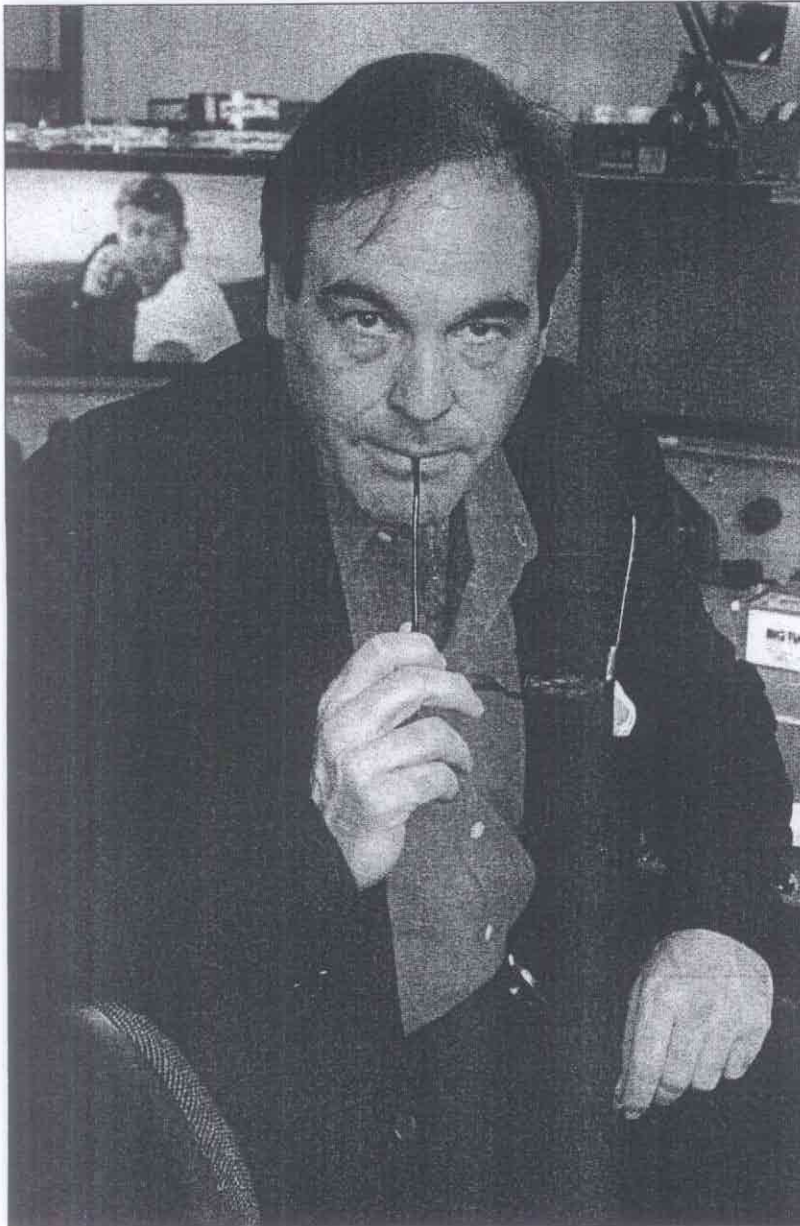


CALENDAR

LOS ANGELES TIMES • DECEMBER 15, 1991

F/W



THE MOST DANGEROUS MAN IN AMERICA?

Why is Oliver Stone's movie "JFK" so threatening to so many people? It all boils down to truth, lies, history and myth. In the trenches with the controversial filmmaker as he wages war over his \$40-million "why-and-whodunit."

By Robert Scheer.

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Theater

On the run with Joan Collins (who just loves to bare... her soul).

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On Location: Roman Polanski on sex in the cinema and America.

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Westside/Valley

Behind the lens with George Hurrell, photographer of cinematic legends.

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CON KEYES / Los Angeles Times

President and Mrs. John F. Kennedy begin their fateful limousine ride in 1963; "JFK" director Oliver Stone says he just wants "to get the people to smell a rat."



Associated Press

Oliver Stone Builds His Own Myths

The filmmaker has touched some very raw nerves—again. But now, with 'JFK,' it's big-time history he's messing with

By ROBERT SCHEER

It's not Vietnam, Salvador or even Dealey Plaza in Dallas, just the dubbing stage at Skywalker Sound in Santa Monica. But Oliver Stone is once again at war.

