

'JFK' COMES

UNDER FIRE

Assassination conspiracists leave no turn un-Stoned in new film

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Like the sun-splashed motorcade that rolls through the film, Oliver Stone's "JFK" is taking sniper fire from more than one direction.

Stone's theory that President John Kennedy was killed in Dallas by a cabal of military chiefs, the FBI, CIA, defense manufacturers and anti-Castro Cubans has been met by a storm of derision from conservative and mainstream critics.

But even some assassination-conspiracy theorists are charging Stone has missed the truth — or at least their truth.

"It's disinformation, travesty and a fraud," froths Harold Weisberg, the author of "Whitewash" and a dean of the conspiracists. Weisberg — who hasn't seen the movie but read an early script — calls Stone "an exploiting, commercializing monster who is duping the public with a tortured and fantastic hypothesis."

"I think it's a disservice," he adds. "If you're doing it as nonfiction, you're lying to the people."

The conspiracy buff network, like the shadowy links they try to expose, can be a treacherous place. Opponents have branded each other as CIA plants. Seemingly trivial distinctions are grounds for bitter feuds. And now envy has crept in, with Stone's film having "kinda caused a rift between the gots and the got-nots," says Jim Marrs, whose book, "Crossfire: The Plot That Killed Kennedy," was a prime source for the film.

There are about 100 active conspiracy researchers working throughout the country.

On one end are people like Weisberg, who ridicule the Warren Commission's "lone gunman" theory, but stop short of blaming anybody else

for the alleged conspiracy.

On the other are theories implicating even Jackie Kennedy or poison darts fired by the "umbrella man" along Dealey Plaza.

The biggest complaint these buffs have about "JFK" is Stone's decision to chronicle the efforts of Jim Garrison, the New Orleans district attorney in the late 1960s and the only prosecutor to try anyone for Kennedy's assassination.

Garrison came to believe Kennedy's death was a coup d'état orchestrated by big business, the military and intelligence agents. Why? They feared Kennedy was too soft on communism and was planning to pull out of Southeast Asia, thereby ending the gravy train for the military-industrial complex.

Two years after the assassination, Garrison began looking into Lee Harvey Oswald's New Orleans links in the months before the Dallas assassination.

After tying Oswald to anti-Castro exiles, right-wing extremists and the CIA, Garri-

son charged retired New Orleans businessman Clay Shaw with conspiring to kill Kennedy. In 1967, a jury deliberated less than an hour before acquitting Shaw.

During his investigation, Garrison was savaged as an intemperate witch-hunter who never had a case against Shaw and ruined him, in part, because he was homosexual. Members of his staff quit in disgust over his tactics, which reportedly also included drugging witnesses and burying information damaging to Garrison's prosecution.

"He was in fact on the trail of the assassins, and the basic direction of his suspicion was correct," said Jerry Rose, editor of "The Third Decade," a upstate-based conspiracy newsletter.

"But his fastening on Clay Shaw, that was very, very

weak," Rose said. "I think he was an opportunist. He saw a chance to make a political name for himself."

Stone says he used Garrison's character in the film as a Trojan Horse to carry a variety of conspiracy theories, and not just the New Orleans connections. He also claims Garrison was vindicated years later, when it was learned that Shaw had indeed been a CIA operative.

Not enough proof, says Rose. "So what the hell?" he snaps. "Who wasn't?"

Mark Lane, whose 1966 book "Rush to Judgment" was the first blockbuster conspiracy book, says Stone made errors of commission and omission. As for Garrison, "it doesn't capture him at all," says Lane, who was married by Garrison after he became a judge.

On the other hand, "the film takes so many liberties that [Stone] has made it vulnerable to attack," Lane charges. "It's very bad on the facts."

Among the most misleading details, says Lane, is a scene where Shaw acknowledges to police his use of the alias "Clay Bertrand."

Shaw always denied he ever used an alias, but the film gives the impression the statement was simply quashed to protect him. In es-

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Wrone

sence, it calls Shaw a liar.

"He [Stone] says it's going to give us a solution to the assassination, and it can't do that, that's impossible," charged David Wrone, a University of Wisconsin professor. "Why should rich people with a lust for greed and fame pervert our history?"

Relax, says Dr. Cyril Wecht, a pathologist consulted by Stone. "Eighty per cent of the American public rejects the Warren Commission. How is it reinventing history showing that the Warren Commission was wrong?"

At the least, "JFK" is serving as a lightning rod for all conspiracy buffs, who conspiracy-turned-lone-gunman advocate Jim Moore brands as "very lonely and psychologically dependent" on the assassination puzzle.

But everyone agrees "JFK" cannot help boosting interest in the assassination — not a bad thing if the truth has yet to be found.

But can it? Weisberg and Wrone say no. "What we should do is find out why we don't know," Wrone says.

But hope springs eternal from most conspiracists. "I think it's going to be beneficial to the general public that this kind of version is put out," says Rose. "That it totally misrepresents who Garrison was is sort of beside the point."