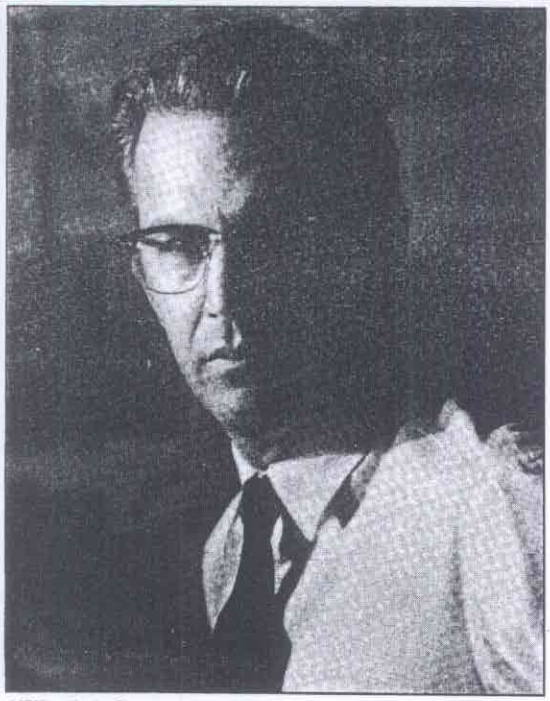

"JFK"—Kevin Costner plays Jim Garrison, the New Orleans District Attorney, in the Oliver Stone film from Warner Bros.

"JFK"

Twenty-seven years ago, the Warren Commission concluded President John F. Kennedy was murdered by lone gunman, Lee Harvey Oswald, setting off a debate that even after a quarter-century has not been settled.

Established by President Johnson seven days after the November 22, 1963 murder, the Commission, headed by Chief Justice Earl Warren, was ordered to evaluate all the evidence and circumstances of the assassination and report a conclusion.

After nearly 10 months work, the panel, which included former CIA head Allen Dulles, and then-Representative Gerald Ford, transmitted its report to President Johnson on September 24, 1964. It was released to the public three days later.

Unlike the media scrutiny associated with Wategate and subsequent intensive investigative journalism, the established press of the time did little to refute the Commission's findings. However, critical reaction to the 26 volume document, with its scores of irrelevances and inconsistencies (and, amazingly, no index), was immediate and has remained strong throughout subsequent decades.

In fact, national polls spanning time from the immediate post-assassination period to the present day, consistently reveal that a vast majority of Americans do not believe Oswald acted alone and that some form of conspiracy to kill the President existed.

Says Stone: "We're attempting to create an alternate myth to the Warren Commission, to kind of explore the true meaning of the shooting in Dealey Plaza, what the murder of John Kennedy meant to this country, why he was killed. And the movie unfolds, I suppose, as a mystery, where you unravel layer after layer and you come out at the end with a very strong speculation as to what might have happened.

We don't say, this is exactly what happened and this is who did it. I wouldn't be that presumptuous, nor do I know. I have taken --I think as a good detective would-- all the clues that have presented themselves, put them into one mosaic, followed the clues and come to some conclusions of my own, but, as I say, I present them as speculation, not as a definite conclusion."

Kennedy to me was like the Godfather of my generation. He was a very important figure, a leader, and a prince, in a sense. And his murder marked the end of a dream, the end of a concept of an idealism that I associate with my youth, and that's the reason I particularly was plunged into betrayal and war -- race war, Vietnam, Watergate. The whole laundry list of problems that have bedeviled America since his death... not that I'm saying he would have solved everything, like the King Arthur legend, but there's no question in my mind John Kennedy would never have committed combat troops to Vietnam. He refused to in 1961 and again in 1963, and he told several people he would withdraw them in '65 if he won the election.

So, you know, my life was shaped by his death, as was everybody's alive today of that age. I think the 1990s were very much determined by what happened in 1960. And I think we should all go back now and try to understand what went wrong in 1963 and if we can begin to understand the consequences of that day in November, it will shape the rest of our lives.

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