

Does Stone hit or miss?

On Nov. 22, 1963, at McIntire Elementary School in Fulton, Mo., Miss Castle, the principal, scuttled into our third-grade classroom, went up to our teacher, Miss Peters, and whispered something into her ear. Miss Peters put a hand to her mouth and exclaimed, "Oh my." Without another word she went on with the lesson, protecting us innocents from the dreadful news.

Since then, I've never paid much mind to who killed our 35th president, that is, until this past month, when an indignant chorus from the mainstream media—who, like Miss Peters, had all of our best interests in mind—issued a warning about the assassination and its celluloid incarnate, Oliver Stone's *JFK*.

According to the *Washington Post*'s Robert O'Harrow, *JFK* is a movie that "historians and journalists of the '60s" have sharply criticized "as a far-fetched conspiracy-theory fantasy." The *New York Times*' Clifford Krauss reports, "Mr. Stone has popularized what his critics argue is the most paranoid vision of America, one in which a fascist elite murdered the president." "It's a work of propaganda," says *Newsweek*'s Kenneth Auchincloss. "A skillful piece of propaganda," writes the *Washington Post*'s in-house assassination expert George Lardner, who continues to espouse the lone-gunner theory.

Without a doubt, these commentators are right. The movie's view of political events deviates from historical reality. *JFK* is propaganda. Kennedy was not the shining knight Stone makes him out to be. Mr. X's soliloquy among the Washington monuments on who shot the president and why is simplistic conjecture. But so what?

By film's end, moviegoers have allowed Stone three hours to make his case that Americans were denied the full story of the assassination. The powers that be lied, then covered up, Stone maintains.

The truly criminal: His film hits a nerve, propaganda that it is, because the official version, as documented in the Warren Commission Report, arguably raises more questions than it answers. Any idea is more plausible than the commission's finding that Oswald acted alone. Stone's list of co-conspirators is long and wide-ranging. They are responsible not only for JFK's assassination but also for the continuation of the Cold War—a conflict that manifested itself most forcefully in Vietnam with the death of 50,000 young Americans and more than 1 million Vietnamese. By tying these two crimes into one, Stone, artistic license in hand, condemns the militarists who fought the war, the industrialists who profited from it and the apologists who made it possible. In effect Stone says, these Cold Warriors are the moral equivalent of those who brought us the assassination—if not one in the same.

And, to some, that moral judgment is a satisfying one. But this satisfaction comes at what price? Stone has supplanted the Warren Commission Report with another tale which, in my opinion, while more convincing and politically palatable, is nonetheless mythic. What's most troubling is that the explanation for the assassination, as related in the movie by Mr. X, was inspired by the theories of one Fletcher Prouty, a former Air Force colonel who served as the Pentagon's director of special operations in the early '60s.

Rich and wrong: These days Prouty serves on the Populist Action Committee of the Liberty Lobby, the nation's largest racist and anti-Semitic organization. Most recently it has been stoking David Duke's bid for the presidency with money and endorsements.

On Oct. 8, 1990, Prouty joined current Populist Party presidential candidate Bo Gritz on the podium at the Liberty Lobby's 35th anniversary Board of Policy convention. The conference theme was "Who is our enemy?" Prouty's answer, "Three letters, CIA, could be part of the problem," Prouty told those gathered. "If anybody really wants to know what is going on in the world today, he should be reading the *Spotlight* [the Liberty Lobby's newsletter]."

In addition to working with quasi-Nazis, Prouty spoke at a LaRouche conference in March 1989. According to a report in *Le Federalist*, a LaRouche paper, "A fitting conclusion to the inference was given by retired Air Force Col. Fletcher Prouty, describing LaRouche's case as similar to Socrates. Prouty denied the prosecution against [LaRouche] as an attack on someone for using his mind."

On the *New York Times*' December 20 op-ed page Stone proposes that the film's critics let Fletcher Prouty and his version of his history have their "day in court."

A researcher who charts neo-fascist political groups in the U.S. explains that Prouty and Victor Marchetti, a former CIA officer, "represent a dissident, far-right branch of the CIA" and, consequently, their analysis of the world and their motivations should not be trusted.

