Ennoble the Cause, Damn the Opponents

Rebuttal of the March/April, 1992
Article in Tikkun on "JFK: The Assassination,
the Movie, and the Cover-up."

by

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March 24, 1992

Mr. Michael Lerner, editor

Tikkun

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Dear Mr. Lerner,

Please excuse my typing and try to understand what you may regard as my effrontery.

In two weeks I'll be 79. I have serious and quite limiting health problems. One requires that I sit with my legs elevated, the typewriter at the side.

The first of my six books on the JFK assassination was the first on the Warren Commission. They are factual, espousing no theoretical solutions. They prove with fact that there was a conspiracy. Because the crime itself was never officially investigated there are no leads for private people to follow and thus one cannot, responsibly, say who did it.

The effect of all the unproven conspiracies alleged, including by Garrison in particular, has been to undermine all legitimate, factual criticism of the official mythology. It also has confused the people even more. This is clearly reflected in may mail, now from about 20,000 strangers, and in innumerable phone calls.

Those who theorize conspiracies and "solutions" and create still

more confusion serve to protect the official miscreants. Innumerable instances are scattered through the third of a million pages on once-withheld official records I got by about a dozen FOIA suits.

The FBI in particular delights in picking and choosing from the wilder and more irresponsible theorized conspiracies what is easily proven wrong and then generates paper showing this to be the case. It then distributes these studies and uses them to support it and the Warren Commission's conclusions and to allege that all criticism is unjustified.

I was shocked at what I read in your magazine, shocked that three of you as ignorant as you are about the subject matter, would write as you did, as partisans defending the most obvious, crudest commercialization and exploitation of all, giving no thought to your own reputations or to deceiving and misleading your readers. I was not shocked at Scott's many factual errors. Nothing new in that.

So, I began writing a letter to the editor several days ago. I finished it today. It grew and is too long for a letter and perhaps is as an article. I am not able to rewrite or edit it but send it to you nonetheless in the hope that you will consider publishing it, critical as it is of you. Less critical than it could have been, though. I realize what this is asking of you, how unpleasant and painful it can be. This would give you the opportunity to cleanse yourself and to demonstrate personal and professional integrity. If you decide to publish it, please feel free to edit it as you'd like but without

making any factual changes on what it says. If you have any questions please ask them. My health now requires that I not take any phone calls after 3:30 p.m. your time. If you'd like my Stone correspondence I'll send it, as I will any documentation you request that is within my present capabilities.

Sincerely, Harold Weisberg

Ennoble the Cause, Damn the Opponents

You and your four intellectuals in your March/April "JFK: The Assassination, the Movie and the Cover-up," remind me that we are the people of Masada and the chassidim; of Yavneh and Bethar; of the Maccabees and the Judenrats - of widely divergent views.

If we are to resolve differences, if we are to come to understand controversies, we must be honestly informed about them. This you neither do nor intend to do. As a result you mislead and misinform your readers. You adopt the propaganda invented by Oliver Stone and along with him pretend that he is the victim of the CIA and its alleged "recipied" reporters who, the The Establishment, were out to get him.

I. The False Premise of the Introduction

You introduce your four learned irrelevancies giving your paraphrase of what Stone lied about (saying it over and over again): that you are "interested in the political meaning of the desperate attempts to discredit Stone's movie" as part of "the continuing cover-up" of the JFK assassination because of the imagined "need to contain and repress the excitement and vitality" of the sixties, which has "never been fully extinguished."

What Stone and you, in your collective ignorance, save perhaps for Peter Dale Scott, who was one of Stone's advisers, are really talking about is one ailing and inform 78 year old--me.

II. Weisberg, not the CIA, exposed Stone

I, not his "CIA," started the exposure of Stone's commercialization and exploitation of the great tragedy of the JFK assassination, on February 8, 1991, by warning him several months before he began shooting, that in basing his movie on Jim Garrison's knowingly dishonest rewriting of his own fiasco, he, like Garrison, would be perpetrating "a fraud and a travesty." When Stone did not respond, I gave a copy of the script and of my own records relating to my preventing still other atrocity Garrison was about to perpetrate, to George Lardner, of the Washington Post, in the hope that once given fair and responsible attention the story would carry itself.

It did, as it should have.

