7627 Old Receiver Road
Frederick, Md. 21702
8/29/91

Editor
Chicago Tribune
Chicago, Illinois

Dear Editor,

After being sent copies of Jay Carr's puffing-up of Oliver Stone first in The Hollywood Reporter and then in your paper I first wrote Stone and then the Globe.

I enclose copies in the belief, at least in the hope, that you will not like having your trust and that of your readers imposed upon.

If you would like copies of quotes of what Stone has been saying I have a considerable file. He quite literally has been making what he says up to suit each need as he then conceived it.

I do not presume that you have the interest but if you do we are not very far from your Washington Bureau. Any reporter can have access to what I have and can use our copier to duplicate anything desired.

As I think back over 78 years, including what I learned as a Senate investigator and editor, an investigative reporter and as a wartime intelligence analyst, I can't think of as blatant a commercialization and exploitation as this Stone obseenity.

The astounding thing to me is that no reporter since the Post's Lardner had the interest to do any checking before flacking for Stone, as one way or another just about all did.

Carr certainly didn't check. Yet every editor who got a copy of his piece on syndication was justified in believing that what he wrote was fair, balanced and accurate.

Unfortunately it wasn't.

Sincerely,

Harold Weisberg

Under fire

Oliver Stone defends his 'JFK' film four months before its release

By Jay Carr

"I hope my responsibility is apparent in the work," Oliver Stone is saying. "But the work cannot be prejudged." Stone is talking about a new film, "JFK," that won't be released until Christmas at the earliest.

Stone just began editing it. But he's doing an interview about it now because it's already succeeding at one of its goals: It is provoking a further re-examination of the assassination of John F. Kennedy in Dallas on Nov. 22, 1963—an event still shrouded in unanswered questions.

According to a recent Washington Post poll, a majority of Americans remain convinced that the Kennedy killing was the result of a conspiracy. The House Select Committee on Assassinations found that the most likely explanation: Its 1978 report in effect rejected the earlier Warren Commission verdict that Lee Harvey Oswald acted alone.

Stone, speaking by phone from Washington, D.C., where he finished filming after shoots in Dallas and New Orleans, says the movie will offer several possible conspiracy scenarios.

He has already come under attack for the direction his script has taken. Based on a reading of one draft—the first of six, Stone says—Washington Post reporter George Lardner accused Stone of handling history sloppily.

Lardner's main gripe was that Stone uncritically accepted the conspiracy theory of former New Orleans District Atty. Jim Garrison and what Lardner called Garrison's "zany" investigation in the mid-'60s (Lardner covered the early stages of that investigation).

The film stars Kevin Costner as Garrison, Gary Oldman as Lee Harvey Oswald and Tommy Lee Jones as New Orleans businessman Clay Shaw (Garrison's target), plus Sissy Spacek, John Candy, Jack Lemmon, Walter Matthau, Kevin Bacon, Joe Pesci, Ed Asner and—in a cameo appearance as Earl Warren—Garrison himself, now 69 and a Louisiana appellate judge.

The attacks on his film haven't caused him to change anything, Stone says, "but they're debilitating to have to answer to in the 15th or 16th hour of a long day. It has made me aware of how sacred people's beliefs about the Kennedy assassination are to them. I had to rethink everything I wrote. It made me aware of the level of antagonism. I had 10 or 12 advisers constantly scrutinizing the script. I was clarifying as I went along."

(Reached by telephone, Lardner said, "Is Oliver Stone ever going to shut up? He's just prolonging this controversy to hype his movie.")

Stone warms to his subject as he recounts the history of incomplete investigations.

"The Warren Commission never had access to the CIA and FBI stuff. It was reported to them by Allen Dulles," the former CIA director who served on the Warren Commission.

"He said, 'Believe me,' and they did. The House Select Committee on Assassinations was terribly incomplete as well."

For instance, he says, the committee wouldn't let the Parkland Hospital doctors, who treated Kennedy in the minutes after he was shot, "see the autopsy photos to verify that the wounds were the same as they saw in Dallas that day. The Parkland doctors unequivocally described a hole in the back of the head. Yet the official autopsy photos show the head intact."

Unlike the Warren Commission (which favored the theory that Oswald fired three times) and the House committee (which concluded that it was most likely that four shots were fired), Stone's script allows for six shots. This, he says, extrapolates from acoustical research done for the House committee.

To judge any film from the reading of a script, even the draft actually used, is a mistake; camera angles, lighting, framing and editing can influence the tone and even the content of a film as much as words, Stone says.

One possibility is that the finished film will be color-coded, with different stock for flashbacks, for instance. "A lot will depend on the editing, what stays, what goes," Stone says.

"I'm trying for a three-hour film. It should be a 12-hour film." Either way, Stone says, "You have to composite time, characters and events. Shakespeare took liberties with 'Richard III.' Orson Welles did, too, with William Randolph Hearst in 'Citizen Kane.' I feel I've behaved responsibly. . . . But we're not doing a documentary."

In a way, "JFK" is the fourth and most complex in a tetralogy of films—the others being "Platoon," "Born on the Fourth of July" and "The Doors"—Stone has made about the '60s, the key decade in his life and the one he considers has shaped the rest of the American century.

He was impelled to make this film, Stone says, because "aside from it being a hell of a story, as a dramatist I was fascinated by a crime emanating from a small city, New Orleans, and assuming international proportions."

Boston Globe

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