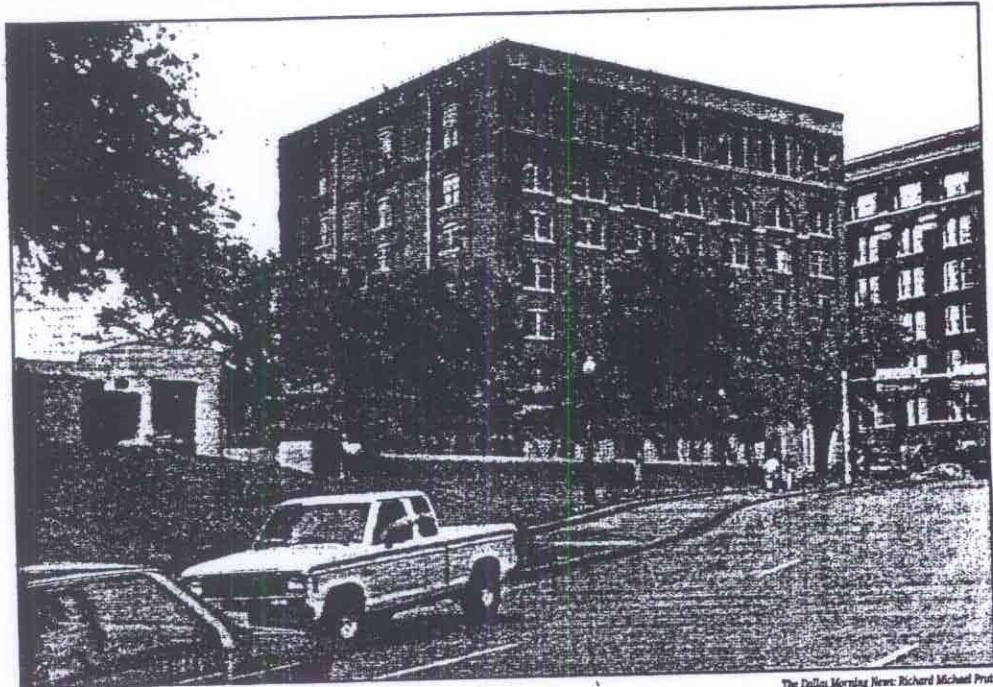


JFK

THE MYSTERY  
BECOMES  
THE MOVIE

The Dallas Morning News: Richard Michael Pratt

Oliver Stone's film company has restored the former Texas School Book Depository to its 1963 look.

## A maverick who's become a power

By Philip Wunch  
Film Critic of The Dallas Morning News

**O**liver Stone ranks 32nd on *Premiere* magazine's new list of the 100 most powerful people in Hollywood — a fact that probably interests the maverick film maker only slightly.

However, the capsule description accompanying the chart is intriguing: "America's cinematic political conscience at a time when most film makers settle for blowing up things . . . Tackles the tough subjects . . . When he finally stumbles, Hollywood will cackle with delight."

Mr. Stone's "tough subjects" include the Vietnam War, Central American politics and — beginning with the filming of *JFK* in Dallas on Monday — the investigation into the John F. Kennedy assassina-

### FILM

tion. He has said that reminding people of things they would rather forget makes him feel "like a janitor, mopping up at the end of the day."

The rise to prominence of this outspoken, liberal director/screenwriter is doubly impressive, occurring in the midst of one of the country's most politically conservative decades. By all rules of Hollywood logic, the movie industry will allow Mr. Stone to make the movies he wants as long as they make an impression at the box office. When he does stumble, Hollywood probably will cackle. Mr. Stone is, after all, an independent, defiant spirit in an industry that often makes its decisions by committee.

During a period in Hollywood when a realistic study of prostitution is rewritten into the Cinderella romance *Pretty*

*Woman*, Mr. Stone stubbornly makes films that might be perceived as "downers." His two most successful movies, *Platoon* and *Born on the Fourth of July*, end on affirmative notes, but the viewer endures a wrenching journey before reaching those positive conclusions.

Governed by political and social views that were radicalized first by his parents' divorce and then by his own Vietnam experiences, Mr. Stone at the least seems obsessed by death. He was shattered by the deaths of two of his heroes, President Kennedy and rock star Jim Morrison, and has been able to soothe his sorrow by making films about their demises.

However, his first film, *Seizure* — made in 1974, before he was 30 — deals with games of death played by a novelist whose nightmares become realities. Rarely seen today, it boasts an eclectic cast (Mary Please see SUCCESS on Page 9C.

# Success hasn't tempered Stone's beliefs

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Wormoy. Horve Villichatz, Troy Donahue) that foreshadows the unique castings of all of Mr. Stone's major films. Even his most ostensibly pacific film, *Wall Street*, was directed as if it were a combat movie.

