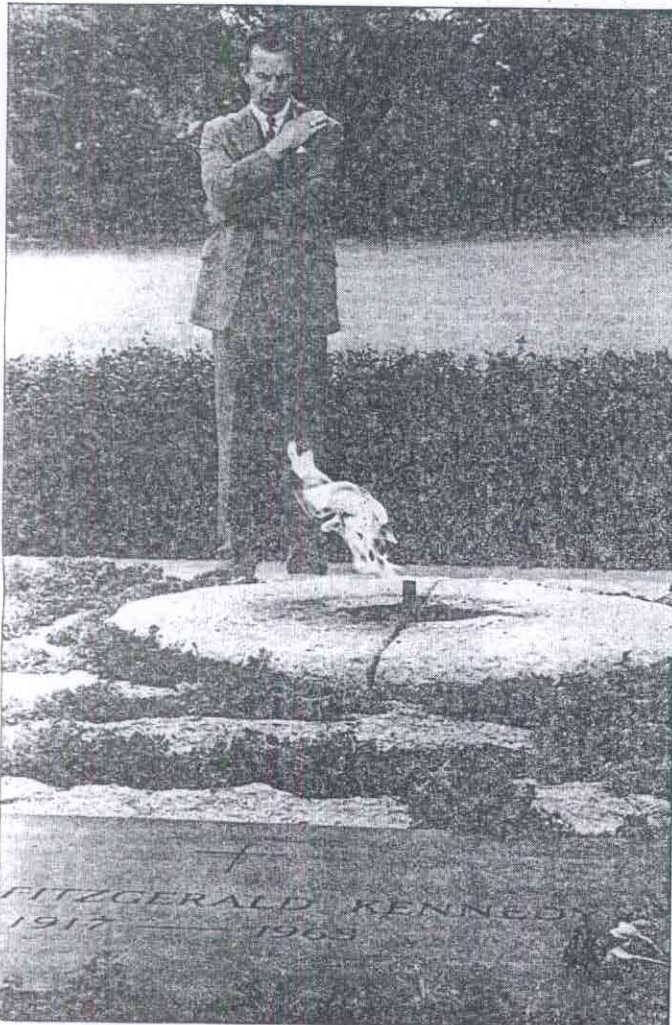
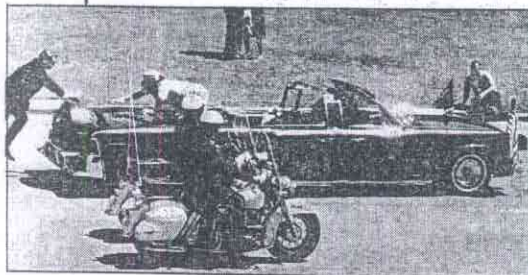


# Truth or paranoia?



Kevin Costner, above, as District Attorney Jim Garrison, visits the grave of John F. Kennedy in "JFK." At right, the film re-creates the assassination. The movie is reviewed today in Weekend.



Oliver Stone's movie "JFK" — which opens today — portrays the President's slaying as a coup d'etat. Is he exploiting public suspicions, or courageously pursuing a real conspiracy?

By Ann Kolson  
Inquirer Staff Writer

**T**he movie ad calls JFK "the story that won't go away." For 28 years, books, lawsuits, dissertations, entire careers have been built around efforts to answer that story's central question: Why was John Fitzgerald Kennedy assassinated?

Now, writer-director Oliver Stone makes an audacious attempt to solve the puzzle in a compelling film that opens nationwide today. More than three hours long, with a kaleidoscope of characters, the densely packed JFK leaps from color to black-and-white, from newsreel to recreation, from fact to conjecture.

It is the work of a filmmaker either utterly brave or completely foolhardy.

In any case, JFK has garnered plenty of attention since Stone, 45, began filming in Dallas last April. Since before shooting wrapped, before editing began, even before the final script was completed, Stone has been the center of a hurricane of controversy — incalculable publicity for a \$40 million film in an unpredictable box-office year.

