

Cineaste  
200 Park Ave.,  
New York, NY 10003

6/8/92

Dear Cineaste,

I regret that someone up there apparently preferred anonymity because I'd like to express personal thanks for sending me your current issue. I enjoyed it as neither you nor any of your mavens can appreciate and I welcome it as an outstanding contribution to the file I am collecting for the historical record, this part relating to Oliver Stone's vulgar and unhidden commercialism and exploitation of the JFK assassination.

It would be difficult if not impossible to equal the space devoted to uncritical adulation and to mythologies believed to be and treated as fact when they are not.

Consistent with this your mavens have no contact with reality. They write about what they imagine and once having imagined alchemize it into fact. What is not true thus becomes important if not basic in what they write and you published uncritically, and they are supported in this by the other nuts who are their authorities, all living and thriving and praising or condemning from their tooth-fairy dream world.

Most of all, I think, I enjoyed Oliver Stone's flaunting of his own ignorance and prejudices along with his providing new proof of what I told him, that like Garrison he has trouble telling the truth even by accident.

The questions you asked him (and Rusconi) would not do credit to an apprentice high-school journalist. Your question about me is of this character and quality. It begins with a presumption that is got only untrue, it is the opposite of the truth, that my opposition to Stone's rewriting of our history and of Garrison's is because I allegedly "feel" that my "turf has been invaded by an outsider." Naturally Stone took your lead and responded, "...here I am making a film about Garrison's story instead of his own." He introduces this by saying, "Weisberg has never been constructive." As he rewrote our ~~most~~ history, he does the same with the meaning of words.

I first wrote Stone - and you are welcome to copies of the correspondence if you want it, as from your adulation I think you will not - February 8, 1991, after reading ~~first~~ that he had announced that he would be filming their history for the people, telling them "who" killed their President, "why" and "how." Despite his being forced to moderate this big claim after exposure began and before those he suspected might <sup>not</sup> credit it, when he pretended in varying formulations that he had never said any ~~sh~~ such thing. And then he said he would do this based on Garrison's "On the Trail of the Assassins."

Like most others I was impressed by Garrison and believed that his excesses and his endless self-contradictions as he addressed every microphone, open pad and sycophantic magazine were as he represented, his fighting of fire with fire. (I did not, as Stone says, ask him to write the "foreword," not the "prologue," as Stone says, to my Oswald in

New Orleans. The published did that, without my knowledge, and it delayed the book because of the time it took Garrison to write those seven eloquent pages.) But a few days after the 1968 election and a few before the fifth anniversary of the JFK assassination I had to face The Garrison relativity.

Two of his staff members closest to him and most deeply involved in what, for lack of an appropriate word for his shenanigans, I'll err in calling his "investigation" asked me to try to do what they had failed to do, prevent his planned commemoration of that fifth anniversary with what would have been an additional national disgrace and additional undermining of all legitimate criticism of the official JFK assassination mythology.

Stone told you of what I wrote him, "I could never understand the basis of his problems with Garrison." I did not write Stone about any ~~of my~~ alleged "problems with Garrison." I wrote him in detail and with documentation, offering more and to answer all his questions, to let him know what he might be doing with his own reputation and to an understanding of what really happened, <sup>GIVE HIM</sup> <sup>WITH GARRISON out to</sup> of our history. In the hope that you have the language facility of pre-high school kids that if we believe Stone he does not, I'll tell you what I told him. And if you also cannot understand it, I'll ask a local high-schooler to put it in <sup>terms</sup> ~~terms~~ and words of that age. *enough for you.*

After considerable internal and secret contention, Garrison's staff, led by Jim Alcock, later a judge, had gotten him to reduce the number of Grassy Knoll assassins he was about to name and charge for that fifth anniversary commemoration to two men. One was Edgar Eugene Bradley, west-coast representative of the ultra Cape May, New Jersey radio preacher the Rev. Carl McIntire. The other was Robert Lee Perrin.

The exclusive basis for make <sup>ING</sup> an assassin of Bradley was Garrison's mis-identification of him, along with innumerable other misidentifications of him and the other two men in those utterly irrelevant photographs known as "the tramp pictures." So my first investigative effort was to establish the truth about them. It has since been confirmed by the disclosed Dallas police records. Two still live, have been found and identified themselves in those <sup>of</sup> pictures. They were boozing in a park <sup>ed</sup> railroad boxcar a block west of the scene of the assassination and two and a half blocks south of it. They were walked off the only way possible, an hour and a half after the shooting, in front of the Texas School Book Depository building. There news photographers were snapping pictures of everything that ~~was~~ moved. In an effort to show the lack of any possible relevance when these fictions first got invented and as they varied, all regarded by Garrison and those who cooed and ahead at his feet at the absolute and unquestionable truth, I got nonsensical explanations. Not that anyone had alleged that the CIA had <sup>INVENTED</sup> ~~invested~~ guns that shoot around corners and sights that make it possible. The closest thing to an explanation of what assassins were doing hanging around in a cul de sac an hour and a half after their crime, is that they were "paymasters!"

While I am confident from reading your articles that there is nothing farther from

your mind of interest, I have a carbon copy of my investigative report that did prevent that additional Garrison national disgrace and you are welcome to read it.

Stone, by the way, persisted in claiming that those pictures were and remained relevant after he learned the truth he did not question. Of such do Oscars come.

Robert Lee Perrin had killed himself in New Orleans, on Garrison's trip, in 1962. Garrison knew this. I have a copy of his copy of the report of his staff investigator informing him of it. It is marked up by Garrison himself.

Now how did I get that and some of the other evidence?

Garrison's own investigators did my leg work and his chief investigator assigned them to it. His staff lawyer who asked my help provided the copies of the existing records I needed. Of them this reflection of Garrison's knowledge is one document.

So, how was Garrison going to charge a man dead 15 months with being a JFK assassin?

No trick at all for the endlessly imaginative Garrison. As with all else, he just made it up, as I cautioned Stone, who was basing his movie and vesting his personal and professional reputation on Garrison. *(I gave Stone much more detail.)*

Perrin, in Garrison's mythology, lived under the alias "Starr" ~~and~~ as a free-lance writer while a Venezuelan seaman was offered by the conspirators, ~~and~~ worked 15 months before the JFK assassination, and buried with Perrin's name.

Garrison abandoned his (ugh!) "commemoration" and fired an innocent man whose real crime was uncritical devotion to ~~him~~, <sup>blaming</sup> him for being a CIA operative who had "penetrated" his staff to wreck his investigation. <sup>His, too, is fiction.</sup> "Bill Boxley," whose real name was "Wood," had been hired by Garrison personally, over strong staff objections, and was paid from private funds. <sup>He was not a city employee, as Stone had him.</sup>

In the hope that unlike Stone, or at least unlike what he told you, you can "understand" this, I move on.

Stone said, "Weisberg has never been constructive," hardly a fair representation of giving him an accurate advance warning of what he was getting into, and, of me, "I don't think he is a very generous man. I think he is a petty man." So, this warning, only part of ~~me~~ what I alerted him to, was "petty."

As the result of about a dozen "Freedom of Information lawsuits, some precedental and one leading to the 1974 amending of the Act to open FBI, CIA and similar agency files to FOIA requests (how could anything be less "constructive," huh?) I've obtained about a third of a million pages <sup>of</sup> ~~of~~ once-withheld records. Most of them are in the JFK assassination. As just about everyone working in the field knows, I do not regard these records as personal property, do believe that the Act makes me surrogate for the people, and I have always made them available to others writing in the field. Most, I know in advance, will write what I do not believe. Maybe this is what <sup>Stone</sup> ~~Stone~~ had in mind when he described me to you as <sup>not "generous" and</sup> "a strange and cranky type." Because of my age, I'm now 79, and serious health problems that limit my mobility, in practise those who use my files do so without

supervision. They ~~also~~ also have unrestricted and unsupervised use of my copier.

Because with the advent of my illnesses I was less able I decided that to the degree possible I would keep for our history as complete and accurate a record as possible of what others wrote and produced. Thus I have a separate file of all the ~~key~~ <sup>many</sup> who had free and unsupervised access to my records for the 25th JFK assassination anniversary. You are welcome <sup>to</sup> examine it and see for yourself. Not that what you publish prompts the belief truth or reality hold any appeal to you.

Another of Stone criticisms of me is a remarkable disclosure of his own approach to truth and reality, to his devotion to fiction like the fiction with which he is enriching himself <sup>self</sup> about the JFK assassination:

"But I have never seen him propose an alternative scenario or even start to have an interest in one."

