

Film reviews

'JFK'

By DUANE BYRGE

A good defense lawyer only needs to cast a reasonable doubt to get his client off the hook, we Kennedy followers have learned, and 1960s slugger Oliver Stone proves he's a masterful litigant in this gumbo-filled historical reconstruction of John F. Kennedy's assassination.

Essentially, it's not about Kennedy but rather the tale of New Orleans D.A. Jim Garrison who — not believing the Warren Commission's Report that a lone gunman, Lee Harvey Oswald, shot down JFK — launched a widespread investigation, eventually prosecuting one New Orleans citizen Clay Shaw for the crime. In Garrison's eye, Shaw was a cog in a murderous conspiracy hatched by the CIA, the defense

industry, Southern rednecks, Cuban refugees and all sorts of goose hunters.

If any cause or special interest group wanted to hire a filmmaker to document the rightness of their issue, Stone would be unbeatable. In this view of nimble bombast, it's not doubtful that Stone could spin a masterful cinematic web linking John Sununu's resignation with the collapse of Pan Am. Aesthetically, "JFK" is crafty, super-skilled filmmaking: propaganda every bit as cinematically splendid as Frank Capra's "Why We Fight" or Leni Riefenstahl's "Triumph of the Will."

Dignifying D.A. Garrison, who even in the jambalaya of this country's screwiest state was considered a loose cannon, is the savvy casting of good-old-reliable, salt-of-the-earth

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'JFK'

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Kevin Costner. As the obsessed litigant, Costner evens sucks on a pipe, avuncularly a la the great wise man of the era, Walter Cronkite.

Opposing this judicious breadwinner are the wide array of "conspirators," shrewdly chosen among Hollywood's finest nutcase players — prominently Joe Pesci as a hypertensive co-conspirator and Donald Sutherland as a slithery CIA op. Down the French Quarter line, you've also got died-blond Tommy Lee Jones as gay Clay Shaw and Ed Asner as a swaggering redneck. Before we even present the facts, ladies and gentlemen of the jury, which side would you trust: gray-suited Kevin or Joe Pesci and the boys.

In the film, Garrison quotes Adolf Hitler as saying the bigger the lie, the more people are likely to believe it; paraphrasing that cynicism, the bigger the movie the more likely people are going to believe it, especially in this post-literate age where college kids only know JFK as the president who got laid a lot. And screenwriters Stone and Zachary Sklar present the "facts" in a stentorian wave of shrewd and sometimes dubious juxtapositions (aided and abetted by muted trumpet and staccato of the

snares).

The narrative movement is thus: Garrison espouses theory, interrogates slimeball who lies to him, followed by flashback to "reality" shot in black-and-white showing Garrison's suppositions are correct.

Indeed, Stone's savvy, documentary-style black-and-white footage casts an aura of truth over this theoretical treatise. Stone has built his case, starting with documentary clips of Dwight Eisenhower's warning of the terrors of the "military industrial complex," through a win-

JFK

Warner Bros.

In Association with Le Studio Canal Plus, Regency Enterprises and Alcor Films
An Ixtlan Corp. and an A. Kitman Ho Production
Producers A. Kitman Ho, Oliver Stone
Director Oliver Stone
Screenwriters Oliver Stone, Zachary Sklar
Executive producer Arnon Milchan
Director of photography Robert Richardson
Production designer Victor Kempster
Co-producer Clayton Townsend
Editors Joe Hutshing, Pietro Scalia
Music John Williams
Costume designer Marlene Stewart
Casting Risa Bramon Garcia, Billy Hopkins, Heidi Levitt

Based on the books "On the Trail of the Assassins" by Jim Garrison and "Crossfire: The Plot That Killed Kennedy" by Jim Marrs

Color/Stereo

Cast:

Jim Garrison Kevin Costner
Liz Garrison Sissy Spacek
David Ferrie Joe Pesci
Clay Shaw Tommy Lee Jones
Lee Harvey Oswald Gary Oldman
Bill Broussard Michael Rooker
Lou Ivon Jay O. Sanders
Susie Cox Laurie Metcalf
Jack Martin Jack Lemmon
Sen. Long Walter Matthau
Dean Andrews John Candy
X Donald Sutherland
Guy Bannister Ed Asner
Willie O'Keefe Kevin Bacon
Earl Warren Jim Garrison

Running time — 188 minutes

MPAA Rating: R

ning montage of Camelot (the energy of the New Frontier; the disastrous Bay of Pigs, the Cuban Missile Crisis, the triumph of "Ich Bin Ein Berliner" speech, to Dallas.

