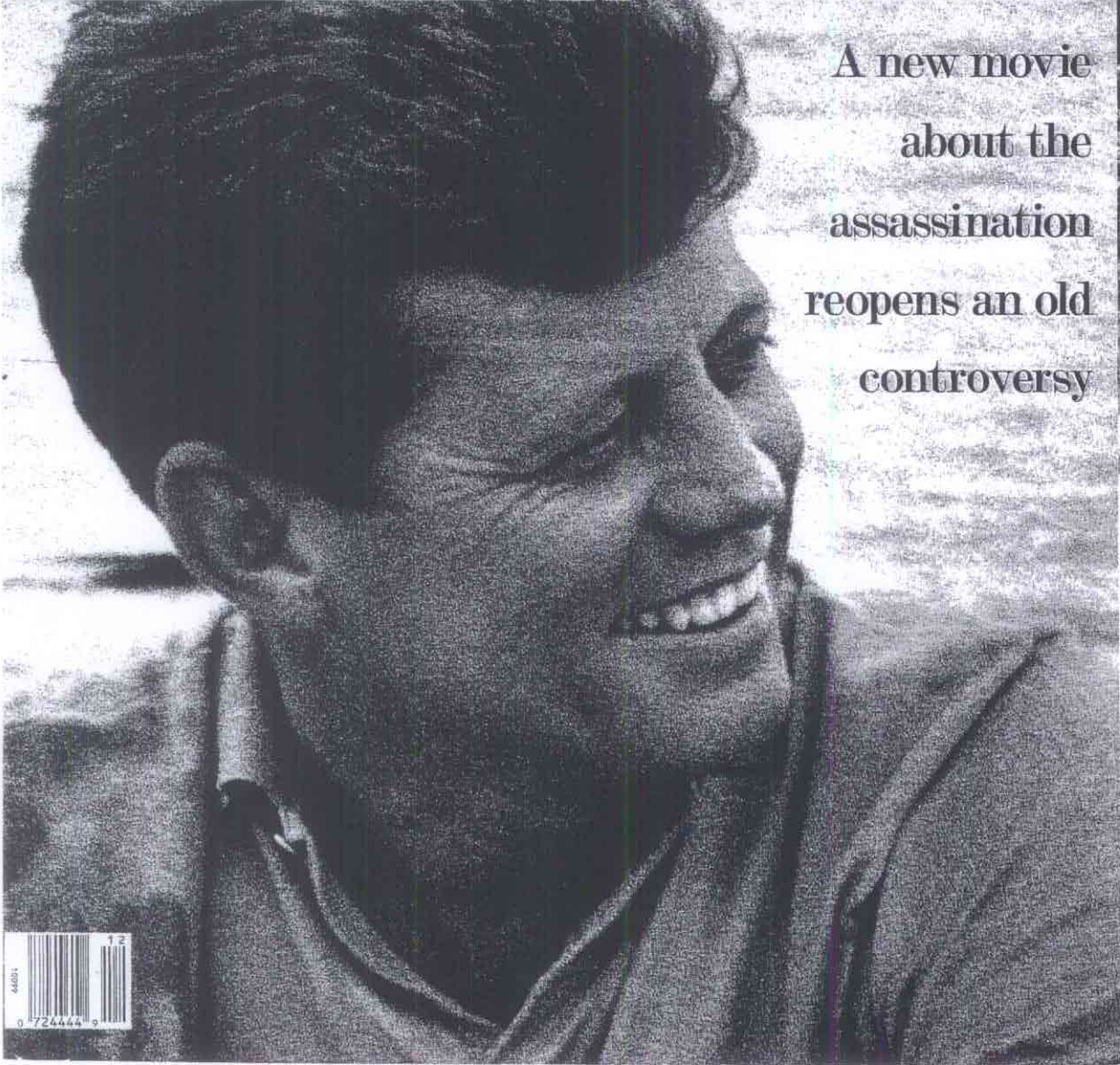
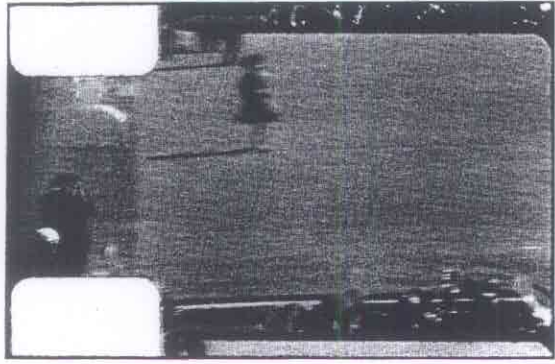


