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SACRAMENTO BEE

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HD: WAS JFK KILLED BY EVERYBODY?

LD: From its start to its finish 3-plus hours later (if you last that long), Oliver Stone's movie "'J.F.K.'", which purports to be about the assassination of President Kennedy, is a hyperventilated recitation of conspiratorial allusions involving everybody from the Dallas cops to the FBI, the CIA, the Pentagon, military contractors, the mob, anti-Castro Cubans and Lyndon Johnson.

Together, Stone suggests, they engineered Kennedy's murder -- and then got the Warren Commission to cover it up -- because he refused to attack Cuba, planned to get out of Vietnam and wanted to wind down the Cold War. Stone even seems to say that Robert Kennedy and Martin Luther King were killed by the same people for the same reason. That none of that is proven and that some of it is blatantly false does not deter Stone from his mission.

The majority of Americans have never accepted the Warren Commission's official version of the Kennedy assassination: that a lone assassin, Lee Harvey Oswald, shot the president. That explanation leaves out too many facts, and fails to explain too many others. But if you accept Oliver Stone's version -- that Kennedy was killed in a great coup d'etat -- you'll believe anything.

The scary thing about the film is that apparently a lot of people, especially young people, are accepting it. When New York Times reporter Michael Specter went to interview people coming out of theaters where the movie is showing, many called it courageous and disturbing. "'He was the only shining star that ever crossed the American sky,'" a young man told the Times, in what is surely one of the silliest things ever said about this country's history. And because the government lies, he reasoned, Stone's version could well be true. Specter calls it the Grand Unified Conspiracy Theory. "'Why,'" asked another young man, "'has this been ignored?'"

Of course, it hasn't. The Kennedy assassination has been worked over for a generation by hundreds of investigators, official and unofficial, by historians, by congressional committees, by journalists, by playwrights and by conspiracy theorists more deft and faithful to fact than Oliver Stone, none of whom ever came up with anything as monstrous as Stone.

But none of them used cinematic innuendo to do to history what Stone has done. Nor did they count on the historical innocence -- innocence not just of fact, but of judgment -- on which this movie depends. For many younger viewers particularly, the bit of tough-mindedness needed to test the wild, and often easily rebuttable, claims of Stone's film just doesn't seem worth the effort.

And that, of course, is a comment not just about history but about citizenship and democracy. Fewer and fewer seem to want to do the hard work of questioning the images that flash before them. More and more seem to want to leave it to the film editors, the splicers and the sound men. Which, of course, is why we have the politics we do.

KE: BEE EDITORIAL KENNEDY MOVIE