

The media's conspiracy against Oliver Stone

Long before Oliver Stone's *JFK* was released a shrill barrage of criticism swept through the ranks of our corporate media. Starting in mid-May with a column in the *Chicago Tribune* and continuing until the film was released in late December, the *New York Times*, the *Washington Post*, *Esquire*, *Time* magazine, *Life* and ABC's *Nightline* all joined in an unprecedented campaign against a film that had not yet been seen by the public. As Garry Trudeau wrote on January 8, readers of the *Times*' sixth, seventh, eighth and ninth personal attacks on Oliver Stone that week could be forgiven for wondering whether the beleaguered director of *JFK* has a point. "Significant elements of the Establishment Media do seem hellbent on destroying his reputation," Trudeau observed.

Curious, and also suspicious of all the negative attention *JFK* had gotten from pundits who normally consider it beneath them to write about a movie, we went to see the film last week. Like the more than 70 percent of the American people who never have believed that Lee Harvey Oswald was a lone assassin, we have always assumed that President Kennedy was the victim of some kind of conspiracy. But we have never been persuaded by any of the conspiracy buffs. Their theories have all seemed long on supposition and short on substantiation.

The movie did little to change our mind. It reinforced our belief that more than one person had to be involved in the assassination, and that Oswald had probably been set up—that, as he claimed, he was a patsy. But the film was confused and confusing on the question of who killed Kennedy. In our informal survey of those who have seen it, this emerged as the near-universal conclusion.

Even the House committee that investigated the Kennedy assassination in 1979 concluded that Oswald did not act alone. And yet the corporate press seems to have formed a conspiracy of its own to defend the Warren Commission report and to denounce Stone for daring to raise questions about the official story. One could have antic-

ipated attacks on the film from the cruder retainers of established power, but it was a surprise that even a normally moderate columnist like the *New York Times*' Anthony Lewis would be outraged about a movie because it "tells us that our government cannot be trusted to give an honest account of a presidential assassination."

Well, we all know that the government cannot be trusted to tell us the truth about anything that might lead to questioning authority—or policy. Over the last 11 years our government has lied to us about the causes—and the effects—of three wars, about the state of our economy and about many lesser issues. American presidents have never been squeamish about withholding the truth from the public when they have deemed it necessary, but the Reagan and Bush administrations have honed lying to near perfection. They had to. If they had told the truth, they would have been driven from office.

And, of course, the corporate media have routinely reported the lies with a straight face. Questioning authority or displaying independent opinions disappeared long ago from our major media. Decades ago, when we still had a free, competitive press, events like the Kennedy assassination would have been widely investigated and discussed in major newspapers and magazines. Now, informing the American people is left to a handful of small independent publications and to individuals like Oliver Stone who have the courage and the wherewithal to capture public attention.

It's true that some of Stone's ideas about the conspiracy to kill Kennedy—and about Kennedy himself—are off the wall. But few besides conspiracy groupies will pay much attention to Stone's cornucopia of specific conspiratorial theories, while most, if not all, who see the movie will know that there's more to this story than we have been told.

Ultimately, the great impact of Stone's movie is a reflection of the media's failure to do what it professes to do. If the media had honestly investigated Kennedy's assassination and explored the various theories in its reporting, Stone's movie would have little significance. And if our journalists and pundits did not act in concert with the government in obscuring and distorting the truth, the American people would be less susceptible to paranoid fantasies. ■



ACTUALLY, I'VE ALWAYS
THOUGHT IT WAS
JOE DIMAGGIO!

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