- 4. After the assassination, people in Dealey Plaza encountered persons who showed Secret Service identification, but later the Secret Service said that they did not assign agents to be there. All their agents traveled with the president's motorcade. Who were these fake agents and why were they there?**
- 5. The book depository building was not sealed off quickly after the murder.**



# **Suspicious elements (4): The Zapruder film**

- 1. The amateur film made by Mr. Zapruder showed Kennedy being shot from the front. This film was hidden from the American public for many years.**
- 2. The president's head moved back and to the left when he was shot, which indicates he was shot by someone who was in front of him on his right side. The schoolbook depository was behind him.**

# **Suspicious elements (5): The Chicago Plot**

- 1. In Chicago, in the first week of November 1963, a plot to assassinate the president was discovered. Kennedy canceled his trip to Chicago when he was told about it.**
- 2. The plot involved a small group of men with rifles and one man who was told to wait alone in a building on the route the president would travel on when he arrived in Chicago.**
- 3. The Chicago plot resembled what really happened in Dallas: there were the real killers and there was one lonely man who was being set up to be the patsy.**

# **Other suspicious elements (6)**

- 1. Oswald was shot two days after he was arrested. His killer was a gangster well known by the Dallas Police, but he was allowed to come into the police building.**
- 2. The gun that Oswald was said to have used was not a good gun, and Oswald was not a good shooter.**
- 3. The magic bullet: one bullet is said to have gone through two men, caused seven injuries, and changed directions many times, then come out undamaged.**
- 4. The autopsy: the first doctors who saw Kennedy's body said he was shot from the front twice, once in the neck and once in the head. Under Texas law, the body should have stayed in Texas, but it was removed by military officers and taken to Washington.**

# And much more...

- All this evidence could be discussed in more detail, and there is much more evidence that could be presented here, but this is supposed to be a brief introduction to the topic.
- The film *JFK* provides more details about the evidence discussed here.
- See the sources in the last slide if you want to learn more about this very complex murder case.

# Motivations (1)

1. Vice president Johnson disliked JFK and RFK, and he hated his role as JFK's Vice President.
2. War = \$\$\$\$\$. Kennedy was hoping to end the war in Vietnam and improve relations with Cuba and the USSR. But war was big money at the time, and many corporations felt threatened by the possibility of peace.
3. Kennedy was fighting against organized crime and had made many enemies in the big organized crime families. The CIA and the Mafia had many connections.
4. Kennedy wanted to help newly independent nations develop without being exploited by foreign corporations.
5. During the 1950s, the CIA had become very powerful, but Kennedy was trying to reduce its power and reform it. He fired Allen Dulles, the head of the CIA in 1962.



# Motivations (2)

1. JFK had plans to eliminate favorable tax breaks for the oil industry, and he had successfully intervened to set prices in the steel industry.
2. JFK mobilized the national guard to integrate schools in Southern States.
3. JFK was reluctant to send troops to Vietnam and he had plans to reduce the number of “military advisors” (murderous CIA programs) there.
4. JFK had made a settlement with Laos that enraged the hawks in government.
5. Anti-Castro elements in government and organized crime felt that JFK had betrayed them at the Bay of Pigs in April 1961 and during the missile crisis of October 1962.

# **The government investigation**

- 1. The federal government and the government of Texas held no courtroom trial after the assassination. There was no legal investigation (no witnesses cross-examined) of people connected to Oswald.**
- 2. President Johnson created a special commission to investigate the assassination. The head of this commission was the former CIA director, Allen Dulles, who had been fired by Kennedy in 1962.**
- 3. This commission, called the Warren Commission, was accused of doing a poor investigation. It had a theory that Oswald was the only killer, and it refused to look at a great amount of evidence that went against this theory, and it relied on the CIA for information.**
- 4. Witnesses for the Warren Commission say their statements were changed, or they were forced to change what they wanted to say.**

# Is there democracy in America?

- Citizens are supposed to have power in a democracy. Power should be held by the people whom citizens elect.
- Jim Garrison wrote in his book, and said in this film, that democracy has been stolen by the unelected parts of the United States government—the military, the FBI, the CIA, and the corporations who benefit from the actions taken by these unelected parts of the government.
- Jim Garrison stated that the assassination of President John Kennedy was a *coup d'état*. Those institutions that stole power are still in power almost six decades after 1963.

