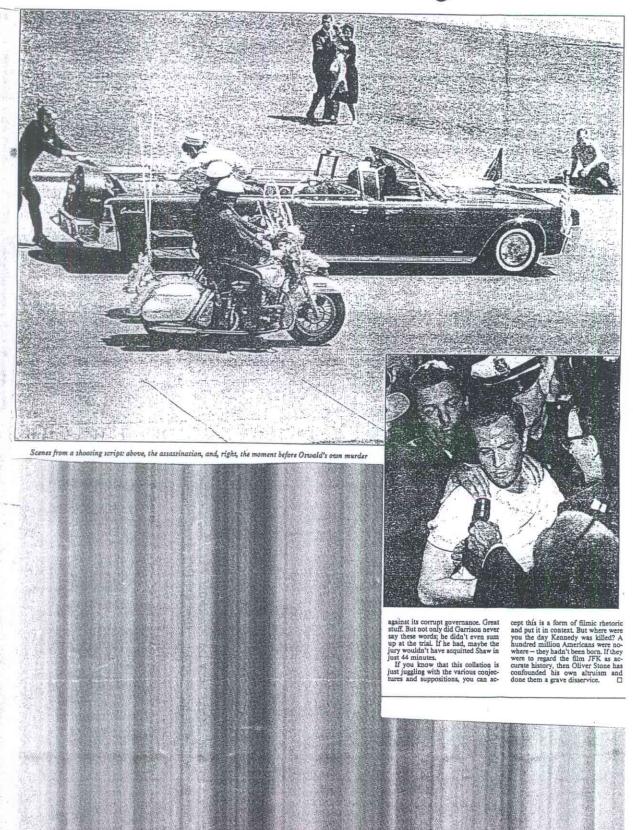
Another crack at Jack



Oliver Stone's controversial film IFK. starring Kevin Costner, is a proud but prejudiced success, says IAIN JOHNSTONE

liver Stone doesn't just make movies — he makes Cost make movies — he makes Cost makes Cost martarives are for wimps. Ever since he stuck it to the Turkish prison system with his seript for Midnight Express, he has attacked his chosen subjects with bias and wayward brilliance. For the most part he has set out to savage what he perceives to be the crimes of the American establishment: its support of right-wing death squads in Salvador; its callous prosecution of the Vietnam war in Platoon; its derelication of duty towards the versums in Born on the Fourth of July-its acceptance of the greed-is-good philosophy in Wall Street.

So, what could be more natural than for Stone to descend on the convoversy arounding the shooting of President Kennedy? What controversy, you might well ask. It's hardy a burning topic after nearly 30 years and 600 books. The one Stone himself has deliberately reswakened is the answer, with a script that combines pride and prejudice in equal measure. Given that 12% of Americans think they have not been told the truth about the Kennedy assassination, 73% think that Lee Harvey Oswald auted in conspiracy with other people, 50% think those other people were the CLA and 43% the mafia (the figures come from a recent, but pre-film, Time-CND Polly, and given that the Warren Commission Report into the assassination is generally regarded as having the validity of Chamberlain's piece of paper, and the Zapruder home movie of the killing establishes the president was shot from different directions, the truly controvernial approach to this subject would be to assert that Oswald just went out one day and did it all on his own.

But in JFW (Empire Leicester Square et al. 15), Stone has gone for the mega-conspiracy cheory: mafia, CLA, pro-Castro Cubans, anti-Castro Cubans, Pentagon, milliary-industrial complex and – here comes the biggie—LBI himself Why else do you think he was in such a hurry to get the body out of the Dallas bospital and press home the Warret whitewash?

Let me distinct the film from the

given him the seminal part of Jim Garrison, the New Orleans district attorney who tried out the conspiracy theory in court.

But this isn't the real-life Jim whose aides threatened and bribed witnesses, and who found his questionable army psychiatric record leaked by the militury when he started causing trouble. No, this is Saint James. As played (quite excellently) by Kevin Costner, a golden aura of honesty and patriotic purity surrounds the lawman, as if transferred from the dead president himself.

Stone has assembled a first division cast to help thump his message home, and the very fact that the acting is so convincing makes his contentious scenario seem all the more convincing as well. Gary Oldman is an edgy, elusive Oswald – preserving the mystery of the man to the last with his plea that he was just a "patry". Joe Pesci, wearing an outsize wig and bearing an outsize grudge, is focal in the New Orleans homosexual underworld – the movie finger points at them, too—and even Jack Lemmon and Walter Marthau contribute hardbitten cam-

eos as a private eye and a senator.

The story begins with the shooting and ends with the only criminal trial ever brought in connection with the death of JFK. But most of the film is consumed by Garrison's pursuit of the conspiracy. Why would Stone's bizarre bedfellows want to kill JFK? The director says it was because he let down the CIA and the Cubans over the Bay of Figs (true) and that he was about to let down the military and munitions men by pulling out of Vietnam (Goubriul). Some extremists at the time believed this – although I hardly think Johnson was among them. Indeed, LBI, referring to the way JFK condoned the CIA's marriage with the mafis in its efforts to eliminate Castro, later told a former side that the president was "running a damned Murder Incorporated in the Caribbean" and that he believed one of those plots backfired in Dallas. It

Carlocal and that he believed one of those plots backfired in Dallas. It remains the most plausible explanation of the assassimation so far. Stone certainly takes this on board. The CIA/maña and Cuban elements hum conspiratorially along. The LBJ-military angle is a bit trickier to

dramatise. We get Donald Sutherland
— "Cail me X"— as a Pentagon pensioner who vouchasfes these allegations to Jim by the Washington menument. His words are based on a 1973 book revealing the inner workings of the CIA by Coll I. Fietcher Prouty. Prouty, however, never briefed Garrison.

But one of the most persuasive characters in the film is Willie O'Keefe (a wholly convincing sameo from Kevin Bason), a rent-boy who fingers Clay Shaw (Tommy Let Jones), the New Orleans homosexual who was the subject of Garrison's conspiracy trial. Only one problem here: Willie never existed. He's a dramatic device and the unwiting author of the huge question-mark underlying his movie; who would buy a thesis from a director who merely creates character?

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Artistic licence is the order of the day as fictional footage is interpolated with the real stuff. Garrison is given a concluding courtroom speech that runs to 15 minutes, with Costner movingly and eloquently spelling out how a patriot must defend his country.