"Call me a guerrilla historian," Stone says, munching a turkey sandwich while the last frame of the famous Zapruder 8-millimeter "home movie" showing President John F. Kennedy getting his head blown off plays over and over on the screening room wall. Stone has been holed up for 18-hour days editing his film "JFK" while fighting a rear-guard action against the intense criticism his new and most provocative film has engendered, sight unseen.

His critics resent the already controversial director poaching on the sacred land of the Kennedy assassination, rearranging the relics and breathing life into the ghosts. Some don't like his attacks on the Warren Commission's Lee Harvey Oswald-did-it-alone conclusion. Others detest his portraying former New Orleans Dist. Atty. Jim Garrison, who brought the only case to trial in the Kennedy assassination, as a hero played by Kevin Costner. And the movie's larger-than-life thesis blaming the assassination on a secret parallel government nested in the military-industrial complex strikes some as bizarre.

Stone is alternately perplexed and angry over the critical articles and columns, which have made a free-fire zone around

his movie before it finished shooting. Punching holes in his adversaries' arguments with his rat-a-tat of ready-to-fire facts, he is apprehensive, combative and can even appear hurt. Then he suddenly flashes an impish grin and one senses he's having a ball. With his unruly hair, still boyish good looks and eight movies and three Academy Awards under his belt, Stone at 45 evidences the outrage lightly laced with glee of one who is sitting just where he belongs.

But whatever the criticism, the film has to get done, and tossing the sandwich, Stone turns his jack-rabbit intensity back to perfectly matching sound with picture and overcoming other obstacles to getting a film done two weeks before it opens.

The Zapruder frame, taken by an amateur photographer present at the assassination, enlarged in frightening detail, is crucial to Stone's cinematic indictment of the official Warren Commission Report. In the final scenes of the movie, Kevin Costner uses it to illustrate how the bullet forced the President's head "back and to the left," indicating the fatal shot came from somewhere other than where Oswald was said to be standing.

With each shot fired at the President, Stone's head snaps involuntarily. This may be the movies, and the foreign distributors showing up for screenings remind one daily of the high financial stakes for the \$40-million Warner Bros. picture (with another

\$15 million for promotion), but there's no question that for Stone, "JFK" was—and is—a cause.

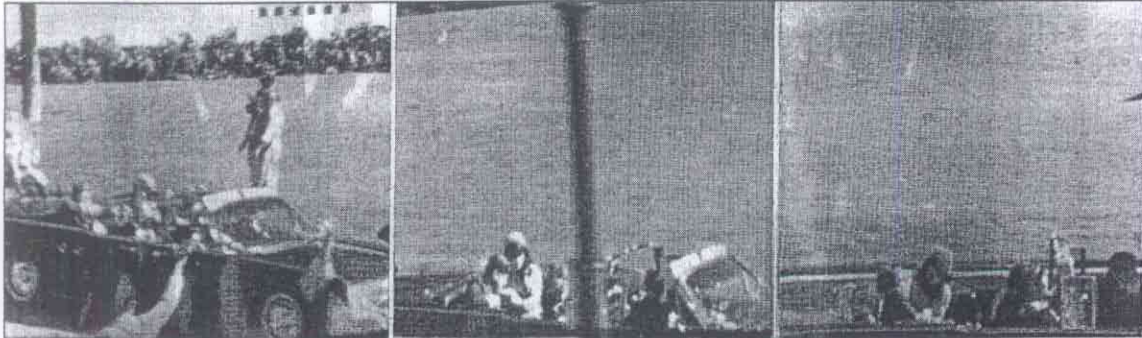
In an industry built on recycling pleasing myths into profit, Stone insists on doing it the hard way. His are counter-myths.

Stone, a twice wounded Vietnam veteran, views "JFK" as digging deeper into what he sees as the origins of that war and nothing less than "a battle over the meaning of my generation with the likes of Dan Quayle, a battle between official



In a scene from "JFK," Lee Harvey Oswald (Gary Oldman) is in police custody and surrounded by the media.

Warner Bros.



Nov. 22, 1963—Frames from the famous 8-millimeter "home movie" taken by Abraham Zapruder show President John F. Kennedy being struck by an assassin's

bullet, slumping toward Jacqueline Kennedy as Texas Gov. John Connally turns to see what happened, and being struck a second time.

mythology and disturbing truth."

