

June 2, 1991

Mr. Ned Chase
Editor
Macmillan Publishing Co.
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Dear Mr. Chase:

An old friend from The Washington Post, George Wilson, told me that he called you on my behalf and that he exaggerated enough for you to invite a letter from me.

It's about Oliver Stone and Jim Garrison and the assassination of John F. Kennedy. Stone, not content with oversimplifying history (Platoon, Wall Street), is about to corrupt it. He is taking a publicity-hungry demagogue (former New Orleans District Attorney Garrison) and turning him into a Jimmy-Stewart-type hero (played by Kevin Costner) so that Stone can peddle his theories about the assassination. "A coup d'etat with Lyndon Johnson waiting in the wings," his script calls it.

The incompetence of Garrison's investigation has never fully come to light. He once discovered a "secret entrance" used by one of his chief suspects. It was a fire exit that opened only from the inside. At another point, he tried to outfit an investigator with a tape recorder in a briefcase--which had to be opened to activate the tape recorder. Until his staff rebelled, the DA was even determined to indict for the assassination a man who died a year before it took place. Stone's fascination with the inquiry stems from his preoccupation with Vietnam. What I propose is a book that moves back and forth between Garrison's inquiry, and its dishonesty, and the Stone movie, and its distortions.

Here is a tentative outline:

DALLAS IN WONDERLAND

I. Origins of the Stone movie, tentatively titled "JFK." Meetings with Jim Garrison. Stone's preoccupation with the war in Vietnam. Garrison's contentions in his 1988 book that the immediate cause of the assassination was a secret cabal, worried that Kennedy had decided to pull out of Vietnam and determined to install a pliant LBJ in his place. The distortions of history that this entails.

II. Beginnings of the Garrison investigation, late 1966. A publicity-hungry DA reads critical books on the findings of the Warren Commission and decides that he can do better. His first informants, a duo with the comedy-team names of Martin and Lewis, point fingers at everyone from Kim Philby to a homosexual ex-airline-pilot named David Ferrie.

III. The death of David Ferrie, February 1967. I was(probably) the last man to see him alive. He told me he was afraid Garrison's investigation would prove to be "a witchhunt." He also rambled on at length about how much Kennedy deserved to die, about how unfair Bobby Kennedy had been to Jimmy Hoffa. At the time JFK was killed, Ferrie was working as a private investigator for New Orleans Mafia kingpin Carlos Marcello and his lawyers. That was one angle Garrison never investigated. The DA was on Marcello's "pad" and had been for several years.

IV. Sentence first, verdict later. Ferrie's demise freed Garrison of all sense of restraint, so long as he didn't touch the mob. Immediately following Ferrie's death, Garrison claimed to the world he had solved the JFK assassination "beyond a reasonable doubt." Hours later, he found a man who would, after undergoing hypnotism, be his chief witness for an alleged conspiracy involving Lee Harvey Oswald, Ferrie, and New Orleans businessman Clay Shaw. Shaw's arrest. The search of his carriage house in the French Quarter. Whips and chains.

V. Oliver Stone's sense of history. A scene from his script showing Clay Shaw being whipped by "a young, sexy street chicken" in a leather mask(Actually Shaw liked to be the whipper, not the whippie.) Excerpt from Garrison letter to a critic deploring any exploitation of Shaw's homosexuality. Then a Garrison quote praising the script. Stone's views on moviemaking and criticisms of his work. Examples from other films. Stone calls himself "a cinematic historian," but he feels free to change the facts so long as he remains true to "the spirit" of an event. His penchant, at least in the JFK movie, for guilt by association. E. G., "Shaw was a CIA-related person," Stone says. "So Jim(Garrison) was certainly partly right(to prosecute Shaw), and maybe wholly right."

VI. The Garrison crusade. The DA's Alice-in-Wonderland approach: white is black and black is white. Star witness Perry Russo asks newsmen(including this reporter) to bribe him to change his story. Subsequent Garrison charges against NBC's Walter Sheridan for "trying to bribe" Russo. Garrison on TV, in Playboy, in Der Spiegel, contradicting himself in each new appearance without blushing. The DA's hiring of an ex-CIA agent to provide insights on the agency's "mentality." The agent's and Garrison's attempts to indict a dead man for killing Kennedy(Garrison insisted the man wasn't dead; there was this Venezuelan seaman, see, and his corpse was substituted for that of...). The Shaw trial, an abuse of power.

VII. "Damage control." Takes up more than half of investigation's time. Garrison sees a CIA/FBI plot against him. All they have to do is watch. The wounds are self-inflicted. Garrison insistence on indicting a rightwing Californian as one of the so-called "tramps," a case of double misidentification. DA's search for an anti-Castro guerilla training camp leads to a bunch of chimpanzees: the Tulane Primate Center. Garrison's "discovery" of an antenna sticking out of the hip pocket of a Dealey Plaza witness(actually an imperfection in the photograph). DA's theory about the "seats of conspiracy"(Seattle, the Boeing Co.; Dallas, H. L. Hunt, etc.)

VIII. Opportunities Lost. Failings of the FBI's and the Warren Commission's investigations. J. Edgar Hoover's insistence on a lone assassin. FBI's enlistment of then House Minority Leader Gerry Ford as an informant on the Commission. Bureau's blind eye to contradictions in the

evidence. FBI/CIA role in frustrating the Commission from hiring its own investigators. Shortcomings in the Warren Report. Garrison's omissions. Blind eye to the Mafia. Nothing done about identification of an Oswald buddy as the man who picked up Hands-Off Cuba leaflets. Abrupt abandonment of court fight for JFK autopsy photos and other physical evidence.

IX. The Making of "JFK." Stone's \$80,000 consultants, a trio that never met a conspiracy theory they didn't like. Resistance from other assassination critics. Grumbling in Dallas. PR Hype. Warner Books' \$136,000 purchase of paperback rights to Garrison book, initially issued by an anti-CIA publishing house. The Warner conglomerate's old ties to Garrison: Life magazine gave him \$60,000 to \$80,000 worth of help in 1966-67, before deciding he was too close to the mob. The Stone script and its flaws.

Perhaps the book could be timed to the release of Stone's \$40 million production and the re-release of Garrison's book, tentatively set for next February. Collaborating with me would be Harold Weisberg, a longtime Warren Commission critic who worked closely with Garrison before becoming disillusioned. I've been with the Post since 1963, covering assassinations, politics, organized crime, the FBI, the CIA and various scandals (Chappaquiddick, Watergate, Wedtech, Iran-contra). I think there would be a big audience for a lively, accurate book on Garrison and the Stone movie. Just look at the publicity it's already generated.

I'm enclosing a copy of a May 19 article that I did in the Post's Outlook section, Stone's response and my reply. He's also taken to denouncing me and the Post in other publications. Stone even told the New Orleans Times-Picayune that I was "now writing a book bashing Garrison." I don't know who told him that. But I'd hate to disappoint him.

Sincerely yours,

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