"The only person Stone can dredge up is a Nazi crackpot? Please, it's ridiculous," said the source, who requested anonymity. "People say *JFK* serves a useful purpose. It doesn't. Who is Stone suggesting that young people look to for an understanding of the bad things the U.S. government does? Fletcher Prouty? A man who recommended that to understand the world you have to read Nazi propaganda like *Spotlight*. The movie could have been a useful contribution—instead it was just a grotesque distraction and, more dangerously, provided a propaganda platform for Nazis."

Fifth columns: It's possible that Stone did not know who he was dealing with. Liberty Lobby types like Gritz, Prouty and Marchetti have made a name for themselves, particularly in California, as responsible critics of U.S. foreign policy. On December 20, the day *JFK* opened, Prouty was praised on Pacifica station KPFA by Mark Lane, the *JFK* assassination expert whose most recent book on the subject, *Plausible Denial*, puts the blame squarely on the CIA.

Lane told listeners that Prouty "is as straight-laced, patriotic, middle-of-the-road an American anyone will ever want to meet anywhere." Lane, however, failed to identify himself as a Liberty Lobby lawyer, or as the former co-editor with Marchetti of the Liberty Lobby publication *Zionist Watch*, or as the lawyer for the Institute for Historical Review, the California-based organization that posits the Holocaust as a Jewish hoax.

A source Stone should have turned to for an explanation of who orchestrated the killing is investigative reporter Jonathan Kwitny. He believes—basing his opinion on the 1979 report by the House Select Committee on Assassinations—that Mafia figures Carlos Marcello of New Orleans and the late Santo Trafficante, formerly of Havana then Tampa, might have been directing the conspiracy. Their motive: President John Kennedy's failure to fight and win the covert war against Castro and Attorney General Robert Kennedy's crackdown on organized crime. Kwitny told the *New York Times* in early January that "the CIA and other federal agencies covered up evidence to avert disclosure of their contracts with the Mafia to kill Castro, as well as information linking Oswald to American intelligence." But, he added, "that doesn't mean they were involved in the crime."

Black money? If Marcello and Trafficante had played a larger role in Stone's movie, the story line could have continued to the present. This would have provided further cameo opportunities for actors to play historical figures like William Casey and Neil Bush. Both Marcello and Trafficante, close associates in crime, turn up as players in former *Houston Post* reporter Pete Brewton's 1990 investigation into an alleged CIA-Mafia connection to the failure of at least 25 federally insured financial institutions. Some facts:

Marcello is a business partner of organized crime associate Herman Beebe of Shreveport, La. The two had mutual interests in nursing homes, holiday Inns and the Teamsters Union. Beebe also loaned Marcello money. According to Brewton, Beebe "controlled or borrowed money from more than a dozen failed S&Ls in Texas." Beebe was also financially involved with four of the largest borrowers of the failed Silverado Savings and Loan of Denver. And Neil Bush, who sat on the Silverado board, had independent business relationships with three of these borrowers.

Trafficante was the biggest client of a convicted money launderer named Lawrence Freeman. According to Brewton, in 1986 Freeman "engineered a Florida land deal" that caused two S&Ls to lose more than \$50 million.

Years earlier Freeman had been a close associate of the late Paul Helliwell. Formerly of the OSS, Helliwell was a CIA founding father and a good friend of the late CIA Director Casey. In fact, Helliwell, Casey and Freeman shared a meal in Zurich in late 1969. Soon after, Freeman and Helliwell worked together at Castle Bank and Trust, a money-laundering operation in the Bahamas used by organized crime and the CIA.

Helliwell was also a leader of the CIA's war against Cuba. He and Trafficante worked on what Brewton describes as "an abortive attempt by the CIA to use the Mafia to try to assassinate Cuban dictator Fidel Castro in the early '60s."

Well, maybe Stone isn't so far off the mark after all.

His film may not definitively answer the lingering questions of who did what back in 1963, but does that really matter? *Chicago Tribune* film critic Gene Siskel thinks not. He writes, "The conspiracy that Stone posits in *JFK* is so huge that it can only be taken metaphorically."