LIFE JUNK

WHY WE STILL CARE

A new movie
about the
assassination
reopens an old
controversy





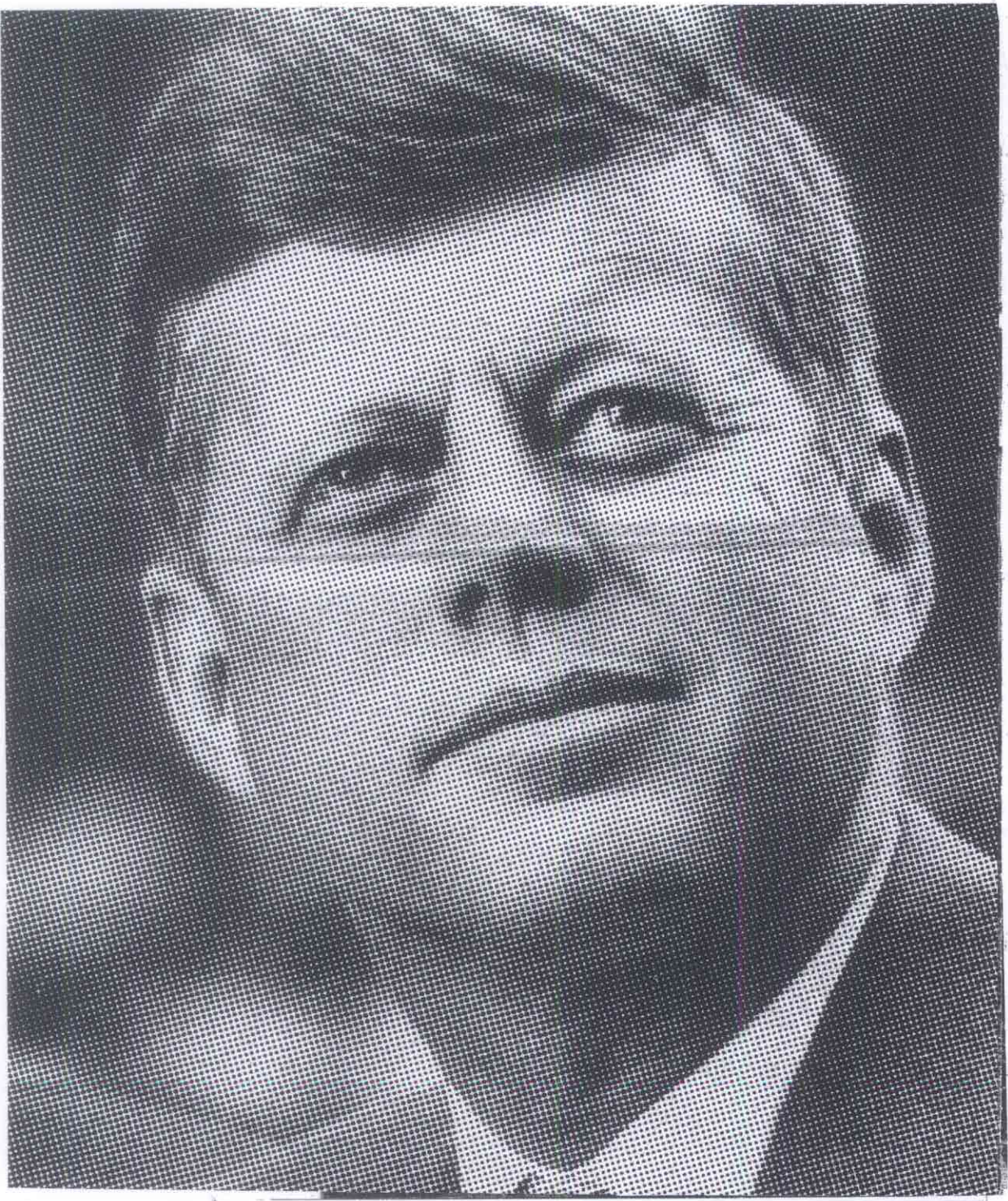
Why We Still Care

Oliver Stone's latest film, *JFK*, revives an American obsession

It took just 5.6 seconds from the moment the first bullet hit President Kennedy's neck to the moment the last bullet tore off the top of his head. In that time, the country lost a leader and gained a martyr. It lost a great source of its faith and gained an even greater source of doubt. And it lost the outcome of a hundred unmade decisions: the agenda in the President's mind at the instant it ceased to be a mind—what to do in Vietnam, in Cuba, with Khrushchev, Hoover, Hoffa. It lost, in other words, the history that the man who was killed would have helped to make. And it gained a different history, the 28 years that have passed since then.

It also gained something less important but equally inescapable: a persistent cottage industry that has provided work—sometimes created careers—for countless authors, filmmakers, researchers and conspiracy buffs. For nearly three decades they have dismantled the assassination like a dream, seeking and finding hidden images, secret symbols, echoes of truths and, sometimes, truths. Relentlessly, they have pursued leads, analyzed evidence, interviewed witnesses, learned the arcana of acoustics, forensics, photography. Together, they have produced more than 600 books about the assassination and more than a dozen televi-

by Lisa Grunwald



A CONSPIRACY LEXICON

In 1964 the President's Commission on the Assassination of President Kennedy, chaired by Chief Justice Earl Warren, published its findings after ten and a half months of investigation. Lee Harvey Oswald, the commission said, a man who "showed disdain for democracy, capitalism, and American society in general," had acted alone, firing three shots from the sixth-floor window of the Texas School Book Depository. Eighty minutes after the assassination, Oswald was arrested for the murder of Officer J.D. Tippit; 12 hours later he was charged with JFK's murder, and two days after that, he was killed in custody, supposedly on impulse, by a grief-stricken Jack Ruby. Assassination students—as well as a consistent majority of the American public—have viewed the Warren Commission report as being anywhere from incomplete to fantastic. Their doubts have inspired a host of alternate theories with a singular cast of characters and a sometimes specialized vocabulary.



BABUSHKA LADY An eyewitness, never interviewed by the Warren Commission, who was wearing a scarf and filming the motorcade as the shots were fired. In the '70s a woman named Beverly Oliver identified herself as the Babushka Lady and said that her film, which showed the **grassy knoll**, had been taken by FBI agents and never returned.

BADGE MAN One of the purported grassy knoll assassins. In a blowup of a tiny section of a Polaroid photograph, some researchers see the image of a man with a badge on one shoulder and a flash of light before him.

