

With 'JFK', Stone continues conspiracy fantasy

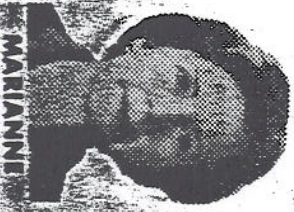
WASHINGTON ¹¹⁻¹⁹⁻⁹¹ For the 116 million Americans born less than 30 years ago, the assassination of President Kennedy is ancient history.

They did not experience the horror of that dreadful moment in Dallas on a sunny Nov. 22 in 1963, nor share the turbulent emotions and political tensions that followed.

What, they have asked, experts have said, however, is a paragon of provocative conspiracy theories suggesting that evil went unpunished and the full story of Kennedy's death was never told.

For nearly three decades, so-called experts have flooded the country with books, speeches and television appearances peddling the notion that something ominous about Kennedy's death is being covered up.

Mostly, however, they disagree about who, how and why this might be. *Marianne Means is a Hearst columnist.*



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be. They do agree that the Warren Commission was wrong to conclude that Lee Harvey Oswald, a mentally disturbed Marxist acting alone, fired three shots from the Texas School Book Depository, two of which felled Kennedy. And not one of them has proved a thing.

Yet they have generated so many doubts that polls show a majority of people now buy the conspiracy idea. It does seem incredible that the course of history could be so dramatically and brutally changed by one crazed Marxist acting for his own solitary purposes. It is natural to suspect that there must be more to it, even if there isn't.

So next month a three-hour film called "JFK" will be released that turns Kennedy's death into another Hollywood fantasy, featuring superstar Kevin Costner and dramatic blowups of the famous Zapruder home movie showing Kennedy being hit.

Producer-director Oliver Stone, who won an Academy Award for "Platoon," a dramatic Vietnam War movie widely denounced as playing fast and loose with pertinent facts, has spent \$40 million on the film.

Stone relies in part on the House Select Committee on Assassination, which conducted a \$5 million probe in the late 1970s that was generally dismissed as a farce. It concluded, without a shred of credible evidence, that there had "probably" been a conspiracy of some kind.

Acoustics experts who testified before the House committee said they found recorded noises at the scene that might have been a fourth shot fired from elsewhere than the book depository. One Stone film draft actually had Kennedy "dying in a shower of six bullets."

As the Hearst Newspapers White House correspondent, I was riding in the Kennedy motorcade that fateful day a few vehicles behind the President. I heard three sharp rifle reports. Everyone else I know who was there also recalls only three shots.

The movie apparently ends ambiguously. But according to an Esquire magazine article detailing Stone's chaotic and often idiotic search for a plausible story line, it implies heavily that Kennedy was killed as the result of a warmongers' conspiracy

to give the presidency to Lyndon Johnson. The theory is that Johnson was more willing than Kennedy to escalate the Vietnam war and kill American boys.

This audacious leap of imagination is a product of Stone's obsession with the Vietnam War, not of any reliable new evidence. Stone assumes that Kennedy opposed expanding the Vietnam War and claims that Kennedy had ordered a withdrawal of 100,000 military personnel that Johnson countermanded. He contends Kennedy intended to withdraw completely from Vietnam after the 1964 election.

But this flies in the face of the record. It was Kennedy who dispatched 16,000 military troops to Vietnam in the first place; his predecessor, Dwight Eisenhower, had only sent a handful of military "advisers."

There is no "smoking gun" to connect Kennedy's death with the war in Vietnam. It is despicable of Stone to mislead Americans by even suggesting it.