

**GLOBAL VIEWPOINT/OLIVER STONE**

# A celluloid version of the truth

*'JFK' is a new kind of history, a kind not found in books: An impressionistic — yet accurate —*

LOS ANGELES

**M**ost of the critics of my film "JFK" have been from the print media, the domain of the typographical kind. Before the advent of the image media, they were the sole owners of history, the chief custodians of reality. Behind these various criticisms of "JFK" seems to stand a profound suspicion of the image media, especially of the rapid-splice editing common to rock videos, which I used in "JFK." Doesn't this technique, they ask, constitute a kind of cerebral bypass in which surface appearances are transported directly into the the subconscious realm of myths and symbols? What about that critical pause for reflection that distinguishes our civilized condition from that of the primitive state of the pure unreflective unconscious? What about the reasoning kind that allows us to distinguish fact from fiction, truth from falsity?

To start with, the killing of John F. Kennedy was a primitive act. The president's head was blown off at high noon in Dealey Plaza.

I want you, the viewer, to be in the skin of the event, inside the surface. I want you to be subjective in your reaction. I want you to feel the sorrow, pity, pain, fear and horror. So I went at it with every tool I had. Sixteen- and eight-millimeter cameras. Blown-up frames. Black and white cinematography. Color cinematography. Odd camera angles.

"JFK" is a very fast movie. It is like plinters to the brain. We had 2,500 cuts, maybe 2,200 camera setups. We were assaulting the senses in a kind of new-wave

technique. We wanted to get to the subconscious.

The idea of the film was not so much to solve the mystery of who killed the president. The idea was to present an overarching paradigm of all the possibilities of the assassination. I would tap one perspective, then another and another. I was digging up evidence from all different places, buried like Schliemann's Trojan walls in several different layers.

As a film, "JFK" can be seen as an archeological investigation, a deconstruction, of one of the central events of American life. "JFK" is really akin to the Japanese film "Rashomon," Akira Kurosawa's fable about the impossibility of ever arriving at a single truth.

In my film, the camera reflected the search for truth. Its various angles captured the simultaneous points of view of an array of witnesses and their own fragments of apprehension. The camera was the critical instrument. It should be self-reflexive.

Take the case of Lee Bowers, the obscure railroad watchman whose testimony is buried amid the thick layers of Warren Commission witnesses. On paper, his testimony is boring as hell. On paper it is hard to imagine its significance.

In the film, we start with a cut of Bower in his railroad watchtower behind Dealey Plaza, then cut to him talking as he gives his testimony at the Warren Commission hearing, then we flash back to the moment in the watchtower — a flashback in a flashback — when he notices three cars that drove up and left mysteriously, when he notices those

weird people at the fence overlooking the assassination site.

The camera here is subjective. It gives us Bowers' point of view — looking out of the watchtower, seeing the gunmen, the fence, the leaving cars. He was not paying full attention. He was doing something else when he heard the shots. He noticed a faint puff of smoke. It could be someone firing from the fence.

The camera did not have a dead-on close-up of a man firing. It jerked. The image was blurred. "Did I hear it or did I see it?" Bowers asked in his testimony. He wasn't sure. "It just seemed like something funny at the fence."

The images flash on film with Bowers' voice-over. On paper you can read these words slowly, go back over them, study them. In film, it goes so fast — as Bowers actually saw it. The moment is gone before you can really even weigh it. Can you be sure of what you saw? Was he? Is it fact?

The same was true of other witnesses on the overpass and the grassy knoll. "I saw smoke over there by the fence," one said. Jean Hill, a witness on the knoll, said she thought she saw somebody firing from the fence. So in "JFK" you will see a brief, three-frame subliminal scene of a man firing at the fence. She thinks she saw it, but can't be sure.

In short, what you see represented over and over again in the film are fragments of consciousness that, together, add up to the reality of a moment. They are shards of an event about which the whole truth is perhaps unknowable. "JFK" is a three-hour

# W O R L D **PERSPECTIVES**

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— *recording of the fragments of experience*

avalanche of fragments of the truth.

Ultimately, "JFK" is not really a political film. The ultimate questions are philosophical ones: Who owns reality? Who owns your mind? Isn't history a distorted hall of mirrors that depends on the kind of surface reflecting its essence and its events?

Unlike many of my critics, I don't think reality belongs to The New York Times and The Washington Post.

The one-shot theory of history is dead. Singular causality and singular perspective are as dead in truth-telling as in science, where the stress now is on the confluence of forces, on synchronicity and simultaneity.

The real question is what form of representation, given the technological advances in filmmaking, best grasps reality. As in some historical literature, do you pile fact upon fact and call it history? Or, in looking at Julius Caesar, for example, do you look at the vision of a man's life? A life is not based on the accumulation of facts, but on flashes of insight, on moments of the spirit.

As a filmmaker, I do believe in what might be called "Dionysian politics." I believe in unleashing the pure wash of emotion across the mind to let you see the inner myth, the spirit of the thing. Then, when the cold light of reason hits you as you walk out of the theater, the sense of truth will remain lodged beyond reason in the depths of your being, or it will be killed by the superego of the critics.

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*Oliver Stone is the producer and director of "JFK," which has been nominated for an Academy Award for best picture.*

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