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*My 2/5, 2/3 Responses
6/17 + My 6/27/91 one.*

Dear Editor,

Oliver Stone, like the hero of his crass and obvious commercialization and exploitation of the JFK assassination, has great difficulty telling the truth even by accident.

He asks in his December 20 op-ed page article, "Who Is Rewriting History?" with unparalleled arrogance and contempt for truth because he knows that in his movie as well as in this article he rewrote the history of the JFK assassination and his own history in making the movie and ^{because} in his article he rewrites the history of criticism of his movie, in fact, what it is all about.

"History may be too important to leave to newsmen," he says. The record is clear: it cannot be left to the Oliver Stones who exploit and commercialize great tragedies and present themselves as serving the people and democratic society in their greed and dishonesty.

Because I am the one who caused the exposure of the fraud and travesty of Stone's movie I not only know why I did it - I wrote and warned/told Stone before he started shooting, on February 8, 1990.

He prefers fighting the battles of Viet Nam all over again in his article but I made no mention of it.

I enclose copies of my letters to him and you can see for yourself that this was not only not ^{what} I wrote him about, it was not even in my mind.

When some time passed and Stone did not respond and I was given a copy of his script and was shocked at its crude and political rewriting of the fact of the crime and of Garrison's incredible irresponsibility I decided, not the CIA, as Stone has said over and over again, that what he was up to required exposure.

It is obvious, my first letter preceding his first shooting by several months, that if Stone were ^{re'} an honest man determined to make an honest movie he had ample time to junk the script based on his embellishment of what he knew was a deliberately dishonest ^{book} and begin fresh.

I have known George Lardner for 25 years. While there is much on which we do not agree I know him to be a conscientious and accurate reporter. I gave him the script and those records he wanted of my own work in New Orleans relating to Garrison. His article was completely accurate. Stone's response was, to say the least, not accurate.

My interest in New Orleans and most of my work there had to do with Oswald's career there. It turned into damage control before the Shaw trial. In my first letter to Stone I told him how when Garrison's staff was unable to talk him out of his outrageous plan for commemorating the fifth anniversary of the JFK assassination and asked me to try I did it.

among other things he was actually going to charge Robert Perri~~on~~, ~~his~~ former husband

of a Warren Commission witness, who to Garrison's knowledge had killed himself in New Orleans in 1962, with being a Grassy "noll assassin in Dallas in 1963!

Like Stone, Garrison just made "history" up as he went. I offered Stone all the documentation and information he might want about this and all else. I did not go into much of what I could have because what I had written was already too long and because I wanted to know that he was interested before revealing all the absolute insanity of Garrison's that alas to late I was able to prevent.

I did not, for example, ^{send} him my copy of the report on Perrin's suicide that Garrison himself underscored.

I have enough of my report on my investigation of this monstrous adventure in my files and Lardner had all of that before he wrote his greatly understated and completely accurate article. I have copies of a number of relevant Garrison staff memos and of some of the work his investigators did for me to save him and the nation from what he was about to do.

You can make your own evaluation of Stone and what he intended if you read my letter to which he did not respond. You can evaluate his proceeding~~s~~ with what he knew was dishonest after getting this letter.

The ~~five~~ false accusations Stone hurls at those who reported honestly what he does not like he cannot address to me. In fact, he never mentions my name except once to the Washington Post. I wrote the first book on the Warren Commission and five more on it and the other official investigations. I filed a series of difficult, costly and time-~~con~~suming FOIA lawsuits through which I obtained about a quarter of a million pages of those very records that Stone, knowing this, uses your column to demand ^{be} their released!

Everybody working in the field knows that I give unsupervised access to all who write on the subject. Stone knew it and his so-called "research coordinator" knew it. Neither had any interest at all. The one response I got for, not from Stone, also enclosed, is a thinly-disguised offer of a bribe.

Stone began promoting his movie and himself by telling the world that he would be recording their history for the people and in it would tell them who killed their President, why and how. He knew he could not and would not and would instead give his rewriting of it based on the mendacity of the Garrison vehicle, his book, "On the 'rail of the Assassins.'" That is the one trail Garrison never took.

Unlike the authors of other assassination books that get attention, I am not a conspiracy theorist. My books are factual and they amount ^{of} a rather large study of the working of the basic institutions of our society in that time of great stress and since. They brought to light most of what is factual and has been published about this crime. When it is possible I expose the contrived theories as invalid or worse. But I am, ~~can~~ in fact, the most severe critic of the Commission and the executive agencies.

My ~~earlier~~ experience is that of a reporter, an investigative reporter, a Senate

investigator and editor, and ^{as} a World War II intelligence analyst (OSS). I ^{came} to this work with a different background, with prior professional experience in related fields.