Throughout, Stone stretches one thread: the CIA and military industrial complex, furious at Kennedy for not providing air support in the Bay of Pigs and fearing his pulling out of Vietnam, hatched a plot.

At its most questionable, a voice-over enumerates the military/industrial types who would benefit from JFK's death — while panning over the likes of the Joint Chiefs and LBJ. While Oliver Stone has certainly stirred up the waters, with good conscience and, in JFK's own parlance, "with vigah," most people are likely to regard "JFK" as BS.

Big Easy's taking it hard as 'JFK' revives Garrison 'case'

NEW ORLEANS (AP) — Even though it's been 22 years since Jim Garrison prosecuted a highly respected New Orleans businessman on charges he conspired to assassinate President Kennedy, passions still simmer over the case.

When Oliver Stone began filming "JFK" last summer, the Times-Picayune began carrying letters praising the film or condemning it as an attempt to aggrandize a shameful episode.

The movie, which stars Kevin Costner as Garrison, features Garrison himself as U.S. Supreme Court Justice Earl Warren, whose Warren Commission report declared Lee Harvey Oswald the lone assassin 10 months after Kennedy was killed in Dallas on Nov. 22, 1963.

Rosemary James, a reporter who covered the investigation and trial, criticized the film and Garrison. Her letter said Garrison fabricated a new conspiracy about the assassination almost daily in 1967 and '68.

"I know for a fact that Garrison

deliberately proceeded with a fraudulent case against Clay Shaw," she said.

She said Garrison selected a scapegoat for political purposes, then set about destroying one of the most creative business and cultural leaders New Orleans ever produced.

"Now comes a gullible from La La Land with a \$60 million budget who wants to regurgitate all of that garbage," James said in her letter to the editor. "Many of us who call New Orleans home are offended by the fact that, once again, our city is about to be propelled into the limelight as a subject of national ridicule."

Stone responded: "James complains that Shaw was prosecuted with a 'fraudulent case' and that Garrison's witnesses were 'lunatic publicity hounds.' The truth is that the prosecution was sabotaged by the federal government from day one."

He said she incorrectly claimed that he bought "Jim Garrison's fictional script."

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Garrison

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The truth was, he said, that he and Zachary Sklar wrote the script for "JFK" based on a variety of sources.

"Sadly, James seems unable to grasp that 'JFK' is not the Jim Garrison story or the Clay Shaw story," Stone said. "It is a film exploring who killed Kennedy and why."

In 1969, Garrison, a hulking man of 6-foot-6 who wears size 14 shoes, packed a pistol under his coat and was called the "Jolly Green Giant" around the criminal courthouse.

During his heyday Garrison tangled with the police, all eight of the city's Criminal District Court judges and the entire Louisiana Legislature.

Garrison became a national celebrity when he prosecuted Shaw for allegedly conspiring with Lee Harvey Oswald and others to kill Kennedy.

The case turned into a nationally publicized farce.

One of Garrison's star witnesses died under mysterious circumstances. Another witness related under cross-examination how he fingerprinted his daughter each time she came home from school to make sure a spy hadn't taken on her identity.

The prosecution consisted primarily of an attack on the Warren report and the testimony of a number of unusual witnesses.

After a two-year investigation and 34-day trial, the jury took less than an hour to acquit Shaw.

Although Garrison vigorously pursued the case and still insists he was right, his prosecution of Shaw was ridiculed in the press. The Times-Picayune looked back on the trial in a 1983 series titled "The Case That Never Was."

Garrison, now 69, retired from the state's 4th Circuit Court of Appeal last month because of ill health. He was elected to the judgeship in 1978.

The former district attorney did not return telephone calls. A secretary at the court said he was too ill to talk to a reporter.