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Wrow

Stoned out on 'JFK'

In the climactic scene of Oliver Stone's "JFK," New Orleans District Atty. Jim Garrison, played by Kevin Costner, is depicted summing up his foredoomed conspiracy case for the jury.

The summation is more oration than argument, full of anguish and anger over the "conspiracy" that, in Garrison/Stone's view, resulted in the murder of President John F. Kennedy and turned the country away from peace and decency to war and greed.

In a revealing passage, Garrison/Stone compares America at that moment (late 1968, early 1969) to Hamlet, agonized by the murder of his father the king (Kennedy) and haunted by the presence on the father's throne of the usurper-murderers.

Stone, it seems safe to say, intended the Garrison peroration to clinch his case to America in 1991 that Kennedy was the victim of a right-wing *coup*, a conspiracy hatched by a military-industrial complex fearful that he was about to cut off their mother's milk—money—and end their adventure in Vietnam.

What the Garrison speech actually does, however, is make one wonder how firm was the man's purchase on reality. To listen to Costner/Garrison, virtually nobody since Nov. 22, 1963, had died of natural causes. Either they were poisoned or shot or otherwise done away with by "them," all to the end of keeping the conspiracy concealed and themselves in power.

What this entire, relentlessly didactic and polemical movie does is make one wonder about Oliver Stone. To some observers, there is nothing to wonder about. In their view, Stone's entire cinematic oeuvre—"Platoon," "Wall Street," "Born on the Fourth of July" and the rest—have been marked by dishonest ren-

derings of history, simplistic moral constructs and a kind of puerile fatuousness about the 1960s.

Even without going that far, "JFK" gives cause to question this very gifted moviemaker's view of the world. Does he, at this late date, still buy the image of John Kennedy as incorruptible and the Kennedy administration as Camelot? Does he really believe that nation-as-Hamlet business?

"JFK" suggests he does, and that in a sense Stone has never aged, emotionally, beyond Nov. 22, 1963. Evil entered the world that day, imported by "them," and nothing has been right since.

The danger is that Stone's film and the pseudo-history it so effectively portrays will become the popularly accepted version. After all, what can scholarship avail against Kevin Costner, Sissy Spacek, Donald Sutherland, et al., on the big screen with Dolby stereo? What if, for example, there was a conspiracy, but not the one that Garrison/Stone identified?

That's why it is time that the documents and all the physical evidence from the Kennedy assassination—pictures, films, tissue samples and the rest—be made public and available for examination.

Two concerns have always been advanced for keeping these things secret until well into the next century: the sensibilities of the Kennedy family and fear that American national security, vis-à-vis the Soviet Union, might somehow be harmed.

Neither of those ought to be an obstacle now, if they ever should have been. If our history since Nov. 22, 1963, demonstrates anything, it is the cleansing effect of public exposure and the corrosive effect—as in "JFK"—of secrecy.