With his slept-in sports jacket and sense of easily outraged idealism, the always irreverent Stone bears the unmistakable marks of the Kennedy generation. It is not that either he or his movie exaggerate the accomplishments of the brief Kennedy presidency. Rather, like many of his generation, Stone persists on mourning an innocence lost.

The assumption of "JFK" is a forgiving one. That for Kennedy, the CIA-sponsored Bay of Pigs invasion of Cuba in 1961 and dispatching the first troops to Vietnam the same year, were merely blunders on an otherwise noble course, and he quickly recognized the error of his ways. After the October, 1962, missile crisis, Kennedy reneged on his pledge to support another invasion of Cuba, and just before his death he had signed an order withdrawing 1,000 troops from Vietnam.

Stone's contention is that the true Kennedy is the man who agreed to a nuclear test ban treaty and initiated the Alliance for Progress economic aid program, and that hard-liners within the government and military were alarmed by this evidence

of his dovishness.

The official version of Kennedy's assassination is this: He was fatally shot Nov. 22, 1963, while riding in a motorcade through downtown Dallas by a lone gunman stationed at a sixth-floor window of the Texas School Book Depository. Shortly after the shooting, Lee Harvey Oswald, an employee of the depository who fled the building moments after the shooting, was arrested and charged with the murder of Kennedy and a Dallas policeman. Oswald denied both murders under questioning; two days later, as he was being transferred from the city jail to county jail, he was shot and killed by Dallas nightclub owner Jack Ruby.

A special presidential commission chaired by Chief Justice Earl Warren investigated the shooting, and on Sept. 24, 1964, issued a report that stated Oswald was the lone assassin.

But "JFK" finds many candidates for an assassination team in the ranks of disillusioned Cubans and the American military-industrial complex. Kennedy was succeeded by Lyndon Baines Johnson, who is portrayed in the film as the servant of the

economic interests and jingoistic parties that benefited from the vast escalation of the Vietnam War.

Of course, an Oliver Stone movie wouldn't be merely an entertaining commercial venture, even though it stars Costner as Garrison. Garrison was sharply criticized for linking New Orleans merchant Clay Shaw to the CIA, anti-Castro Cubans and others in a far-ranging conspiracy to kill the President—a conspiracy that he could not prove in court.

But Garrison was also a rebel hero for some, making him a natural subject for Stone, who with movies like "Platoon," "Born on the Fourth of July" and "The Doors," has fought a battle for the soul of the '80s. Stone is compelled by what he self-mockingly terms a "demon counter-cultural drive" to stick his cameras into the most sensitive national wound, attempt to solve the most puzzling of mysteries, champion a widely discredited lawman and take on the CIA, the FBI, the Joint Chiefs, L.B.J., the Mafia and the Washington Post. Say what you will about Stone, he does not

go gently into the success of the Hollywood night.

"So I've created a counter-myth to the official one—is that so bad?" he asks, with one of his trademark sucker questions designed to throw a challenger off guard. No, it's just unusual for the business he's in, and he knows that. This is not some low-budget rebel film like Costa-Gavras' "Z" or his own "Salvador," which he often brings up. This is the high-stakes holiday season, make-it-on-the-first-weekend crap game.

It's understandable why Stone would make provocative political films, given his past experiences recounted in "Platoon" and in numerous interviews. But why would Warner Bros., united in a partnership with Time-Life, bankroll this excoriating view of the American Establishment? Is this a ruling-class death wish? Is it, as Stone puts it only half joking, that "the Establishment is obviously cracking and fissuring"?

The answer can be sought in a dinner meeting two years ago at The Grill restau-

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In another scene, New Orleans Dist. Atty. Jim Garrison (played by Kevin Costner) peers through the sights of the same type of rifle used in the assassination.

Marketing J.F.K.'s Murder

By ELAINE DUTKA

When Warner Bros. embarked on its \$15-million promotional campaign for "JFK," it was by no means certain that Oliver Stone, who finished shooting the movie on the last day of July, would be able to deliver it by the Dec. 20 release date.