Well, now, he certainly knew I had a great interest in ~~one~~ "scenario," his! He knows very well, although by his lies he converted it into an asset, that it was not the CIA, as he said on innumerable occasions, not his hundreds of "recipied reporters," not even "The Establishment" that began the criticism of the fraud and the travesty he produced. As he knows very well, I did it and he knows why,

To Stone as to his sycophants like you, history, fact, scholarship, investigation, analysis, requires only a "scenario." It all has to be imagined.

In order to report the fact and the truth about the assassination of their President to the people in my books I had to have a "scenario?" One different than his or Garrison's or the Warren Commission's? *In fact, that is what I published in seven books.*

If Stone like his clique and hero were not subject-matter ignoramuses they <sup>id</sup> know and would have reported the documents I got by FOIA litigation that leave it without question that the <sup>crime</sup> ~~crime~~ itself was never investigated and never intended to be. (Be my guest if you doubt this.) As a result there are no legitimate, factual leads to be followed.

So, if one has any concern for fact, for truth, for history, for informing the people truthfully and accurately, one has to make it all up and like Stone describe it as real, as true and factual?

If not accepting this gruesome concept of how representative society works, ~~writes~~ of the responsibilities those of us who undertake to inform the people about <sup>major</sup> ~~major~~ issues, makes me "strange" and guilty, I enthusiastically plead <sup>guilty</sup> ~~guilty~~!

(Resumed later. My apologies for my typing. It can't be any better. I have to sit with my legs elevated, the typewriter to the side. With impaired vision for hunt-and-pack typing.)

Stone now claims he could not understand what I wrote him. He knew it was about Garrison, on whose book he was basing the movie he did not start to shoot for another two months. I told him that from personal knowledge I knew that book was a fraud and a

travesty. I am confident those words Stone can understand. And rather than asking me for any more information, of which I had plenty, or documentation, again an abundance, or <sup>asking</sup> any question at all, he was silent. <sup>He</sup> Is to this day ~~save for his flunkies.~~

Stone several times referred to me as a thief because I had his script. It was given to me. If I'd <sup>w</sup>anted to steal it, that would have been a physical impossibility. My source did not steal it. And <sup>as</sup> I'm sure you know, Stone had to give many copies away to get his "fraud and travesty" started. That's where the script I was given comes from.

After I read the script, and was really shock<sup>ed</sup> by it, by the gross ignorance of both Stone and Sklar where Sklar is supposed to be an expert, when Stone cared so little about trashing our history and the people's minds, was so unconcerned about making a hero out of a tragic charlatan, I gave the script and access to my records relating to what I'd written Stone about to George Lardner, Washington Post reporter I've known for 25 years, an accurate <sup>and</sup> informed reporter. His story was accurate. It was read and picked up extensively. It is the beginning of the exposure of the <sup>stones</sup> crass exploitation and commercialization of that tragedy. Not <sup>by</sup> the CIA. Not <sup>by its</sup> "recipied" reporters. Not <sup>by</sup> The Establishment. A single man, 78 years old then and outraged at <sup>stones</sup> ~~his~~ contempt for all things decent and for the people who make him rich and famous, so great a contempt he proceeded with what he had been told is a fraudulent book, <sup>asking no questions</sup> One possible explanation is what he told Fletcher Prouty, his "Mr.X." Prouty repeated it in a letter: Stone was using the JFK assassination as a vehicle for what he wanted to say about Viet Nam.

Stone's response to Lardner's story was published by the Post last June 2. As usual, he was full of the nutty theories, insisting even on the relevance of those "tramps" when they were ~~of~~ relevant to nothing at all. I wrote him the next day calling his errors to his attention.

To that letter Rusconi responded. Her letter of June 17 was eight days getting into the mail, I presume until Stone OKed it. It was a snotty letter and it was a thinly-disguised invitation to be bribed. Stone says I wanted him to do his movie about me. I suppose this is merely another proof that there is nothing to dishonest, to cheap and abandoned when he is started on one of his projects. In any event, what I wrote him through his Rusconi is the exact opposite of what he told you.

After telling her that <sup>they</sup> we could still have unsupervised access to all my FOIA records I responded to their solicitation ~~me~~ to be bribed in these words: "The last thing I want is any kind of relationship with the obscenity of which you are part."

For all his professed lack of understanding, I am certain Stone understood that.

So what did he do, this man you fawn over so? He told the press that I was helping him! <sup>Sklar</sup> ~~blat~~ repeated the same lie.

And when I wrote him asking him to stop doing that, Stone was not man enough to reply to that either.

After Stone finished his film and was promoting it he was on Nightline. There and

elsewhere it was apparent that even after making his movie he was still ignorant about the fact of the JFK assassination. He was interested only in the untenable theories.

Those he consulted were these theoreticians not one of whom is a dependable subject expert, an authentic <sup>accurate</sup> expert.

Before the Nightline show was aired the satellite was live. Stone used those few minutes to ask Rusconi how he should reply to simple factual questions about the <sup>ass</sup>assina-  
tion. Like, "Quick, ~~quick~~, what do I say about the head shot?" the fatal <sup>shot</sup> inju- he <sup>made</sup>  
so much about. The satellite was taped. I have a transcript- given to me, not stolen.

There is no point in taking any more time to let you know how utterly ridiculous you are to those who do not substituted their and the wild ravings of others for fact, but you really did print a bunch of childish crap from supposed experts who don't know or care a ~~damned~~ thing about <sup>of</sup> fact of truth.

Stone is a hero to sycophants like you. To me he is a contemptible liar, a man who while professing his love for JFK was crapping on his corpse by his crude and crass commercialization of his assassination. He is a liar, regularly. And he is yellow. He did not dare face an aged and inform man and instead <sup>of</sup> uses captive mouthpieces like you to slur and lie about *me. He suckered you and all the others. Be proud!*

That there were so many like you, editors who shed all editorial responsibility, made no effort to check anything and repeated so often the palpably false and irrational, is your own self-characterization.

My work, although you ~~do~~ have no way of knowing it from those subject-matter ignoramuses, Stone and his "research coordinator," is an in-depth study <sup>of</sup> both the assassination and the failure of all our basic institutions then and since.

So I welcome your contribution to the record I leave for history, for those who do more than pimp and whore in their writings and "research," so that Americans in the future will know who lied and about what, who failed them enriching themselves at the same time, who care <sup>d</sup> in fact, not in oft-repeated words that are no more true than "love" in the mouth of a whore.

With wholehearted contempt and disgust for your "journalism,"

*Harold Weisberg*  
Harold Weisberg



JFK and LBJ

Oswald, Ferrie and Ruby conspire over drinks in Ruby's club in JFK

lence is by no means a figment of Stone's imagination. Lansdale was principal overseer of Operation Mongoose, the umbrella for CIA-sponsored attempts to invade Cuba and assassinate Fidel Castro, which continued even after the Cuban Missile Crisis and JFK's order to shut down anti-Castro operations. The CIA-funded training camps in Florida and Louisiana where David Ferrie and Oswald cavorted, as depicted in *JFK*, were run by Lansdale; their existence is substantiated by photographic evidence. The Mongoose operation included a variety of 'buffer' groups protecting the CIA and the U.S. military; Mongoose has been well-documented for its employment of Mafia types, Cuban exiles, and American mercenaries of an extreme rightist stripe.

The House Select Committee on Assassinations, for all its failings (its former Chief Counsel, G. Robert Blakey, is the key proponent of 'The Mafia Did It' theory—he denounced *JFK* as "leftist fantasy"), provided information that not only gives X more authority and resonance, but may also point to, in the words of British researcher Anthony Summers, "the heart of the matter." HSCA staffers strongly believed that a Lansdale colleague, David Atlee Phillips, using the pseudonym "Maurice Bishop," was a mentor to Lee Harvey Oswald while Phillips was supervising phases of the Mongoose scenario. An HSCA witness to this effect was Antonio Veciana, organizer of the anti-Castro paramilitary organization Alpha 66; Veciana claimed Bishop/Phillips (Veciana's case officer) tried to coerce Veciana into assisting with the framing of Oswald, but Veciana declined. Although Veciana nervously declined to name Phillips as Bishop outright, the HSCA, particularly chief investigator Gaeton Fonzi, believed Phillips (who became CIA Chief of Western Hemisphere Operations and orchestrated the coup against Chilean President Salvador Allende) and Bishop

were the same man.