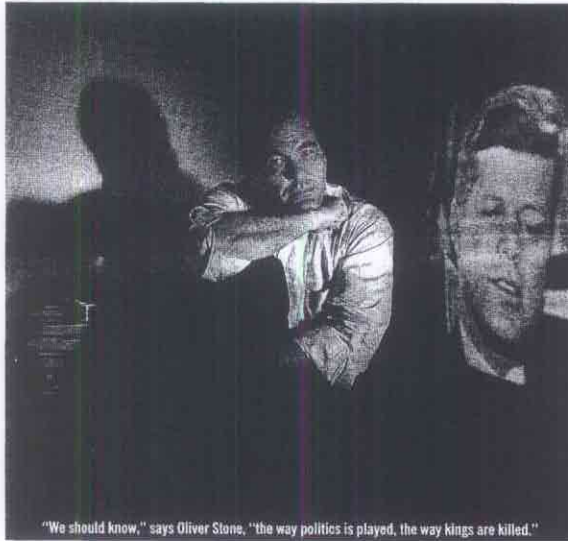
sion documentaries, as well as novels, plays, miniseries, musicals, poems, college courses, exhibits, lectures, newsletters and feature films. The latest and most ballyhooed of the industry's products is a movie, due out this month, by the self-appointed chronicler of the '60s, Oliver Stone.

JFK was directed and cowritten by Stone, and ever since it started filming in April on a closed set in Dallas, bootlegged copies of its first-draft script have been abundant—and premature criticism of its contents impassioned. Articles this spring in *The Washington Post*, *The Chicago Tribune*, *Time* and *The New Orleans Times-Picayune* raised questions about Stone's accuracy and his motives. The *Tribune's* Jon Margolis called the script an "insult to intelligence and decency." The *Post's* George Lardner Jr. decried its many "errors and absurdities" in a lengthy feature story titled "Dallas in Wonderland." Stone, who created *Platoon*, *Wall Street*, *Born on the Fourth of July* and *The Doors*, tends to make news whenever he makes movies. He has a gift not only for storytelling but also for hitting the nation's nerve. Still, the advance reaction to *JFK* has gone beyond the usual hype. One of the reasons seems to be that he has cast the very credible Kevin Costner in the central role of Jim Garrison, a controversial former New Orleans district attorney who in 1969 attempted to convict a local businessman named Clay Shaw of conspiracy to assassinate the President.

Garrison, who raised eyebrows, tempers and some lingering questions with his prosecution of Shaw, was generally dismissed by the press as a publicity seeker—and equally praised by conspiracy researchers as a maverick. The jury in the six-week trial reached a not guilty verdict in less than an hour. But Garrison has held firm to his theory that Shaw was part of a coup engineered by the covert action arm of the CIA. In his 1988 book, *On the Trail of the Assassins*, he insisted that the cast of characters involved in the conspiracy or cover-up ultimately included the CIA, the Secret Service, LBJ, J. Edgar Hoover, Earl Warren, the Dallas police and just about everyone except Lee Harvey Oswald, who he claimed was busy that day being framed. As Garrison, now 70 and a retired state appeals court judge, has put it: "Lee Oswald was totally, unequivocally, completely innocent of the assassination, and the fact that history... has made a villain of this young man who wanted nothing more than to be a fine Marine is in some ways the greatest injustice of all."

Oliver Stone, 45, sits in a conference room at Skywalker Sound, a large postproduction facility west of Los Angeles. Along with a crew of 65, he has spent the last three months working 16-hour days and trying to edit 120 hours of film down to three. His eyes are puffy, and his hair is wild, and he

looks very tired. He is reminded about Jim Garrison's words and acknowledges that though he's based much of his film on Garrison's story and admires the man, he doesn't see eye-to-eye with him on every point. Stone doesn't, for example, believe the CIA masterminded the plot. He suspects Army Intelligence was involved. And he thinks of Lee Harvey Oswald as "semi-innocent, which means semi-guilty." Garrison, in his film, is a semi-fictional protagonist, "an underdog," according to Stone, whose goal is to seek the truth. So just how much of the real Jim Garrison and how much of his perspective Stone has adopted won't be known until the movie is released. What is clear is that *JFK* is a conspiracy film and that for the American people, 45 percent of whom were not even born at the time of Kennedy's death, it has the potential to become the version of history they take to be history. "The



"We should know," says Oliver Stone, "the way politics is played, the way kings are killed."

best thing this movie could do for me," Stone says, "is if it would exist as an alternate myth to the Warren Commission myth, if it would be a beacon to another generation that would think of the Kennedy killing always in these new terms."

That prospect has alarmed even some long-standing members of the assassination research community. Harold Weisberg, 78, the author of six books on the assassination, has gathered some 250,000 documents through the Freedom of Information Act. He believes passionately that there was a conspiracy but feels that the whole truth will never be known and fears that Stone's movie will distort the established facts. "Oliver Stone will do an influential job," says Weisberg, "and the people are going to believe what he says. You have to know the subject to know what an atrocity this is." ➡

ADDITIONAL REPORTING: JIM CALIO, DEBORAH FEYERICK, KATHRYN JONES

BANISTER, GUY A former FBI agent and anti-Castro activist. Employing **David Ferrie**, he worked at 544 Camp Street in New Orleans, the address on the pro-Castro leaflets Oswald had passed out several months before the shooting.

BLACK DOG MAN Another photograph of the scene reveals a triangular black patch behind the concrete wall on the grassy knoll. Some researchers say the shape is a man with a gun. Members of the 1976 House Assassinations Committee felt that the dark patch looked like a dog-shaped blur.

