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Remains of the day, **CLOCKWISE FROM ABOVE:** John and Jacqueline Kennedy arriving in Dallas, November 22, 1963; Jack Ruby at a pretrial hearing; Jacqueline Kennedy (with Robert Kennedy) after bringing the president's body back to Washington; Lee Harvey Oswald being escorted to Dallas police headquarters after his arrest. **OPPOSITE:** Kevin Costner as District Attorney Jim Garrison in Oliver Stone's latest '60s flashback, *JFK*.

was stung by the early criticism, which he said was based on the first draft of a script that had since undergone major revisions. And he answered the charges with a detailed defense of his theory and Garrison's evidence.

As long as the assassination remains a public issue, the facts and their interpretation will remain in dispute. It is now almost impossible to tell whether the studies of the case constitute knowledge or counterknowledge. Whole tracts may be written on whether Oswald, on his way to the movies, shot Officer Tippit just after Kennedy's murder. Who can tell whether "Clay Bertrand," who called a New Orleans lawyer to arrange representation for Oswald, really was Clay Shaw? Were the "tramps" spotted and briefly detained by Dallas police near the grassy knoll just after the shooting part of the plot or merely tramps? And was one of them E. Howard Hunt, of Watergate infamy, in tramp drag?

Such speculations, which were fascinating to only a few for these many years, may soon be household topics. If Stone et al. are true harbingers of a Kennedy revival, the arguments of a rather rarefied group of buffs, nuts, and scholars could gain a new national currency. Just why it should all surface again at this time, after so many years of low visibility, is another imponderable that still begs to be pondered.

For one thing, the generation of Americans for whom the assassination was the first traumatic world event is now coming into early middle age. It is a point when people for the first time feel they have "arrived" somewhere in life, and they may look back to see the landmarks that led them to where they are. They think of television shows they saw as teenagers, they remember their partner at the senior prom, they recall leaving home, finding a first job, starting a family. Oliver Stone—as well as many of the people he hopes will see his movie—is at that forty-something age when the past becomes detached from the present and may be seen clearly for the first time as prologue to the rest of life.

More than that, the post-Vietnam generation of Americans continues to have the sense that something went wrong—terribly, terribly wrong—in some strange season many years ago, and it appears that nothing will set it right. There may be no connections in fact, but in many minds the assassination of John Kennedy is tied to the assassination of his brother Robert and to the killing of Martin Luther King. And those deaths are inextricably bound up with Vietnam, with racial strife, and with the counterculture of the 1960s: in other words, with the material of Stone's films. It's as if America took a wrong turn and got lost: government betrayals, economic dysfunction, interethnic hatred, scandals, and a certain sense of social devolution have not been cured by wars in Central America or the Middle East, nor by investment banking, crystals, or health clubs.

Stone believes that he has found the worm in the apple of American history, the original sin that started the deterioration and decay of the last thirty years—virtually all of his adult life. It is there in the six seconds of the Zapruder film, as the limousine swings into Dealey Plaza.

"They killed Kennedy because he was rocking the boat, he was rocking the establishment on all fronts," Stone told me. "I don't think he was a saint, and I don't think he would have saved us from all the bad things that happened. I believe that he was a good man who had integrity. He was the leader of our generation. People like me, we believed in him, he was our Godfather. I don't believe that he would have escalated the war in Vietnam the way Johnson did. They knew that, the people who wanted the war. And he paid for it." ●

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