A three-time Oscar winner, Stone is notorious for dramatically (some would say melodramatically) mining the '60s in such incendiary movies as *Platoon*, *Born on the Fourth of July* and *The Doors*. In each, the hero is a lone man in a world gone mad.

In JFK, that hero is Jim Garrison, the flamboyant and widely discredited former New Orleans district attorney who prosecuted the only Kennedy assassination case that ever went to trial. As Garrison, Stone cast America's Golden Boy, Kevin Costner, and filmed him in a honeyed glow, surrounded by a loving blond wife (Sissy Spacek) and five young children.

Writing a five-page defense of his movie for the current *Premiere* magazine, here is how Stone describes Garrison: "Like a Capra everyman, he is darkened and sacrificed, yet wins his soul in the end."

His is a conspiracy movie, a murder mystery aimed at detonating the 26-volume Warren Commission report released by the government 10 months after the assassination. The commission's findings: that a lone gunman, Lee Harvey Oswald, shot and killed President John F. Kennedy on Nov. 22, 1963.

Stone disparagingly calls this conclusion — that Oswald acted alone — America's "Official Story." "We're trying to create an alternate myth to the Warren Commission," he explains.

(A young Philadelphia assistant district attorney, Arlen Specter, was appointed to the commission and is credited as author of its controversial "magic bullet" theory. In JFK, Garrison refers to Specter as one of the "grossest liars" in America.)

(Sen. Specter's official statement on JFK? "When I get a chance I intend to see the movie because I enjoy fiction," he says.)

The film was inspired by Garrison's 1988 book *On the Trail of the Assassins*. Stone incorporated that work and the book *Crossfire: The Plot That Killed Kennedy*, by Jim Marrs, and an array of other (See "JFK" on 8-D)



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*Earl Warren headed the federal panel that heard 552 witnesses and reviewed thousands of pages of documents before concluding that Lee Harvey Oswald acted alone.*



*Lee Harvey Oswald didn't live long enough to face a trial. Some think he was the patsy in a conspiracy; others think he was hired by the mob or by angry Cuban exiles.*



*Lyndon Johnson rode in a car behind Kennedy's limousine. Some believe the politically ambitious Texan, who ascended to the presidency after the shooting, was behind a plot.*

## Conspiracy theories play

## a part in 'JFK'

By Steve Scott  
Dallas Morning News

**A** profusion of theories suggests that a conspiracy was behind the assassination of President John F. Kennedy in Dallas' Dealey Plaza. Director Oliver Stone makes liberal use of some theories in *JFK* and discounts others. Here's a partial list:

**The Official Story.** A federal commission, chaired by Chief Justice Earl Warren, conducted the government investigation of the assassination. After hearing 552 witnesses and reviewing thousands of pages of documents, the Warren Commission concluded in 1964 that Lee Harvey Oswald, acting alone, fired three shots from a sixth-floor window of the Texas School Book Depository.

**The Garrison Theory.** Former New Orleans District Attorney Jim Garrison, who prosecuted the only assassination case carried to criminal trial, attempted to prove that right-wing CIA operatives and anti-Castro Cubans conspired to kill the President. His theory is one of more than a dozen incorporated in *JFK*.

**Crossfire.** Films of the assassination seem to show Kennedy being struck in the head by a shot fired from in front of his limousine. Theorists say this means that the depository gunman, whether Oswald or someone else, was aided by a sharpshooter firing from behind a wooden fence west of the building.

**The Patsy.** Conspirators, whoever they were, used Oswald as a dupe, arranging for a  
(See THEORIES on 8-D)



"JFK," from 1-D theories that have come into being over the years.

So, as Stone told the New Orleans Times-Picayune during filming in that city, "I cannot say — I do not say — that this is a true story."

Still, says Stone, facts aside, his movie "speaks an inner truth." As his star Costner remarked in Vanity Fair magazine: "You could examine it point by point and discredit and dismantle everything in JFK, but the movie as a whole has an emotional truth."