CIA CONSPIRACY THEORY The supposed motivation was three-fold. First, a desire on the part of certain agents to avenge what they saw as their disgrace at the Bay of Pigs. Second, a desire to thwart JFK's intention to withdraw advisers from Vietnam. And third, a desire for self-preservation in light of his purported plan to eliminate the agency.



FERRIE, DAVID A New Orleans pilot and private eye—according to some a CIA operative, to others a Mafia contact. Ferrie (who was left totally hairless by a disease) had known Oswald in the mid-'50s and is alleged to have lured him into the conspiracy. Ferrie died in 1967, apparently of a ruptured blood vessel, days after being named by District Attorney **Jim Garrison** as a possible conspirator in JFK's killing. His death is one of many considered mysterious by assassination buffs.

FRAME 313 The frame of the home movie (page 35) taken by **Abraham Zapruder**, in which the fatal shot shatters JFK's head.

FRENCH CONNECTION THEORY Suggests that at least one of the assassins was a French hitman working for the CIA.

Meanwhile, other assassination researchers—even those who might have been expected to resent Stone as a Johnny-come-lately—are greeting the prospect of his movie with unconcealed delight. Says R. B. Cutler, the 78-year-old publisher of a bimonthly newsletter called the *Grassy Knoll Gazette*: "When the movie comes out, someone is going to stand up in 1992 and say, 'Hey, Bush, Oliver tells me Oswald didn't do it alone. Who the hell did?'" Mark Lane, whose new book, *Plausible Denial*, points the finger at the CIA and is thus at odds with some of Stone's views, nevertheless declares: "The greatest contribution to a discussion in America about this subject since the shot was fired is being made by Oliver Stone. He's placed it on the agenda, and I salute him." In short, there is enthusiasm among many of the buffs for anything that keeps interest in the assassination alive.

Since November 23, 1963, it has never really waned. Despite the Kennedy family's wishes, JFK remains the only former President who is commemorated on the day of his death, not his birth. Every year, on the anniversary of the assassination, a somewhat macabre crowd gathers to mourn and reminisce at Dealey Plaza in Dallas. Four million people visit the grave at Arlington National Cemetery each year, praying, reciting words from the great speeches, gazing upon the eternal flame. John Metzler Jr., Arlington's superintendent, receives dozens of letters addressed to Kennedy in care of the cemetery from all over the country. "People tell the President how much they like him," he says, "and that they would like him to do things for them. Others just come to the site. They get tears in their eyes. Some lay a single flower. You can see it's a humbling time."

At the former Texas School Book Depository, from which Oswald is said to have fired the fatal shots, a museum called The Sixth Floor was opened in 1989. For six dollars, a visitor can hear an audiotape of interviews with witnesses, view memorabilia from the '60s and book cartons that re-create the sniper's perch. As executive director of the exhibit, Bob Hays sees the visitors and their emotion and says he is still amazed by their intensity. "They come to question," he says, "they come to remember, and in part, I think, they come to heal."

The healing has to do with Camelot, a word that conjures a host of pictures, a pang of idealism and of loss. No matter what the country is told about the real Jack Kennedy—his infidelities, his health problems, his crudeness, his questionable World War II heroism, dubious Pulitzer Prize, tainted Cook County votes—the illusion is more powerful than the disillusionment. Even in a bad Kennedy year such as this, when Ted and Joan and Willie fail to garner the kind of headlines that the country still expects of them, America's royal

family remains indestructibly glamorous. The main reason is that its chief tragedy remains, like its victim, larger than life, even larger than death.

Would we care as much if he had been less handsome? If she had been less beautiful? If he hadn't had those children? That speechwriter? That voice? Would we feel at all the same if the press hadn't been so deferential, so polite, so selective? If he'd been killed at 55 or 60 instead of 46? If he hadn't been killed but had died of old age? Other loved Presidents have died in office, even in this century; when FDR was gone, the citizens wept in streets and crowded bars. But when we lost FDR we lost a father; when we lost JFK we lost a son and brother, and, as with all such premature, unnatural deaths, the grief was simply deeper, the disbelief more profound.

Hence, the consumers for the Kennedy industry. The expected audience for Oliver Stone's film. The readers who have made five books best-sellers in the last two years, as well



Mark Lane's new book will be his last on the assassination. "I've made my contribution," he says.

as dozens more in the past 28. The endless stream of TV Jackies and TV Jacks, the fake pink Chanel suits and fake Boston accents. And yes, the magazine covers. Kennedy's sell. "The Kennedy story is inherently engaging because of what might have been," says Kent Carroll, who at Carroll & Graf has published four books on the assassination. "A young life was snuffed out. It's a real-life story. Kennedy's accomplishments as President were mediocre, but he's viewed as being one of the great Presidents. It has to do with what people want to believe he was. He is the unfulfilled promise." Even 20 years after Kennedy's death, a Harris Survey found that a majority of Americans still felt "a deep sense of grief" for the President and "miss[ed] him more" as time went by.

Camelot remains the American Eden. Though many of the theorists are quick to assert that they are not blind to Kennedy's faults, others seem less inclined to let go of ➔



GARRISON, JIM Former New Orleans district attorney, he described David Ferrie as "one of history's most important individuals" and had, until the suspect's death, intended to prosecute him. Instead, he set his sights on businessman Clay Shaw, who was found not guilty of conspiracy in 1969.

