

Why Did It Have to Take 'J.F.K.' to Wake Us?

To the Editor:

I have read with great interest your extensive coverage of Oliver Stone's film "J.F.K." However, only Mr. Stone himself, in "Who Is Rewriting History?" (Op-Ed, Dec. 20), speaks in support of the movie.

Why has the burden of awakening this country to the unexplained killing of President John F. Kennedy fallen on the shoulders of a Hollywood film director? Perhaps because no one else has been brave enough, or powerful enough, to examine thoroughly the official version of the events surrounding the assassination.

As a generation wept, where was the press, asking who might have wanted the President dead? If a leader of the Soviet Union had been assassinated, the press would have had a field day with conspiracy theories, preaching and editorials.

Mr. Stone is willing, as many Americans are, to see our country as imperfect and in "J.F.K." suggests that the press looks the other way when faced with the possibility that government may be rotten. Most of us are still unwilling to consider coup d'état in the United States, but the events in Dallas on Nov. 22, 1963, tore at us, and we have not yet learned the severity of our wounds.

Because there has never been a thorough, well-budgeted investigation, outside of Government, the public must rely on such visions as Mr. Stone's. The reaction to his work should ignite debate and inspire investigation. Before condemning the film, its director and the studio, both press and public need to realize how little has been done to shed light on this subject.

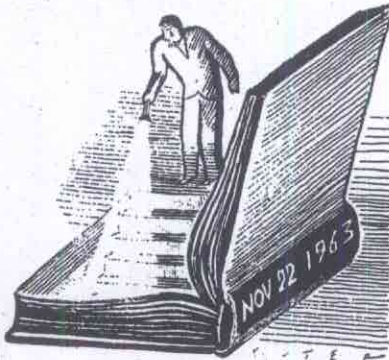
DAVID MARKS
Elk, Calif., Dec. 24, 1991

Raises Suspicions

To the Editor:

"When Everything Amounts to Nothing," your review of the film "J.F.K.," directed by Oliver Stone (Dec. 20), though severely critical, nonetheless states: "What the film does do effectively is to present the case for the idea that there actually was a conspiracy, rather than the lone gunman, Lee Harvey Oswald, specified by the Warren Commission report." This statement supports one of Mr. Stone's chief objectives in producing the movie.

The director's most important



point is that the Warren Commission appointed by President Lyndon B. Johnson to investigate the Kennedy assassination did a careless and incomplete job, and then set a limit of 75 years for the public release of its materials. That imprisoned the documents until the year 2039. This was an

amazing ruling and made us suspicious of the commission's analysis.

A few years later came the report by the House Select Committee on Assassinations, which accepted the conspiracy thesis. Congress took no action on this report, and its documents were imprisoned until 2029.

The movie "J.F.K." is accomplishing its purpose in stimulating discussion and questions about President Kennedy's assassination. On this 200th anniversary of our Bill of Rights, in which we celebrate freedom of speech and the press, we must remember that the underlying corollary of both of these freedoms is the people's right to know. The film strikes a strong blow for that right.

CORLISS LAMONT, BETH LAMONT
New York, Dec. 24, 1991

Kennedy Was No Dove

To the Editor:

Oliver Stone's assertion (Op-Ed, Dec. 20) that history "may be too important to leave to newsmen" should be expanded to include reductionist film makers.

According to Mr. Stone, the "military-industrial complex," a combine of military, business and political interests, killed John F. Kennedy. Their motive was to prevent the President from carrying out a policy of détente toward the Soviet Union that would have ended the cold war and prevented a \$100 billion conflict in Vietnam. Mr. Stone's case rests essentially on the question: "What political forces were opposed to this leader and would benefit from his assassination?"

Mr. Stone more than implies that Lyndon B. Johnson was a principal figure in the plot. Johnson's policies on Vietnam, according to Mr. Stone, reversed Kennedy's plans and served the military-industrial war interests.

While Kennedy was improving relations with the Soviet Union, he and his principal advisers were deeply concerned about an aggressive, expansionist China, which supported a Communist takeover in South Vietnam. Kennedy had no intention of "losing" Vietnam. He increased United States troops there to 16,700, hid their role in combat operations by the South Vietnamese and played a part

in toppling the unpopular Ngo Dinh Diem regime in October 1963.

Johnson was also determined to prevent a Communist victory in South Vietnam and struggled with how to achieve that end. Anyone who reads George Kahin's "Intervention: How America Became Involved in the Vietnam War" (1986) or Brian VanDeMark's "Into the Quagmire: Lyndon Johnson and the Escalation of the Vietnam War" (1991), based on extensive archival research, understands that Johnson agonized over escalating the Vietnam War.

Federal Bureau of Investigation files I have obtained under a Freedom of Information request show that Johnson had nothing to do with Kennedy's assassination. Johnson believed that a Castro conspiracy was behind Kennedy's death, and he feared a Cuban attempt on his own life. He asked J. Edgar Hoover for help in assuring his safety and that of his family. Johnson had no direct evidence of a Cuban role in Kennedy's death, and his concern may tell us something about his cast of mind. But these records are invaluable in refuting suggestions of a Johnson role in killing Kennedy.

Mr. Stone urges opening "all C.I.A., F.B.I. and military intelligence files" on the assassination. I agree. But if they show there was no conspiracy or at least not the one that Mr. Stone alleges, would he not argue that the record was doctored to refute the truth? I doubt that Mr. Stone is open to having his mind changed about the assassination. Let us hope, however, that those misled by his article and movie are.

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Los Angeles, Dec. 24, 1991

The writer is professor of history, University of California, and author of "Lone Star Rising: Lyndon Johnson and His Times, 1908-60" (1991).

Questions Need Asking

To the Editor:

Does it matter that Oliver Stone presents in his movie a view discredited by some? The point of "J.F.K." lies not in Jim Garrison's (and Mr. Stone's) point of speculation. Rather the film stirs debate and demands questions be asked about the assassination of President John F. Kennedy. The film is important, whether or not President Lyndon B. Johnson was involved and independent of possible connection with the assassinations of the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and Senator Robert F. Kennedy. Even if Mr. Garrison (and Mr. Stone) miss the boat completely, the Warren Commission report may still be subject to inquiry.

Do we really believe that Lee Harvey Oswald acted alone? If more than one person shot at the President, then a conspiracy occurred. Many dismiss the notion of a conspiracy because of its horrible implications. However, it need not include the United States Government, the Central Intelligence Agency and the Federal Bureau of Investigation. Let's proceed with our heads, not with our hearts.

The physical evidence surrounding the assassination is very curious. Could Oswald have gotten off marksmanlike shots so quickly with that rifle? Were gunshots heard and seen coming from somewhere in addition to the book depository? It is possible a conspiracy took place, and we, the public, should demand some answers.

MARTIN COHEN, JOSEPH COHEN
Rockville Centre, L.I., Dec. 21, 1991