This is center of the controversy, not what Stone immediately lied in saying, Viet Nam.

III. Stone propagandizes his fraud.

On that false issue he skillfully used to propagandize his fraud and travesty, I compare his credentials and mine.

Stone volunteered to go to Viet Nam to kill the innocent. I was on the first of the protests against what we were doing, including that of the writers and editors.

As Stone told another of his advisers (his "Mister X" in his mythology) Fletcher Prouty, he was using the JFK assassination as a vehicle for saying what he wanted to say about Viet Nam. Prouty was accommodating enough to put this in a letter I have.

If Stone had not begun by telling the world that by using Garrison's On the Trail of the Assassins, (the one trail to my personal knowledge Garrison never took) to record their "history" for the people, telling them "who" killed their President, "why" and "how," he'd have had the right to say anything he wanted to say in his movie.

Once he represented that his would be a non-fiction account of that tragedy he was and should have been subject to criticism because, as he knew, he was as big a liar as Garrison.

Neither has the right to rewrite this turning point in our history. Both did.

Compounding his nonstop lying by which he converted the factual criticism of his carefully-designed commercialization and exploitation of the JFK assassination into persecution of himself, Stone on the one hand boasted that he was drawing on "all" that had come to light about it while on the other hand alleging that all official records were suppressed at least until the year 2039.

He and his advisers knew that I alone have about a quarter of a million pages of those allegedly "suppressed" records as the result of a series of Freedom of Information Act lawsuits, some precedental and one resulting in the 1974 amending of that Act to open CIA, FBI, and other such files. They knew also that I have always granted free access to these records to all writers. They had no interest in fact about the assassination.

Stone's sole interest was in the multitude of unproven and mostly untenable conspiracy theories presented as solutions to the crime of the century.

In addition to buying the rights to Garrison's indecency, Stone bought the right to Jim Marrs' uncritical and ignorant compendium of this nuttiness.

What a basis for telling the people their "history," "who killed their President, "why" and "how!"

Stone was and remained so grossly ignorant of the fact of the JFK assassination that in the minutes before ABC-TV aired him on "Nightline" January 22 he had to ask his "research coordinator," Jane

Rusconi, how to respond to questions he expected to be asked!

The satellite was live before the show was aired, their animated consultation was on the satellite and I have a transcript of it.

He asked her, "Quickly. Head stuff," referring to the fatal shot, "What shall I say?"

About the "magic bullet," so impressive in his movie, albeit none of that new, he asked her not only what to say, "Anything, quick," he also asked her to explain "in what sense" it is "preposterous!"

About the former general counsel of the House Select Committee on Assassinations, he asked her, "Jane, quick, Blakey," what should he say. When one of the Stone's other "experts," a man, said of G. Robert Blakey, "... let him call for opening the files" because "he's the one who's keeping the seals," or keeping those records suppressed," Expert Rusconi added, "He is the one." Stone asked her, "He is the one?" and she repeated this falsehood, "Yes..."

Rusconi even had to tell Stone to say "that one thing all researchers agree on is that the government hasn't told us the truth about what happened."

This flaunting of abysmal ignorance of fact about the JFK assassination and its investigations was a month after the film was released, when it was already a success, when it was already a Warren Report from the other side.

IV. The four Tikkun authors

A. Peter Dale Scott.

How one of your four fairies-and-needles, boys, Peter Dale Scott, could have been an adviser to Stone and not have perceived his ignorance about and indifference to the fact, and that of those around him is not easy to see or to explain.

Scott's contribution to your cover-up of what Stone pulled and your propagandizing in support of it is headed, "The Assassination and the Cover-up: What Really Happened?" Not fact but unproven and unprovable theories supported (if that is the right word) by repeated factual error that reflects factual ignorance by a supposed expert, is what you give your readers.

Some of it is pretty far out, referring to an all-encompassing conspiracy that includes all but the Sisters of the Poor. Like Stone, Scott says that those who killed JFK and those in government who covered the crime up are all part of this single vast conspiracy. In involving Lyndon Johnson and his "financial backers" Scott says, "I'll go even farther than Stone and say" they are included in the conspiracy. His proof?

"At least one of these people presciently brought a lot of stock in his own aerospace firm prior to the assassination, which to me is a clue that he knew the assassination was coming."

