

JFK assassination expert calls movie 'poison'

By GUY FLETCHER
Staff Writer

FREDERICK, Md., — Harold Weisberg doesn't want to see the movie "JFK." He isn't even the least bit curious.

"I don't want to waste my time on that kind of poison," Weisberg, 78, said.

If he were just anybody, Weisberg's aversion to Oliver Stone's movie about the assassination of President John F. Kennedy and a subsequent investigation by New Orleans District Attorney Jim Garrison would be no big deal.

But Weisberg is an authority on the Kennedy assassination — boasting 250,000 pages of government memos and reports in some 60 file cabinets — and seemingly would have a great deal of interest in any motion picture about the subject.

But since seeing a copy of the script for "JFK" last spring, Weisberg has had little use for the film or Stone. He has blasted

the production and creator for making speculative claims and sweeping assertions without the benefit of facts and evidence.

"As soon as I saw (the script) I knew it was a phony," said Weisberg, author of several books on the assassination. He called the movie "a grossly inaccurate, entirely unfaithful work of fiction."

Gerrald McKnight, a Hood College professor, has similar feelings about the motion picture he has yet to see. He said the claims made by Stone could be true, but without the evidence to back them up, it's wrong to present them as fact.

"We simply just don't know because the case was never investigated," McKnight said.

The fateful day

Twenty-eight years after the shots rang across Dealey Plaza, many Americans are still trying to make sense out of what hap-

pened "at day in Dallas. To some, the sheer horror of Nov. 22, 1963 — the handsome president gunned down while his wife sat by his side — is enough to keep the memory fresh in the mind. To others, Dallas was the watershed event of a generation, a line of demarcation between good and evil, harmony and havoc, blind innocence and tempered suspicion.

In the \$40-million "JFK," Oliver Stone claims that U.S. involvement in Vietnam would have been stemmed had Kennedy lived to serve another term. Tens of thousands of lives would have been saved. The '60s would have been a decade of peace and prosperity.

With that claim, Stone places the smoking gun, or guns, in many hands — those who had something to gain from the president's death — like those of the CIA, the FBI, the armed forces, the Dallas police, and the military-industrial sector.

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Harold Weisberg

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Such claims, with conflicting and suspect evidence to back them up, have triggered boisterous opposition by historians, authors and investigators of the assassination. Many, like Weisberg and McKnight, have criticized Stone for fabricating theories and ignoring facts.

In his defense, Stone has said that "JFK" is his interpretation of the assassination and the events that followed. He has described the movie as an "outlaw history" or "counter-myth" to offset the widely criticized Warren Commission Report findings.

"I think the Warren Commission was a myth," Stone told Time magazine, "and I think this movie, hopefully, if it is accepted by the public, will at least move people away from the Warren Commission and consider the possibility that there was a coup d'etat that removed the president."

The central figure

About a year ago, Harold Weisberg heard that Oliver Stone was going to shoot a movie which would explore conspiracy theories about the assassination of President Kennedy.

The name that set off alarm bells in Weisberg's head was Jim Garrison, a flamboyant New Orleans district attorney who prosecuted the only Kennedy assassination case that went to trial. Garrison is the hero of the Stone movie, leading a charge of good against evil, the honest man versus the corrupt world.

In 1968, Garrison's staff asked Weisberg, a writer and investigator, to help them in their investigation.

The climax of Garrison's work is the trial. But a jury only took an hour to find the defendant, businessman Clay Shaw, innocent.

Knowing Stone was using Garrison as the centerpiece for the movie, Weisberg wrote the director last February, urging that plans to use

the Garrison story be scrapped.

Weisberg never heard from Stone, but had infrequent contact with staff members of the production. The movie went on as planned, without Weisberg's input and with Jim Garrison as the movie's central character.

"I think that is one of the most indecent things Stone could have done after what I told him," Weisberg said.

Fact and fiction

Ironically, many of the concepts Stone presents in the movie — conspiracy, multiple gunmen, Oswald a patsy — have been ideas popular in the assassination community for years, and with people like Weisberg and McKnight.

But Stone's critics don't appreciate how Stone took those themes, without proper evidence, to a higher level, making the killing a metaphor for the '60s.

All of that would have been fine, Weisberg said, if Stone had not presented the movie as historical fact. He said that Stone went to great lengths, even as far as trimming trees to their 1963 look, to make the picture correct. Why weren't similar efforts made to preserve historical integrity, Weisberg asked.

McKnight, who has taught at Hood for 17 years, said Stone should have tried to uncover the bungled investigations into the assassination, rather than making the grand play of solving the crime of the century.

"He could have really made a contribution to the case," he said.

Where that case will go, influenced by the movie, remains to be seen. Some believe the movie will result in a renewed interest in the assassination, opening the door to public scrutiny that will lead to demands for another investigation.

Weisberg said the movie cannot do a thing to help the investigation, and he said it may never be known what happened on Dealey Plaza the day of Nov. 22, 1963.

"There's no way this can help. It deceives and misleads the people," he said.