Feature: 5 Films That Understand November 22, 1963

Submitted by PatrickMcD [1] on November 21, 2013 - 1:06pm

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CHICAGO – Tomorrow, November 22nd, 2013, is the 50th Anniversary of President John F. Kennedy's assassination. Beyond the numerous TV programs and tributes expected for the memory, which films have lent the best perspective over the years regarding that Day in Dallas? The following offers five films for consideration.

Films and the cinema also figured in the capture of Lee Harvey Oswald. The alleged assassin ducked into Texas Theater in Dallas as he was on the run from the murder scene, and was apprehended inside the theater. A war film double feature was playing there – "Cry of Battle" (1963) and "War is Hell" (1963). It was the second film that was interrupted when police descended on Oswald.

The following five films – available for digital download, Blu-ray and DVD – provides different observations and objectives regarding November 22nd, 1963, and submits the facts, conspiracy theories and background players that were present in Dallas on that day.

Four Days in November (1964)



Title Card from 'Four Days in November'
Photo credit: MediaOutlet.com

From famed documentary producer David L. Wolper, "Four Days in November" is remarkable because it was released one year after the events of the assassination, and is still one of the best Kennedy films regarding that day – and the days following the shocking tragedy. What stands out is the appearances Kennedy made in the other cities on his Texas trip (Houston and San Antonio), where every word and gesture becomes ironic. Wolper also recreates some significant moments through eyewitness testimony and actual locations, which had yet to be marred by time. An essential, exquisitely composed document regarding the assassination in its own time, and it's almost impossible not to

shed some tears by the time the funeral is shown. *Available on DVD through MediaOutlet.com.*

JFK (1991)



The Magic Bullet Demonstration from 'JFK'
Photo credit: Warner Home Video

Director Oliver Stone's paranoid classic, and the JFK film that all others aspire to be. The outrageous editing, re-creations and conspiracy presentations are all manifested through the unique vision of Stone, who has expressed that he made the film so extreme because he felt that the government's Warren Commission – the official conclusion that Oswald acted alone – was on their side an extreme obscuring of the truth. No matter what your opinion is about the assassination, Stone's view touched a raw nerve, because it seemed to create havoc when released in 1991 – especially within the mainstream press – who really didn't do their job back in 1963. Flamboyant, controversial and essential. *Available on Blu-ray and DVD through Warner Home Video.*

Executive Action (1973)



The Assassination Scene: An Overview of Dealey Plaza, Dallas, in 'Executive Action'
Photo credit: Warner Home Video

Regarding assassination conspiracy theory, this film almost achieves as much as “JFK,” even though it was released twenty years prior and with a decidedly lower budget. Co-written by famed blacklisted screenwriter Dalton Trumbo and early conspiracy advocate Mark Lane (“Rush to Judgment”), the film depicts the assassination as ordered – like in Stone’s film – by oligarch forces behind Big Oil and the military industrial complex. These shadowy figures are represented by veteran actors Robert Ryan and Will “Grandpa Walton” Geer, and in an intriguing late career role, Burt Lancaster as leader of the black ops team that accomplishes the hit. The film lacks the ability and budget to maintain the 1963 period – several anachronisms exist – and is a bit claustrophobic, as most of the plans are realized indoors, but the step-by-step carrying out of the mission chillingly makes sense. Kennedy had to be be stopped, because he was progressive, wealthy – and didn’t really care for his fellow millionaires – and increasingly popular. *Available on DVD through Warner Home Video.*

Interview with the Assassin (2002)



The Interviewee (Raymond Barry) Visits the Scene of the Crime in ‘Interview with the Assassin’
Photo credit: Magnolia Pictures

Made almost ten years after “JFK,” this low budget gem piggybacks off the former film by taking it one step further – presupposing that the real killer of the president (portrayed brilliantly by character actor Raymond Barry) is still alive and ready to confess to the crime. Directed by Neil Burger (of the upcoming “Divergent”), the film is shot in “found video footage” style, which increases the intense paranoia throughout. Is the character portrayed by Barry telling the truth? The cosmic spotlight of truth is tested as strange events start to occur between the interviewer (a laid off news cameraman) and the interviewee. As more revelations about the assassination are exposed, more danger appears. The film is short on facts, but high on suspicion, and Barry is superb. *Available on DVD through Magnolia Pictures.*

Parkland (2013)



Abraham Zapruder (Paul Giamatti) Captures Historic Footage in ‘Parkland’
Photo credit: Exclusive Media Group

The most recent JFK assassination film steps back from theory and spotlights the people who had roles on the day of the shooting. Sticking with factual information, it profiles the medical staff at Parkland Memorial Hospital – charged with trying to save a fatally wounded president – Lee Harvey Oswald’s hapless brother Robert (James Badge Dale), local Dallas FBI and Secret Service officials and Abraham Zapruder (Paul Giamatti), the innocent Dallas businessman who ends up capturing the most important 25 seconds of the assassination on his home movie camera. An intensely compelling portrait of that weekend – written and directed by Peter Landesman, and produced by Tom Hanks and Bill Paxton – “Parkland” succeeds by displaying ordinary people caught up in an insane series of events. Giamatti is amazing as Zapruder, capturing the odd accent of an immigrant Texan, and the assassination itself is impressively shown from his point-of-view, perched in Dealey Plaza. *Available on Blu-ray and DVD through Exclusive Releasing.*

BONUS: The Zapruder Film (1963)



The Aftermath: Frame from the Abraham Zapruder Film in the DVD ‘Image of An Assassination’
Photo credit: MPI Home Video

Often called the “most important film in history,” the odd life of a little home movie is as monumental as the event it captured. Shot on a Model

414 Bell & Howell Zoomatic Director Series Camera, the film sequence runs for 26.6 seconds, and has 486 frames. Standing on the concourse in Dealey Plaza, near the grassy knoll, Abraham Zapruder got the key elements of the shooting, including the fatal head shot – which is still stunningly shocking. The film was suppressed from media and public view for 12 years after the assassination, the rights bought by Time-Life magazine, which led to several theories of evidence tampering. It survives as the real deal, a street shooting without tears, and shows an event that changed the country profoundly. *Available on DVD ("Image of An Assassination: A New Look at the Zapruder Film") through MPI Home Video.*

I was a toddler when the events of the assassination occurred, but like the babies born in a post 9/11 world, the United States after JFK became a less optimistic, more suspicious place. It was also a precursor to the revolution of the 1960s, which morphed into more assassinations, the war in Viet Nam, Richard M. Nixon and Watergate. The official findings of the "Warren Commission" spawned a cottage industry of theories and deceptions, and even today there are advocates who continue to sponsor the notion that Lee Harvey Oswald – a 1950s drifter who somehow was able to freely travel and defect to the Soviet Union at the height of the Cold War – was the lone assassin. The truth was killed by Jack Ruby, and obscured through a compliant media, a shocked nation and the persons or entities who wanted this event to happen. Why have a strong, peaceful and optimistic nation when there is chaos to be created, and money or power to be had as a result?

For the four-and-a-half star review of "Parkland" by Patrick McDonald click here. *[17] For the five star review of the new "Ultimate Collector's Edition" of the film "JFK" by Brian Tallerico,* click here. *[18]*

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