

Readers Respond to the Editor's Memo on 'JFK'

In a magazine which is supposed to be so deeply suspicious of the Government, the views on the Kennedy assassination expressed in Erwin Knoll's Memo from the Editor (March issue) are difficult to interpret. In light of the extensive and detailed work done in this field since 1963, including, among many others, that of Mark Lane as counsel in the case of *Hunt v. Liberty Lobby*, it is not possible in reason to say that no one has any idea what happened to John F. Kennedy.

If, as Knoll says, he has "no idea who killed John Kennedy or at whose behest," how can he inform us that Oliver Stone's answers are false?

Milner Benedict
Cheverly, Maryland

I know that unresolved issues still exist regarding the assassination of Abraham Lincoln. Does that mean John Kennedy's killing will forever remain a mystery? Oliver Stone has a theory, Erwin Knoll has a theory, I have a theory, etc. Some of our theories share common information, some only share certain suspicions, but they all share one thing: We don't believe the Warren Commission report.

Stone's film did revive that basic feeling that most Americans share. Maybe we won't ever get to the point where we all can feel that the case has been closed. That doesn't stop me from allowing myself to experience the pain and sort through the rubble of the past.

Robert Scully
Chapel Hill, North Carolina

Erwin Knoll condemns Oliver Stone's *JFK* for providing "false answers" to important questions, but Knoll admits he has "no idea who killed Kennedy or at whose behest." Then why is he so certain that the an-

swers provided in *JFK* are false?

He says Stone's movie is "a mélange of fact and fiction." To be sure, some of the dramatization is fictionalized—but not the core events relating to Clay Shaw's perjury, eyewitness reports at Dealey Plaza, the behavior of U.S. law officers, and other suspicious happenings. If anything, the movie remains faithful to the factual content unearthed by serious investigators and consultants.

Knoll believes "the Warren Commission did a hasty, slipshod job" of investigation. I disagree. The Commission sat for fifty-one long sessions, over a period of seven months. It had the investigative powers of the CIA and FBI at its disposal, along with its own professional team. It compiled twenty-six volumes of testimony and evidence, condensed into a five-volume report. Far from being hasty and slipshod, it painstakingly crafted conclusions and theories out of frail evidence or thin air.

The Commission systematically ignored certain kinds of evidence or omitted testimony about gunfire on the grassy knoll. From the beginning, it asked only a limited set of questions that seemed to assume Oswald's guilt as the lone assassin. All this took a great deal of determined and conscious effort. A "hasty and slipshod" investigation would show some traces of randomness in its errors. But the Warren Commission's distortions consistently lean toward the same foreordained conclusions.

Along with imputing only the crassest motives to Stone's cinematic effort and political commitment, Knoll conjures up a patronizing view of a gullible public, easily manipulated in its emotions. Yet Knoll admits to a certain credulity of his own:

"I believe Kennedy may have fallen victim to a plot that encompassed more than a 'lone assassin.'" If so, one wonders why *The Progressive* has not pursued that question all these years.

Knoll also believes that all sealed Government records on the assassination should be made public. What suddenly moves him to this grudging advocacy? I think he is trying to catch up with a gullible public that has been swayed by the fantasies of a movie he vehemently denounces.

Michael Parenti
Washington, D.C.

I do not question Erwin Knoll's inalienable right to "despise" Oliver Stone. Knowing Knoll's devotion to linguistic precision and proportionality, I'm curious to learn how he would characterize his feelings toward Josef Mengele.

Mindless emotionalism is not conspiracy. It is mindless emotionalism.

Richard Levine
Madison, Wisconsin

If you're going to disparage one of our bravest and most talented filmmakers for blurring the distinction between fact and fiction, then you'd better include any filmmaker who picks history as his subject in your condemnation.

Stone has received enough derision from the mainstream press. I was surprised and disappointed to see it in a magazine that I thought was open to alternative views.

Nan Rush
Whitehall, Pennsylvania

There is a huge body of hard evidence which makes it clear why and who killed President Kennedy. The crucial reason was Kennedy's intention to withdraw all U.S. forces from Vietnam by the end of 1965. Other

central reasons were Kennedy's efforts to create better relations with the Soviet Union and Cuba and his intention to cut the oil-depletion allowance and to clean house at the CIA.

The evidence points overwhelmingly to the military-industrial-intelligence complex. Specifically, the crime involved Division Five (the espionage and assassination sector) of the FBI, at least some of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, the Defense Intelligence Agency, the Defense Industrial Security Command, the Permindex Corporation, such major figures as Lyndon Johnson, J. Edgar Hoover, Werner Von Braun of NASA, elements of organized crime, some Cuban exiles, plus other individuals.

We lie to ourselves if we say that we will likely never know who killed Kennedy. Anyone who does homework and applies common sense can find the answer. Oliver Stone has done a great service to the whole world.

Bruce Gray
Thunder Bay, Ontario

I applaud Erwin Knoll for turning a cold shoulder to the all-too-numerous conspiracy nuts such as Mark Lane, Jim Garrison, Oliver Stone, *et al.* But at the same time he needs to recognize that what the Warren Commission and the FBI did was much more than "hasty and slipshod." They lied to the American people.

Knoll's reference to "opening the files" ignores the fact that one man, Harold Weisberg (who also, incidentally, has been the biggest thorn in Oliver Stone's side), obtained most of what has been suppressed through FOIA litigation in the 1970s. I do not recall *The Progressive* covering any of this.

