

# Stone's Opening

**R**ecently, the Dallas Police Department announced it would release its files on the Kennedy assassination. Representative Louis Stokes, who was chairman of the Select Committee on Assassinations, is drafting a House resolution to authorize the release of the remaining files of the committee's 1977-79 inquiry, as well as the release of the files of all government agencies.

All this suggests that whatever one thinks of the ins and outs, ups and downs, highways, byways and cul-de-sacs of the conspiracy theory that dramatically unfolds in Oliver Stone's *JFK*, the movie is a powerful one and has already had a profound sociopolitical impact. Ransacking our literary, theatrical and cinematic history for works that caused similar rufflings of the *Zeitgeist* (though in different ways) one comes up with *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, *The Birth of a Nation*, *Waiting for Lefty* and *The Grapes of Wrath*.

Stone's film posited a counterimage to the Warren Commission's findings with such force that the public is now ready to take a fresh look at the evidence, old and new—indeed demands it. Whatever one thinks of the real-life Jim Garrison, his movie incarnation, played by Kevin Costner, embarks on a cinematic quest that takes him into back alleys and dark corners of the national life—places where many believe the Warren Commission refused to go. Or so the lingering residue of popular skepticism about its findings strongly suggests. Stone's job was not to "solve" the actual crime; it was to make effective cinema of the political forces that were, in the words of one of the film's characters, "in the air." In this he has succeeded and the culture is the richer for it.

We have received scores of letters taking issue with this or that *Nation* contributor's theory about what John F. Kennedy would or would not have done in Vietnam had he lived. The debate on these issues will be played out on our Letters page in a future issue. For now, we salute Oliver Stone and his co-writer, Zachary Sklar, for doing what assassination buffs

February 17, 1992

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and conspiratologists of all stripes had previously been unable to do—rivet popular attention on a murky event in American history and create the pressure needed to disgorge the documents that can help illuminate it.

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