

Princetonian Daily Newsweek Editor discusses 'JFK' controversy

By ERIC HINES

Kenneth Auchincloss, editor-in-chief of Newsweek's international edition, argued in a Wilson School address yesterday that while Oliver Stone's movie "JFK" has spawned renewed interest in the Kennedy assassination, it has not led the American public to agree on what actually happened.

Auchincloss, who wrote Newsweek's cover story on "JFK" last December, did not directly debate any of the numerous conspiracy theories on Kennedy's assassination. Rather, Auchincloss expressed what he called frustration and fascination with the "mess of details" which seem to give no coherent explanation for the incident on November 22, 1963.

Life's a mess
"My word to you today is that life is a mess. It is up to us to try to make sense of it," he said to a chucking audience of over 100 students, faculty and residents. Auchincloss emphasized that though the Warren Commission — established to investigate the assassination — had conducted an excruciatingly detailed investigation, it had still not exhausted all

possibilities.

"All of this information we have leads to a vast treasury of detail. What we are left with . . . is a mess," he said.

Numerous forgotten details of the mess is a result, he said, of the enormous number of details which were never mentioned — for the most part are forgotten — especially by the American media. "Most of it we forget about. What you don't forget, you don't include because you don't have space."

In cases such as the JFK assassination, Auchincloss said to an audience murmuring agreement, that a referee was needed, "a figure of stature in our country trusted by all sides. . . . But there isn't any such figure."

The "referee," Auchincloss said, was supposed to be Supreme Court Chief Justice Earl Warren. "Lyndon Johnson thought everyone would trust Earl Warren. But look at what happened to Warren in 'JFK.' (He was portrayed) as a simpering, senile old fool," he said.

Though Auchincloss refrained from debating conspiracy theories,

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he exhibited a veiled disdain for the thesis of Stone's film, which hypothesized the existence of a vast network in the government, military and business sectors covering up the truth. However, Auchincloss expressed his feeling that an artist does have the right to present his or her own interpretation of the truth.

Auchincloss compared the debate provoked by Stone's movie over the many details of the assassination to courtroom hearings.

In a trial "the prosecution takes all evidence and tries to make a coherent whole (and) the defense will do the same thing," Auchincloss said. "And then the jury will weigh the two and whatever side seems to cohere better will probably win."

Rationalizing a mess

Movies, Auchincloss said, cohere much better than news reports. "They are making little two-hour rational compartments of life that do cohere much better than life." He added that a conspiracy theory is appealing to movie makers, "because) it is a way of making

everything fit. It is a way of rationalizing a mess."

Stone has called for the earlier-than-scheduled release of confidential government files on the assassination, but Auchincloss cautioned that digging up all old files and exposing all raw investigation may do more harm than good, because the new details uncovered will not necessarily be the truth.

"People have come to the FBI with wild details. (all of which are) in the raw FBI interviews. So it is traditional that it is kept guarded, not brought into a court of law," he explained.

Nevertheless, Auchincloss predicted that public pressure will inevitably open the files, likely adding to the mess, rather than solving any mystery.

The rehashing of the debate in "JFK" has reminded the previous generation of the confused times and introduced the younger generation to the controversy. With this increased awareness Auchincloss said that he believed investigations have not finished.

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