

JFK: The movie and the controversy

By JOSEPH RYAN

JFK: A film produced and directed by Oliver Stone.

Just when the ruling class thought the "Vietnam Syndrome" was dead, along comes director Oliver Stone with his controversial movie, "JFK." Only this can explain the subsequent avalanche of criticism that has landed on the film—and its director.

Stone's politically provocative film alleges that President John F. Kennedy was killed in Dallas on Nov. 22, 1963, as the result of a conspiracy involving the CIA, anti-Castro Cubans, and the "military-industrial complex." He contends that the accused assassin, Lee Harvey Oswald, was set up as a "patsy," and the conspiracy was then covered up.

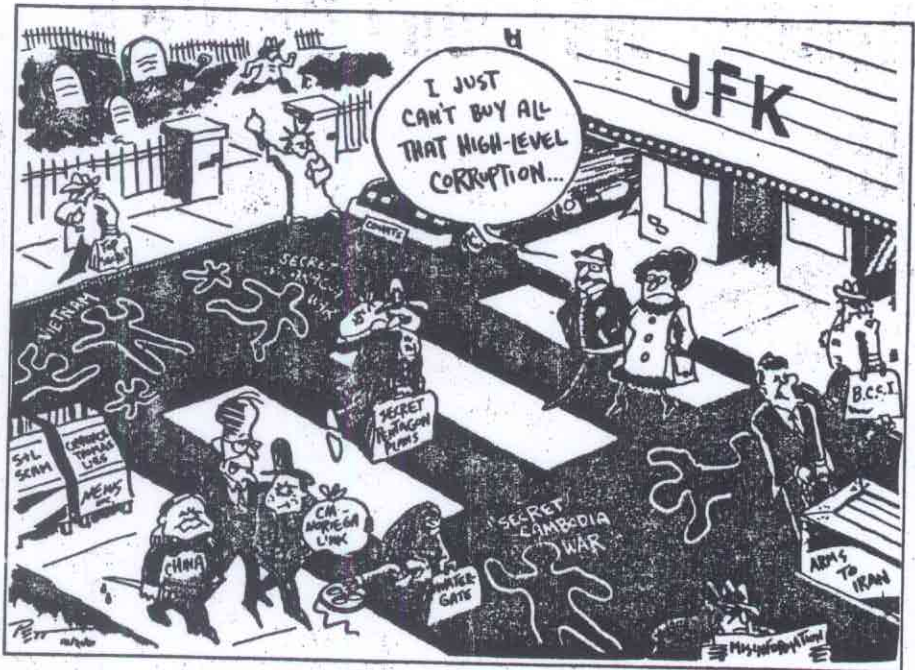
"JFK" has struck a responsive chord among movie-goers, who are justifiably dubious of the Warren Commission Report conclusion that Lee Harvey Oswald was the lone assassin. Recent polls indicated that 56 percent of the population believed Kennedy was the victim of a conspiracy.

But more than anything, "JFK" has struck a raw nerve among those who try to manipulate public opinion—the capitalist politicians and the major media.

Even before "JFK" was released to theaters around the country, a counter-offensive was launched against the film on the editorial pages of every major newspaper and magazine in the country—*Newsweek*, *Time*, *The Wall Street Journal*, *The New York Times*—and the list goes on. Miles of column space have been devoted to attacking Stone for "rewriting history" and turning "fiction into fact."

U.S. News and World Report called the film "several hours of shameless propaganda." One editor, Jack Limpert, of *Washingtonian Magazine*, was so outraged by "JFK" he refused to publish a glowing review of the film written by one of his staff critics.

Former President Gerald Ford, one of the two members serving on the Warren Commission who are still alive, was compelled



to write a column in *The New York Times* debunking Stone's conspiracy thesis.

Arthur Schlesinger, a former Kennedy adviser and a biographer of his administration, attacked the veracity of the movie and then waxed agnostic about the conspiracy premise: "I find it difficult to exclude the conspiracy theory—or to accept it."

Why all the flak? After all, Stone's movie is based on two books—Jim Garrison's "On the Trail of the Assassins" and Jim Marr's "Crossfire"—that have been in circulation for years and never drew the fire Stone's movie has.

"Executive Action," a movie made in 1973, had almost the identical thesis as

JFK. It went virtually unnoticed, although you'll hardly ever see it on TV. What Stone has done with his \$30 million "docu-drama" is challenge the official version of Kennedy's murder with his own political scenario.

Stone's "JFK" sends a visceral political message. His main character in the movie, New Orleans District Attorney Jim Garrison, states during scene of the trial of Clay Shaw, that a virtual coup d'etat was accomplished when Kennedy was assassinated.

Kennedy's role glamorized

Stone's "JFK" is based on a syllogistic approach. His premise is that Kennedy planned to pull out of Vietnam and was contemplating *detente* with the Soviet Union and Cuba. The CIA, anti-Castro Cubans, and the "military-industrial complex" were opposed to any appeasement in the "war against communism." Therefore, Stone concludes, Kennedy had to be killed if the pro-war faction was to prevail.

The problem with Stone's hypothesis is that if one of his premises is proven wrong, then his conclusion falls to pieces.