What I have that is factual is more than enough to make a book ^{on this topic} but I am not up to that now. By coincidence, before the mail brought me a copy of Stone's indecent diatribe that he ~~had~~ knew very well would promote his movie, having heard that he had written this article, I began the draft of a lead and summary for a proposed Sunday Magazine article. ~~What~~ These sanctimonious monsters who toy with our history and our tragedies for their personal benefit cry out for exposure. I am not sure that I am up to it and I know that anything I now write will require editing. I explain.

I am now almost 79. I have survived a number of surgeries two of which I was not expected to survive. As a result of them and what caused some of them I am weak and severely limited in what I can do and am medically-permitted to do. I cannot stand still other than momentarily, am limited in the use of stairs when most of these records are in our basement, and thus I have only limited access to my own files. I have violated medical instructions in not getting up and walking around the house while writing this. When I forget as I did the blood does not return as it should from my lower extremities and that tires me more. I must sit with my legs elevated, which means with the typewriter to one side.

But my work is accurate. For all the effort by a number of agencies and those who do not like my work, no serious error has been complained of and there are almost no minor errors.

Those at the Times who ~~knew~~ ^{knew} my work, like Peter Kihss and Martin Waldrom (he became a dear friend and visited us when he could) are dead ~~of~~, like Wednell Rawls and John Crewdson and perhaps others I do not remember, seem no longer to be with the Times.

David Wrone, professor of history at the University of Wisconsin at Stevens Point and Gerald McKnight, professor of history at local Hood College, are among those who can give you credentials as evaluated by professionals who are also subject experts.

All I have, which includes about 60 files cabinets of the records Stone has long complained are suppressed, will be a permanent, free public archive ^{at} Hood, with no quid pro quo. Thus as they are now, they will always be available, including to the Times.

I add that when Stone talks about "research" and "information" he is talking about theories and not fact. He had mostly conspiracy nuts as his consultants, plus a few on whose names he could trade. I will not see the movie, I have read only an early script, but I am well familiar with Garrison's rewriting of his own history and that compendium of all the nutty theories by Jim Harts, "Crossfire," the basis of Stone's movie. There is no fact in the movie other than that the President was assassinated and that Jack Ruby killed Oswald. This tells the people only what they knew. The rest misleads, deceives and confuses them and in this is still another of the many works that amount to and are used as self-justification by those agencies that failed to meet their responsibilities. Please excuse my typing and my haste. Sincerely, Harold Weisberg

Harold Weisberg

Who Is Rewriting History?

By Oliver Stone

Members of the media establishment get upset when art gets political, especially when they disagree with the politics and fear the viewpoint. When this priesthood is challenged as the sole or privileged interpreters of our history, they bludgeon newcomers, wielding heavy clubs like "objectivity" and charging high crimes like "rewriting history."

The leading detractors of my film "J.F.K." have been political journalists like Tom Wicker of The New York Times, George Lardner of The Washington Post, Dan Rather of CBS News and Kenneth Auchincloss at Newsweek, all of whom covered events of that period.

I think what is clear from their efforts to destroy my film's credibility is that history may be too important to leave to newsmen. And that artists certainly have the right — and possibly the obligation — to step in and reinterpret the history of our times. Was it not Dan Rather who, upon viewing Abraham Zapruder's film of the assassination, reported that the fatal shot to the head drove President Kennedy "violently forward." Years later, when the film was finally shown to the American people, it was clear that Kennedy's head was going backward.

My critics are outraged that I pose the view that Kennedy's desire to wind down the cold war and the Vietnam War is a possible motive for the murder. When a leader of any country is assassinated, the media normally ask: "What political forces were opposed to this leader and would benefit from his assassination?"