# A new unaccountable branch of government

The lawyer and author Mark Lane wrote several books about the US government of the late 20<sup>th</sup> century. He concluded that a new branch of government, consisting of the CIA and the “national security state,” now exists outside of democratic control.

BANKS, INDUSTRIES & CORPORATIONS HAVE A HEAVY INFLUENCE ON ALL FOUR BRANCHES OF GOVERNMENT. CRITICS OF THE CIA SOMETIMES CALL IT “Capitalism’s Invisible Army.”

<b>1. EXECUTIVE:</b>  PRESIDENT  <u>ELECTED BY CITIZENS</u>  POWER IS LIMITED BY THE <b>LEGISLATIVE</b> AND <b>JUDICIARY</b> BRANCHES	<b>2. LEGISLATIVE:</b>  CONGRESS--SENATE AND HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES  <u>ELECTED BY CITIZENS</u>  POWER IS LIMITED BY THE <b>EXECUTIVE</b> AND <b>JUDICIARY</b> BRANCHES	<b>3. JUDICIARY:</b>  JUDGES ARE <u>ELECTED</u> OR <u>APPOINTED BY ELECTED OFFICIALS</u>  POWER IS LIMITED BY THE <b>EXECUTIVE</b> AND <b>LEGISLATIVE</b> BRANCHES	<b>4. THE NATIONAL SECURITY STATE, OPERATING IN SECRET:</b>  FBI, CIA, NSA, MILITARY  JUDGES AND ELECTED OFFICIALS OF THE OTHER THREE BRANCHES ARE AFRAID TO TOUCH THIS FOURTH BRANCH
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**Mark Lane**

***Last Word: My Indictment of the CIA in the Murder of JFK***  
**(Skyhorse Publishing, 2012), 280:**

**“Our system of governance has been traduced by the emergence of a fourth branch, the Central Intelligence Agency; a branch which repudiates legislative limits, ignores presidential edicts, and refuses to respond to the decisions of the judiciary. Unlike the other branches, mandated by the founders [the constitution] to be cooperative with the Congress, the president, and the court system, the CIA alone has insisted upon and created its own rules that exempt it from seeking collaboration with the legally authorized branches of government.”**



# Conclusion:

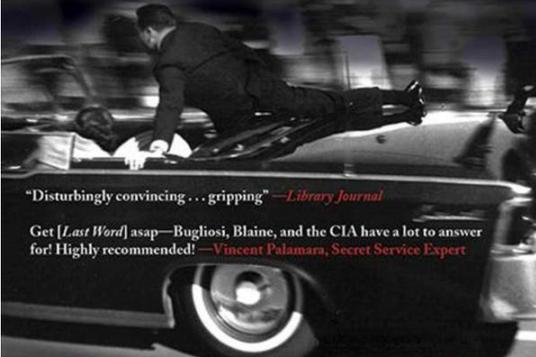
## Reasons to watch *JFK* and other films by Oliver Stone

- Most Hollywood films now provide escapist entertainment. Fantasy films, science fiction, and Marvel hero stories have little connection to reality. They may be enjoyable films in their own way, but they don't tell us much about history or the world we live in.
- In contrast, Oliver Stone has tried, in all his films, to both *entertain* and *educate*. *JFK* is a three-hour history lecture presented as a story. By making such films, he states his belief that storytelling and film-making should have a meaningful role in society.
- The assassinations of JFK, Malcolm X, MLK and RFK represented a failed revolution. There were enormous consequences for the United States and every country of the world. The fates of many nations may have been very different if the counter-revolution had not prevailed.

#1 NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLING AUTHOR

# LAST WORD

MY INDICTMENT OF THE CIA  
IN THE MURDER OF JFK



"Disturbingly convincing...gripping" —*Library Journal*

Get [*Last Word*] asap—Bugliosi, Blaine, and the CIA have a lot to answer for! Highly recommended! —*Vincent Palamara, Secret Service Expert*

## MARK LANE

Introduction by ROBERT K. TANENBAUM  
With a chapter by OLIVER STONE

# Sources