Among the film's more nitty-gritty issues provoking protest-too-much media outrage are the connections alleged between Lee Harvey Oswald and Clay Shaw. To suggest that these connections actually existed, and were of a political/ clandestine nature rather than a personal/casual nature, is to vindicate Garrison entirely and allow a view of Shaw that the media and the Justice Department (of both Johnson and Nixon) refused mightily from the first moments of the investigation. To this day Shaw is an unjustly maligned, "Kafakesque" figure (Shaw's own favorite expression), a victim of a McCarthy-style (and antigay) persecution (as if Garrison's key attackers held anything but reverence for McCarthy).

A few points need to be made country-simple. First, Louisiana law prescribes that a prosecutor bring his/her case before both a three judge review panel and a Grand Jury before the accused can be brought to trial. Garrison did this in the Shaw case; after the Grand Jury examination, Garrison was forced to proceed with the trial. Contrary to popular anti-Garrison narratives, the trial was postponed two years not by Garrison (who was forced to watch his witnesses and evidence disappear) but by the Justice Department and conservative governors (including Ronald Reagan) who refused to extradite witnesses. As *JFK* suggests, by the time of the trial Garrison's case had been so picked apart and compromised that he used it chiefly to demonstrate the nature of the conspiracy. Surprisingly, the film makes little use of the most compelling evidence Garrison had against Shaw. Among Garrison's Grand Jury and trial evidence were dozens of eyewitnesses who saw Oswald with Shaw, Ferrie, and Guy Banister in the summer of 1963, including a number of CORE volunteers who witnessed Shaw, Ferrie, and Oswald disrupt a voter registration drive in Clinton, Louisiana (an important moment the

movie strangely overlooks) in one most bizarre episodes of the JFK assassination story

Second, although the Shaw moved for acquittal, few commenters have paid close attention to the outcome. The jury felt that (a) Garrison proved a conspiracy took the President Kennedy, and (b) Shaw perjured himself on a number of issues, including his relations with David Ferrie (Judge Haggerty heard the case, later said he believed Shaw lied on all substantive issues). An unprecedented move, the Justice Department blocked Garrison's motion for acquittal on the grounds of perjury. Shaw was unable to convict him beyond reasonable doubt for a role in the murder since Garrison failed to demonstrate the key motive of Shaw's connection with the CIA. Since the earliest, a wealth of information has become available demonstrating CIA connections, most importantly CIA agent Victor Marchetti's 1977 revelation that, at the time of the Garrison inquiry, then-CIA Director Robert Helms expressed great concern over suspects Clay Shaw and David Garrison, regularly asking senior officers to give them all the help they could. Both Helms and William Colby succeeded Helms as Agency head, but insisted on Shaw's CIA affiliation, but insisted he was merely an occasional informant in the CIA's Domestic Contact I program (an informant about what?). This is that Shaw was always adamantly denying any CIA association.

In fact, research shows that Shaw was more than an international businessman giving occasional tips to the CIA, nor was he merely the prosecutor observing David Ferrie's young anticommunist, anti-civil liberties provocateurs (the main role he ascribes to him). Cumulative research including work done by the French and Italian governments, shows that Shaw worked for U.S. intelligence since

Tom Sharrett

ment to fully investigate the JFK assassination.

**Cineaste:** Some of the JFK assassination scholars have taken a very contentious attitude toward your film. Is this another example of specialists who feel that their turf has been invaded by an outsider? Harold Weisberg, in particular, is very negative about the film.

**Stone:** Weisberg has always been a strange and cranky type. Years ago he asked Jim Garrison to write the prologue to his book, *Oswald in New Orleans*, but now he seems to think Garrison is the devil incarnate and I am his son or something. He wrote long, rambling letters to us, but I could not understand the basis of his problem with Garrison. It seems to be a minor thing.

Weisberg has never been constructive. He did a good job using the Freedom of Information Act to get information out and he obviously attacked the Warren Commission report as a whitewash. But I have never seen him propose an alternative scenario or even start to have an interest in one. He was never positive about the House hearings and he has been just cranky about a lot of the other researchers' work. I don't think he's a very generous man. I think he's a petty man. Why did he feel like that about the film?

*Must be a character, not just a person*

He's the dean of the researchers, the oldest one, and here I am making a film about Garrison's story instead of his own, but he didn't do anything in the public vein like Garrison did. Garrison is the only official to carry out a public prosecution. Who ever approached him?

**Cineaste:** The press has criticized you for attempting a hard-sell of your own specific interpretation of the assassination conspiracy, but isn't the author's message of the film as you have it, say, in so many words, "Don't take my word for it. Think for yourself" in the film?

**Stone:** I'm presenting what I call the countermyth to the myths of the Warren Commission report because, honestly, I don't have all the facts. The best smoking gun we have is the Zapruden film, which is a time clock of the assassination. Beyond that, there are all these files that could be opened to bring out more truths. The best I can do is present a hypothesis which will hopefully encourage people to move away from the Warren Commission report and maybe read some books or at least to question the concept of our government's covert operations. What did The New York Times/CNN poll show, that fifty percent of the American people believe the CIA did it and eighteen percent believe the military did it? That means sixty-eight percent of the American people believe their own government killed JFK. That's far more than those who believe the Mafia theory's a petty

**Cineaste:** Do you believe that the assassinations of Robert Kennedy and Martin Luther King, Jr. grew out of the JFK assassination conspiracy?

**Stone:** Yes, as I said at the National Press Club, and I'm speculating. Here are three progressive leaders, three of the most important antiwar leaders of the Sixties, each gunned down by a lone nut, and each of them under suspicious circumstances, with suspect ballistics and forensic evidence. It all happened so fast. The country was in a bloodbath at that time—we had Vietnam going on, race wars—we didn't have much time to connect those two assassinations back to John Kennedy's. Very few people pointed that out at the time of the Warren Commission report because, honestly, I don't know. Larry King told me that he interviewed Garrison in 1968, and when discussing Robert Kennedy's assertion that, if elected President, he would pull out of Vietnam, Garrison commented that Kennedy would die weeks before he did. So much for Garrison as a kook. He saw it coming. In fact, in his book *A Heritage of Stone* in 1969, he pointed to the winding down of the Cold War as a possible motive for the death of John Kennedy.

**Cineaste:** In this regard, the question constantly thrown at me is, "Why did you invent X?" I didn't invent X, he actually existed. Why did it?

**Stone:** That means sixty-eight percent of the American people believe their own government killed JFK. That's

ed. X is based on L. Fletcher Prouty, who told me this story. He never met Garrison but I took the liberty of transposing it. You must keep in mind that Jim Garrison was reached essentially the same conclusions in 1968-69.

**Cineaste:** Why didn't you use Prouty's name in the film?

**Stone:** Because the man does not want to be known. I'm he says. He doesn't want to be traced. He's wearing civilian clothes and he's not easily traceable. I will not testify, says. I can only give you the background, you do the foreground. "Do your own work," he says, and leaves him on a park bench.

I don't agree with everything Prouty says, but he's very intelligent and he makes it clear to me the way the assassination could have been pulled off. He ascribes it to professionals and assassins whereas other people have pointed Mafia hit-men like Charles Harrelson. I myself really do know, I'm torn.

Fletcher is...well, you've got to consider the history of a man. He's done a lot, he's seen a lot. He can really tell you how they did things, what the mechanics were, he knows the way things work. He briefed Bissell and Dulles in the homes, as he said. I don't know why, just because late in life he became a member of the Liberty Lobby, the men won't talk to him, whereas they're willing to talk to Richard Helms who we know lied to the Warren Commission when he said that Oswald had no connection with the CIA when in fact they had a 201 file on him.

**Cineaste:** JFK features some remarkable cameo performances by major stars. How did they become involved? Any performers you approached turn you down for political reasons? Why do they?

**Stone:** I went to Marlon at one point but I don't think it turned us down for political reasons. I just think it was a matter of money. We had a problem with Robert Mitchum too. A lot of people turned us down for money reasons because we really didn't have a budget for each star. All supporting cast really pitched in and I thought it was a best repertory company I've ever had. Best Supporting Actor nominations should be there for a lot of them. They're all good that in a way, they almost cancel each other out. E. G. Marshall is so good, that is, that no one really sticks out.

**Cineaste:** That helps carry the film, too.

**Stone:** That was my point. Remember *The Longest Day* was a black and white movie, produced by Darryl Zanuck. Very documentary-like in its approach, but it was filled with stars—I loved it. Since *JFK* is a very cerebral movie, I thought it would help to offset the facts and the dryness to have familiar signposts along the way who you felt comfortable with.

