

JFK Movie Based on UNH Historian's Book Premieres on TLC

Thursday, November 14, 2013

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Letters to Jackie, Official Trailer

The movie about President John F. Kennedy based on the book “Letters to Jackie: Condolences From a Grieving Nation” by Ellen Fitzpatrick, professor of history at the University of New Hampshire, will premiere nationwide on TLC at 9 p.m. Sunday, Nov. 17, 2013. The film includes many A-list actors such as Kirsten Dunst, Anne Hathaway, Laura Linney, and Betty White.

The two-hour film “Letters to Jackie: Remembering President Kennedy” is executive produced by Academy Award-winning documentary filmmaker Bill Couturié’s The Couturie Company in partnership with Amblin Television. The film revisits the months following the assassination of President Kennedy, when First Lady Jacqueline Kennedy became the heart of the nation, leading its citizens – and her own children – through a dark and difficult time.

“It has been a privilege to see letters written by Americans in the days after President Kennedy’s assassination brought to life in Bill Couturie’s remarkable documentary. And I am delighted that TLC will be broadcasting this work and making it accessible to its viewers. The film explores an important period in the history of our country in ways that capture the tensions and the ideals of the early 1960s very well,” Fitzpatrick said.

The film debuts as an exclusive television event on TLC to mark the 50th anniversary of the president’s assassination. The documentary is based on Fitzpatrick’s book, which examines the extraordinary collection of letters sent to First Lady Jacqueline Kennedy following the president’s assassination and creates a moving portrait of the nation’s grief from such a cross-section of American life.

Within seven weeks of the president’s death, Jacqueline Kennedy received more than 800,000 condolence letters. Two years later, the volume of correspondence would

exceed 1.5 million letters. And for the next 46 years, the letters would remain essentially untouched until Fitzpatrick began conducting her research.

Her book culls about 200 of these extraordinary letters into three parts: Americans' vivid recollections of Nov. 22, 1963; their views on politics, society and the office of the presidency; and personal experiences of grief and loss.

Twenty A-list celebrities have lent their recognizable voices to give life to these letters from everyday Americans, including a polio-stricken 13-year-old who offers words of strength for the first lady, a Peace Corps volunteer who mourns the loss while stationed in Ethiopia and an African American woman who expressed her pride and gratitude for President Kennedy's work in the civil rights movement.

The participating talent includes Bérénice Bejo, Demián Bichir, Jessica Chastain, Chris Cooper, Viola Davis, Zooey Deschanel, Kirsten Dunst, Anne Hathaway, Allison Janney, John Krasinski, Melissa Leo, Laura Linney, Frances McDormand, Chloë Grace Moretz, Mark Ruffalo, Octavia Spencer, Hailee Steinfeld, Channing Tatum, Betty White, and Michelle Williams.

"I'll never forget where I was when JFK was killed. No one will. It cast a dark shadow over America. The world, really. Afterwards, the American people poured out their hearts to Jackie. The strength and wisdom of the nation, coming out of profound tragedy, rings clear in these letters. As soon as I read them, I knew I had to make a movie around them and the time they so eloquently evoke. Luckily, Amblin TV and TLC agreed," said filmmaker Bill Couturié.

Ellen Fitzpatrick, a professor and scholar specializing in modern American political and intellectual history, is the author and editor of six books and has appeared regularly on PBS's The NewsHour with Jim Lehrer. She has been interviewed as an expert on modern American political history by the New York Times, the Wall Street Journal, the Los Angeles Times, USA Today, the Boston Globe, the Washington Post, CBS's Face the Nation, and National Public Radio. At the University of New Hampshire, she has been recognized for Excellence in Public Service.

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