The mainstream press has always bent over backwards to defend even the most ludicrous aspects of the Gov-

ernment's case, but perhaps that is to be expected. I do not expect it from *The Progressive*.

Gerald Ginocchio
Spartanburg, South Carolina

Why was President Kennedy's security so low that day in Dallas? Why was the autopsy so incomplete? Why did the chief pathologist burn the notes of the autopsy? Why was Kennedy's brain, preserved in formalin after his murder, lost by 1972? Why did no one take notes of the interrogation of Oswald?

Fact or fiction, *JFK* is an important film which begs the question that assassination records be opened for the public. I applaud Oliver Stone's courage in making the film. It needed to be said.

Mary Engelberg
North Bergen, New Jersey

God bless Oliver Stone for telling us the truth—something the Government and the mainstream media have desperately been trying to keep under wraps these last twenty-eight years. For that reason alone, *JFK* will come to be regarded as the most important movie ever made.

I do not accuse Erwin Knoll of being part of the cover-up. I think he is just sadly uninformed.

Chip DeNure
Linden, Wisconsin

What causes an editor of Erwin Knoll's reputation to attempt to direct *The Progressive's* readers to look the other way? Whose side is he on, anyway?

I think it's a cheap shot for Knoll to accuse Oliver Stone of turning "a buck by pandering to the emotions of a gullible audience." Stone is a movie director and he turns a buck making movies. That's what he gets paid to do. Highlighting or emphasizing valid questions is hardly pandering.

And this gullible audience—could it be the same audience that was expected to believe the Warren Commission's report? Could this gullible audience be one that needs its consciousness stimulated to challenge the politically based explanations we are sick of hearing over and over again?

Is this gullible audience the same audience that read Knoll's Memo?

B.F. Thiele
Glenview, Illinois

Oliver Stone deserves our gratitude for rekindling discussion of an important, unpopular idea. Whether his film's overall thesis—Jim Garrison's version of the conspiracy—is correct or not, Stone presented an alternative view in a plausible manner.

At each point in the film where supposition was introduced, equivocal language was used. Granted that the film's fast pace makes this difficult to discern and that, considering the sophistication of most viewers, the distinction from definite assertions is probably lost. Stone is partisan; there are enough others arguing the official or a balanced line.

The ideas Stone's film espouses are correct: that the Warren Commission's conclusions were wrong, that the major media supported the official story, and that they acted to stifle further, contrary investigation. Obviously, if there were solid evidence of anything further, we wouldn't need to be considering this.

Robert M. Goldberg
Jericho, New York

While there are many flaws in Oliver Stone's *JFK*, one should not dismiss out of hand his assertion that President Kennedy was planning to extricate the United States from Vietnam.

If Stone is right, there could very well have been a connection between Kenne-

dy's shifting views on Vietnam and his assassination.

Larry Vigon
Chicago, Illinois

Milk for Iraq

"Milk for Iraq" in the On the Line Section of the March issue fails to mention that the Schiller Institute is an arm of the Lyndon LaRouche organization. This so-called humanitarian effort by dairy farmers is a front for supporting LaRouche. Many farmers and farm journalists have been duped, and *The Progressive's* article adds to the problem.

I called the number given in the article and told the woman who answered that "I would like to know more about the connection with Lyndon LaRouche's Schiller Institute." She said the bishop of the Chaldean Catholic Church could answer such questions but was unavailable. I asked who else could help, and she said, "Phil Valenti, but I don't have his number and he's always on the road and hard to reach." Valenti is one of LaRouche's top organizers.

John Stauber
Madison, Wisconsin

The Schiller Institute is an arm of Lyndon LaRouche's organization that exploits the hard times of dairy farmers for its own purposes. Like fascists anywhere, they play on desperate people.

In a small town near my dairy farm, they set up a display that included a sign reading MORE DAIRIES, LESS FAIRIES. When I challenged them, they said the economic problems confronting dairy farmers were part of a conspiracy that aimed to make homosexuality a legitimate life style. Warped minds at work!

Feeding hungry and sick Iraqi children is certainly a worthy endeavor, but the

motivations of the Schiller Institute must not go unchallenged.

Bruce R. Krug
Constableville, New York

Hurt Feelings and Free Speech

In "Hurt Feelings and Free Speech" (Who's on First? February issue), Nat Hentoff claims that to assuage students' hurt feelings, the District of Columbia School of Law (DCSL) has leveled "charges" against free-speech champions Tom Mack and Bob Catz. But Hentoff never offers any evidence of adverse administrative or legal actions against the men. Instead, Hentoff argues that the students endangered free speech by hurting their professors' feelings.

Even stranger is Hentoff's characterization of Tim Maguire's views as "unpopular." Anti-affirmative-action lies make bestseller lists, propel slimeball Senators into third terms, and, according to the polls, are believed by a majority of Americans. Could the DCSL students' anger stem, in part, from a sense that Mack and Catz allowed themselves to be duped into *pro bono* work for a client able to raise support on his own?

By taking this case, Mack and Catz were temporarily unable to take other whistle-blowing cases—cases in which powerful, rich people would not have been on the defendant's side.

We judge law professors by their legal and teaching skills. Teaching requires communication, which requires empathy. The facts of the Maguire case surely suggested to Catz and Mack that the case's issues might upset their own students. Feelings of community and personal involvement run deep in small schools. Hentoff doesn't convince me that Catz and Mack built the necessary emotional bridges be-