"The whole Wall Street area is a battle zone, and I filmed it as such," he told *The Dallas Morning News* upon the movie's release in 1987. "The conversations are all filmed like physical confrontations, and even in the ensemble shots, the camera circles in a way that makes you feel you're in a pool with sharks. And that's what those guys are. They're sharks."

## The early years

Nothing in Mr. Stone's early years would indicate such a propensity for the unconventional or confrontational. Born on Sept. 15, 1946, to a Jewish stockbroker ("the old-fashioned, honorable kind of stockbroker," Mr. Stone says) and a Catholic wife, he was raised a Protestant. He lived on New York's fashionable Upper East Side and attended private schools. As an only child, his small world fell apart when his parents divorced. His recent Kol-

ing Stone account of learning of his parents' pending divorce from a cold-hearted headmaster is searing.

Yet it would be too easy to trace Mr. Stone's passion and rebellion solely to disillusionment with his parental role models. The protagonists of *Born on the Fourth of July*, *The Doors* and *Wall Street* did indeed have parental problems, and the young hero of *Platoon* seemed in search of a father figure.

Though Mr. Stone and his father were estranged during Mr. Stone's post-Vietnam years, they reconciled before the senior Stone's death in 1985. The film maker described both Salvador and *Wall Street* to him, and he wanted to make *Evils* as a tribute to his mother, whom he described as "part *Evils* Person, part Auntie Mame."

His father's beliefs have had a lasting effect on him.

"I'm ambivalent about capitalism," he told *Vanity Fair* in January 1988. "My father used to say people need incentives, and I fundamentally believe in that."

According to Ron Kovic, on whose autobiography *Born on the Fourth of July* is based, Mr. Stone provides incentives to his cast and crew. "His directorial style could

be ferocious," Mr. Kovic has said. "Watching him direct was like watching Bruce Springsteen in concert for the first time. He's filled with intensity and passion, like a general who commands great respect."

## An intense connection

Mr. Stone always has felt a close kinship with his characters. In the upcoming JFK film, one wonders if he will feel an alliance with the Lincolnshire district attorney Jim Garrison, played by Hollywood's current golden boy Kevin Costner, or with accused presidential assassin Lee Harvey Oswald, played by Gary Oldman.

At one point in time, there might not have been any question. A January 1989 profile in *Vanity Fair* quotes the film maker describing his state of mind when he lived in the drug-infested Lower East Side tenements of New York during the early 70s, the period after his return from Vietnam when his relationship with his father deteriorated. (The second *Vanity Fair* article appeared while Mr. Stone was giving interviews for *Talk Radio*, and he told local reporters that he felt the writer had painted too dark a picture of him.)

"If the right people had said the right

things to me, I might have gone after Nixon," he told *Vanity Fair*. "If the right people had inspired me . . . if I'd felt the flood was with me. There was a moment there. It could have happened."

"The moment passed," he said. "And the suicidal impulses are gone."

But the passion, fanned by his horridly long wartime experiences, remained. As long ago as 1979, a movie version of *Born on the Fourth of July* was planned. Daniel Petrie was to direct. Al Pacino was to star and Mr. Stone was to write the screenplay.

Three weeks before filming was to start, financing evaporated when Mr. Pacino grew leery of the controversial topic and opted to make *And Justice For All* instead.

He was "devastated" by the reaction to another Pacino movie, 1983's *Scarface*. He wrote the screenplay for the savage gangster drama, directed by Brian De Palma.

"I wrote a violent screenplay with lots of profanity," he told *The Dallas Morning News* in 1987. "Brian doubted the violence and tripled the profanity . . . I learned from *Scarface* that you can't glorify a gangster and not have a good guy to offset him—at least as far as the blue-nosed critics are concerned. Look at the raves De Palma got with *The Untouchables*. He had a very colorful bad guy and a very dull good guy. And the critics accepted it as a balance."

The sharply divided reaction to Mr.

Stone's *Scarface* screenplay made it difficult for him to get financing for *Salvador*, his bitter indictment of the Salvadoran government and the U.S. support for it. However, the critical acclaim for that film, still regarded by many as Mr. Stone's finest, made it easier for him to make *Platoon*.

In an address before the National Press Club shortly after the release of *Platoon* in 1986, he said he personally had witnessed some of the atrocities depicted in the Oscar-winning film.

"Atrocities happened in villages," he said. "On the other hand, I can see what drove the U.S. soldiers to do it."

Mr. Stone has not tempered his political beliefs, stating that a right-wing media blitz prevented *Born on the Fourth of July* from winning a best-picture Oscar and bemouthing the more jingoistic treatments of the Vietnam War in films that followed *Platoon*.

But those who would worry about such a fervent man making a film about the JFK assassination might take solace in the words of Val Kilmer, who played Jim Morrison in *The Doors*.

"Oliver is in love with passion. He is in love with commitment to a cause. But — and this is eternally to his credit — he is also in love with the idea of making a good, entertaining movie."