

S.F. CHRONICLE FEB. 11, 1992

ANOTHER VIEW / BILL THOMPSON

Why Are So Many People So Agitated About 'JFK'?

PEOPLE JUST won't stop talking about "JFK." I refer here to "JFK," the movie, as opposed to JFK, the president.

Certainly, the late President John F. Kennedy and his murder at the hands of one or more assassins provides the basis for the Oliver Stone movie "JFK." But the movie isn't about JFK — not really. It's about Stone's — and America's — wildest dreams, deepest fears, most far-out fantasies.

Stone fantasizes that Kennedy was a peacenik who wanted to put an end to war, cold and otherwise. Stone dreams that if JFK had not been shot to death on Nov. 22, 1963, there would have been no Vietnam War. Stone fears that the U.S. government and an astonishing number of warmongering freaks on its fringes conspired to put John the Peacenik in his grave — and then cover up their evil deed.

Well, movies are art, and art is fueled by dreams and fantasies and fears. Why should an artist such as Oliver Stone let facts get in the way of a good story? Why should Stone's story cause everyone to get so agitated? Why can't we just accept "JFK" for what it is — a movie?

As one of the few living Americans who is still willing to consider the possibility that Lee Harvey Oswald acted alone in killing Kennedy, I must say I approached Stone's movie with

considerable skepticism.

As a movie, "JFK" wasn't great, but it was good.

My personal reaction to the movie's conspiracy theory was that it was ludicrous. Thinking maybe I'd missed something important, I went back and sat through the three-hour movie a second time. The theory was still ludicrous.

The major hole in the story is that we are being asked to believe that the FBI, CIA, chief justice of the Supreme Court, members of Congress, the vice president, the Dallas Police Department, the Pentagon, the Mafia and as bizarre a collection of perverts and sociopaths as you will ever hope to see somehow banded together to kill a president, conspired to cover up the crime and then remained totally silent about it for more than 28 years.

Encouraged by the movie and by Oliver Stone's seemingly round-the-clock appearances on the talk-show circuit, conspiracy buffs have been demanding access to secret government files regarding the assassination. Purportedly, release of these documents would blow the lid off the conspiracy.

Actually, I think Stone has performed a great public service with his movie — not in exposing some vast, evil cover-up, but in giving Americans something to think about and talk about other than taxes, unemployment, health insurance and Dan Quayle's IQ.

Everybody loves a mystery. Perhaps the Kennedy assassination is, as a character in "JFK" describes it, a riddle wrapped in a mystery inside an enigma.

On the other hand, maybe Lee Harvey Oswald simply loaded his rifle and gunned down JFK, on his own, for reasons we will never understand.

Isn't that mystery enough for anyone?

N.Y. Times Service

Bill Thompson is a columnist for the Fort Worth Star-Telegram.