**Cineaste:** How long was your first cut of the film and did many major scenes get eliminated?

**Stone:** The first cut was about four and a half hours and many scenes were eliminated. For me, the worst part of cutting stuff you like. We had the Clinton witnesses made all the important connections between Shaw, Feinberg, and Oswald. We had a lot more Shaw stuff which I dropped because ultimately it's four movies—it's Garrison New Orleans against Shaw, it's Oswald's background story, it's the recreation of Dealey Plaza, and it's the deep background in Washington, D.C. I mean, the film is so big. It's important for people to see it in one sitting, so I cut a lot of stuff I liked. I cut the business at the airport where it was almost set up in the men's room, and the Bill Buckley thing, and I also had to cut a wonderful scene with a Johnny Carson type.

**Cineaste:** Was the editing style of the film preconceived or simply necessitated because you were interweaving so many simultaneous events?

**Stone:** Well, it's a bit of both. It was preconceived, I had a lot of flashbacks in the first draft. I wanted to do a very dramatic thing. I had a lot of flashbacks in the first draft. I wanted to do a very dramatic thing. I had a lot of flashbacks in the first draft. I wanted to do a very dramatic thing.



# Striving for Authenticity

AN INTERVIEW WITH JANE RUSCONI

by Gary Crowdus



**J**ane Rusconi, who worked as Research Coordinator on JFK, is a 1988 graduate of Yale University where she received her B.A. degree in Philosophy and Psychology. Cineaste spoke with Rusconi in late January 1992 via telephone from the Santa Monica office of Ixtlan, Oliver Stone's production company.

**Cineaste:** What did your job as Research Coordinator involve?

**Jane Rusconi:** Oh, everything really, from working with Oliver and the technical advisors, researchers, and historians to locating photos, film, and other information. It involved, for example, getting photos of Dealey Plaza and other locations we'd be using, finding out for the art department what kind of clothes people wore when they testified before the Warren Commission, and getting films of the real people so the actors could hear what their voices sounded like.

Every day I'd prepare material to have on the set for whichever scenes we were shooting that day. If we were filming a scene in a hearing room, we'd have the real transcript there in case we needed to check something. We had a lot of technical advisers, too—if we were shooting a scene in the Dallas police station, we'd make sure we had a retired police officer there.

There are lots of minor things that don't show up in the film. For the scenes in the Book Depository, for instance, we made up 3,000 exact replica boxes, with the same stamps and printing on the side. These are details that few people will appreciate or even notice, but it's an indication of the great lengths we went to for authenticity. That wasn't just me, it extended to the prop man, the art directors — everybody wanted to make this film dead accurate, and I think we did. At least people haven't been criticizing that aspect of the film. Of course, production design is most successful when it doesn't call attention to itself.

**Cineaste:** Did you actually read a few hundred books on the subject, as Oliver mentioned?

**Rusconi:** It seems like it [laughs] and, if not completely, I certainly read that many sections of books. It's a tremendous undertaking.

**Cineaste:** Did you have any previous interest or expertise in the Kennedy assassination?

**Rusconi:** I knew a bit about it, I'd read a few books, but not terribly much. I wasn't an assassination buff by any stretch. Basically my job was to become an expert on the Kennedy assassination because, as Oliver says, he likes to have all his information in one person's head.

**Cineaste:** We understand that nearly 600 books have been published on the JFK assassination.

**Rusconi:** Yes, but after a while you can pretty much tell which ones are good and which ones aren't. The approach I took was to try to read as much of everything that I could. I read David Belin's book which says that Oswald did it alone, and I read the books which say that the Mafia did it, those

which say Castro did it, another which says Oswald was a KGB double, and so on. You read through all of this stuff to see what you can get out of it. I also read books on a lot of other aspects, like books on Vietnam, the CIA or covert operations, the anti-Castro Cubans, and so on. When you start to study the Kennedy assassination, you get an excellent education in the history of the period.

There's also an incredible network of private researchers who have done work on the case and I've gotten to know just about all of them. They were a tremendous help to us and were, almost without exception, extremely generous about sharing information and lending support.

**Cineaste:** Which researchers and scholars did you draw on most heavily?

**Rusconi:** That's a tough question because there actually is a convergence of ideas in the research community. In other words, there are basic conclusions about the assassination that most researchers share. Probably the main one is that the government—or elements of it—was involved on some level. There are differences, of course—somebody might think Texas oilmen were responsible, another thinks it was LBJ's cronies, someone else blames it on Division Five of the FBI, etc.—but because of the evidence that's been developed, there is a convergence of ideas.

In terms of good books on the subject, it goes without saying that Sylvia Meagher's *Accessories After the Fact* gives the best case against the Warren Report. Once you've read that, you have no choice but to reexamine the evidence of the whole case. Probably the best compendium of research is Jim Marrs's *Crossfire*, although it's poorly footnoted. Then there's an excellent book on Oswald by Dr. Philip Melanson called *Spy Saga*. It's a terrific book, about 200 pages, which focuses on Oswald and his intelligence connections. For more advanced students, there are some great books by Peter Dale Scott, like *The Dallas Conspiracy* and *Crime and Cover-Up*, really intricate work with lots of odd sources and footnotes.

**Cineaste:** What sort of fact-checking did you try to do?

**Rusconi:** We tried to do every kind, although you're not always able to. It went down to the minor points of what color car somebody was driving that day — that's an extreme, trivial example — or in making sure that if we refer to, say, fifty-one witnesses, that there were actually fifty-one.

**Cineaste:** What sort of documents were you able to go back to? If we're critical of the mainstream press for failing to do their homework on the JFK assassination and instead just citing each other and thereby perpetuating errors and inaccuracies, we must acknowledge that this can also be a tendency amongst the assassination scholars and should be guarded against.

**Rusconi:** Right, and that brings up one of my biggest criteria for knowing whether a book is good or not, which is the footnotes. If the footnotes are good, then you generally know that the book has a lot of value. If you see something in a

book and there's no footnote for it, you try to find it somewhere else. There are excellent primary sources in Washington such as the Assassination Archives and Research Center, or the Center for Defense Information, a nonprofit organization where you can check things like what the defense budget was in 1960. Another great place is the National Security Archives which can provide copies of all the declassified National Security Action Memos. We also used the volumes published by the Warren Commission and the House Select Committee on Assassinations.

**Cineaste:** Isn't it true that most if not all of the facts and speculative theories dramatized in JFK have been available for years in the various books on the assassination and that the national controversy over the film has flared up because all this information has for the first time been popularized and made available to a mass audience?

**Rusconi:** Yes, I think that's happened. We shouldn't play down the impact of these books — which started to come out in 1966, when a lot of people stopped believing the Warren Report — and we must give credit to the pioneering work of people like Harold Weisberg, Mark Lane, and Sylvia Meagher. When you write a book, the information lies kind of low, but a movie brings it to everybody's consciousness, it makes it undeniable in a way. You can ignore a book, but you can't ignore a movie. And it's a good movie, too, with three dimensional portrayals of people — Oswald, for example, becomes a real person.

**Cineaste:** The mainstream press has charged that JFK is based on "spurious evidence" and has called it everything from "a fantasy" to "a pack of lies." How do you respond to those charges?

**Rusconi:** I think what the press is doing is starting their own worst failure in the face, and that's further evidenced by their attacks on the film. Rather than actually going out and checking on the information in the film, they started screaming "spurious evidence" and "trick photography." Running psychological profiles on Oliver Stone has been another popular pursuit.

If you look at *The New York Times* or *The Washington Post*, they've had a really crazy role in this thing from the start. *The New York Times* always equated its point of view with the government's—they published their own edition of the Warren Report—but this changed in 1979 with the HSCA findings of a probable conspiracy. The *Times* kept defending the Warren Commission, although recently they've begun to refer to Oswald as the "accused assassin," rather than calling him "Kennedy's assassin," as they have for twenty-eight years. Of course, this happens after we pointed it out to them in a letter.

There have been some really good reporters for smaller papers. Earl Golz is probably the best—he was at *The Dallas Morning News*, now he's at *The Austin American-Statesman*. He did wonderful work in Dallas in the 1970s tracking down and talking to witnesses and reporting on the JFK case.

Generally, the media is lazy—most newspapers are content with reporting government press releases as 'news' and they just don't know the subject. Tom Wicker, for example, talks out of both sides of his mouth, condemning the movie as long-discredited and then saying we were right on Vietnam. TV programs like *Nightline* tend to go for the easy, textbook version of events rather than examine the complexities and contradictions in the official story. They rely heavily on government officials or retired officials who, in many cases, will have a rather biased or at least limited knowledge of the subject. We should all know by now that a government official is not always a credible source, especially when you're looking critically at the government's role in something.