GRASSY KNOLL The sloping hill from which many theorists claim the fatal shot was fired. Most witnesses did say they thought the shots had come from this direction, but none saw a gunman shooting.

HOOVER, J. EDGAR Mark North's *Act of Treason* claims that FBI Director Hoover had learned of a Mafia contract that had been put on JFK in September 1962. His "act of treason" was his failure to inform the Secret Service or his superiors in the Justice Department about the threat. According to North, Hoover's motive was self-preservation: "As a result... President Kennedy was assassinated, Johnson became President, and the director obtained an Executive Order, on May 8, 1964, waiving his compulsory retirement."



JOHNSON, LYNDON BAINES Few buffs suggest that LBJ was directly involved in planning the assassination, but many believe that he may have been part of a vast cover-up.

the legend. As Jim Marrs writes in *Crossfire*, a kind of compendium of assassination theories (and another book used by Stone in the writing of his film): "I seek not only the killers of President Kennedy, I seek the persons who killed Camelot." Says Mark North, author of the newly published *Act of Treason* (which blames the assassination on J. Edgar Hoover): "My interest initially was historical—trying to set the record straight. Then it became a question that the memory of John Kennedy had been wronged. People can say what they want about him, about his philandering and the Bay of Pigs, but he donated all his salary to charity, and he was an honest man who had the country's interests at heart."

Penn Jones Jr., 77, may be the assassination researcher who has taken Kennedy's death most personally. Former publisher of Texas's weekly *Midlothian Mirror*, Jones started in the mid-'60s to question the official version of Kennedy's death in the paper's editorials. In subsequent years he published both a newsletter (*The Continuing Inquiry*) and, using his own money, a four-book series called *Forgive My Grief*. Jones believes the assassination was a military coup ordered by the Joint Chiefs of Staff with the CIA's cooperation. He believes there were nine assassins that day in Dallas, one of them concealed by a manhole cover. Surrounded by portraits of JFK and floor-to-ceiling shelves filled with assassination books, tapes and mementos, he talks in his phoneless, white-frame farmhouse in Waxahachie, a rustic town half an hour south of Dallas. "Democracy died in Dealey Plaza," he says sadly. "I love democracy. I loved Kennedy." His pain and his work are shared by Elaine Kavanaugh Jones, 38, his colleague since 1978 and wife since 1986 (they met on the grassy knoll). "A lot of people study the assassination for the mystery, the intrigue," she says, "but we do it because we loved him. He brought youth and wit to this country. He made every single person believe they had an important part in this country. Now there's no hope."

In contrast to the Joneses, Oliver Stone is quick to say he sees Kennedy's imperfections. "I was never a Kennedy lover when he was alive," he says, "so I did not come to this with a liberal ambulance-chasing knee-jerk reaction to the murder, or saying he was some kind of god. Kennedy was a man with many flaws, and an ambivalent man. I see him as a pragmatic politician wanting to get elected and willing almost to sell his mother to do so." Yet Stone, whose own experience as a soldier in Vietnam has shaped much of his politics and his art, also sees the dead President as the first great victim of that war. "Kennedy was a man who achieved a vision and by the end of his thousand days in office was becoming less of a cold warrior and more of a statesman and peacemaker," Stone says. "He told [Senators] Mike Mansfield and Wayne Morse and he told [aide] Kenny O'Donnell that he was going to withdraw all the troops after he was re-elected. I have a very strong feeling that if Kennedy had lived, the Vietnam war as we knew it would never have happened. There were sinister forces at work that killed



Penn Jones Jr. has been a researcher since the '60s. "I think there were nine guns fired at JFK," he says, "and it was a beautiful coup d'état."





MAFIA THEORY Both Oswald and Jack Ruby have been shown to have had connections to organized crime. In addition, Louisiana mob boss Carlos Marcello apparently thought it a betrayal that the CIA under JFK would hire the Mafia to assassinate Castro while JFK allowed Robert Kennedy, as attorney general, to crack down on the mob. Marcello is said to have sworn vengeance on RFK. So why assassinate JFK? "If you want to kill a dog," Marcello reportedly said, "you don't cut off the tail, you cut off the head." But some theorists have the mob just carrying out CIA orders.

him because he was seeking to change things." The production company Stone set up for this film is called Camelot.

But Camelot alone does not explain the assassination industry. Not everyone needs a hero; some people need a villain. For some, conspiracy theories can answer a deeply personal need to make sense of an event that, if the official version were true, would be too vast and too random to fathom. As Dr. James W. Pennebaker, a Dallas psychologist who specializes in studying the effects of traumatic events on communities, puts it: "It doesn't make sense to people that a partially deranged man would have done this. It doesn't make sense that Elvis could have just died." The fact that a single madman could change the world in a single moment can be more unsettling than the prospect of an organized action, however corrupt. The organization suggests control; the madman suggests chaos.

Mark Lane begs to differ. "That's just cheap psychology," he argues, "a mystical concept imposed upon us by people who've refused to look at the facts." But Harold Weisberg is one researcher who agrees. "People want to give meaning to a random event like the assassination," he suggests. Says Stone: "[The press] demeans Kennedy, they trivialize history by making November 22, 1963, into a car accident. A thunderbolt came down from the sky and knocked off this guy. O.K., we lost him, grieve a bit, have your three days of grief, and then move on. That's what



Stone's filming began with the motorcade in Dealey Plaza, where, with eerie precision,

they would like us to believe. Well, it wasn't an accident."

