

More Shots in Dealey Plaza

Oliver Stone returns to the '60s once again with a strange, widely disputed take on the Kennedy assassination

By RICHARD ZOGLIN

Did Lee Harvey Oswald act alone? Were three shots fired in Dealey Plaza on that awful afternoon in November, or were there more? Was there a large-scale, sinister conspiracy behind the assassination of John F. Kennedy, or just one troubled little man with communist sympathies and a Mannlicher-Carcano rifle?

Unanswered questions about the Kennedy assassination have nagged the nation for nearly 28 years, rousing emotions, inciting speculation, provoking arguments. It

in 1969 put New Orleans businessman Clay Shaw on trial for complicity in Kennedy's murder. (The case ended in a quick acquittal.) Stone's script, a version of which was obtained by TIME, is based largely on Garrison's 1988 book, *On the Trail of the Assassins*. Garrison is considered somewhere near the far-out fringe of conspiracy theorists, but Stone appears to have bought his version virtually wholesale. One need look no further than the actor who will play Garrison: Hollywood's reigning all-American hero Kevin Costner.

In the early draft of Stone's script (co-

Lyndon Johnson in office so that the Vietnam War could be escalated. "This was a military-style ambush from start to finish," Garrison tells his staff later, "a coup d'état with Lyndon waiting in the wings."

David Belin, former counsel to the Warren Commission and author of two books on the assassination, calls the script "a bunch of hokum." By ignoring key pieces of evidence and misrepresenting others, Belin says, Stone casts doubt even on issues that are relatively clear-cut, like Oswald's murder of Dallas police officer J.D. Tippit. (Oswald was identified as the gunman at the scene by at least six eyewitnesses.) "It is a shame that a man as talented as Stone has had to go to such lengths to deceive the American public," says Belin.

In his article for the *Post*, George Lardner Jr., who covered the Shaw trial and now specializes in national-security issues,



Stone took great pains to re-create the assassination scene in Dallas, with Steve Reed and Jodi Farber portraying the President and the First Lady. But seven—not three—shots ring out, and conspirators seem to be hiding under every bed.



was probably inevitable that Hollywood would step into this minefield sooner or later—and probably inevitable that the man leading the charge would be Oliver Stone, filmdom's most flamboyant interpreter of the 1960s (*Platoon*, *The Doors*, *Born on the Fourth of July*).

Stone is only halfway through shooting his movie about the assassination, for which he has staged an elaborate re-creation of the event in Dallas. But already the film (at least an early draft of the script, which Stone has tried to keep secret) has come under vigorous assault. The *Washington Post* attacked the movie's "errors and absurdities." Experts on the assassination have voiced outrage at Stone's version of events. Stone has responded with dark hints of a conspiracy to discredit his movie. And who said the '60s were over?

The hero of Stone's film, scheduled for release in December by Warner Bros., is former New Orleans district attorney Jim Garrison, a wide-eyed conspiracy buff who

written with Zachary Sklar, who edited Garrison's book), we learn that Oswald was just a pawn in an elaborate plot that ranged from seedy gay bars in the French Quarter to the corridors of power in Washington. We meet bizarre characters like David Ferrie, a homosexual ex-airline pilot with a homemade wig and greasepaint eyebrows who claimed involvement in the conspiracy but died before he could testify. We witness shadowy meetings between Oswald and Jack Ruby before the assassination. We are told that as many as seven shots may have been fired at Kennedy from three different directions—none of them by Oswald.

The killing was planned, Garrison discovers in the film, by a coalition that included the Mafia, the CIA and other protectors of the military-industrial complex. In a key scene, the crusading D.A. has a rendezvous in Washington with a mysterious unnamed figure who describes how security for the President's visit to Dallas was slackened. It was all part of a plot, he tells Garrison, to eliminate Kennedy and put

called Garrison's investigation "a fraud" and attacked the script for such dubious scenes as one in which Ferrie is murdered by two mysterious figures who force medicine down his throat. (The New Orleans coroner ruled that Ferrie died of natural causes, though two apparent suicide notes were found.) Lardner also ridiculed the film's attempt to explain away Garrison's botched prosecution of Shaw by inventing a Garrison aide who turns out to be a mole for the Feds aiming to sabotage the case.

Even critics of the Warren Commission find fault with Stone's version of events. Harold Weisberg, author of *Whitewash*, one of the earliest attacks on the Warren Report, calls Stone's script "a travesty" that dredges up bogus theories and unfounded speculation. Among them: the suggestion that three hobos arrested near the assassination site were involved (they were vagrants who had nothing to do with the assassination, says Weisberg), and Garrison's "discovery" that the route of Kennedy's motorcade had been changed at the