

‘Parkland’ Starkly Recreates November 22, 1963

Submitted by [PatrickMcD](#) [1] on October 4, 2013 - 5:39pm

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Rating: **4.5/5.0**

CHICAGO – It’s been close to 50 years since 11/22/1963, the day when a certain American innocence was lost with the assassination of President John F. Kennedy. In time for that anniversary, is the excellent film overview entitled “Parkland.”

“Parkland” is also the name of the hospital in Dallas, Texas, that Kennedy was taken to after an assassin’s bullet severed half his skull. The film focuses on that hospital’s emergency staff, the president’s bodyguards, the brother of accused gunman Lee Harvey Oswald and dressmaker Abraham Zapruder – an innocent home moviemaker who captured the most crucial eight seconds of the assassination, including the fatal headshot. The film, written and directed by Peter Landesman and produced by Tom Hank’s Playtone Company, is a precisely and reverently done history lesson as to the events and chaos that surrounded the street shooting of a modern president. The cast is up to the challenge of the re-creation, and there are several standouts, including the always intuitive Paul Giamatti as Zapruder. Whether you know everything about that unforgettable day, or nothing at all, “Parkland” is a stark reminder of the human element of tragedy in history.

The staff at Parkland Hospital in Dallas, Texas, is going through a routine late autumn day in November, 1963. Nurse Doris Nelson (Marcia Gay Harden) and Dr. Jim Carrico (Zac Efron) carry on with their emergency room duties, while the city itself is excited by the visit and a motorcade through town by President and Mrs. Kennedy. The normalcy of the day is shattered when Kennedy is shot, and the emergency destination is Parkland Hospital.



Nurse Nelson (Marcia Gay Harden) and Dr. Carrico (Zac Efron) in the ER at ‘Parkland’

Photo credit: Exclusive Media Group

The events of that trauma start to unfold. Dr. Carrico and Nurse Nelson are the attendants in the ER working to revive the limp body of the president. In downtown Dallas, dress manufacturer Abraham Zapruder (Paul Giamatti) thinks he caught the assassination on film, which interests Dallas Secret Service officer Forrest Sorrels (Billy Bob Thornton). A suspect named Lee Harvey Oswald is apprehended, and his brother Robert (James Badge Dale) tries to protect the family name. At the FBI office in Dallas, Agent James Hosty (Ron Livingston) may have previously met the alleged killer. The death of a president and the events associated with it occur in a long four days in American history.

To this JFK assassination historian, the film got everything right, including the utter panic and chaos that surrounded the killing. It served as an amazing reminder of the happenstance of historic events, in which even the most minute detail has significance sometimes beyond comprehension. Unlike Oliver Stone's "JFK" (1991), this film deals with facts, not conspiracy theories, and those facts have as much of a chilling effect as any theory could postulate.

The cast is top drawer, and obviously are re-creating these events as a labor of love. The performances are are compelling and absorbing, even to the smallest character part. Giamatti leads the way, affecting the odd immigrant accent that Zapruder had, and really understanding the sadness the man lived through, dealing both with being a witness and a filmmaker with a valuable property. James Badge Dale shoulders the mighty burden of being the brother of the assassin, and wears it heavily all the way up to the point where he has to bury his sibling, silenced forever by a another bullet through the heart.

Doing a period film is always daunting, and writer/director Peter Landesman uses exquisite composition to keep the atmosphere true. The assassination is not physically redone, but captured through the point-of-view of Zapruder on the exact vantage point in Dallas where the home movie maker stood. In many ways, that was more effective and chilling then all of Oliver Stone's redo pyrotechnics. This showed great respect, and great restraint in cinematic storytelling, and the results are captivating and gripping the whole way through.



Abraham Zapruder (Paul Giamatti) Captures Historic Footage in 'Parkland'

Photo credit: Exclusive Media Group

Like September 11th, the JFK assassination is awash in bizarre background noise, not only with the main participants but down to the last mourner. The reverberation of the killing led to a fundamental distrust of government authority and protection. If they can't safeguard the president – or two tall towers in New York City – how can we trust any person or country to protect us? The assassination was the prologue to our circumstance 50 years on.

And "Parkland" is also a reminder of another fundamental fact. No matter how hard the cinema art tries to shape or recreate our memories, it can be the hapless innocent with a home movie camera that unwillingly exposes a truth that no one is safe, and no one gets out of here alive.

"Parkland" opens in various U.S. locations on October 4th. See local listings for theaters and show times. Featuring Zac Efron, Paul Giamatti, Marcia Gay Harden, Ron Livingston, Billy Bob Thornton and James Badge Dale. Written and directed by Peter Landesman. Rated "PG-13"



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