Though Stone had considered a February opening as a fallback, it was in his interest—and the studio's—that the picture come out during the holiday season. It is, after summer, the biggest moviegoing time of the year. A December opening would qualify director, cast and crew for Oscar consideration, all important in terms of prestige and box office. And, not so incidentally, Stone—superstitious by nature—had been very successful releasing "Platoon," which won best picture, and "Born on the Fourth of July" at that time.

Operating on the assumption he'd pull it off, the studio began its media blitz in the early fall. Posters featuring a close-up of the film's star Kevin Costner were plastered on buses, in bus stalls and subway stations. A trailer was running in theaters across the country by mid-October. On Nov. 24, a two-page ad ran in the Los Angeles Times and the New York Times.

The next day, Warners blanketed the airwaves of the top 50 markets. A 30-second ad was placed on "Monday Night Football." A 90-second version heralding "the movie event of the year" appeared as the first spot on the CBS "MASH" special, the late-night talk shows, as well as on MTV. During news broadcasts, the studio employed a technique known as "roadblocking"—only used, as a rule, the night before a major film is to open. It bought the

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Faces From the Movie, Faces From History

In Oliver Stone's "JFK," some notable actors are cast as notable figures in the Kennedy assassination and its aftermath. Kevin Costner, fresh from winning a bundle of Oscars for his "Dances With Wolves," plays New Orleans Dist. Atty. Jim Garrison. British actor Gary Oldman plays Lee Harvey Oswald, Kennedy's alleged assassin. Tommy Lee Jones plays Clay Shaw, who was accused by Garrison of being part of a plot to kill Kennedy. And Garrison himself has been cast as Chief Justice Earl Warren, who chaired the commission that found Oswald to be the lone assassin.



Costner



Oldman



Jones



Garrison



Garrison in 1969



Oswald



Shaw



Warren

'JFK'

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rant in Beverly Hills with Stone, his Creative Artists Agency agent Paula Wagner, and the three top executives from Warner Bros.—President and Chief Operating Officer Terry Semel, Chairman of the Board and Chief Executive Officer Bob Daly and Bill Gerber, a Warner production executive—who had long been interested in Stone's work.

The ambience of that meeting marks the distance that Hollywood has traveled from the days when it was run by conservative moguls who held all the cards. What has emerged in its place, if Stone's experience is a guide, is a less ideological and more competitive Hollywood capitalism focused more purely on making a buck. It is also a market in which successful artists, no matter their politics, abetted by the powerful agencies that represent them, can have considerable clout.

Stone was a hot director, and Warners had been courting him for some time to make a movie about Howard Hughes. That effort came to naught because Warren Beatty controlled the rights. Stone told the Warners execs he had "quietly optioned" two books on an even more important mystery. Stone, who had won an Academy Award for the screenplay for "Midnight Express," wanted to write a script about the Kennedy assassination.

One of the books Stone optioned was "On the Trail of the Assassins" by Jim Garrison,

published in 1988 by Sheridan Square Press and barely reviewed. It was a revision of an earlier book by Garrison, then a Louisiana Appellate Court Justice, in defense of his earlier case charging a New Orleans-based conspiracy that included Clay Shaw, an international merchant. The other book was Jim Marrs' compendium, "Crossfire—The Plot That Killed Kennedy," which covers the gamut of Kennedy assassination theories.

"My immediate reaction was 'Wow! What a powerful and great idea for a movie,'" said Warners' Semel. "Any time the assassination had come up in the last 30 years, everyone seemed to feel that we didn't get the whole story."

But could Stone attract top-drawing actors to the project? It helped that Stone was accompanied by Wagner of CAA. Stone has had a close working relationship with Wagner since 1985, when she helped put his movie "Salvador" together. At that time, she secured the services of James Woods, who was also represented by her agency. She would subsequently get Stone together with CAA clients Tom Berenger and Willem Dafoe for "Platoon," Michael Douglas for "Wall Street," Tom Cruise for "Born" and Val Kilmer, who starred in "The Doors." "So," Stone laughs, "I guess Paula and I have a relationship."

In short, Stone came to the meeting holding quite a few of those cards that would have been solidly in the hands of the studio in the old days. The only one he was missing—which they had—was the money. But he didn't think that was a major obstacle with this property and was confi-

dent of successfully shopping it around.

Stone says that "better deals could have been made in the international market" but that he preferred selling the whole thing to Warners because "I didn't want the script going all over the world to be bid on and read. I knew the material was dangerous and I wanted one entity to finance the whole thing and the history of Warner Bros., given Terry Semel's record of political films, was my first choice."

