

the Progressive

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MEMO from the Editor

Conspiracy

On November 22, 1963, I was at the U.S. Capitol, reporting on a bill of little moment that was wending its way through the Senate. When word arrived that John F. Kennedy had been shot in Dallas, I knew my story didn't have a prayer of making it into the next day's newspapers. So I walked across the street to the Library of Congress, looked up the assassination of Abraham Lincoln, and discovered an amazing array of reports, inquiries, and investigations, official and unofficial, stretching well into the present century. In fact, some aspects of the shooting at Ford's Theater apparently remained shrouded in mystery almost a century later.

On the strength of those archives, I wrote a story which suggested that traumatic events are bound to engender mystery and controversy, and that Americans might, therefore, be disputing the circumstances of the Kennedy assassination for a long time to come.

Over the years, *The Progressive* has received at least 100 manuscripts in support of one or another conspiracy thesis regarding the Kennedy assassination. The plotters have been variously identified as the KGB and the CIA, the FBI and the Mafia, Fidel Castro and the veterans of the Bay of Pigs invasion, Lyndon Johnson and the Secret Service, members of the Joint Chiefs of Staff and of the Fortune 500, and several combinations and permutations of the above. A recent submission attributed the conspiracy to French intelligence agents.

One of the first conspiracy manuscripts came from Mark Lane, the author of *Rush to Judgment* and a leading critic of the Warren Commission report and its "lone assassin" conclusion. My predecessor at *The Progressive*, the late Morris H. Rubin, was a scrupulously careful editor, and he found some troubling inconsistencies in Lane's account. Rubin wrote Lane a detailed letter asking for clarification on those points before the article could be accepted for publication. Lane never replied, but not long afterward he began publicly accusing *The Progressive* of being part of the "cover-up" of the Kennedy assassination.

A few years back, an excited writer proposed an article based on a hitherto secret document he claimed to have obtained under the Freedom of Information Act. It proved conclusively, he said, that when Kennedy was shot, he had been poisoned and the U.S. war in Vietnam. I looked at

the document, which proved no such thing and which struck me as vaguely familiar; it turned out to have been published many years before as part of the Pentagon Papers.

None of the conspiracy theories we have scrutinized meets the test of accuracy—or even plausibility—we normally apply to material published in *The Progressive*, so none has appeared in the pages of this magazine. Some authors (like Mark Lane) have accused us, therefore, of participating in a cover-up. It is, I suppose, a conspiracy so profound that we don't even know we're part of it.

Now Oliver Stone's film, *JFK*, is breathing new life into the various conspiracy theories—he manages to touch base with most of them—and reviving the debate about the Kennedy assassination. Before the next avalanche of manuscripts descends on us, let me put in my own two cents:

I believe the Warren Commission did a hasty, slipshod job of investigating the Kennedy assassination, leaving many questions unanswered. I believe Kennedy may have fallen victim to a plot that encompassed more than a "lone assassin." I believe the sealed records of the assassination inquiry (like all other sealed Government records) should be opened to the public right now.

I have no idea who killed John Kennedy or at whose behest. Neither does Oliver Stone. I doubt that either of us will ever find out. Stone's film is a mélange of fact and fiction that makes no attempt to distinguish one from the other. I believe the distinction between fact and fiction is a useful one that ought to be preserved.

I've been told that *JFK* deserves credit for asking important questions, and for raising the political consciousness of a generation not yet born when Kennedy was shot. I believe it is no service to raise important questions and then provide false answers. I don't believe anyone's consciousness is raised by still another attempt to perpetuate the Camelot myth. I don't question Stone's right to turn a buck by pandering to the emotions of a gullible audience, but I insist on my right to dispense him for doing so.

Please don't write to tell me I'm participating in a conspiracy. I know, I know.