Whether inspired by goodness or convinced of evil, the assassination theorists share an extraordinary intensity. David Lifton, author of the 1981 best-selling *Best Evidence*,

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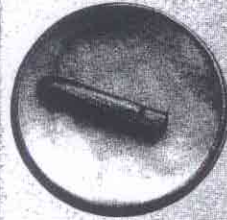
re-created the events of November 22, 1963, in more detail than ever before.

conceal the evidence that he'd been shot from the front. "It was a night in October of 1966 when I figured out that the body must have been altered," he says. "I went to a coffee shop with my girlfriend. I took a napkin and wrote down my two choices. One was to complete my graduate studies and get a master's degree at Cornell. The other was to follow up this evidence, to do what I was burning to do. I saved the napkin in a folder somewhere. I ended up in an apartment living with filing cabinets. I had no idea then that the book would take me fifteen years. But I had the sense that I was really onto something. I knew it couldn't wait." Says Mark North, who started his career as a tax attorney: "My father fought in the battle of Iwo Jima, my brother in Vietnam. I was an Eagle Scout. It bothered me that this could happen in my country."

Oliver Stone's intensity about the assassination, like his interpretation of it, has evolved. He was a senior in high school the day that Kennedy was shot. "I was just on a lunch break or something, and I remember that somebody came and knocked at the door. Just a quiet moment. And actually I didn't realize at the time that my life had changed forever." He was not, he says, a buff. He accepted the theory that Oswald was the lone gunman. But three years ago, while finishing *Born on the Fourth of July* in the Far East, Stone read Jim Garrison's book. "I was very shaken by it," he recalls. "I was deeply, deeply moved and appalled, and I optioned the book myself. I wanted to get this story out."

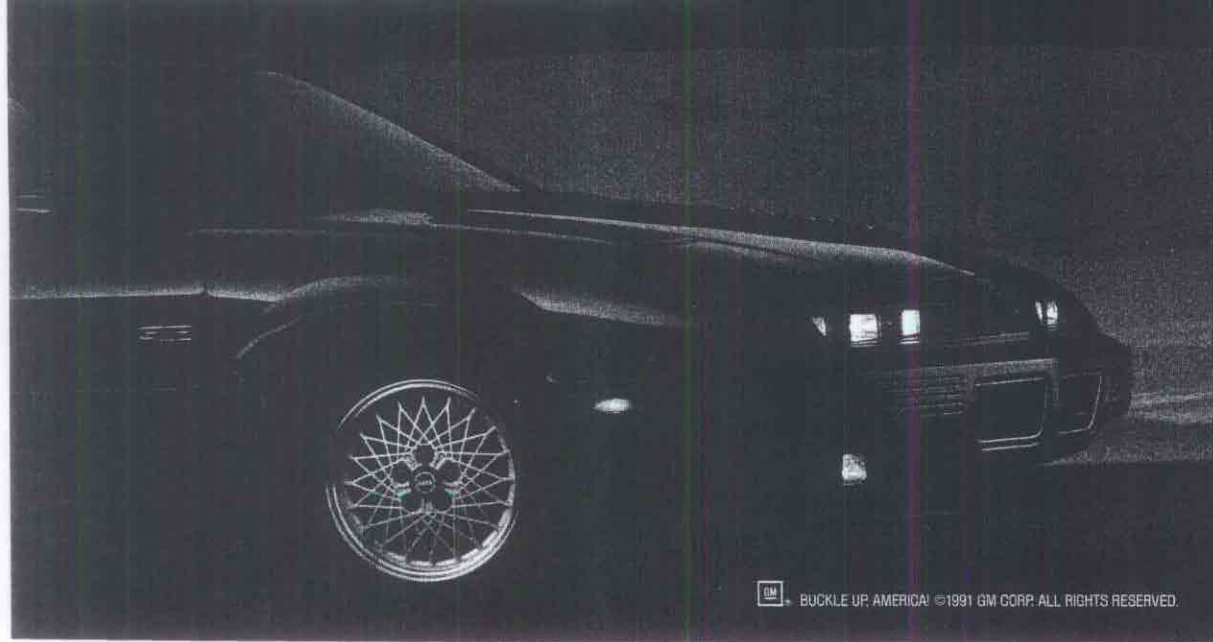
not only remembers where he was when he heard the news of JFK's death; he remembers where he was when he decided to begin researching it. Lifton's theory, one of the most sensational, is that JFK's body was surgically altered to


MILITARY-INDUSTRIAL COMPLEX THEORY The interpretation of the assassination that focuses on perceived vested interests of big business and the military. Many assassination researchers see an attempt at self-preservation in JFK's destruction. According to them, Kennedy's acceptance of a nuclear test ban, his perceived softening toward the U.S.S.R. and Cuba, and his reassessment of the U.S. presence in Vietnam all constituted an economic and moral threat.



PRISTINE BULLET The bullet that ended up on John Connally's stretcher, virtually unmarked, and was said by the Warren Commission to have injured both JFK and the Texas governor.

AL KNOCKOUT.



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RUBY, JACK The Dallas nightclub owner who shot Oswald in the basement of the Dallas police station. The Warren report saw no "significant link" between Ruby and organized crime, but by the time of the House investigation, Ruby's mob connections were taken more seriously. Though he never confessed to having had any part in a conspiracy, he did ask Earl Warren, "If you felt your life was in danger ... wouldn't you be reluctant to go on speaking?" Ruby tried several times to kill himself in prison, once by running headlong into a wall. He died of cancer in prison in 1967, having told guards he had been injected with cancer-causing agents.