Warner Bros. under Semel produced "All the President's Men," "The Parallax View" and "The Killing Fields."

Dinner that night around a table in the front room of The Grill was "like a bunch of guys sitting around in Las Vegas saying, 'Hey, I want to build this thing and people will come.'" Stone says. "I told them I wanted 'JFK' to be a movie about the problem of covert parallel government in this country and deep political corruption. Here's the story. I laid it out in 15, 20 minutes. They were all ears. I said I want to tell the story as it was first understood in 1963 and then tell it over and over so it unravels and by the end you see it in a totally different light."

Semel remembers Stone saying "lots of things like 'Are you concerned politically? Would it affect your company? Are there negative reasons why you wouldn't do it?' My immediate reaction was 'No, we should do it.' If it's entertaining and it's intriguing, a great murder mystery about something we all cared about and grew up thinking about, why not? To me, it took two minutes to be totally ensconced in the whole idea."

By the time cappuccino was served, they

had a handshake deal. The details took months of bargaining to work out, but the commitment to a film for around \$20 million was made and Stone knew "my movie had a home." CAA client Costner was signed to play Garrison in January, 1991, (two months before Costner's "Dances With Wolves" swept the Academy Awards). The budget doubled to \$41 million when Arnon Milchan, an Israeli representing German and French money, became executive producer, and Stone was able to afford an impressive cast of supporting actors as well.

The presence of Joe Pesci, Walter Matthau, Ed Asner, Donald Sutherland, Jack Lemmon and the others was important to Stone's strategy. "The supporting cast provides a map of the American psyche, familiar comfortable faces that walk you through a winding path in the dark woods. Warners thought it was too costly to have them but those actors all waived their normal fees to help the picture."

Despite rumors that Mel Gibson and others were candidates to play Garrison, Stone insists that Costner was his preferred choice. "It helped that [CAA President] Mike Ovitz was a strong fan of the movie," Stone says, and was strongly urging Costner, his client, to be in it. An obstacle was the actor's promise to his wife that he would take a year off from work. But, as Costner says, "after she read the book, she said, 'You have to do it.'"

Costner, who pointed out he comes from a conservative Republican background, researched the material carefully before

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agreeing to play Garrison. "I met with his critics as well as people on the street who still love him. He's a complex character and both Oliver and I wanted him played that way," says Costner, who credits Stone with exposing him to a full range of Garrison's critics.

Stone adds: "I wanted Costner to get both sides, to witness the hatred and extremism that Jim engenders and as an actor to look into the eyes of his enemies and know what he was up against back then. These were tough people and they'd come in a parade in front of Costner with their New Orleans accent saying that Jim's a snake—that he liked boys and was angry that Shaw stole his lover and a lot worse.

"Kevin read the script several times, saw back-up material and it was not easy for him to do. Kevin took some chances—he's going to make some enemies with this movie but I'm proud of him."

Stone feels signing Costner was a crucial break for the film and not just because of the actor's box-office appeal. "Kevin was the perfect choice for Jim Garrison because he reminds me of those Gary Cooper, Jimmy Stewart qualities—a moral simplicity and a quiet understatement.

He listens well. He anchors the movie in a very strong way. He guides you through it because you empathize with him and his discoveries become yours. Through Kevin playing Jim you get on the 50-yard line for the Kennedy assassination."

But while Costner is quintessentially believable, the real-life character he plays, Garrison, is not. Flamboyant, ambitious, carousing and quick of mouth, Garrison burst into the national media with a series of wild charges. When he brought Clay Shaw to trial in March, 1967, on charges of conspiracy to kill Kennedy, after many delays, two years later a jury took only an hour to declare Shaw innocent.

Garrison picked up enemies in the news media along the way that have now risen in outrage at the thought that, decades later, Stone has cast this fellow in a heroic role.

"Dallas in Wonderland: How Oliver Stone's Version of the Kennedy Assassination Exploits the Edge of Paranoia" is how the Washington Post headlined a piece by its national security correspondent, George Lardner, who had crossed swords with Garrison while covering the original trial. Lardner hadn't seen the movie but, basing his criticisms on an unauthorized early draft of the script, proceeded to

challenge what he considers "the absurdities and palpable untruths in Garrison's book and Stone's rendition of it."