Stone says that Kennedy ordered the withdrawal of 1000 U.S. "advisers" from the force of 16,000 in Vietnam and that he planned on withdrawing all troops by 1965. Four days after Kennedy's assassination, President Johnson contravened Kennedy's order with National Security Action Memo 273.

Kennedy is portrayed as a politician who wanted to end the Cold War and was martyred by the hit men of a secret government. But there is no firm proof that Kennedy intended to withdraw from Vietnam. On the contrary, it was Kennedy who increased the number of American "advis-

ers" in Vietnam from 700 in 1960 to 16,000 in 1963.

In public statements, Kennedy always spoke out of both sides of his mouth—depending on the audience. One month before his assassination, Kennedy condoned a military coup in South Vietnam in which the increasingly unreliable U.S.-installed puppet, President Diem and his brother, were killed. More than likely, Kennedy ordered the withdrawal of 1000 U.S. advisers as a pressure tactic to force the new South Vietnamese leaders to shape up in the war against the National Liberation Front.

Kennedy certainly didn't want to give the American people the wrong message. He signed a memorandum stating that "no formal announcement should be made of the implementation of plans to withdraw 1000 U.S. military personnel by the end of 1963."

According to documents in Volumes 3 and 4 of the government publication, "Foreign Relations of the United States, Vietnam, 1963," Kennedy was firmly committed to staying the course in Vietnam.

Nor was Kennedy a "dove" when it came to protecting the interests of U.S. imperialism in other parts of the world.

He was an unrelenting opponent of the Cuban Revolution. He approved the 1961 Bay of Pigs invasion; brought the world to the brink of nuclear disaster during the 1962 Cuban missile crisis; and authorized assassination attempts against Fidel Castro. Under the disguise of the UN, he intervened in the Belgian Congo in 1961 and faced off against Khrushchev during the Berlin crisis in 1962.

Kennedy, like any other chief executive of the U.S. ruling class (indeed, he was a

member of this elite circle), was incapable of carrying out any agenda that would vitiate the interests of his class.

Oliver Stone's unforgivable sin

The "dangerous" element in Oliver Stone's film that irks the powers-that-be is that while his specific scenario on Kennedy's assassination might be flawed, his basic contention that there was a conspiracy and a cover-up makes sense to people. While defending his film on the op-ed page of *The New York Times*, Stone said, "I cannot say—I do not say that this is a true story. But that it speaks to an inner truth."

Stone's sin of sins, in the eyes of the politicians and their literary pundits, is that he tapped into that reservoir of healthy skepticism that American working people reserve for the U.S. government.

During the press onslaught against "JFK," many of these well-paid scribblers pinned the movie's popularity on Americans' love for conspiracy theories. They say that not only Oliver Stone is paranoid—but the American people, too.

The press avoids the fact that the Vietnam War, Watergate, Conragate, and the dozens of other conspiracies uncovered over the years, make people think twice about the version of events they get from the government and the media.

Furthermore, Stone's attempt to connect the U.S. escalation of the Vietnam War with Kennedy's assassination has opened wounds that the capitalists thought they had closed with their lightning victory in the Gulf War.

We probably never will know who really killed Kennedy. That type of conspiracy never leaves a paper trail. However, Oliver Stone's campaign to get all files relating to the case—currently sealed until 2049—declassified and released should be supported.

While the files probably won't point to the killers—be they right-wingers, anti-Castro Cubans or CIA agents who perceived Kennedy as "soft on communism—they might expose those responsible for the cover-up.

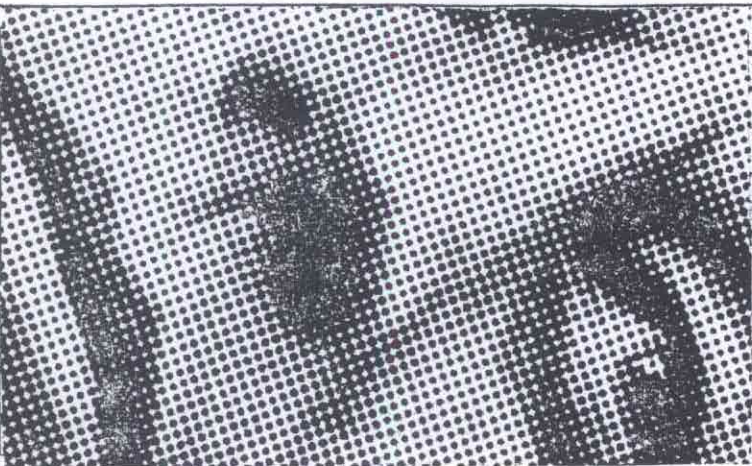
The basic contention of the now discredited Warren Commission Report was that Kennedy was killed by a left-winger, Lee Harvey Oswald, supposedly a Marxist who was active in Cuba solidarity work.

But voluminous research by investigators, like Mark Lane and Harold Weisberg, has revealed that Oswald, if anything, was an informant for the FBI and had numerous connections with anti-Castro paramilitary organizations.

It was certainly in the interest of the U.S. government in 1963 to pin the assassination on the left wing. It dove-tailed with their war drive.

Unlike the Warren Commission Report, Oliver Stone's "JFK," despite its political naivete, is not an attempt to "rewrite history" or "turn fiction into fact." On the contrary, "JFK" is an attempt to create pressure to correct the historical record.

In this regard it has certainly succeeded.



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