For some reason, everybody accepted the official version early on and just dug their heels in. It's hard to know now if



Jane Rusconi (far left) during rehearsal of a scene for JFK

they still believe the Warren Commission Report — v to say that they believe something that the governm longer believes — or if they're so far behind becau didn't get it in the beginning and they didn't keep up they didn't pay attention. Dan Rather actually adm somebody off camera — they were doing an interview *Hours* — that he felt bad that he'd screwed up the the beginning and that he wanted to set the historica straight. That's interesting, maybe there's some guilt

There are some good reporters out there at som news services, like States News and Reuters, & reporters at *Variety* and *The Hollywood Reporter* are they really know what they're talking about. Maybe a matter of time before the Old Guard takes their ig into the retirement home.

**Cineaste:** Considering somewhat darker interpretations possible that some of these journalists are what the "propaganda assets"?

**Rusconi:** Well, they do exist. I'm sure you're refe Oliver's comment on George Lardner here. Lardner esting because he did some very good reporting on ti hearings, some very good questioning of people, problem with Lardner isn't that he appears to be so of CIA plant. The problem with Lardner is that his journalism makes fun of both sides and tears eve pieces. It's totally nonconstructive and that's w upsetting. You admire his instincts and his abill people to talk to him, but he ends up smearing ever a totally snide manner. Who needs that?

In this regard, have you read Carl Bernstein's Stone article on the CIA and the media? It's a fantas and the best thing Bernstein ever did. It discu Church Committee revelations about intelligence i academia and the media. It appeared in 1977, whil Bush was head of the CIA, and he does not come favorably in this article. The CIA basically admit they were responsible for the writing of over 1,000 b that they had over 400 journalists on their payroll books and which journalists, we don't know. We do a few cases like Hal Hendricks, who was very invo the CIA, but you can't tell, really. Besides, ascrib motives to people is never a very good way of resp them.

**Cineaste:** Well, it's too easy in a sense, and it's al best way to respond if you're trying to defend against charges of paranoia.

**Rusconi:** Sure, we can say, "No, we're not para don't think these people are part of the conspiracy. It up to ignorance." Then you think, "Wait a minu is really worse?" I mean, if they were working for tl least they'd know the real story. Here we're fightn people who just don't know the facts.

## The Allen "NOBODY READS" Dulles Memorial Bibliography of the Ten Best Books on the JFK Assassination

Our bibliography was compiled by inviting a number of JFK assassination researchers and scholars to send us their recommendations, from which we have listed, alphabetically by title, the ten most often cited books. Those polled include Mary Ferrell, independent researcher; Larry Howard, Director, JFK Assassination Information Center; Robert T. Johnson, Assistant Director, JFK Assassination Information Center; John Judge, cofounder of the Committee for an Open Archives, independent researcher, and author; James H. Lesar, President, Assassination Archives and Research Center; Al Navis, Almark & Co., Booksellers; Carl Oglesby, founder, Assassination Information Bureau, and author; Jane Rusconi, Research Coordinator for JFK; Zachary Sklar, author and cowriter with Oliver Stone of JFK; and David Wrono, coeditor of *The Assassination of John F. Kennedy: A Comprehensive Historical and Legal Bibliography, 1963-1979* (Greenwood Press).

### THE TEN BEST BOOKS

*Accessories After the Fact: The Warren Commission, the Authorities & the Report* by Sylvia Meagher (Indianapolis, IN: The Bobbs-Merrill Co., 1967; NY: Vintage Press, 1976, 1992).

*Best Evidence: Disguise and Deception in the Assassination of John F. Kennedy* by David Lifton (NY: Macmillan Publishing Co., 1980; NY: Carroll & Graf Publishers, 1988).

*Conspiracy: The Definitive Book on the J.F.K. Assassination* by Anthony Summers (NY: McGraw Hill Book Co., 1980; NY: Paragon House, 1989).

*Crossfire: The Plot That Killed Kennedy* by Jim Marrs (NY: Carroll & Graf Publishers, 1989).

*High Treason: The Assassination of President John F. Kennedy and the New Evidence of Conspiracy* by Robert J. Groden and Harrison Edward Livingstone (Boothwyn, PA: Conservatory Press, 1989; NY: Berkeley Publishing Group, 1990).

*Reasonable Doubt: An Investigation into the Assassination of John F. Kennedy* by Henry Hurt (NY: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1986; NY: Henry Holt and Co., 1987).

*The Ruby Cover-Up* by Seth Kantor (NY: Kensington Publishing Corp., 1992) Originally published as *Who Was Jack Ruby?* (NY: Everest House, 1978).

*Six Seconds in Dallas: A Micro-Study of the Kennedy Assassination* by Josiah Thompson (NY: Bernard Geis Associates, 1967; NY: Berkeley Books, 1967, 1976).

*Spy Saga: Lee Harvey Oswald and U.S. Intelligence* by Phillip H. Melanson (NY: Praeger Publishers, 1990).

*Whitewash* series by Harold Welsberg (self-published by the author), including: *Whitewash: The Report on the Warren Report* (1965); *Whitewash II: The FBI-Secret Service Cover-Up* (1966); *Photographic Whitewash: Suppressed Kennedy Assassination Pictures* (1967); *Whitewash IV: Top Secret JFK Assassination Transcript* (1974).

### BOOKSHOPS AND OTHER RESOURCES

Almark & Co., Booksellers, P.O. Box 7, Thornhill, Ontario, Canada L3T 3N1, Phone (416) 764-BOOK

Tom Davis Books, P.O. Box 1107, Aptos, CA 95001, Phone (408) 476-6655

The Last Hurrah Bookshop, 937 Memorial Avenue, Williamsport, PA 17701, Phone (717) 327-9338

The President's Box Bookshop, P.O. Box 1255, Washington, D.C. 20013, Phone (703) 998-7390

Prevailing Winds Research, P.O. Box 23511, Santa Barbara, CA 93121, Phone (805) 566-8016

Harold Welsberg, Route 12, Old Receiver Road, Frederick, MD 21702

Assassination Archives and Research Center, 918 F Street, N.W., Suite 510, Washington, D.C. 20004, Phone (202) 393-1917

Committee for an Open Archives, P.O. Box 6008, Washington, D.C. 20005-0708, Phone (202) 310-1858

JFK Assassination Information Center, 603 Munger/Box 40, Dallas, TX 75202, Phone (214) 871-2770

National Security Archive, 1755 Massachusetts Ave., N.W. Suite 500, Washington, D.C. 20036, Phone (202) 797-0082

### VIDEOS

*Best Evidence* (VHS, 25 mins.): Produced by David S. Lifton; available from Rhino Video, 2225 Colorado Ave., Santa Monica, CA 90404-3555, Phone (213) 828-1980.

*The Men Who Killed Kennedy*: Five one-hour episodes directed by Nigel Turner; originally broadcast Fall 1991 on the Arts & Entertainment Network. For further information, contact A&E, 235 E. 45th St., New York, NY 10017, Phone (212) 210-1331.

*Reasonable Doubt: The Single Bullet Theory* (VHS, 51 mins.): Directed by Chip Selby; available from White Star, 121 Hwy. 36, W. Long Branch, NJ 07764, Phone (908) 229-2343.

*Who Didn't Kill...JFK* (VHS, 60 mins.): Directed by Jim Marrs; available from 3-C Home Video, Montebello, CA 90640.

For comprehensive video listings, contact the Assassination Archives and Research Center. ■

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JFK and LBJ

Oswald, Ferrie and Ruby conspire over drinks in Ruby's club in JFK

lence is by no means a figment of Stone's imagination. Lansdale was principal overseer of Operation Mongoose, the umbrella for CIA-sponsored attempts to invade Cuba and assassinate Fidel Castro, which continued even after the Cuban Missile Crisis and JFK's order to shut down anti-Castro operations. The CIA-funded training camps in Florida and Louisiana where David Ferrie and Oswald cavorted, as depicted in *JFK*, were run by Lansdale; their existence is substantiated by photographic evidence. The Mongoose operation included a variety of 'buffer' groups protecting the CIA and the U.S. military; Mongoose has been well-documented for its employment of Mafia types, Cuban exiles, and American mercenaries of an extreme rightist stripe.

The House Select Committee on Assassinations, for all its failings (its former Chief Counsel, G. Robert Blakey, is the key proponent of 'The Mafia Did It' theory—he denounced *JFK* as "leftist fantasy"), provided information that not only gives X more authority and resonance, but may also point to, in the words of British researcher Anthony Summers, "the heart of the matter." HSCA staffers strongly believed that a Lansdale colleague, David Atlee Phillips, using the pseudonym "Maurice Bishop," was a mentor to Lee Harvey Oswald while Phillips was supervising phases of the Mongoose scenario. An HSCA witness to this effect was Antonio Veciana, organizer of the anti-Castro paramilitary organization Alpha 66; Veciana claimed Bishop/Phillips (Veciana's case officer) tried to coerce Veciana into assisting with the framing of Oswald, but Veciana declined. Although Veciana nervously declined to name Phillips as Bishop outright, the HSCA, particularly chief investigator Gaeton Fonzi, believed Phillips (who became CIA Chief of Western Hemisphere Operations and orchestrated the coup against Chilean President Salvador Allende) and Bishop

were the same man.

