

# Open the JFK records

The assassination of John F. Kennedy remains a defining moment for a generation of Americans — a wretched opening act to a decade whose legacy ultimately would be dashed hopes, disillusionment and body bags.

Many people, Oliver Stone among them, have a need to make sense of the act and the era. In Mr. Stone's case, making sense means conspiracy in the broadest and most incredible terms: The CIA, FBI, government leaders, businessmen, all out to see President Kennedy dead because they were afraid he would pull out of Vietnam.

Mr. Stone's foundation for such a scenario, laid out in his movie "JFK," is paper-thin. Yet the movie is striking a chord — two chords, actually, but harmonious on at least one point.

To millions of Americans who never quite believed the Warren Commission's single-bullet theory, the film resurrects all the doubts and questions. Even those who don't buy Mr. Stone's grand-scale coup d'etat wonder who had what to gain by President Kennedy's death. They want the records, many of which have been sealed until the year 2029, opened for public inspection.

Then there are those who have devoted a good chunk of their lives to investigating the assassination. They range from Sen. Arlen Specter, the Philadelphia Republican who is a main proponent of the single-bullet theory, to former President Gerald Ford, who sat on the Warren Commission, to Rep. Louis Stokes, the Ohio Democrat who chaired the former House

Assassinations Committee which found there probably was a small-scale conspiracy involving organized-crime figures.

These men also are calling for the records to be unsealed — but on the grounds that disclosure will dispel suspicions, not that they contain some previously unreported salient detail. "The files don't contain information that alters publicly disclosed information," Rep. Stokes told the Associated Press.

Because the House sealed its records (a typical step in investigations where innocent persons might be harmed by unsubstantiated charges), it will take a vote of the House to open them. Releasing documents held by the FBI and CIA would require a law signed by the president.

The passage of time overrides whatever privacy interests might have justified sealing the records. And there seems to be no national-security argument against opening the records, a position supported by former FBI and CIA director William Webster and a growing number of congressmen, including Sen. Edward Kennedy.

It is bothersome that the impetus for this latest move to unseal the documents comes from a film of dubious historical merit. "JFK" may be the impetus, however, but it is not the reason. The reason to open the 800 boxes of raw data and interviews sealed by the Assassinations Committee (as well as other documents) is that Americans crave more information about this defining moment in their history.

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