One can as persuasively prove the moon is made of green cheese.

B. Michael Lerner.

Michael Lerner's improvisations on the grim reality of what Stone really perpetrated is typified by his praising Stone for making a hero of Garrison, who "embodies in the film that sense of empowered outrage that made him feel entitled to seek the truth and courageous enough to take risks to change a reality he found appalling."

What is really appalling is the ignorance this reflects and Lerner's pontifications based on ignorance.

Aside from what he cribbed from books and then did nothing to advance, what Garrison did was make it all up as he went. He had no factual basis for anything. Witness the acquittal of Clay Shaw--by the jury that believed there had been a conspiracy--in less than an hour.

How did Garrison "seek the truth?"

As I told Stone in my February 8, 1991 letter, when Garrison's staff failed to talk him out of charging new Grassy Knoll assassins to commemorate its fifth anniversary, two of them asked me to try to prevent this additional monstrosity. My investigation did that. In Garrison's book and in the first draft of Stone's script this is not only unrecognizable - it is disguised as a CIA plot to wreck Garrison when Garrison himself made it all up out of nothing at all.

One example: he planned to charge Robert L. Perrin with being a 1963 JFK assassin even though he knew Perrin had killed himself in New Orleans in 1962!

This is heroic, courageous, reflects a sense of outrage and seeks

the truth, Lerner's words?

C. Todd Gitlin

Todd Gitlin's irrelevant pontifications, which repeat the canard that the factual criticism I started was "The Stoning of Oliver stone," does criticize the movie--for what does not exist: "its neglect of the Oswald-Ruby-Cuban-mob connections."

He swallows and holds down that assassination mythology while further reflecting the dependence that can be placed on what he says:

"Stone's sainted JFK tried and tried again, in camera, to kill Castro. Fact: Conspiracies are routine."

There is not a scintilla of evidence that JFK tried to have Castro killed or even that done; and in October 1962 he publicly guaranteed to protect Cuba from any invasion in the solution to the Cuba missile crisis. He had been negotiating with Castro on two levels when he was assassinated, officially at the United Nations and unofficially through the French reporter, Jean Daniel.

D. Peter Gabel

There remains Peter Gabel's "Spiritual Truth of JFK."

He begins by referring to one of Stone's contradictions of Stone, that the movie he never stopped describing as factual is a "myth". Throughout his article, where it deals with fact about the assassination or the movie, which is not often Gabel shows that he really knows nothing at all about fact. For his contribution he does

not need to.

On the simplest level he says that the Warren Commission published "twenty-six volumes of testimony." Only 15 were of testimony. And he refers to what also does not exist. "The evidence marshalled together by conspiracy theorists." What they "marshall" is not "evidence," any more than what Garrison developed was "evidence." Not one brought to light anything that was both new and factual about the assassination or its investigations.

Gabel himself is so lost in the utter nonsense twisted off on a still-sorrowing people he cites the conspiracy-theory junk on which he depends that "the phones in Washington shutting down just before the assassination," proves a conspiracy.

The phones were overloaded by people calling each other after the assassination and that, not some imagined conspiracy, is what caused some of the phone circuits not to work temporarily.

The utter childishness of repeating this fiction is reflected by the fact that in an official conspiracy there was no need to shut the phones down at all.

Stone said that his movie tells "the spiritual truth" so Gabel, without question, says that it does. It holds no truths, despite your efforts and those of your four literati, who in varying degrees are ignorant of the established fact about the assassination and its investigations to tell your readers the exact opposite, that it does.

V. Summary view of the four.

All four mis-state the crux of the controversy.

Ignorant or worse, Gabel also quotes Stone as saying the opposite of what he had been proclaiming for months, that "the movie is a myth."

All-wise and all-knowing, your four ignore Stone's public record, that except when he had to appear to give a little or when for other purposes its served his immediate interest, Stone insisted that his movie would tell the people their "history" and "who" killed their President, "why" and "how."

All four ignore what does not serve to advance their personal agendas. This is no way to inform your readers about this major controversy now become international. It is not journalism. It is propaganda.

VI. Stone as an effective liar

A. As a propagandist

In his movie and in his enormous number of statements about it once I began exposure of its deliberate dishonesty, Stone was a remarkably effective propagandist. As in writing about "Stone's Technique" in Vogue (Entertainment, 1. 17. 92) Steve Daly observed, "Ennoble the cause, damn its opponents. These are the prime rules in crafting propaganda" which Stone uses "to sensational effect."

