

Two Wrongs Make a Right

by

Harold Weisberg

Letter to Tom Oliphant criticising his column
praising Oliver Stone's movie JFK

Table of Contents

	Page
I. Oliphant's column praising JFK bizarre.....	1
II. Bona Fides of Harold Weisberg.....	2
III. Stone's pre-film knowledge of JFK's falsity.....	3
IV. Stone's absurd claim of a cabal against him.....	4
V. Oliphant's failure to do his homework.....	4
VI. What Oliphant could do to right the wrong he committed.....	5
VII. Stone and history.....	7

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Two wrongs make a right

Mr. Tom Oliphant
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Dear Mr. Oliphant,

I. Oliphant's column praising JFK

Your "Inside Washington" affirmation of P.T. Barnum's perceptiveness about suckers, surprising from an experienced and sophisticated reporter, and your to me amazing comment that amounts to two wrongs making a right (The Warren Report is wrong therefore any criticism of it like Garrison/Stone's is right) plus the ignorance of the subject matter as well as the actualities of Oliver Stone's crude and overt commercialization and exploitation of the great tragedy of the JFK assassination serve to confuse the still sorrowing people and to provide additional protection for the official miscreants who never investigated the crime and never intend to.

(My apologies for my typing. I'm almost 79, seriously impaired and must sit with my legs elevated and the typewriter to one side.)

Like Jim Garrison, Oliver Stone has trouble telling the truth even by accident.

Not having seen the movie, which I will not waste time on and do not have to in order to be able to tell you what I say, I do

not know whether he has yet modified one of his more flamboyant lies that he knew was a lie before he first uttered it. In its original form it was that "all" official records were suppressed until the year 2039 except that the CIA could suppress its into perpetuity. If I heard you correctly you said 2029, which means that after many months of promoting himself and his movie he finally corrected his arithmetic. From what you said he seems now to have reduced this fiction to the records of the former House assassins committee.

II. Bona fides of Weisberg

I am a former reporter, investigative reporter, Senate investigator and editor, and World War II intelligence analyst (OSS). I am the author of the first book on the Warren Commission, five others on it and the other official investigations, of one on the King assassination, and there is no theory in any one of them.

Responsible theorizing is impossible because the government never investigated the crime itself and never intended to. I'll provide the documentation if you'd like it.

write I have this documentation as the result of about a dozen FOIA lawsuits. Some were precedental. One led to the 1974 amending of the investigatory files exemption of the Act. As everyone working in the field knows and as I told Stone when I first ~~work~~ met him 2/8/91, I make these records - about a quarter of a million pages - available to all writing in the field. Virtually all will, I know, write what I disagree with.

III. Stone's pre-film knowledge of its falsity.

If not earlier, Stone knew before he began his endless repetition of this (and, of course, as any informed person would know, endless other) lie, from my letter, that more than this considerable volume of records is and long has been available. About 200 cubic feet were mostly available in the Archives beginning in late 1965.

I wrote Stone in considerable detail as soon as he said that he was basing his movie on Jim Garrison's "On the Trail of the Assassins". I know, I was there, and that was the one trail personable, persuasive and not infrequently eloquent Garrison never took. I was to have been his "Dealy Plaza" expert until I belatedly learned what his case was and that it was no case at all against Shaw. So, I was never in the courtroom, never laid eyes on Shaw. But from personal experience and observation I came to know Garrison and what he was up to better than I wanted to. The plain and simple truth is that, aside from cribbing from published works and then enlarging on this, what he really did is make everything up, never bringing anything factual and new to light that was in any way really relevant.

One of the illustrations I gave Stone was his planned commemoration of the fifth assassination anniversary that I broke up. This is entirely unrecognizable in the book. He was, among other things, going to charge Robert Perrin, former husband of Warren Commission witness Nancy Perrin Rich, with being a 1963 Grassy Knoll Assassin even though he knew that Perrin had killed

himself in 1962, in New Orleans. Garrison simply invented the fairy tale that the conspirators, 14-15 months before they pulled it off, killed a Venezuelan seaman and gave him the name "Perrin" while Perrin, in this fairy tale, lived to be an assassin under the name "Starr".

If you want copies of my Stone correspondence, I'll be glad to send it.

You can get a quick opinion on my dependability by phoning George Lardner. He has seen my records of the investigation I made that prevented that additional Garrison desecration of the great tragedy of the JFK assassination.

IV. Stone's absurd claim of a cabal against him.

Stone has been claiming for months that a combination of reporters in the CIA's pay and the "Establishment media" are out to get him. He made this up, too, knowing better.

When he did not respond to the letter I refer to above and when I was given a copy of the script, believing that what turned out to be true would follow, I interested Lardner. His story was 100% accurate and Stone's response was close to 100% inaccurate and false. As I told him with detail in a second letter the day after his article appeared.

It became what it deserved to be, a self-perpetuating story.

V. Oliphant's failure to do his homework

I'm surprised that you would write as I've been told you wrote and speak as I heard you speak without familiarizing

Two wrongs make a right

yourself with what Stone had said and what had been said about him and his project. I am surprised that you could be in Washington as long as you have been and not know that much more than the 250,000 pages of once-withheld records that I have are readily available. In Stone's Post article alone he lied about this. (What he really talks about when he talks about doing his "homework" and using all that "information" he says is "all" other than Garrison produced, is the nutty and unproven theories and when he talks about "experts" and "researchers" he is talking mostly about those who invented, enhanced or wrote about these theories.)

If you read Lardner's story you knew I was his source and I was as close as your phone. Another Globe reporter spoke to me at some length when he planned a story. And there are other subject rather than conspiracy-theory experts you could have consulted - I think as a responsible reporter, should have.