Zachary Sklar was the editor of Garrison's book and co-authored the JFK screenplay with Stone. In Sklar's view, Garrison is a hero, but he doesn't believe the script paints him that way. "The character in the film is not the Jim Garrison I know," he says. "The character in the movie is a metaphor and a composite of many researchers who've done a lot of hard work trying to get the truth of the Kennedy assassination."

The national media generally denigrated Garrison when he brought New Orleans businessman and reputed CIA operative Clay Shaw to trial in 1969 for conspiracy in the murder of the President. Shaw was acquitted after a brief jury deliberation.

In May, in one of the earliest published attacks on Stone's effort, Washington Post reporter George Lardner Jr., who covered the Shaw trial, wrote a story headlined "Dallas in Wonderland: How Oliver Stone's Version of the Kennedy Assassination Exploits the Edge of Paranoia." Garrison's investigation, he charged, was "a fraud."

"Jim has gotten a raw deal in the press," says Sklar. "The reason basically is, Jim Garrison was carrying a message that people were not ready to hear at that time: that the CIA was in some part involved in the assassination of their president. That message was basically unacceptable."

Lardner further accused Stone of "chasing fiction." Others have called into question Stone's veracity, his motives, his right to tinker with history, even his outsize ego.

After spending 16- and 17-hour days on the set, the indefatigable Stone sat down to pen impassioned, point-by-point rebuttals to critical stories that



Gary Oldman as Oswald, being interviewed by reporters in "JFK."

have appeared in Esquire and the Washington Post. He referred to members of the so-called "establishment" press as "Doberman pinchers" and "vultures."

"Stone was very upset by the early, real savage attacks on him last summer," says Frank Mankiewicz, the high-powered Washington public relations man and former campaign manager for Robert F. Kennedy. Following the initial wave of negative publicity, Warner Bros. hired Mankiewicz to introduce Stone to influential members of the Washington press corps and to plead the case for JFK.

Says Mankiewicz, "I think some people feel very challenged by this movie because they all have a stake in some other point of view. There are probably more believers in the Warren Commission among the media than there are in the general population."

Indeed, there have been doubts about the commission's findings. In 1976, the House of Representatives reopened the investigation and, 2½ years later, the House Select Committee on Assassinations concluded that Kennedy "was probably assassinated as a result of a conspiracy."

According to a Washington Post poll taken in May, 56 percent of the American public believes that the assassination was the result of a conspiracy; only 19 percent thought that Oswald acted alone. And in a July Gallup Poll, commissioned by Warner

Bros., 73 percent said they believed that others, besides Oswald, were involved.

"It was the most public murder of the most public man — and glamorous, and much missed. And the most notoriously unsolved murder. It's not surprising that the question doesn't go away," says 40-year-old British playwright Stephen Davis, whose 1987 work, *Love Field*, also dramatized events surrounding the assassination.

Stone's film hammers home the idea that the assassination was nothing less than America's first coup d'etat: a sweeping conspiracy and cover-up involving the CIA, the FBI, the military-industrial complex, even FBI head J. Edgar Hoover and Vice President Lyndon Johnson.

Philadelphia lawyer Vincent Salandria would agree. He was one of the first to publicly cast doubt on the Warren Commission report, analyzing its conclusions in the Nov. 23, 1964, issue of the Philadelphia law newspaper *The Legal Intelligencer*. He has mountains of material on the

assassination.

Based on his reading of a pirated version of the *JFK* screenplay, he believes the truth has been served. In a recent letter to Garrison, now a retired Louisiana judge, Salandria asked his longtime friend to pass along this message to Stone:

"Tell him that what he has undertaken is pivotally important. Tell him that his movie will educate the world's public on the most significant shift of power in our century. Tell him that because of the importance of his work he will be targeted by the military-industrial complex.

"Tell him that he, like you, will have his character, integrity, mental balance, motives and artistry impugned."

But tell him, too, said Salandria, that "he will be admired by all those who speak and act against the corruption of the powerful."

