

ANOTHER VIEW / STAN LICHTENSTEIN

'Whose Conspiracy Was It' In JFK's Assassination?

SHORTLY after the assassination of President Kennedy, Lyndon Johnson persuaded Chief Justice Earl Warren to head the investigation of the event. Everyone would calm down, Johnson thought, if "unimpeachable" authorities concluded that Lee Harvey Oswald had acted alone.

Jim Garrison, the investigator-protagonist of director Oliver Stone's movie, "JFK," is as impeachable as the next fellow.

Yet the basic question is not, "Was there a conspiracy?" but rather, "Whose conspiracy was it?"

The Warren Commission's report ended up having more glaring weaknesses than the conspiracy theories it was intended to squelch.

Oswald, the "lone assassin," was rubbed out by Jack Ruby, another "lone assassin," whose Mafia connections made ludicrous the idea that he burst into a Dallas police station and killed Oswald so that Jacqueline Kennedy would not have to endure further suffering.

In the Warren Commission version of the assassination, bullets performed incredible gyrations. Discrepancies in the medical observations of the president's body are not fully or convincingly explained. And no one yet knows why Surgeon General Edward Kenney put a gag on everyone present at the autopsy.

Fourteen years later, the House Select Committee on Assassinations managed to get the gag order lifted. But portions of the Warren Commission files will remain under wraps until well into the 21st century.

Now, in the wake of "JFK,"

there is renewed controversy. Former President Ford, who served on the Warren Commission, is among those attacking Stone. Stone responds by citing Ford's "questionable" actions involving leaks to the FBI.

Such behind-the-scenes maneuvering by a commission member certainly suggests the possibility of cover-up.

Stone also cites Ford's "open mike" stumbling during a break in a House assassinations committee hearing.

Ford, obviously thinking

the microphones were turned off, leaned over to David Belin, his attorney, and asked: "Have I compromised anything yet?" Stone calls this "a rather curious statement under the circumstances."

Relatively few people are in a position to assess the "hogwash" content of the scenario advanced by Garrison and Stone.

But undoubtedly there was "hogwash" in the Warren Commission's investigation and report. Its search for truth was neither impartial nor thorough, and over the decades there has been much stonewalling against those who would investigate the investigators.

The controversy can hardly be expected to cease while files, documents, X-rays or other potential evidence remain sealed.

It may well be that we will never know the full story. But to abandon the search is inexcusable. And if it takes a film maker of semi-documentary thrillers to spur us on, then so be it.

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Stan Lichtenstein, a lawyer, writes from Bethesda, Md.