

# The Nation

March 23, 1992 \$1.75 U.S./\$2.25 Canad

MR HAROLD WEISBERG  
2627 OLD RECEIVER RD  
FREDERICK MD 21701-2752  
RB

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NAN0000042345 77 08N099

## EDITORIAL

### RECAPTURING THE PAST

Panel discussion, symposium, political psychodrama, historical inquest? The March 3 event at Town Hall in New York City, sponsored by The Nation Institute, the Center for American Culture Studies, Columbia University and the Writers Guild of America, East, was certainly all these. The ostensible subject was "Hollywood & History: The Debate over *JFK*," but the talk covered far more ground than the media-framed issue of the factual accuracy of Oliver Stone's movie. And, as noted by panelist Nora Ephron, co-screenwriter of *Silkwood*, which was attacked in much the same way as *JFK*, a movie's politics rather than a reverence for history is often the real *raison d'être* of such assaults.

As far as Oliver Stone was concerned it was history—and the politics thereof—that was on trial rather than his movie. He regarded the official version of the assassination as typical of the pervasive untruths in received American history. But Stone's version of events in Dallas was challenged by writer Edward Jay Epstein and a panel of questioners. The director had answers, not all of them satisfying to his inquisitors or the audience. This is the Kennedy assassination, after all. For every "fact" there is a counterfact, and opinions among the illuminati run strong and deep. Still, the dialectic informed, if it did not synthesize.

As panelist Norman Mailer observed, the assassination is the great unresolved question of our time, and doubts about the official story have left people in a limbo "between apathy and paranoia." He made an impassioned call for the formation of a commission to find what answers remain to be found.

The event in Town Hall was about the politics of history—how it is written, how it is interpreted, how it is conveyed and portrayed. The moral is that history is *not* bunk. It is so crucial that we must keep on debating it.

**GAY-BASHING**  
Donna Minkowitz

**RODNEY KING: ANY LEGACY?**  
Paul Chevigny

**EUROGHOSTS**  
Daniel Singer

**TRIBAL WRONGS**  
Susan E. Davis

**BUSH'S CHILL**  
Christine Triano  
Nancy Watzman

**CAPTIVES OF BAGHDAD**  
Stephen Hubbell

**SHRINKS AND BIOGRAPHERS**  
Paul Alexander

## EXCLUDING THE OTHERS

### THE MIDDLE CLASS—A USEFUL MYTH

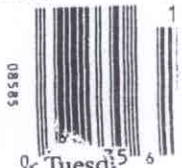
VICENTE NAVARRO

The new conventional wisdom among political pundits is that the Democratic Party has been too concerned with the minorities and the poor and has not paid enough attention to the middle class. The Democrats' political redemption, the commentators say, can occur only if the party concentrates on the needs of the middle class—needs that are assumed to be different from those of the minorities and the poor. In this political discourse, the pundits' concern for the middle class has an antimorality flavor. Indeed, this appeal to the middle class—which supposedly includes the majority of Americans—is profoundly ideological.

Actually, the majority of Americans belong not to the middle class but to the working class: That is their financial identity is defined by hourly wages. According to Professor Erik Olin Wright of the University of Wisconsin, one of the most respected scholars in the analysis of social class structure manual, supervised, unskilled and semiskilled workers represent more than 50 percent of the adult working population. They are the core of the working class, and they and their dependents represent the majority of the population. Most members of the working class are white, although minorities (predominantly black and Hispanic) and women are the fastest-growing sector of that class.

A majority of the working population do not identify themselves as middle class. According to the 1983 class self-identification survey of the National Opinion Research Center, more people defined themselves as working class (48 percent) than as middle class (43 percent). This differential is even higher among

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ISSN 0898-0175  
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