

'JFK' revives debate

Demands increase for release of secret files

By Dennis Cauchon
USA TODAY

Oliver Stone's controversial new movie, *JFK*, has renewed demands for the government to release its secret files about President John F. Kennedy's assassination.

Both conspiracy buffs and conspiracy debunkers say it's time to open the files.

Friday, former CIA and FBI director William Webster — who kept the files secret for years — added his call: "I know of no records that could not be released."

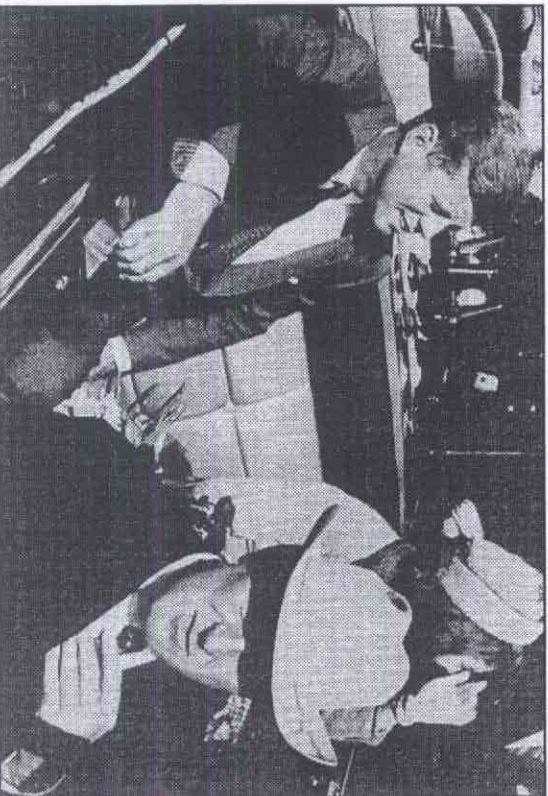
The Warren Commission files are what people want most. The commission — the official panel investigating the November 1963 shooting — concluded Lee Harvey Oswald was the lone assassin.

But the best-known conspiracy theories claim more than one assassin and the involvement of the CIA, FBI or Mafia. The secret files have kept the debate alive.

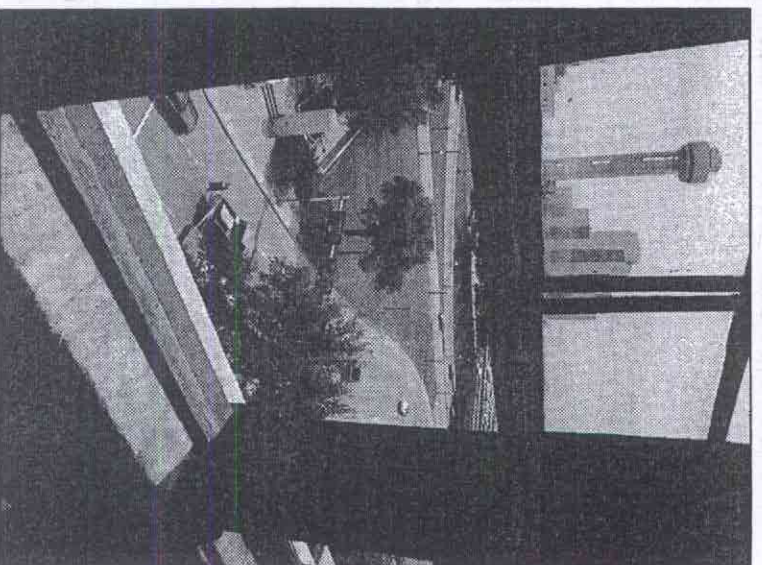
The CIA, FBI, State Department, Secret Service and Kennedy family have declared portions of the files off-limits.

National Archives archivist Sue McDonough says about 2% of the commission's files are secret. Webster puts the amount at 5%.

"The government's refusal to release these documents has done more than fuel ridiculous conspiracy theories," complains Warren Commission



MOTORCADE SEATING: President John F. Kennedy sat behind Texas Gov. John Connally. Critics question a Warren Commission finding that a bullet passed through Kennedy, then struck Connally.



ASSASSINATION SIGHTLINE: The 6th floor window of the Texas School Book Depository where Lee Harvey Oswald fired his fatal shots.

general counsel David Belin. "It's created fertile ground for movie producers, TV producers and book writers to make huge amounts of money off a presidential assassination."

Belin has seen the files — one of the few people to do so. "They are way overblown," he says. "There's nothing of great significance in them about the assassination."

Most Warren Commission files — 90 rolls of microfilm, from lie-detector tests to police reports — can be seen at the National Archives between 8:45 a.m. and 10 p.m.

What experts clamor to see:

► Correspondence between the Soviet and U.S. governments about Oswald. Secrecy reason: Protect CIA sources.

Oswald, a Marxist who lived in the Soviet Union, was framed by the CIA, according to some theories. The commission said Oswald visited the Cuban and Soviet embassies in Mexico City two months before the assassination.

But conspiracy theorist Mark Lane, author of *Plausible Denial*, says "the cables between Washington and the Mexico City embassy will show

Oswald was framed."

Belin says the CIA wrongly refuses to release the files because it has dirty hands on other matters, such as discussions about killing Fidel Castro.

► The autopsy photos and X-rays of the slain president — the most basic piece of physical evidence in a murder investigation. Secrecy reason: Kennedy family request.

The photos haven't been released because they'd show Kennedy was shot from the front by a second assassin, say some conspiracy theorists.

► Details of how the presi-

dent was protected in 1963. Secrecy reason: Not to endanger safety of other presidents.

► Other threats to Kennedy's life. Secrecy reason: Protect privacy of individuals.

Former CIA director William Colby says a blanket release of information would be unwise. "It's a very complicated issue that must be done document by document."

But Belin says, "The public good that comes from knowing the truth outweighs any argument for secrecy."

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