

# The truth of 'JFK' is upsetting the media

By EDWARD S. HERMAN

Oliver Stone's movie *JFK* has caused a remarkable mainstream media reaction that can be likened to a rush to the barricades by defenders of the faith. The attacks started even before the film was completed and escalated after it began to be shown around the country in December. As New York Times editorial board member Brent Staples acknowledged on Dec. 25, the mainstream media have been trying "to blow it off the screen"

The explanation by some members of the media for this response is that the movie is falsifying history. Stone's defenders, however, point out that the movie is not a documentary and that the mainstream media have not treated with similar intense scrutiny and open hostility the hundreds of other films shown on U.S. screens over the past half century that rewrote history. This suggests that *JFK* is being attacked because of its politics, not its untruthfulness.

Staples argues that the film's menace lies in "the realization (presumably by media commentators) that historical lies are nearly impossible to correct once movies and television have given them credibility." He implies that it is Oliver Stone who threatens to inject lies into the historical record of explanations of the Kennedy assassination and that Stone's critics are defenders of the truth. In reality, the Warren Commission report and the theory of Lee Harvey Oswald as the lone assassin shooting a "magic bullet" are the "historical lies" accepted by the establishment and supported by movies, TV and the press.

The establishment institutions never seriously questioned the Warren report, nor applied to it the critical zeal they apply to *JFK*. They never followed up on the 1979 congressional assassination committee report that suggested the likelihood of a conspiracy, nor did they complain when its files were made unavailable to the public until 2029; and they have constituted a solid phalanx fending off successive attacks and

questions about the preferred model.

An excellent case can therefore be made that it is the elements of *truth* in *JFK* that have aroused hostility, not its debatable claims. Arguably, the most important feature of the movie is its unrelenting review, one after another, of the points that make the single-assassin, magic-bullet Warren Commission theory of the assassination untenable.

*JFK* is also offensive to defenders of the faith for its stress on the militarization of the United States and the power of the military-industrial complex to override civilian authority and render democratic government inoperative. The movie

begins with President Dwight Eisenhower's farewell address warning about the military-industrial complex, and it refers more than once to the history of Pentagon and CIA interventions, from Iran in 1953 to Nicaragua and Iran-contra in the 1980s. The film suggests that these activities are the norm, and it portrays the military-intelligence leadership in an unsavory light.

*JFK* does expound the view that Kennedy was killed by a conspiracy of officials at many levels, who wanted him out of the way because he was threatening to curb the CIA and end U.S. involvement in Vietnam. This explanation is debatable, but Stone allows oppositional viewpoints to be expressed in the film —

*Is the movie being attacked because of its politics?*

there is, in fact, more openness on this question in *JFK* than one can find in the reviews of its critics. The defenders of the faith use the contestability of Stone's model to discredit the film as a whole, ignoring the strengths and legitimate facts and questions raised.

The movie also stresses the cover-up of the Kennedy assassination, by government and media in tandem. It provides numerous pieces of evidence of the destruction and misrepresentation of data, failures and perversion of police-intelligence procedure and media connivance in closing down the inquiry prematurely, from the moment Kennedy was shot until the movie *JFK*. The Zapruder film for example, was bought by Time and Life, and then kept out of the public domain for many years. The media's response to Stone's film follows a long tradition of protecting a "historical lie" that they have failed since Nov. 22, 1963, to investigate critically.

Stone's menace runs deeper. If not discredited now, he might some day look with a similarly jaundiced eye at the Iran-contra report, hearings and media treatment; or, even more frightening, he might examine the great Persian Gulf war as possibly related to the political interests of President Bush and the threatened budget of the military-industrial complex (which had been looking frantically for a "mission"), instead of as a triumph of virtue against naked aggression. This would never do.

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