Among the film's more nitty-gritty issues provoking protest-too-much media outrage are the connections alleged between Lee Harvey Oswald and Clay Shaw. To suggest that these connections actually existed, and were of a political/ clandestine nature rather than a personal/casual nature, is to vindicate Garrison entirely and allow a view of Shaw that the media and the Justice Department (of both Johnson and Nixon) refused mightily from the first moments of the investigation. To this day Shaw is an unjustly maligned, "Kafakesque" figure (Shaw's own favorite expression), a victim of a McCarthy-style (and antigay) persecution (as if Garrison's key attackers held anything but reverence for McCarthy).

A few points need to be made country-simple. First, Louisiana law prescribes that a prosecutor bring his/her case before both a three judge review panel and a Grand Jury before the accused can be brought to trial. Garrison did this in the Shaw case; after the Grand Jury examination, Garrison was forced to proceed with the trial. Contrary to popular anti-Garrison narratives, the trial was postponed two years not by Garrison (who was forced to watch his witnesses and evidence disappear) but by the Justice Department and conservative governors (including Ronald Reagan) who refused to extradite witnesses. As *JFK* suggests, by the time of the trial Garrison's case had been so picked apart and compromised that he used it chiefly to demonstrate the nature of the conspiracy. Surprisingly, the film makes little use of the most compelling evidence Garrison had against Shaw. Among Garrison's Grand Jury and trial evidence were dozens of eyewitnesses who saw Oswald with Shaw, Ferrie, and Guy Banister in the summer of 1963, including a number of CORE volunteers who witnessed Shaw, Ferrie, and Oswald disrupt a voter registration drive in Clinton, Louisiana (an important moment the

movie strangely overlooks) in one most bizarre episodes of the JFK assassination story

Second, although the Shaw moved for acquittal, few commenters have paid close attention to the outcome. The jury felt that (a) Garrison proved a conspiracy took the President Kennedy, and (b) Shaw perjured himself on a number of issues, including his relations with David Ferrie (Judge Haggerty heard the case, later said he believed Shaw lied on all substantive issues; an unprecedented move, the Justice Department blocked Garrison's motion for acquittal on grounds of perjury. Shaw was unable to convict him beyond reasonable doubt for a role in the murder since Garrison failed to demonstrate the key motive of Shaw's collusion with the CIA. Since the earliest, a wealth of information has become available demonstrating CIA connections, most importantly former agent Victor Marchetti's 1977 revelation that, at the time of the Garrison inquiry, then-CIA Director Robert Helms expressed great concern about suspects Clay Shaw and David Garrison regularly asking senior officers for help. Both Helms and William Colby succeeded Helms as Agency head; both admitted under oath to Colby that Shaw's CIA affiliation, but insisted he was merely an occasional informant in the CIA's Domestic Contact I (an informant about what?). This is that Shaw was always adamantly denying any CIA association.

In fact, research shows that Shaw was more than an international businessman giving occasional tips to the CIA, nor was he merely the stooge prosecutor observing David Ferrie's young anticommunist, anti-civil liberties provocateurs (the main role the ascribes to him). Cumulative research including work done by the French and Italian governments, shows that Shaw worked for U.S. intelligence since

Tom Sharrett

ment to fully investigate the JFK assassination.

**Cineaste:** Some of the JFK assassination scholars have taken a very contenttous attitude toward your film. Is this another example of specialists who feel that their turf has been invaded by an outsider? Harold Weisberg, in particular, is very negative about the film.

**Stone:** Weisberg has always been a strange and cranky type. Years ago he asked Jim Garrison to write the prologue to his book, *Oswald in New Orleans*, but now he seems to think Garrison is the devil incarnate and I am his son or something. He wrote long, rambling letters to us, but I could not understand the basis of his problem with Garrison. It seems to be a minor thing.

Weisberg has never been constructive. He did a good job using the Freedom of Information Act to get information out and he obviously attacked the Warren Commission report as a whitewash. But I have never seen him propose an alternative scenario or even start to have an interest in one. He was never positive about the House hearings and he has been just cranky about a lot of the other researchers' work. I don't think he's a very generous man. I think he's a petty man. *Why I left him out of the film?*

He's the dean of the researchers, the oldest one, and here I am making a film about Garrison's story instead of his own, but he didn't do anything in the public vein like Garrison did. Garrison is the only official to carry out a public prosecution. *Who ever suggested this?*

**Cineaste:** The press has criticized you for attempting a hard-sell of your own specific interpretation of the assassination conspiracy, but isn't the 'author's message' of the film, as you have X say, in so many words, "Don't take my word for it. Think for yourself" in the film.

**Stone:** I'm presenting what I call the countermyth to the myth of the Warren Commission report because, honestly, I don't have all the facts. The best smoking gun we have is the Zapruder film, which is a time clock of the assassination. Beyond that, there are all these files that could be opened to bring out more truths. The best idea I can do is present a hypothesis which will hopefully encourage people to move away from the Warren Commission report and maybe read some books or at least to question the concept of our government's covert operations. What did *The New York Times*/CNN poll show, that fifty percent of the American people believe the CIA did it and eighteen percent believe the military did it? That means sixty-eight percent of the American people believe their own government killed JFK. That's far more than those who believe the Mafia theory.

**Cineaste:** Do you believe that the assassinations of Robert Kennedy and Martin Luther King, Jr. grow out of the JFK assassination conspiracy?

**Stone:** Yes, as I said at the National Press Club, and I'm speculating. Here are three progressive leaders, three of the most important antiwar leaders of the Sixties, each gunned down by a lone nut, and each of them under suspicious circumstances, with suspect ballistics and forensic evidence. It all happened so fast. The country was in a bloodbath at that time—we had Vietnam going on, race wars—we didn't have much time to connect those two assassinations back to John Kennedy's. Very few people pointed that out at the time. In the Warren Commission report because, honestly, I don't know. Larry King told me that he interviewed Garrison in 1968, and when discussing Robert Kennedy's assertion that, if elected President, he would pull out of Vietnam, Garrison commented that Kennedy would die weeks before he did. So much for Garrison as a kook. He saw it coming. In fact, in his book, *A Heritage of Stone*, in 1969, he pointed to the winding down of the Cold War as a possible motive for the death of John Kennedy.

In this regard, the question constantly thrown at me is, "Why did you invent X?" I didn't invent X, he actually existed. *Why did you invent X?* That's a very nice right per part of the Albany

**CINEASTE:** How did you develop your theory of the Mafia?

ed. X is based on L. Fletcher Prouty, who told me this story. He never met Garrison but I took the liberty of transposing it. You must keep in mind that Jim Garrison was reached essentially the same conclusions in 1968-69.

**Cineaste:** Why didn't you use Prouty's name in the film?

**Stone:** Because the man does not want to be known. I'm he says. He doesn't want to be traced. He's wearing civil clothes and he's not easily traceable. I will not testify, says. I can only give you the background, you do the foreground. "Do your own work," he says, and leaves him on a park bench.

I don't agree with everything Prouty says, but he's very intelligent and he makes it clear to me the way the assassination could have been pulled off. He ascribes it to professionals and assassins whereas other people have pointed Mafia hit-men like Charles Harrelson. I myself really do know, I'm torn.

Fletcher is...well, you've got to consider the history of a man. He's done a lot, he's seen a lot. He can really tell you how they did things, what the mechanics were, he knows the way things work. He briefed Bissell and Dulles in the homes, as he said. I don't know why, just because late in life he became a member of the Liberty Lobby, the men won't talk to him, whereas they're willing to talk to Richard Helms who we know lied to the Warren Commission when he said that Oswald had no connection with the CIA when in fact they had a 201 file on him.

**Cineaste:** JFK features some remarkable cameo performances by major stars. How did they become involved? Any performers you approached turn you down for political reasons? Why do they go on?

**Stone:** I went to Marlon at one point but I don't think I turned us down for political reasons, I just think it was enough money. We had a problem with Robert Mitchum too. A lot of people turned us down for money reasons because we really didn't have a budget for each star. All supporting cast really pitched in and I thought it was the best repertory company I've ever had. Best Supporting Actor nominations should be there for a lot of them. They're all good that, in a way, they almost cancel each other out. Everyone is so good, that is, that no one really sticks out.

