

Commentary

PERSPECTIVES ON CONSPIRACY

Facts Knit the Single-Bullet Theory



Fame and fortune would have been incentives to debunk the Warren panel's findings. But then there's the evidence.

By KENNETH KLEIN

The new Oliver Stone movie, "JFK," might lead moviegoers to suspect the conclusions of the Warren Commission, which investigated the assassination of President Kennedy. But the commission's findings have stood the tests of forensic analysis.

In September, 1976, the House of Representatives established the Select Committee on Assassinations to investigate the deaths of President John F. Kennedy and Martin Luther King Jr. In early 1977, I resigned as an assistant district attorney in New York County, assigned to investigate and try homicide cases, and accepted the position of assistant deputy chief counsel for the committee. I spent the next two years investigating the Kennedy assassination.

When I first heard of the "single-bullet theory," I was very skeptical. How could a single bullet found on a stretcher in Parkland Hospital enter the upper back of President Kennedy, emerge from the front of his neck, then enter the back of Texas Gov. John Connally, emerge from his chest and then shatter a bone in Connally's right wrist and cause a superficial wound to his left thigh?

Since the validity of the Warren Commission's finding that Lee Harvey Oswald was the lone assassin rested firmly on the validity of the single-bullet theory, the staff members of the select committee would have been thrilled to have disproved it. To have done so would surely have led to fame and fortune. Only one thing prevented us from doing so—the evidence.

First, the committee formed a panel of top forensic pathologists. These men had performed tens of thousands of autopsies and were experts at determining points of entry and the trajectories of bullets as they passed through human bodies. The panel concluded that two bullets struck the President from the rear.

The panel also noted, and the committee found very significant, the ovoid shape of the wound in the governor's back. Such a wound indicates that the bullet had begun to tumble or yaw before entering. An ovoid wound is characteristic of one caused by a bullet that has passed through or glanced off an intervening object.

Second, the committee performed a trajectory analysis of the shots fired. We used the expertise of the forensic pathologists, acoustical and photographic analysts and an engineer from the National Aeronautics and Space Administration who plotted the trajectories. By coordinating the data from these experts, the analysis yielded three circles within which all shots originated. The southeast corner window of the Texas School Book Depository—the window from which the Warren Commission concluded that the single bullet was fired along with two other shots—was inside each of these circles.

Third, the committee considered the fact that the Zapruder "home movie" shows Kennedy's head moving backward after being hit. Of course, there are no other motion pictures of people being shot that could have been used for comparison purposes. Instead, the committee consulted an expert on gunshot wounds who determined that nerve damage from a bullet entering the President's head could have caused his back muscles to tighten, which, in turn, could have caused his head to move toward the rear. While such testimony was not considered decisive, it did lead the committee to conclude that the

rearward movement of the President's head was not inconsistent with a bullet striking from the rear.

But the firearms evidence was the most important. The rifle found on the sixth floor of the Texas School Book Depository was analyzed by an independent panel of ballistics experts chosen by the committee. It was determined that the bullet found on a stretcher at Parkland Hospital had been fired from the rifle recovered from the depository.

A remaining issue was determining whether the bullet found on the stretcher was the source of the bullet fragments taken from Connally's wrist. In making the determination, the committee had the benefit of neutron-activation analysis, a highly precise test that was not in existence at the time of the Warren Commission.

The essence of neutron-activation analysis is that every bullet has a unique composition. Using this analysis, it is possible to analyze precisely the composition of a bullet and a bullet fragment to determine whether the fragment came from the bullet. The analysis showed that it is highly likely that the bullet found on the stretcher was the one that passed through Connally's wrist, leaving tiny fragments behind.

That the single-bullet theory was not only a plausible explanation but, in fact, was the only reasonable explanation for the wounds suffered by President Kennedy and Gov. Connally is supported by the facts: The bullet that hit the President and the governor came from the rear; the trajectory of the bullet leads back to the Texas School Book Depository; the bullet was fired from a rifle found on the sixth floor of the depository; the bullet had been deflected before entering Connally's back, and the fragments in Connally's wrist came from the bullet found on the stretcher in Parkland Hospital.