Lardner points out that Garrison lost his case linking New Orleans merchant Shaw to an assassination conspiracy and therefore might be presumed to have defamed an innocent man. He adds that Garrison embellished a weak case by picking on the man's homosexual relations to prove guilt by possible association.

Not so, says Stone, who documents Shaw's connection with the CIA, which had been denied on the stand, and then goes on to provide photographs and eyewitness accounts linking Shaw to the assassination. "He was in the CIA according to [CIA director] Richard Helms, spotted by numerous witnesses with Lee Oswald and David Ferrie [the man Garrison thought was the getaway pilot for the Dallas assassins], whom he denied knowing. So don't give me this jive about his being an innocent man. He was a perjurer at the very least."

He adds that members of the jury when interviewed said they did believe there was a conspiracy to kill Kennedy.

It is true that the case against Shaw was weak. The movie itself contains powerful voices, including that of Sissy Spacek, playing Garrison's long-suffering and eventually divorced wife, arguing persuasively at one point in the movie that Shaw's rights are being violated in a witch hunt. The defection of a key Garrison staffer, shown in the movie, is supported by a strong criticism detailing the failure of the enterprise.

"Even paranoids have enemies,"

Stone answers, decrying the fact that the Washington Post's Lardner "has not seen the movie and is unconscionable in criticizing a work in progress, including scenes in the early script that are not even in the movie."

But Lardner was only one critic. In an Op-Ed piece in the Los Angeles Times, former Garrison researcher Tom Bethell, who concedes that he turned over Garrison's witness list to the Shaw defense team, says "many students of the assassination are concerned that glamorizing someone as reckless as Garrison might undermine legitimate skepticism about the official findings." Time magazine observed that "Garrison is considered somewhere near the far-out fringe of conspiracy theorists, but Stone appears to have bought his vision virtually wholesale."

On the other hand, Semel of Warner Bros., who read Garrison's book at Stone's suggestion, was "blown away by the fact that clearly something else happened" than the Warren Commission reported.

"If people are upset or uptight about the fact that they don't agree with some of the premises of the movie, I think that's one of the great things about our country," says Semel. "We are allowed to express all these things. We are presenting possible scenarios that many of us feel in our gut have real threads of possibility."

Stone himself is even more sympathetic to Garrison than the movie he has made. In interviews, he defends Garrison's "courage" in bringing the indictments, points out that Garrison went to trial only

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'JFK'

Continued from Page 33

after a three-judge panel and a grand jury said he had sufficient evidence and that Garrison was thwarted at every turn in his investigation by much of the American legal and political Establishment. "His subpoena against [CIA Director] Allen Dulles, Charles Cabel [Dulles' deputy] and Richard Helms [who succeeded Dulles as CIA director] were all quashed, four governors in four different states would not honor his extradition requests, his files were copied and passed on to the defense by several traitors on his staff and his office was tapped. He was also bribed with a federal judgeship and his witnesses were threatened, cajoled and also bribed."

But the movie is compelling not because it makes the case against Shaw or for Garrison but because it presents in exhausting detail the conflicting accounts that indicate that something very different from the official version

happened. We and Garrison still are not sure what it proves, except that the Warren Commission got it wrong.

"No one really knows exactly what happened, who did it or how," Stone concedes, "but we have some pretty good clues and we reach some conclusions in the movie that I hope will shape a counter-myth to the one the Warren Commission put out that will exist in the minds of the next generation. Mythology is not a child's fairy tale; it's a true inner meaning of an event."

But why hang a plausible case against the Warren Commission on the controversial theories of Garrison—why did Stone pick this book for his "JFK"? Stone had not thought much about the assassination until 1988, when the Garrison book was pressed upon him by Ellen Ray, publisher of Covert Action Information Bulletin, which delights in exposing the CIA, and publisher of the book, on a creaky elevator when they met by chance, or so it seems, in Havana's old Nacional Hotel. Stone was in Cuba to accept a Latin American Film Festival award for "Salvador" from Nobel laureate Gabriel Garcia

Marquez. Stone at first thought Ray was "just another sandal-wearing advocate of a cause," but he took the book with him to the Philippines, where he was completing shots for "Born on the Fourth of July." "It was a great gumshoe story. This pistol whipping occurs on the night of [Nov.] 22 on a rainy night in which this guy, Jack Martin [an FBI informant], gets his skull laid open by his boss, Guy Banister, [a former FBI bureau chief] and out of that little Raymond Chandler kind of incident, Garrison spins this tale out with international intrigue—a hell of a trail. As a dramatist, that excited me."