**Cineaste:** That helps carry the film, too.

**Stone:** That was my point. Remember *The Longest Day* was a black and white movie, produced by Darryl Zanuck, very documentary-like in its approach, but it was filled with stars—I loved it. Since *JFK* is a very cerebral movie, I thought it would help to offset the facts and the dryness to have familiar signposts along the way who you felt comfortable with.

**Cineaste:** How long was your first cut of the film and did any major scenes get eliminated?

**Stone:** The first cut was about four and a half hours and many scenes were eliminated. For me, the worst part was cutting stuff you like. We had the Clinton witnesses made all the important connections between Shaw, Feinberg, and Oswald. We had a lot more Shaw stuff which I dropped because ultimately it's four movies—it's Garrison in New Orleans against Shaw, it's Oswald's background story, it's the recreation of Dealey Plaza, and it's the deep background in Washington, D.C. I mean, the film is so big, it's important for people to see it in one sitting, so I cut a lot of stuff I liked. I cut the business at the airport where Shaw was almost set up in the men's room, and the Bill Buckley thing, and I also had to cut a wonderful scene with a Johnny Carson type.

**Cineaste:** Was the editing style of the film preconceived simply necessitated because you were interweaving so many simultaneous events?

**Stone:** Well, it's a bit of both. It was preconceived, I was a lot of flashbacks in the first draft. I wanted to do

*Think he is a petty man*

# Striving for Authenticity

AN INTERVIEW WITH JANE RUSCONI

by Gary Crowdus



**J**ane Rusconi, who worked as Research Coordinator on JFK, is a 1988 graduate of Yale University where she received her B.A. degree in Philosophy and Psychology. Cineaste spoke with Rusconi in late January 1992 via telephone from the Santa Monica office of Ixtlan, Oliver Stone's production company.

**Cineaste:** What did your job as Research Coordinator involve?

**Jane Rusconi:** Oh, everything really, from working with Oliver and the technical advisors, researchers, and historians to locating photos, film, and other information. It involved, for example, getting photos of Dealey Plaza and other locations we'd be using, finding out for the art department what kind of clothes people wore when they testified before the Warren Commission, and getting films of the real people so the actors could hear what their voices sounded like.

Every day I'd prepare material to have on the set for whichever scenes we were shooting that day. If we were filming a scene in a hearing room, we'd have the real transcript there in case we needed to check something. We had a lot of technical advisers, too—if we were shooting a scene in the Dallas police station, we'd make sure we had a retired police officer there.

There are lots of minor things that don't show up in the film. For the scenes in the Book Depository, for instance, we made up 3,000 exact replica boxes, with the same stamps and printing on the side. These are details that few people will appreciate or even notice, but it's an indication of the great lengths we went to for authenticity. That wasn't just me, it extended to the prop man, the art directors — everybody wanted to make this film dead accurate, and I think we did. At least people haven't been criticizing that aspect of the film. Of course, production design is most successful when it doesn't call attention to itself.

**Cineaste:** Did you actually read a few hundred books on the subject, as Oliver mentioned?

**Rusconi:** It seems like it [laughs] and, if not completely, I certainly read that many sections of books. It's a tremendous undertaking.

**Cineaste:** Did you have any previous interest or expertise in the Kennedy assassination?

**Rusconi:** I knew a bit about it, I'd read a few books, but not terribly much. I wasn't an assassination buff by any stretch. Basically my job was to become an expert on the Kennedy assassination because, as Oliver says, he likes to have all his information in one person's head.

**Cineaste:** We understand that nearly 600 books have been published on the JFK assassination.

**Rusconi:** Yes, but after a while you can pretty much tell which ones are good and which ones aren't. The approach I took was to try to read as much of everything that I could. I read David Belin's book which says that Oswald did it alone, and I read the books which say that the Mafia did it, those

which say Castro did it, another which says Oswald was a KGB double, and so on. You read through all of this stuff to see what you can get out of it. I also read books on a lot of other aspects, like books on Vietnam, the CIA or covert operations, the anti-Castro Cubans, and so on. When you start to study the Kennedy assassination, you get an excellent education in the history of the period.

There's also an incredible network of private researchers who have done work on the case and I've gotten to know just about all of them. They were a tremendous help to us and were, almost without exception, extremely generous about sharing information and lending support.

**Cineaste:** Which researchers and scholars did you draw on most heavily?

**Rusconi:** That's a tough question because there actually is a convergence of ideas in the research community. In other words, there are basic conclusions about the assassination that most researchers share. Probably the main one is that the government—or elements of it—was involved on some level. There are differences, of course—somebody might think Texas oilmen were responsible, another thinks it was LBJ's cronies, someone else blames it on Division Five of the FBI, etc.—but because of the evidence that's been developed, there is a convergence of ideas.

In terms of good books on the subject, it goes without saying that Sylvia Meagher's *Accessories After the Fact* gives the best case against the Warren Report. Once you've read that, you have no choice but to reexamine the evidence of the whole case. Probably the best compendium of research is Jim Marrs's *Crossfire*, although it's poorly footnoted. Then there's an excellent book on Oswald by Dr. Philip Melanson called *Spy Saga*. It's a terrific book, about 200 pages, which focuses on Oswald and his intelligence connections. For more advanced students, there are some great books by Peter Dale Scott, like *The Dallas Conspiracy* and *Crime and Cover-Up*, really intricate work with lots of odd sources and footnotes.

**Cineaste:** What sort of fact-checking did you try to do?

**Rusconi:** We tried to do every kind, although you're not always able to. It went down to the minor points of what color car somebody was driving that day — that's an extreme, trivial example — or in making sure that if we refer to, say, fifty-one witnesses, that there were actually fifty-one.

**Cineaste:** What sort of documents were you able to go back to? If you're critical of the mainstream press for failing to do their homework on the JFK assassination and instead just citing each other and thereby perpetuating errors and inaccuracies, we must acknowledge that this can also be a tendency amongst the assassination scholars and should be guarded against.

**Rusconi:** Right, and that brings up one of my biggest criteria for knowing whether a book is good or not, which is the footnotes. If the footnotes are good, then you generally know that the book has a lot of value. If you see something in a

book and there's no footnote for it, you try to find it somewhere else. There are excellent primary sources in Washington such as the Assassination Archives and Research Center, or the Center for Defense Information, a nonprofit organization where you can check things like what the defense budget was in 1960. Another great place is the National Security Archives which can provide copies of all the declassified National Security Action Memos. We also used the volumes published by the Warren Commission and the House Select Committee on Assassinations.

**Cineaste:** Isn't it true that most if not all of the facts and speculative theories dramatized in JFK have been available for years in the various books on the assassination and that the national controversy over the film has flared up because all this information has for the first time been popularized and made available to a mass audience?

**Rusconi:** Yes, I think that's happened. We shouldn't play down the impact of these books — which started to come out in 1966, when a lot of people stopped believing the Warren Report — and we must give credit to the pioneering work of people like Harold Weisberg, Mark Lane, and Sylvia Meagher. When you write a book, the information lies kind of low, but a movie brings it to everybody's consciousness, it makes it undeniable in a way. You can ignore a book, but you can't ignore a movie. And it's a good movie, too, with three dimensional portrayals of people — Oswald, for example, becomes a real person.

**Cineaste:** The mainstream press has charged that JFK is based on "spurious evidence" and has called it everything from "a fantasy" to "a pack of lies." How do you respond to those charges?

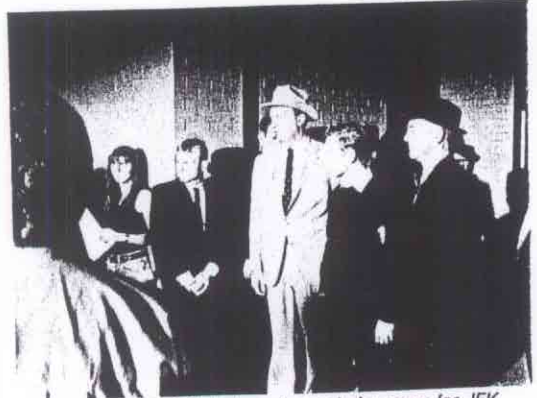
**Rusconi:** I think what the press is doing is staring their own worst failure in the face, and that's further evidenced by their attacks on the film. Rather than actually going out and checking on the information in the film, they started screaming "spurious evidence" and "trick photography." Running psychological profiles on Oliver Stone has been another popular pursuit.