THREE TRAMPS Among the suspects arrested near Dealey Plaza were three men dressed in shabby clothing who seemed to be vagrants. Released soon after their arrest, they were never conclusively identified. Some researchers recognize, in one of the tramps, the face of Charles V. Harrelson, a convicted hitman. Harrelson (who is the father of *Cheers* star Woody Harrelson) is in prison for murder, while conceding his resemblance to the "tramp," he denies having been in Dealey Plaza that day.

TWO-COFFINS THEORY David Lifton's *Best Evidence* alleged that the coffin taken from *Air Force One* and driven to Bethesda Naval Medical Center was empty, and that a second coffin, bearing the President, was detoured to an unknown location, where proof that the fatal shot had come from the front was concealed. According to Lifton, the altered body actually arrived at Bethesda before the empty coffin; it was being prepared for autopsy, he claims, before the coffin had arrived.

With Garrison's editor, Zachary Sklar, serving as coauthor, Stone immersed himself in the process of research and writing—and suddenly found himself deluged by the buff community. "They lined up," he says, "like hogs at a trough. Not all, but some. They wanted to be consulted or to have their theories included, and we could not do that. There are too many books and too many researchers. But because we were a movie, we were considered the golden goose."

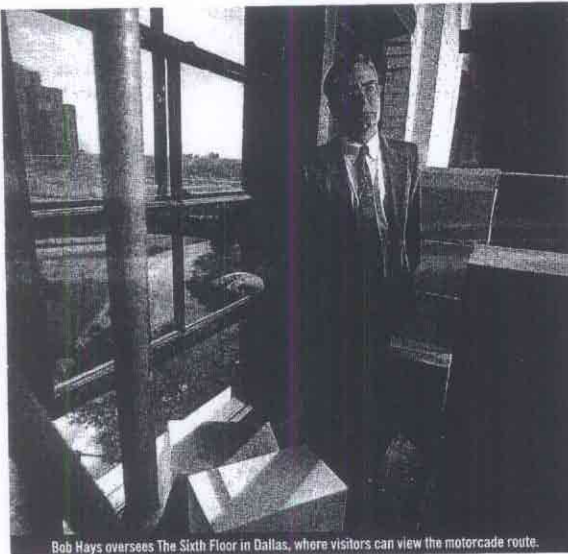
Stone says his emotions have changed in the course of the project. "Much of my initial rage went into the script-writing process," he says, "and by the time you're shooting, so many other people are involved that you're sharing that kind of anger; you're not carrying the burden by yourself. It's a job, and you do it professionally." Still, it is impossible to talk to Stone without being struck by his anger. He is angry at the government, which he perceives as dishonest; at some of the research community, which he perceives as envious; and at most of the press, which he perceives alternately as blind and blinding. His response to his early critics in the press was to call them "Doberman pinchers trained to protect the government." "The media," he says, "would like to think that they can control the people, but I think the people, if they turn out for the movie, will show that they care. And they're not going to buy the official version."

He can sound close to delusion, and he knows it. "I'm not going to be classified as a paranoid," he says. "But I do see a special interest—a vested interest—in certain publications to maintain the official Warren Commission theory." Asked if he dreams of the assassination, he answers, "If I say yes, that could be taken negatively. That could be pictured as me seeing a shooter behind every bush." He wants to be clear that he is not a kook. "I had much anxiety over this film," he says. "I've had many three-o'clock-in-the-morning attacks, doubts, uncertainties. It probably has aged me and certainly has exhausted me. And I certainly hold the possibility that I could be dead wrong in my head. I have that capacity. To look at myself and laugh and say, 'Maybe Oswald is what everyone thinks he was, and I'm on the longest, goofiest spin in history—in my history.'"

But no. Stone's imagery for Kennedy, while not Arthurian, remains regal, and his sense of injustice sublime. "The Kennedy myth is a bit like America's *Hamlet* story," he says. "Kennedy is the king who was murdered. There's been an ugly succession of kings in this country, none of whom have worked, really worked. And we, the American people, are like *Hamlet* before the first act, waiting to find out that there is a false king who sits on the throne."

In *Hamlet*, of course, the false king was also the murderer, and even Stone does not go as far as some others, who trace a CIA plot from the Bay of Pigs to Watergate to George Bush. Though Stone believes that one person did know of the whole assassination plan, he also says that only a viewer of his movie who is "very alert" will be able to say who that person is. His film, he insists, doesn't solve the murder; he's not sure that the murder can ever be solved. "I'm not in the business of bringing charges and trying to make a case in a court of law in the light of day," he says.

But mystery has a rich tendency to breed conspiracy theories. Since 1966, when the first attacks on the Warren Commission report were made, polls conducted by organizations including Gallup, Harris and *The Washington Post* have consistently shown that a majority of Americans (56 percent in



Bob Hays oversees The Sixth Floor in Dallas, where visitors can view the motorcade route.

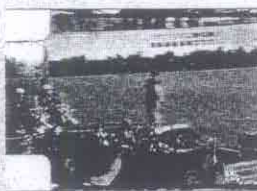
the most recent sampling) believe there was some kind of conspiracy behind the assassination. A lot of their doubts about the official version have been inspired by other people's convictions; like the best preachers and politicians, the conspiracy theorists can often sway by the sheer force of their faith. And with the exception of David W. Belin, a former counsel to the Warren Commission and the author of two books that support its methods and findings, the buffs have generally been the noisemakers. It is difficult to confront their exhortations without being somewhat seduced.

