

Biography: Oliver Stone

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Oliver Stone

William Oliver Stone (born September 15, 1946), known simply as **Oliver Stone**, is an Academy Award-winning American film director and screenwriter.

Biography

Stone was born in New York City. His father was Jewish and his mother a Roman Catholic of French birth. He was raised an Episcopalian as a compromise. His parents divorced when he was in high school, and only then did Stone learn of his father's extramarital affairs with the wives of several family friends.

Stone attended The Hill School, Yale University and New York University. He attended Yale, dropping out after one year. He then taught English at the Free Pacific Institute in South Vietnam for six months after which he worked as a merchant marine, and traveled to Oregon and Mexico, before returning to Yale, where he dropped out a second time.

A veteran of the Vietnam conflict, Stone served with the United States Army from April 1967 to November 1968. He specifically requested combat duty and was assigned to the 25th Infantry Division and the 1st Cavalry Division, and was wounded twice in action. His personal awards include the Bronze Star with "V" device for valor for "extraordinary acts of courage under fire", and the Purple Heart with one Oak Leaf Cluster.

He has made three films about Vietnam —*Platoon* (1986), *Born on the Fourth of July* (1989), and *Heaven & Earth* (1993). He has called these films a trilogy, though they each deal with different aspects of the war. *Platoon* is a semi-

autobiographical film about Stone's experience in combat. *Born on the Fourth of July* is a biography of Ron Kovic, a veteran of the war who was paralyzed in Vietnam and subsequently became a political activist against the war. *Heaven & Earth* is a true story of a Vietnamese girl whose life is drastically affected by the war.

Stone has won three Academy Awards. His first "Oscar" was for Best Adapted Screenplay for *Midnight Express* (1978). He won two Academy Awards for Directing for *Platoon* and *Born on the Fourth of July*, Other films whose screenplays he participated in, are *Conan the Barbarian* (1982), *Scarface* (1983), *Year of the Dragon* (1985), *8 Million Ways to Die* (1986) and *Evita* (1996). He has also written or taken part in the writing of every film he has directed, except for *U Turn* (1997). The very first film that he directed professionally was the obscure horror picture *Seizure* (1974).

A distinct feature in Oliver Stone's movies is the use of a multitude of different cameras and film formats, from VHS to 8mm film to 70mm film. He sometimes uses several formats in a single scene, as in *JFK* (1991) and *Natural Born Killers* (1994).

Controversy

Stone's films often deal with political matters and are sometimes critical of the government. *JFK*, for instance, hypothesizes about many high-level government officials having a hand in the assassination of President John F. Kennedy. In 1991, he showed the film to Congress on Capitol Hill, which helped lead to passage of the Assassination Materials Disclosure Act of 1992. The film was discussed by the Assassination Records Review Board created by Congress to end the secrecy surrounding Kennedy's assassination, and Stone's observation at the end of the movie, *JFK*, about the dangers inherent in government secrecy.[1] The film was widely criticized in the media as being a mixture of truth and fiction. Stone published an annotated version of the screenplay, in which he cites references for his claims, shortly after the film's release. Similarly, he published an annotated version of his screenplay for the film *Nixon*, nominated for 4 Academy Awards, but which was also criticized for its portrayal of President Richard M. Nixon.

Stone has been rumored to use drugs while making films. On the DVD of *Natural Born Killers: The Director's Cut*, one of the producers recounts stories of taking psilocybin mushrooms with Stone and some of the cast and crew and almost getting pulled over by a police officer—a situation which Stone later wrote into the film. *Natural Born Killers* is filmed and edited in a frenzied style where animation, grainy black and white 8mm film, color 35mm film, and VHS are intercut and juxtaposed in a psychedelic montage of images showing not only the story's action, but also conveying the characters thoughts and feelings. The film was criticized by some for its apparent glorification of violence. Stone refutes this claim, saying that it is a satire of the American media's glorification of violence

and violent people. In fact, the original screenwriter of *Natural Born Killers*, Quentin Tarantino, was unhappy with the end result of the film because of the attention Stone gave to the aspects of the story involving the media, and asked that his name be removed from the credits. Tarantino was credited with "Story By" on the final film.

In 1999, Stone was arrested and pleaded guilty to drug possession and no contest to driving under the influence. He was ordered into a rehabilitation program. He was arrested again on the night of May 27, 2005 in Los Angeles for a small amount of marijuana possession.

Stone's first Academy Award winning film, *Midnight Express*, was based on the book by Billy Hayes. The film was surrounded by controversy in Turkey, and in 2004, during his visit to Istanbul, Stone expressed his regret over any misunderstanding that resulted from the picture.

Other Work

In 1993, Stone produced a mini series for ABC Television called *Wild Palms*. In an ironic cameo, Stone appears on a television in the show discussing how the theories in his film *JFK* had been proven correct (the series took place in the future). *Wild Palms* has developed a moderate cult following in the years since it aired, and has recently been released on DVD.

1993 was apparently Stone's year for ironic cameo appearances; he also appeared as himself in the comedy hit *Dave*, spinning a conspiracy theory about the title character's replacement by an identical double.

In 1997, Stone published *A Child's Night Dream*, a largely autobiographical novel first written in 1966-1967. After several unsuccessful attempts to get the work published, he "threw several sections of the manuscript into the East River one cold night, and, as if surgically removing the memory of the book from my mind, volunteered for Vietnam in 1967." Eventually, he dug out the remaining pages, rewrote the manuscript, and published it. The book is an almost stream of consciousness telling of his experiences as a child, in college, and in Vietnam.

In 2003, Stone made two documentary films: *Persona Non Grata*, about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and *Comandante*, about Cuban president Fidel Castro. In 2004, he made a second documentary on Castro, titled *Looking for Fidel*. Stone has called himself a friend and an admirer of Fidel Castro.

Recent Work

Recently, Stone has directed *U-Turn* (1997), which he describes as a small film that he would enjoy seeing as a teenager, *Any Given Sunday* (1999), a film about power struggles within and surrounding an American football team, and *Alexander* (2004), a biographical film about Alexander the Great. He later said he

was stung by the critical pans of *Alexander*, which was, nonetheless, one of the highest-grossing films internationally in 2004, grossing close to \$175 million worldwide.

On July 9th, 2005, Paramount Pictures announced that Oliver Stone was working on a film, tentatively called *World Trade Center*, about two Port Authority officers trapped under the rubble of the World Trade Center in New York City in the aftermath of the September 11, 2001 attacks. Nicolas Cage will star as Sgt. John McLoughlin. The plot will focus on the officers' rescue and their families, not the political implications of the attack. The movie is scheduled to be released in 2006 [2].

Filmography

- *Last Year in Viet Nam* (1971, short)
- *Seizure* (also known as *Queen of Evil*, 1974)
- *Mad Man of Martinique* (1979, short)
- *The Hand* (1981)
- *Salvador* (1986)
- *Platoon* (1986)
- *Wall Street* (1987)
- *Talk Radio* (1988)
- *Born on the Fourth of July* (1989)
- *The Doors* (1991)
- *JFK* (1991)
- *Heaven & Earth* (1993)
- *Dave* (1993, also actor)
- *Natural Born Killers* (1994)
- *Nixon* (1995)
- *U-Turn* (1997)
- *Any Given Sunday* (1999)
- *The Day Reagan Was Shot* (2001, TV) (produced only)
- *Persona Non Grata* (2003)
- *Comandante* (2003)
- *Alexander* (2004)
- *Looking for Fidel* (2004)
- *World Trade Center* (2006) (post production)