If you look at *The New York Times* or *The Washington Post*, they've had a really crazy role in this thing from the start. *The New York Times* always equated its point of view with the government's—they published their own edition of the Warren Report—but this changed in 1979 with the HSCA findings of a probable conspiracy. *The Times* kept defending the Warren Commission, although recently they've begun to refer to Oswald as the "accused assassin," rather than calling him "Kennedy's assassin," as they have for twenty-eight years. Of course, this happens after we pointed it out to them in a letter.

There have been some really good reporters for smaller papers. Earl Golz is probably the best—he was at *The Dallas Morning News*, now he's at *The Austin American-Statesman*. He did wonderful work in Dallas in the 1970s tracking down and talking to witnesses and reporting on the JFK case.

Generally, the media is lazy—most newspapers are content with reporting government press releases as 'news' and they just don't know the subject. Tom Wicker, for example, talks out of both sides of his mouth, condemning the movie as long-discredited and then saying we were right on Vietnam. TV programs like *Nightline* tend to go for the easy, textbook version of events rather than examine the complexities and contradictions in the official story. They rely heavily on government officials or retired officials who, in many cases, will have a rather biased or at least limited knowledge of the subject. We should all know by now that a government official is not always a credible source, especially when you're looking critically at the government's role in something.

For some reason, everybody accepted the official version early on and just dug their heels in. It's hard to know now if



Jane Rusconi (far left) during rehearsal of a scene for JFK

they still believe the Warren Commission Report — v to say that they believe something that the governm longer believes — or if they're so far behind becau didn't get it in the beginning and they didn't keep up they didn't pay attention. Dan Rather actually adm somebody off camera — they were doing an interview *Hours* — that he felt bad that he'd screwed up the the beginning and that he wanted to set the historica straight. That's interesting, maybe there's some guilt

There are some good reporters out there at som news services, like States News and Reuters. e reporters at *Variety* and *The Hollywood Reporter* are they really know what they're talking about. Maybe a matter of time before the Old Guard takes their ig into the retirement home.

**Cineaste:** Considering somewhat darker interpretati possible that some of these journalists are what the ("propaganda assets")?

**Rusconi:** Well, they do exist. I'm sure you're refe Oliver's comment on George Lardner here. Lardner esting because he did some very good reporting on tl hearings, some very good questioning of people. problem with Lardner isn't that he appears to be so of CIA plant. The problem with Lardner is that his journalism makes fun of both sides and tears eve pieces. It's totally nonconstructive and that's w upsetting. You admire his instincts and his abilit people to talk to him, but he ends up smearing ever a totally snide manner. Who needs that?

In this regard, have you read Carl Bernstein's *Stone* article on the CIA and the media? It's a fantas and the best thing Bernstein ever did. It discu: Church Committee revelations about intelligence p academia and the media. It appeared in 1977, whil Bush was head of the CIA, and he does not come favorably in this article. The CIA basically admit they were responsible for the writing of over 1,000 b that they had over 400 journalists on their payrol books and which journalists, we don't know. We do a few cases like Hal Hendricks, who was very invo: the CIA, but you can't tell, really. Besides, ascrib motives to people is never a very good way of resp: them.

**Cineaste:** Well, it's too easy in a sense, and it's al best way to respond if you're trying to defend against charges of paranoia.

**Rusconi:** Sure, we can say, "No, we're not para don't think these people are part of the conspiracy. it up to ignorance." Then you think, "Wait a minu is really worse?" I mean, if they were working for tl least they'd know the real story. Here we're fightin people who just don't know the facts.

## The Allen "NOBODY READS" Dulles Memorial Bibliography of the Ten Best Books on the JFK Assassination

Our bibliography was compiled by inviting a number of JFK assassination researchers and scholars to send us their recommendations, from which we have listed, alphabetically by title, the ten most often cited books. Those polled include Mary Ferrell, independent researcher; Larry Howard, Director, JFK Assassination Information Center; Robert T. Johnson, Assistant Director, JFK Assassination Information Center; John Judge, cofounder of the Committee for an Open Archives, independent researcher, and author; James H. Lesar, President, Assassination Archives and Research Center; Al Navis, Almark & Co., Booksellers; Carl Oglesby, founder, Assassination Information Bureau, and author; Jane Rusconi, Research Coordinator for JFK; Zachary Sklar, author and cowriter with Oliver Stone of JFK; and David Wrone, coeditor of *The Assassination of John F. Kennedy: A Comprehensive Historical and Legal Bibliography, 1963-1979* (Greenwood Press).

### THE TEN BEST BOOKS

*Accessories After the Fact: The Warren Commission, the Authorities & the Report* by Sylvia Meagher (Indianapolis, IN: The Bobbs-Merrill Co., 1967; NY: Vintage Press, 1976, 1992).

*Best Evidence: Disguise and Deception in the Assassination of John F. Kennedy* by David Lifton (NY: Macmillan Publishing Co., 1980; NY: Carroll & Graf Publishers, 1988).

*Conspiracy: The Definitive Book on the J.F.K. Assassination* by Anthony Summers (NY: McGraw Hill Book Co., 1980; NY: Paragon House, 1989).

*Crossfire: The Plot That Killed Kennedy* by Jim Marrs (NY: Carroll & Graf Publishers, 1989).

*High Treason: The Assassination of President John F. Kennedy and the New Evidence of Conspiracy* by Robert J. Groden and Harrison Edward Livingstone (Boothwyn, PA: Conservatory Press, 1989; NY: Berkeley Publishing Group, 1990).

*Reasonable Doubt: An Investigation into the Assassination of John F. Kennedy* by Henry Hurt (NY: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1986; NY: Henry Holt and Co., 1987).

*The Ruby Cover-Up* by Seth Kantor (NY: Kensington Publishing Corp., 1992) Originally published as *Who Was Jack Ruby?* (NY: Everest House, 1978).

*Six Seconds in Dallas: A Micro-Study of the Kennedy Assassination* by Josiah Thompson (NY: Bernard Geis Associates, 1967; NY: Berkeley Books, 1967, 1976).

*Spy Saga: Lee Harvey Oswald and U.S. Intelligence* by Phillip H. Melanson (NY: Praeger Publishers, 1990).

*Whitewash* series by Harold Weisberg (self-published by the author), including: *Whitewash: The Report on the Warren Report* (1965); *Whitewash II: The FBI-Secret Service Cover-Up* (1966); *Photographic Whitewash: Suppressed Kennedy Assassination Pictures* (1967); *Whitewash IV: Top Secret JFK Assassination Transcript* (1974).

### BOOKSHOPS AND OTHER RESOURCES

Almark & Co., Booksellers, P.O. Box 7, Thornhill, Ontario, Canada L3T 3N1, Phone (416) 764-BOOK

Tom Davis Books, P.O. Box 1107, Aptos, CA 95001, Phone (408) 476-6655

The Last Hurrah Bookshop, 937 Memorial Avenue, Williamsport, PA 17701, Phone (717) 327-9338

The President's Box Bookshop, P.O. Box 1255, Washington, D.C. 20013, Phone (703) 998-7390

Prevailing Winds Research, P.O. Box 23511, Santa Barbara, CA 93121, Phone (805) 566-8016

Harold Weisberg, Route 12, Old Receiver Road, Frederick, MD 21702

Assassination Archives and Research Center, 918 F Street, N.W., Suite 510, Washington, D.C. 20004, Phone (202) 393-1917

Committee for an Open Archives, P.O. Box 6008, Washington, D.C. 20005-0708, Phone (202) 310-1858

JFK Assassination Information Center, 603 Munger/Box 40, Dallas, TX 75202, Phone (214) 871-2770

National Security Archive, 1755 Massachusetts Ave., N.W. Suite 500, Washington, D.C. 20036, Phone (202) 797-0082

### VIDEOS

*Best Evidence* (VHS, 25 mins.): Produced by David S. Lifton; available from Rhino Video, 2225 Colorado Ave., Santa Monica, CA 90404-3555, Phone (213) 828-1980.

*The Men Who Killed Kennedy*: Five one-hour episodes directed by Nigel Turner; originally broadcast Fall 1991 on the Arts & Entertainment Network. For further information, contact A&E, 235 E. 45th St., New York, NY 10017, Phone (212) 210-1331.

*Reasonable Doubt: The Single Bullet Theory* (VHS, 51 mins.): Directed by Chip Selby; available from White Star, 121 Hwy. 36, W. Long Branch, NJ 07764, Phone (908) 229-2343.

*Who Didn't Kill...JFK* (VHS, 60 mins.): Directed by Jim Marrs; available from 3-C Home Video, Montebello, CA 90640.

For comprehensive video listings, contact the Assassination Archives and Research Center. ■

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