Stone has been accused not only of tampering with history, but with other projects having to do with JFK. In February, *Ruby*, a film starring Danny Aiello, is scheduled to open. It

focuses on Jack Ruby, the small-time mobster who shot Lee Harvey Oswald.

"There was so much difficulty with Stone," says Davis, who adapted the *Ruby* script from *Field*. "We had to fight like crazy to get filming permission in Dallas. We had to fight to get access. [Stone] said he wasn't going to be upstaged by some cheeseball movie.

"If he claims he's trying to reopen an era of American history, it's a peculiar way to go about it. He has no exclusive rights to American history, or the '60s. It's hard enough making movies without going head-to-head against fellow filmmakers."

Last month, more than 300 assassination buffs showed up in Dallas for a three-day Assassination Symposium, a veritable bazaar of theories. And they abound — from the Umbrella Man theory to the Three Tramps theory.

In possibly the most original twist, CBS anchorman Dan Rather has been implicated in the new book *The Rather Narrative — Is Dan Rather the JFK Conspiracy's San Andreas Fault?* To coincide with the symposium, a

local tavern held its fifth annual Conspiracy A-Go-Go featuring the Six Lone Assassins band and Oswald and Ruby look-alikes.

One symposium participant was Andrew Winiarczyk, 38, co-owner of the Last Hurrah Bookshop in Williamsport, Pa., which specializes in assassination and conspiracy books. He tries to explain this obsession.

"For people who were alive at the time, they feel they were robbed of not merely someone but of something — the idea of both what John Kennedy was and what he stood for. We received a psychic wound, and replaced our natural idealism with a sense of cynicism," he says.

*JFK* screenwriter Sklar, who, like Stone, was a teenager when Kennedy was shot, also believes that the assassination is a wound that has not healed.

"I feel the assassination has not been truthfully or adequately dealt with," he says. "Until then, it is not possible to reclaim our national soul."



# Conspiracy theories play a part in 'JFK'

**THEORIES, from 1-D**  
look-alike to draw attention to himself days before the shooting by having a rifle repaired and by taking target practice.

**The Three Tramps.** Three hobos riding in a freight car were arrested shortly after the killing. Some say the men fired shots from the grassy knoll, then ran to the train.

**The Umbrella Man.** Films of the assassination show a man standing on the north side of Elm Street, twirling an umbrella as Kennedy's car approaches. Some believe the man is signaling for others to shoot. Another theory suggests the man fired poison darts at the President.

**The Magic Bullet.** The bullet

that the Warren Commission said was Oswald's second shot was found on a stretcher at Parkland Hospital, in nearly pristine condition. Critics say the bullet would have been severely damaged if it had, as the commission said, passed through the President and Texas Gov. John Connally.

**The Autopsy.** Doctors' descriptions of the President's wounds differ widely. This has led at least one researcher to believe that the wounds were surgically altered to make it appear that the President was shot from behind. The theory suggests that the surgery was done after the body left Dallas and before the autopsy at Bethesda Naval Hospital in Maryland.

Other theories concentrate on who plotted the murder and why.

**The Angry Exiles.** Cubans in the United States hired Oswald to kill President Kennedy because he had failed to crush the Castro regime.

**The Red Menace.** Communists in the Soviet or the Cuban government plotted the assassination.

**Vietnam.** The President was killed because he would have withdrawn the United States from Vietnam, while Lyndon Johnson escalated our role in the war.

**The Mob.** Organized crime killed the President because he was trying to break the Mafia's grip on the

Teamsters union and his influence in other facets of American life. One version suggests that a financially strapped Jack Ruby accepted a mob contract to murder Oswald and cover up mob involvement.

**The Far Right.** Early theories sought to blame conservative, extremist groups such as the John Birch Society, which were vocal in Dallas at the time.

**The Hard-Liners.** U.S. intelligence — most likely the CIA — had the President killed because he was a liberal and too soft on communism.

**LBJ.** Political ambition drove the Vice President to plot the assassination.