Thus I became the CIA and those who reported on Stone accurately were "a lot of paid-off journalists...with their recipied political

theories...a thousand and one vultures" who "want to come down and just peck out my eyes and rip my guts out," as he told The Texas Monthly (12/91 p. 164).

Why? Because "There would be a revolution if the truth comes out about the assassination," as he told JFK-bashed Andrew Kopkind. (Vogue, 1/92, p. 66). "They would lynch major congressmen who covered it up, and they would start a new government, somewhere west of the Mississippi."

B. As a historian.

The covering up, as anyone at all familiar with the official JFK assassination investigations at all knows, was most of all by the FBI and the Warren Commission. Stone, too, knew this, but fact and truth did not serve his purposes in that interview so, consistent with his personal definition of "history" and with damning his opponents, Stone made this up and got away with it.

1. A personal definition of history

His, or at least one of his definitions of "history", as quoted by Robert Sam Anson in Esquire (11/91, p. 93) is "a bunch of gossip.... What is history? Who the fuck knows."

If nobody knows what history really is, how can anyone, including Oliver Stone, record it as from the outset he promised his movie would do?

2. As a historian

Historian Stone - and make no mistake about it, he has said over and over again that he is a historian and wants to be remembered as such, that he hopes it will be his "legacy" - knew from my February 8, 1991 letter that he would be making a film of a "fraud and a travesty." (See for example Mother Jones, March/April 1991; USA Weekend February 22-24, 1991). He knew he would be criticized.

He knew before he started shooting in Dallas that George Lardner of the Washington Post was working on a story. So, considering himself "a person who's taking history and shaping it in a certain way," (Esquire November 1991), as he did in the script that rewrites this history, he decided to do this also by controlling press access.

Quite literally, with Dallas' approval, he took and kept control of Dealey Plaza, the assassination area, and his paid guards prevented Lardner and others from visiting the Grassy Knoll even when there was no filming.

He also began to ease off on his description of his movie as history but he never stopped making that misrepresentation.

Talking about his movie to the Dallas Morning News (4/14/91) he said one of its importances is that it "would get this history lesson out there."

After other references to it as history, when he finished shooting in Dallas and moved to New Orleans, he was interviewed for the Times-

Picayune by David Baron. (4/24/92) Knowing New Orleans would be friendly to him he slipped back closer to his original assurance. He described his movie as "the larger story, which is why Kennedy was killed and how we think it was done and who did it."

Milking his false pretense of filming history at every opportunity, after the movie was done he grumbled to GQ (1/91), "Some people will say we're fiction. I would have avoided all this bullshit if I'd said this is fiction from the get-go."

But if he had, as he well knew, he'd not have caused this major controversy that assured him even greater wealth and added honors. He could not have gotten all the free advertising he and his movies got if he had begun by telling the truth.

To truth, as his record on this movie alone leaves without question, he is a stranger.

But as he insisted throughout that his movie was completely factual, as Richard Bernstein of the New York Times wrote (7/28/91) "Every point, every argument, every detail in the movie, he (Stone) says, has been researched, can be documented and is justified," so also did he tell The Texas Monthly (12/91) after the movie was in the can, in its words, "he won't give an inch about the factual accuracy of JFK. Stone says his movie portrays history."

VII. The real issue: Stone's lies.

This, not Viet Nam and not the agendas of your issue's pursuers of

personal agendas in terms of Oliver Stone's propaganda -- really, his lies--is the real issue.

He said he would record our history in his movie when he knew before he started shooting that he would not and could not from Garrison's disgraceful dishonesties and the stupidities and ignorances in the fictions in Marrs' Grossfire.

In some ways it is an awfuller truth that he never intended to record the truth about the JFK assassination.

For, as he told Prouty, he was using that great tragedy as a vehicle for saying what he wanted to say about Viet Nam.

As fiction, he had that right. As non-fiction he did not. He described his movie from the "first `get-go'" as non-fiction.

As Daly put it, he ennobled his cause and damned its opponents, those he could not sucker.

You were so willing to be suckered!

You owe your trusting readers the admission of this, the truth.