

Stone's Vision Raises More Questions than it Answers

Very loosely based on the books On the Trail of the Assassins by Jim Garrison and Crossfire: The Plot That Killed Kennedy by Jim Marrs, Stone's movie version manages to project quite a bit of smoke, some fire, but never a clear picture of who lit the match. The dramatic framework is built around Garrison, the New Orleans District Attorney (Kevin Costner), who apparently brought local businessman Clay Shaw (Tommy Lee Jones) to trial in an effort to break the bigger case by inspiring others to come forward. The fact that Garrison's ploy failed did not deter Stone.

Stone's most questionable technique consists of re-creating scenes that clearly implicate Shaw, David Ferrie (Joe Pesci) and Guy Bannister (Ed Asner); and other scenes that show Oswald with Jack Ruby (Brian Doyle-Murray) and with unnamed Cuban malcontents; and yet other scenes that seem to implicate Lyndon Johnson. There is, however, no proof that the depicted scenes ever occurred. In the case of President Johnson, for example, a quote from an informal gathering is switched to the official context of the Oval Office.

In fictional movies, flashbacks are to be taken as facts in a character's life. By contrast, the flashbacks acted out in Stone's film are depictions of theoretical happenings that even the filmmaker doesn't claim actually took place. The scenes are presented to bring to light the possibility of a greater truth—the mindset of people who could have conspired.

Then there's the character known only as "X" (Donald Sutherland). In the movie, Garrison meets with "X" on a park bench in the shadow of the Capitol, where the unnamed but highly placed source provides the investigator with a wealth of background informa-



District Attorney Jim Garrison (Kevin Costner) confronts a horde of reporters in Oliver Stone's remake of recent history, "JFK."

tion. Is it important to know that such a meeting never took place in real life? Is it vital to understand that "X" is a composite (based on retired Air Force Colonel L. Fletcher Prouty and others), used mainly as a device to introduce a number of theories that didn't appear in either Garrison's or Marrs' books? Is it appropriate for Stone to edit-in staged footage, including simulated 8mm shots that closely match the Zapruder amateur movies of the death scene?

Stone claims he's seeking the truth. His movie "JFK" is a well formulated question, but unfortunately Stone doesn't know and can't prove what happened. It only looks like he did.

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Harold Weisberg is a long-time Frederick resident who has written six books on the Kennedy assassination and was one of the first people to speak out against the Oliver Stone movie "JFK."

During a recent telephone interview, Weisberg had some interesting and surprising concerns about Stone's approach and the moviemaker's reliance on the Jim Garrison book.

"I'm afraid Stone's movie will deceive and mislead as many Americans as the Warren Commission did," Weisberg said, with a high degree of indignation in his voice. Unlike ex-presi-

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dent Gerald Ford, Weisberg is not discounting Stone's most basic premise that a conspiracy did in fact exist. Rather, Weisberg is concerned with what he thinks is Stone's disregard for verifiable facts.

"Stone proves nothing," Weisberg contends. "All he does is dramatize theories. He brings nothing factual to light. Without evidence, you have fiction rather than reality."

Weisberg, who wrote a four-volume series entitled Whitewash, a history called Oswald in New Orleans, as well as an overview and examination of the medical evidence entitled Post Mortem, does believe that there was more than one shooter and thus a conspiracy, and does believe that the FBI investigation and the resulting Warren Commission Report were badly botched and inconclusive. But he is deeply troubled by Stone basing his film on Garrison's theories and investigation.

"I was there in New Orleans, and I even met and talked with Garrison on more than one occasion, and I can tell you that he invented evidence and that his book is filled with lies," said Weisberg. "So what does that tell you about Stone basing his movie on Garrison's book?"

This reviewer found it interesting that Weisberg, still active and articulate at age 79, who has been quoted extensively in newspaper and television reports critical of Oliver Stone, does not disagree with the film's most general contentions. Weisberg's problems are with the details; he believes Stone is too cavalier in terms of accuracy and verification.

Like 73% of the general public, neither Stone nor Weisberg agree with the findings of the Warren Commission. Weisberg believes Stone goes too far in trying to prove a case that still has too many unanswered questions. ■■■

A True/False Quiz