After also buying rights to the Jim Marrs book, Stone teamed up with Zachary Sklar, the editor of Garrison's book, to write a script based on the books and a massive amount of other information gathered by Jane Rusconi, a recent Yale graduate he had hired as a researcher. The material, gathered over two years, "allowed me to use Garrison as a vehicle for a larger perspective than was available to him in 1967-69."

The "use" of Garrison and the other real-life characters in this

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docudrama raises a host of questions about a dramatist's use of history. Stone thinks it is the dramatist's right to form composite characters as well as the things they say.

Most startling is the character called Mr. X, played by Donald Sutherland, whom Garrison meets on a park bench in Washington and who speaks out the grand theory of the CIA and military intelligence as a secret government. Garrison did meet some potential witnesses on park benches but not Mr. X, who in real life is Fletcher Prouty, a former aide to the Joint Chiefs of Staff. Stone met Prouty in Washington while he was writing the script. "We took the liberty of having Garrison meet the X character because I met X, who stunned me with his revelations, and I incorporated what he told me into a meeting between [Costner as] Garrison and Sutherland. I feel that was not a violation of the spirit of the truth, because Garrison also met a Deep Throat type named Richard Case Nagell, who claimed to be a CIA agent and made Jim aware of a much larger scenario than the microcosm in New Orleans."

Another melange involves Garrison's closing argument in the Shaw trial, which includes much of the actual argument from the trial's transcript, but half of which was written by Stone to get in the points, he says, learned since that time.

"I wanted to make it better, to bring up the man's whole life into the summation about his feelings and my feelings, which crossed in there."

"The dramatist takes license to composite events and characters into a condensed space; moving fact around. For example, I take three homosexual characters who spotted Oswald with Ferris and Shaw and made them into one character played by Kevin Bacon. This is hardly unusual for a dramatist. 'Killing Fields,' 'Reds' and 'Missing' come to mind as elastic but accurate interpretations of our

history. I'm not hiding what I'm doing, we're putting out a screenplay which is highly footnoted as to our choices and sources so it can be studied and picked apart.

"Sometimes it's hard to remember who's who when you're finished with the movie. You become part of the character, but I will never regret having visited Jim Garrison's soul; it made me a better man. How do you like that quote?" It will really get the haters out."

Most of the critics attacking Garrison nevertheless seem to share Stone and Garrison's view that there was more than one gunman and that the Warren Commission was therefore wrong. Stone, who has often been accused of using a sledgehammer when a scalpel will do, this time carves out detail after mysterious detail to rebut the single-assassin theory.

The improbable angle of fire from the book depository. The "magic bullet" said by the Warren Commission to have hit both Kennedy and Texas Gov. John Connally in three separate places. Oswald's cheap Italian rifle, incapable of getting off the requisite accurate rounds. Mysterious deaths. Contradictory sights. Witnesses the Warren Commission refused to question.

Costner says it was the "magic bullet" that turned him against the lone assassin conclusion of the Warren Commission. It will likely have the same effect on many viewers of this movie, not because of any new facts, but as a tribute to Stone's skill as an agit-prop filmmaker. Employing the skills of the cinematic technician, he uses the Zapruder film to fullest advantage to establish that Kennedy and Gov. Connally were shot no more than 1.6 seconds apart.

The Warren Commission and virtually everyone else accepts that Oswald's rifle could not have fired twice in that time period. How they solved the problem is described by Costner in a courtroom presentation. The Commis-

Please see page 38.

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Chaz Krupar, *GRAMMIE*

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'JFK'

Continued from Page 35

sion concluded that a single bullet found on a stretcher at the hospital had entered the President's back and exited through the front of his throat and then proceeded to enter Connally behind his right armpit, coming out in the front of his chest, breaking a rib and then entering and breaking his right wrist, exiting and smashing into the governor's left thigh. Most miraculous of all, the bullet emerged virtually unscathed. This explanation was accepted by the Warren Commis-

sion despite FBI tests shooting similar bullets into human cadavers and animals that resulted in major distortions of the bullets.