Whatever you had in mind you have become part of a monster disinformation and misinformation and a sordid commercialization and exploitation. If you had done your "homework" you'd have known this. As one who has come to respect you from seeing you on TV, I regret this very much because I came to respect what you said. I think you have now undermined your credibility very much.

VI. What Oliphant could do

to right the wrong he committed.

I do not know whether you want to try to undo the harm you have done, whether you want to satisfy yourself that you have done

harm, or whether you can begin to undo the harm you have done to your own reputation and to the nation. If you want to, I'll take all the time you want, beginning by sending you copies of what I wrote to Stone, with details of what he knew and what he could have learned before he made this fraud and travesty you praised so highly.

If I understood you correctly, and you shocked me so much I am not at all certain, you believe that there are secrets that could solve the crime in the records of the House assassins. There cannot be because the FBI never wanted any and because the House assassins did not really investigate the crime itself. It had its own agenda, beginning with trying to refute published criticism (Blakely never once mentioned me in the pre-hearing narrations) and I know that it, meaning its general counsels, began with the determination to support the official mythologies.

However, even about this Stone lied. Mark Allen and I both filed FOIA requests for the records given to that committee. Serious health problems prevented ~~by~~ pursuing this but the lawyer who had been my lawyer, Jim Lesar, filed successful litigation for Allen. As a result more additional records than Stone and his staff would take the time to read that were provided to that committee have been available since before Stone saw the personal and commercial possibilities of Garrison's disgustingly dishonest self-justification. Lesar, who can confirm much of what I say, is, I think, out of town briefly. His phone is 393-1921. His office is at 918 F St., NW.

VII. Stone and history.

Despite what you may know of Stone's more recent claims, he began by telling the world that his film would record their history for the people, that it would tell them who killed their President, why and how, and this is what made me decide to speak to Lardner when Stone did not respond to the letter you are welcome to have along with the other things I offer. He cannot claim that he never represented he would present a nonfiction account and he never had anything else in mind, only the attractive fictions. Waiting until after his movie was out made criticism meaningless. Criticism also enabled him to make himself into the honest man that from his movie he is not and did not intend to be.

Sincerely,

Harold Weisberg

Washington's attack on Oliver Stone's 'JFK' is ridiculous

By THOMAS OLIPHANT
Boston Globe

Washington, D.C. — Before you see the film "JFK" (which, if you've any sense, you will), you should know something about the city that lurks and hovers menacingly throughout Oliver Stone's riveting tale of murder and deceit — this one.

It's important because of an ironic twist to the politics of Stone's latest work, which, as art, is simply magnificent; as historical drama, is honest on a level few here will understand; and, as polemic, is devastatingly effective.

This is the city whose best and brightest failed to solve the assassination of a president to the public's satisfaction, and to the minimum standards of thoroughness and logic, despite nearly a decade of all-out support for its official investigation from the journalistic and political establishments.

And yet, after nearly two decades of continual pummeling of the still-official version in the world of print (suffered nearly in silence), much of the town is aghast at the appearance of this film and has taken after Stone with a vengeance.

The irony is multiple and ludicrous.

The town whose main indus-

try has been failing with monotonous regularity since the day John Kennedy was murdered dares to condemn a dramatization of one of its most despicable failures.

The town whose paralyzed government is the deserved butt of national humor doesn't even understand that its media mobilization against Stone can only backfire spectacularly.

The town whose remaining defenders of the "One Lone Nut Murdered By One Lone Nut" version of the crime (including, by the way, presidents and Congresses who routinely refuse to reopen the case) insist that the rest of us believe them and also refuse to help make public the reams of evidence in the case that will otherwise remain locked up until the year 2029.

As ever undeterred by its ridiculous position, Washington's attack upon Stone consists of two major points:

■ He alleges a conspiracy so vast (military, intelligence, industrial, right-wing fruitcake, Cuban exiles, the FBI, Texas authorities, even Lyndon Johnson) as to be ridiculous.

Stone does no such thing to my eyes. In his spellbinding blend of drama, documentary, and even dramatized documentary, he suggests possibilities

through his characters and then illustrates them.

His point of view is clearly that President Kennedy's murder originated in military-intelligence opposition to post-Cuban-missile-crisis changes in policy away from the Cold War, against a second invasion of Castro's Cuba, and, above all, against Vietnam.

However, Stone leaves one free to accept all or none of his suggestions; only elitist Washington would assume a mass audience of zombies, incapable of viewing a political film carefully and critically.

■ He has built his story around a fabricated hero — Jim Garrison, the former New Orleans district attorney — who was an incompetent buffoon, who slandered a local businessman in the pursuit 24 years ago of an imagined network of assassination conspirators in the city's low-life community.

Not so. "JFK's" Garrison has visible, and large, warts, and is well within the boundaries of dramatic license as portrayed by Kevin Costner.

The passage of time, moreover, has strengthened the real Garrison's basic case. The businessman (the late Clay Shaw) lied in denying ties to the CIA, and witnesses insist to this day

they saw him with Lee Harvey Oswald and the bizarre character Garrison believed drove to Texas in time for the assassination to be the real killers' getaway pilot (the late David Ferrie).

History is not always what is left when falsehoods and rumors are professionally discarded; history can also be the prod-

uct of political power's warping tools. The Warren Commission's 28-year-old report is at least in part that; it failed in its declared purpose long ago.

In conversations here and in California, Stone told me he sees JFK as myth in the classical sense of the term, meaning allegory that points to an inner truth.

As such, it is credible; it is honest. Stone asks us to consider the possibility that John Kennedy's murder was, in effect or in fact, a coup d'etat.

We don't have to, but it is interesting that Washington's attack on him does not include any hint of a willingness to let us see that long-suppressed evidence.