Goodbye fame. Goodbye fortune.

Kenneth Klein is an attorney in Los Angeles.

Oliver Stone Gives Paranoia a Bad Name



Stone's celluloid diatribe is an act of contemptible citizenship by a man of technical skill but negligible conscience.

By **GEORGE F. WILL**

LA Times

12/24/91

Oliver Stone's movie "JFK" will give paranoia a bad name and give us all pause. Viewing his travesty about the Kennedy assassination makes one wonder what Stone would have thought about the century's most consequential assassination.

On June 26, 1914, six young men were poised in Sarajevo, Bosnia, to throw bombs at the car of Archduke Franz Ferdinand. Five of them, intimidated by the crowds or unwilling to hurt the archduke's wife, did nothing. However, one asked a policeman which car was the archduke's, the policeman identified it and the boy threw his bomb, which bounced off the archduke's car and exploded under the following car.

One of the others, Gavrilo Princip, went off disconsolately for coffee at a corner cafe, where he loitered. Later, the archduke, going to a museum, decided to visit the people injured by the bomb. His driver, confused about the route to the hospital, stopped in front of the cafe where the astonished Princip sat. Princip leaped up and shot the archduke and his wife, thereby lighting Europe's fuse.

Stone's portrayal of this would be: Like, wow. What a complex conspiracy brought the victim to the assassin's cleverly contrived coffee break. The driver was not confused, the first bomb "miss" was a ruse, the policeman was in on the plot, and there must have been hundreds of others, too. Who was behind it all? Well, who benefited? Munitions makers—merchants of death.

That is the message of Stone's celluloid diatribe. Much of America's Establishment conspired to kill Kennedy because he loved peace and "they"

wanted war. Strange that a society so sick allowed such a saint to be President at all, but this is cartoon history by Stone, who is 45 going on 8.

In his three-hour lie, Stone falsifies so much he may be an intellectual sociopath, indifferent to truth. Or perhaps he is just another propagandist frozen in the 1960s like a fly in

amber, combining moral arrogance with historical ignorance.

History teaches that as a conspiracy increases in size arithmetically, the chances of it unraveling increase exponentially. Yet Stone asserts that a conspiracy of many thousands (involving the FBI, the CIA, the armed forces, the Secret Service, the Mafia, doctors, Earl Warren and the other members of his commission, the press and many others) succeeded until, 28 years later, there came a hero: Stone.

Back in Stone's formative years—those 1960s he loves so ardently—members of the John Birch Society thought President Eisenhower had been a com-

munist. Intellectually, Stone is on all fours with his mirror images, the Birchers, who, like Stone, thought Earl Warren was a traitor. Stone and they are part of a long fringe tradition, the paranoid style in American politics, a style ravenous for conspiracy theories.

Why is actor Kevin Costner lending himself to this libel of America? Is he invincibly ignorant or just banally venal? Nothing else can explain his willingness to portray as a hero Jim Garrison who, as New Orleans' district attorney, staged an assassination "investigation" that involved recklessness, cruelty, abuse of power and dishonesty, all on a scale that strongly suggested lunacy leavened by cynicism.

After covering the assassination story for 28 years, the journalist who knows most about it is the Washington Post's George Lardner. He documents Stone "stomping on presumptions of innocence, cooking up false admissions, ignoring contrary evidence and giving a conspiratorial tone to inconsequential facets of the tragedy that were explained long ago." Stone himself should have played Garrison.

Every viewer will have his or her favorite Stone fabrication. Mine is either the assertion that U.S. troops from Germany were airborne over America as part of the plot, or the assertion that President Johnson reversed a Kennedy order about Vietnam that in fact Johnson approved four days after the assassination, or the assertion that the CIA had stories about Oswald's arrest in some foreign papers almost at the moment he was arrested.

The through-the-looking-glass premise of this movie is: Proof of the vastness of the conspiracy is that no one can prove it exists. Stone's pose is that he loves America and the truth equally. That is true.

"JFK" is an act of execrable history and contemptible citizenship by a man of technical skill and negligible conscience.

George F. Will is a syndicated columnist in Washington.



Associated Press

Oliver Stone on Dallas set of "JFK."