This and other evidence led the House Select Committee on Assassinations in 1979 to conclude after a two-year investigation that "President John F. Kennedy was probably assassinated as a result of a conspiracy." Most of Stone's critics seem to also believe that there was more than one killer, as do most Americans. That suspicion has been largely latent in the public psyche, but if Stone has his way it may bubble up to the surface.

"I just want to get the people to smell a rat. I want people to be

moved by it and have their consciousness shifted. I want a movie that works. All the words in the world don't add up to jack if the movies don't work—a movie is a seat-of-the-pant experience."

At the film's conclusion, the fact that many of the government's records on the assassination have been sealed until the year 2029 is an end title on the screen. If the audience leaves the theater with an apprehensive and questioning buzz and heightened suspicion of official truth, why blame Oliver Stone?

Robert Scheer is a national correspondent for the Los Angeles Times.

Marketing

Continued from Page 5

same time slot on all the networks and their local affiliates, increasing the chances of reaching the largest possible audience.

Print publicity also kicked in. The current issue of Vanity Fair features Costner on the cover. Time and Newsweek cover stories are in the works and, if not dislodged by stories about the disintegration of the Soviet Union, would serve as free billboards for the film.

Still, there are those who believe the film faces an uphill battle. "JFK," they point out, may not be the 3½-hour-with-an-intermission marathon Stone had once contemplated. But the three-hour-running time could still pose problems for theater owners and audiences. The subject—the assassination of our 35th President—is downbeat, particularly at holiday time when family films and lighter fare usually thrive.

Costner, the skeptics admit, is a superstar, an obvious way of broadening "JFK's" built-in audience of over-25 year-olds. But this time around, they point out, he's playing a role that affords him less than his usual quota of charisma and sexuality.

The headline-grabbing Stone

has a strong following, as well. But observers question whether it will be enough to ensure that "JFK" holds its own in a field jammed with high-profile "adult" films, such as "Bugsy," "The Prince of Tides" and "Grand Canyon."

The movie's defenders believe it will. They point to last year's Oscar-winning "Dances With Wolves," another three-hour Costner vehicle (with subtitles, at that) that grossed \$184 million in the United States and Canada alone. They argue that other heavyweight dramas, such as "Rain Man" and "Platoon," did excellent business during the Christmas season. They predict that if "JFK" is as good as its word-of-mouth, a good portion of the seats in the more than 1,150 theaters showing it should be filled.

"The market expands or contracts based on quality or, at least, on whether it contains films people want to see," maintains Joe Petrow, a vice president and film buyer for Metropolitan Theaters. "At Thanksgiving, 'The Addams Family,' 'Beauty and the Beast' and 'My Girl' all took off. And this, after box office was so terrible in the fall. A pack of good films doesn't have to be a drawback. If people see 'Prince of Tides' and like it, they're more likely to go to the movies

again. If 'JFK' is as good as I've been led to believe by the exhibitors who saw it, the audience will be there."

Variety box-office analyst Art Murphy says that, since the target audience is adults—a segment skeptical of and turned off by more traditional forms of advertising—reviews and placement on year-end 10-best lists could help the film. Still, he cautions, it would be a mistake to evaluate "JFK's" box-office performance too fast.

"I wouldn't be concerned if the numbers aren't that large when the movie opens," he says. "For one thing, because the movie is long, it will have one or two fewer showings a day so you'd have to multiply 'JFK's' numbers by 1½ in order to equalize things. For another, the subject matter may cause people to defer seeing it until after the holidays so no conclusions should be drawn until well into January. If the picture opens big, though, all these qualifications don't apply. There's nothing like a hit to take care of all advance speculation."

For his part, director Stone bucks all this "marketing" talk. "It's something sick in American culture when every Christmas we have to talk about how many toys are sold and how much money is made off the Christmas movies when it should be a time of spiritual coming together," he says. "I made the best film I can, and whoever comes, comes."

Stone acknowledges, however, that if "JFK" performs well commercially, it may have a ripple effect. "The success of a 'Missing,' a 'Silkwood,' a 'Reds,' a 'Killing Fields' helps the next one get made," he points out. "Those that do well create more of a market for other historical interpretations and help to continue a tradition."

Elatine Dutka is a Times staff writer.

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