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Washington and 'JFK': Big-time pettiness

Thin-skinned reaction to suggestion of cover-up raises its own questions.

There is a small-town retort to the big city where folks believe they are the center of significance, innovation and truth:

"Bigger the town, bigger the hick."

Welcome to Washington, D.C.

Everybody here is in high dudgeon over Oliver Stone's movie *JFK* because it depicts a conspiracy to kill Kennedy which was orchestrated by government officials and covered up with at least tacit cooperation from the media.

It didn't take the accused long to strike back. *Newsweek*, *The Washington Post*, *The New York Times* and all manner of Washington-based syndicated columnists published attacks on Stone, calling him a "paranoid," a "liar" and an "intellectual psychopath."

Gerald Ford, a member of the Warren Commission which concluded Lee Harvey Oswald acted alone when he shot Kennedy, came in off the links for what must be his first official act as ex-president. He actually wrote something — a rebuttal

to Stone's film.

Now you might wonder why there is all this fuss over a movie. You might recall some earlier Washingtonians who believed you have a right to speak out — especially against the government.

Pat Dowell, the movie critic of *Washingtonian* magazine, wasn't really trying to speak out against anybody when she filed her review of *JFK*. But for the first time in 10 years, her editor wouldn't print her opinion. What was so reprehensible about it? Here's the review, in total:

"If you didn't already doubt the Warren Commission report, you will after seeing Oliver Stone's brilliantly crafted indictment of history as an official story. Is it the truth? Stone says, 'You be the judge.'"

You be the judge? Dangerous idea.

Jack Limpert, the editor, sells 170,000 copies a month to the kind of upscale, professional, highly educated readers most publishers only dream about. He wanted to protect those folks from Dowell's heresy.



Joe Urschel's column appears on Tuesdays and Thursdays.

Limpert felt the review misrepresented "what kind of city this is. . . . The film was a false portrayal . . . political pornography."

So Dowell resigned in protest.

Limpert has no regrets: "I don't agree with her politics at all. I edit bad judgment and stupidity wherever I find it."

Aren't Washingtonians a little thin-skinned about this?

"It isn't a good movie, and we aren't going to say it is," Limpert replies.

He is, however, planning to print a 1,000-word story about the 34-word review he never published.

Meanwhile, out there between the coasts, moviegoers have spent over \$50 million going to see *JFK*. Stone won a Golden Globe award, and the film will probably be nominated for Academy Awards. Four books challenging the Warren Commission report are now on *The New York Times'* best-seller lists.

Does this suggest there are some dumb hicks out there who believe there were elements within the government that may have conspired to kill Jack Kennedy? Does it mean people believe the government might lie? Concoct cover-ups?

Don't ask me. I live in Virginia.

You decide.