Parkland. Dir. Peter Landesman. Perf. Paul Giamatti, Zac Efron, Billy Bob Thornton. The American Film Company/ Exclusive Media Group/ Playtone, 2013. Film.

The fiftieth anniversary of the assassination of President John F. Kennedy has spawned the release of *Parkland,* which depicts the events surrounding 22-24th November 1963. Writer and directorial debutant Peter Landesman adapts Vincent Bugliosi's *Four Days in November,* a book which, unlike the wealth of conspiracy laden equivalents, concentrates on evidence compiled in the Warren Commission Report. The film focuses on an array of characters affected by the assassination, ignoring all but the briefest suggestion of conspiracy in an attempt to display solid facts pertaining to an event which still - to some extent - comprises a deep wound in American culture.

First of all, it is impossible to discuss *Parkland* whilst ignoring the plethora of other films, books, documentaries, articles and *YouTube* videos which have already exhausted this oversaturated topic. *JFK* (1991) is the most notorious cinematic example of this sort, although *Parkland* shares more in common with Emilio Estevez's *Bobby* (2006) - a film which portrays the events surrounding the assassination of Senator Robert F. Kennedy in 1968. Landesman's effort follows a similar narrative trajectory exhibited in the latter example, the film skipping from one shocked bystander to the next, with a single traumatic event driving the narrative. Parkland's overall strength can be identified in detractions away from the conspiracy theorizing and gaudy murder-analysis offered by *JFK* and most other texts discussing the subject. The film attempts to add something new to the topic, offering numerous viewpoints and reactions to the assassination.

Screen time is split between an ensemble of characters displayed within approximately three acts. The first act comprises the murder, which is not displayed on-screen; the viewer offered the reaction of Abraham Zapruder (Paul Giamatti) as he records the events on his 8mm. home film camera. The fallout from the events is made evident in the following scenes, which take place in Parkland Hospital where Dr Charles "Jim" Carrico (Zac Efron) and Nurse Doris Nelson (Marcia Gay Harden) attempt to revive the President. The latter sequences concern Forrest Sorrels' (Billy

Bob Thornton) acquisition of the Zapruder footage and the effect of Lee Harvey Oswald's (Jeremy Strong) arrest on his family, particularly his brother, Robert (James Badge Dale). Much like the piece of 8mm. film at the heart of the story, *Parkland* implements a cinematographic style commonly associated with observational documentaries, recording the reactions of a spectrum of supporting characters. This is largely achieved with frenetic, constant-motion camera work - a trademark of director of photography Barry Ackroyd - constructing a documentary aesthetic which drives a sense of realism throughout. Further, the photography is littered with a spectrum of close-ups of characters' faces, often tightly framed in claustrophobic interiors. Landesman's main success can be identified here, creating an insular character piece which accurately portrays the collective grief displayed in the weeks following the assassination.

In *Parkland's* pivotal scene, Zapruder first witnesses his recording of the shooting in a darkened projection room. The interesting variation in *Parkland* is that the viewer is never shown the complete footage of the assassination. One of the most prominent and shocking events in American history, and American visual culture, is explored solely through the reactions of Zapruder and Sorrels. In the case of the former, the footage is partially viewable in an extreme close-up of Zapruder's glasses, simultaneously offering the shock of an American man and an evasive glimpse of the fateful events. This scene uncovers the primary subtext offered in the film; the US' difficulty in comprehending and mourning such events, a similarity shared in *Fahrenheit 9/11* (2004) and *United 93* (2006), for example, which both refuse to show documentary footage of planes hitting the World Trade Center. Equally, *Parkland* revisits a traumatic event fifty years later, yet still examines the subject matter with caution. As historical events the 9/11 attacks and the JFK assassination share common ground, both comprising visually documented, notorious occurrences in US visual culture. This example also reveals one of many differences between *Parkland* and the other prominent film about the Kennedy assassination, *JFK*. The two texts appear to be diametrically opposed, with the latter entertaining conspiracy theories and displaying in-depth slow-motion analyses of the Zapruder footage. Whereas *JFK* was a film about textual analysis, Parkland refuses to reveal the "text" that everybody has already seen, illuminating a sense of contrition still permeating the subject matter.

Parkland succeeds in an attempt to provide an alternate perspective

of the events surrounding Kennedy's assassination, yet the evidence of box-office figures suggest that interest is waning in an already oversaturated topic, despite the film's timely release. Arguably, the reason the assassination became such a pointed event in history is precisely because it was immediately committed to film. The lack of an analysis or recreation of these events is both *Parkland's* strength and weakness; refusing to fall into the panoply of cinematic examination and in doing so perhaps ignoring the central theme of the event - the reason why dozens of films already occupy similar territory. Ultimately, *Parkland* unwittingly succeeds in exposing a scopophilic desire made evident by the wealth of *YouTube* video analyses of this and other shocking historic events, whilst attempting to offer a different slant on an otherwise over-analyzed incident.

Works Cited

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