It is also difficult to dismiss some of their questions. Why weren't more of the witnesses interviewed by the Warren Commission? How could one bullet have pierced JFK's back and neck, then John Connally's chest, wrist and hand, and ended up on the governor's stretcher virtu- ➤

TWO-OSWALDS THEORY Questions about the true identity of Lee Harvey Oswald led Michael Eddowes, a British researcher, to publish *The Oswald File* in 1977, in which he claimed that the Oswald born in New Orleans in 1939 was captured by Soviets in 1959. According to Eddowes, JFK was killed by a KGB agent, an Oswald look-alike. Eddowes' evidence—mostly discrepancies among medical reports—led to Oswald's exhumation in 1981. The body was positively identified as Oswald's. But two Dallas funeral directors now claim that the exhumed body is not the one they buried in 1963.



UMBRELLA MAN He was standing by a Dealey Plaza freeway sign, beneath an open umbrella on a sunny day. One theory: The umbrella was a device that fired a paralyzing dart into JFK's neck. Another: The umbrella was a sign to JFK that he was being killed by disgruntled anti-Castro agents who had hoped vainly for "an umbrella" of air protection during the Bay of Pigs invasion.



ZAPRUDER, ABRAHAM The Dallas clothing manufacturer who stood near a concrete wall on the grassy knoll and filmed the most famous footage in history. Some researchers still claim that LIFE, which purchased the film the day after the assassination, kept its most controversial contents from the public until the 1970s, either in outright collusion with the government or in a misguided attempt to shield the public from its grotesque contents. In fact, LIFE published even the most grisly of the movie frames, Frame 313, on October 2, 1964.

ally pristine? Why wasn't Oswald, a known supporter of Castro, watched by federal agents? Why, after his arrest, did he insist upon his innocence and call himself a patsy? Why did more than 50 witnesses say they thought the shots had come not from the Book Depository behind the President but from the infamous grassy knoll ahead? Why, when the alleged lone gunman was supposed to have fired from behind JFK, does the crucial footage shot by Abraham Zapruder seem to show him recoiling backward? The answers to such questions, as provided by the conspiracy buffs, are unfortunately never simple and, lacking evidence, not conclusive.

But the suggestions of a conspiracy were sufficiently compelling to inspire an official reopening of the case by the House of Representatives in 1976. After two and a half years of study, at a cost of \$5.4 million, the House Select Committee on Assassinations concluded that "President John F. Kennedy was probably assassinated as a result of a conspiracy." Part of the evidence: a recording from a motorcade policeman's Dictabelt that seemed to reveal that there had been four shots, not three. In 1988 the Justice Department concluded that the acoustical evidence on which the committee had based its conclusion had been misinterpreted. The Warren Commission findings stood, but so did the controversy. Says Jim Marrs: "It's the greatest murder mystery ever." Says David Belin: "It was the crime of the century." Says Stone: "The mystery has never been laid to rest."

The true-crime nature of the assassination may be the most seductive part of all. In 1966, when Norman Mailer reviewed Mark Lane's first book, he predicted that the question marks would lure a lot of amateur Sherlock Holmeses to Dealey Plaza: "... plans will be made and money saved to make a trip to Dallas, which will become a shrine for all the unborn Baker Street Irregulars of the world."

And that, of course, is precisely what has happened. Indeed, the *Grassy Knoll Gazette's* motto is a quote from Sir Arthur Conan Doyle: "When you have eliminated the impossible, whatever remains, however improbable, must be the truth." Even the buffs' names for the various characters in Dealey Plaza would not seem out of place in one of Conan Doyle's stories: Umbrella Man, Badge Man, Black Dog Man and so on. Erik Rinne, a Dallas teacher and researcher who believes that any one of 10 theories might explain the assassination, says: "I do the research for the lust of knowing. I want to know the unknown—or the unknowable. It's like a Rubik's Cube. It's a labyrinth. It's like the mystery of the pyramids or Jack the Ripper." Rinne's course at Eastfield College near Dallas is called "Who Shot JFK?," and he always begins the class by telling his students he doesn't have

all the answers. "It would be a letdown if this were solved," he concedes. "It's terrible to say, but this is something that could become a parlor game in twenty years." (In one case, it already has. A year ago a small California company came out with *Coup D'Etat: The Assassination of John F. Kennedy Trading Cards*, each card featuring a major player, theory or event in the case.)

At the JFK Assassination Information Center in Dallas, Larry N. Howard, 46, oversees an unofficial repository of tapes, artifacts, government documents and published material. His office is crowded with books and tapes about the assassination, and he has a large ring notebook filled with photos of the JFK set, where he worked as a consultant. There is Howard with Oliver Stone, Howard with Kevin Costner. He's proud to show it to visitors. Every day he receives a stack of pink phone message slips from researchers wanting to pass on information or ask questions about the assassina-



Larry Howard's Assassination Information Center stays open late at night and on weekends.

tion. He estimates that some 100 people around the country are still actively exploring the crime. Many of them visit his center, which stays open late at night and on weekends. He and his two full-time colleagues, working with a half dozen volunteers, charge a five-dollar admission fee and make additional money from the sale of books and T-shirts. Howard and his staff are determined to solve the Kennedy murder. "We're close," he says portentously. "We're very close."

Last month Howard and the Information Center sponsored a three-day assassination symposium at Dallas's Hyatt Regency. The agenda included a book fair, a tour of the motorcade route and seminars featuring eyewitnesses and authors. "Relive History," the brochure suggested. Hundreds were planning to do just that: As long as there are unknowns, there is reason for hope. Says Hugh Forrest, one of the symposium's organizers: "Barring the solution of the assassination, we plan to make this an annual event." □