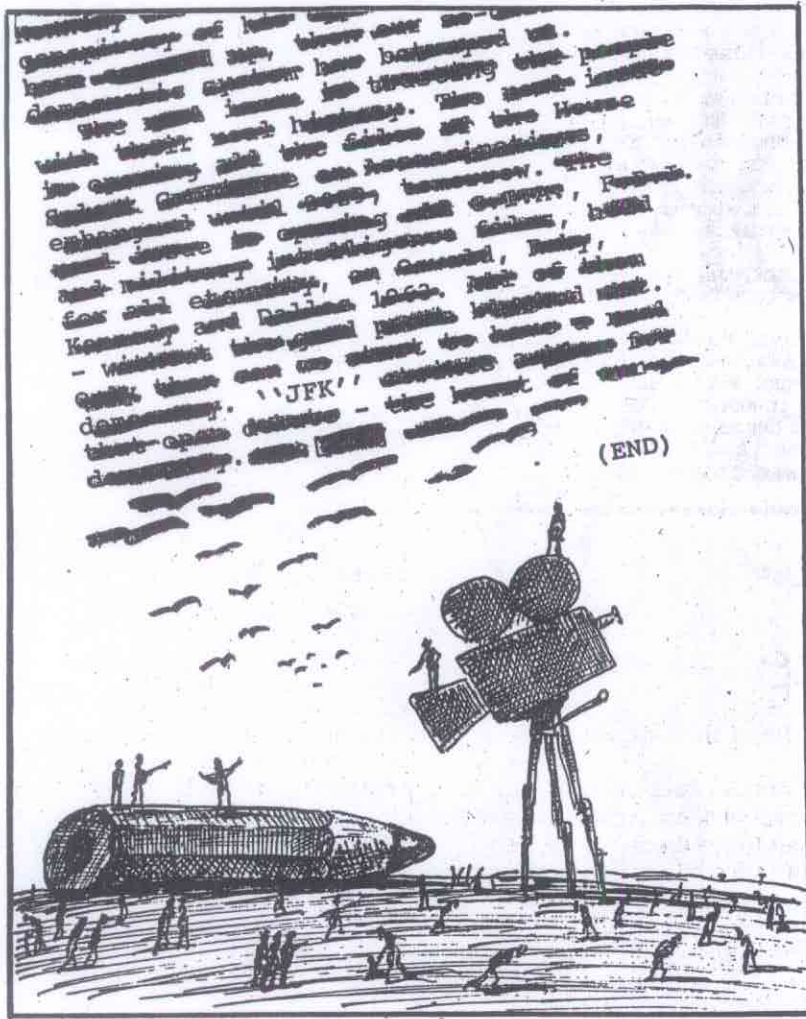
Oliver Stone directed and co-wrote the screenplay for 'J.F.K.'

It seems a little strange to me, 28 years later, that such a question was rarely asked once it was established that Lee Harvey Oswald was not simply mentally ill. And that in its stead, the dramatic cover story, with Lee Harvey Oswald as sole assassin and Jack Ruby as earnest vigilante, was immediately substituted and accepted by almost the entire American media (in sharp contrast to the foreign media). A great John Wayne movie, but why? Why was the possibility of a political motive rarely discussed (or only vaguely attributed to diversionary theories involving pro-Castro forces or the Mafia) after it was clear that there was evidence that undercut the Warren Report?

Whether or not there was a fundamental difference between Kennedy's and Johnson's Vietnam policies deserves more debate. For years most historians assumed there was no basic difference. But people like John Newman, an Army major in intelligence who has written a book on the subject, Fletcher Prouty, a former Air Force colonel who served as director of special operations at the Pentagon in the early 60's, and Peter Dale Scott, a professor at the University of California at Berkeley, should have their day in court.

A basic chronology underlies their view. In June 1963 in a speech at American University, Kennedy envisions a world without the cold war and arms race. He sets the stage for détente, defying the "military-industrial complex," a phrase coined by Eisenhower. Kennedy and Khrushchev have already negotiated the first step: a modus vivendi on the Cuban problem (no Soviet missiles, no U.S. invasion). In July 1963 they install the nuclear hotline and in August sign the first-ever nuclear test-ban treaty.

Later in August, Gen. Charles de Gaulle of France proposes a reunited, neutral Vietnam and plans to visit Kennedy in February to talk about it.



(END)

Eugene Mihaesco

Behind the media establishment's anger over 'J.F.K.'

In September, Kennedy states that the war is Vietnam's, not ours, to decide and then he approves secret negotiations with Fidel Castro outside State Department-C.I.A. channels. In October, the White House forecasts that 1,000 men would be withdrawn from Vietnam by the end of 1963 and that the U.S. military mission would be over by the end of 1965. That same month, Kennedy authorizes the pullout in a national security action memo — NSAM 263. The Government projects major Pentagon cuts.

Kennedy is killed on Nov. 22. Two

days later, Lyndon Johnson meets with Henry Cabot Lodge and the Joint Chiefs of Staff about the Vietnam "crisis." Four days after the assassination, Johnson overrides NSAM 263 with NSAM 273 — step one in reversing Kennedy's direction. A "withdrawal" occurs on paper — 1,000 men are rotated home — but more are sent back to Vietnam by February. Johnson's NSAM 273 opens the way for air attacks on North Vietnam and increased covert warfare. Finally, in August 1964, Johnson uses the bogus Tonkin Gulf incident to start the air war and win a Congressional mandate to do as he sees fit in Vietnam.

By March 1965, 15 months after Kennedy's death, the first combat troops are sent, something Kennedy refused to do. No difference between Kennedy and Johnson on Vietnam? With the nexus of interest — military, business, political — standing to profit from the hundred-billion-dollar war, there's ample reason to believe that therein lies the motive.

Jim Garrison, though some have tried to discredit him, sought that motive and in suggesting the possibility of a nightmare unacceptable to our official historians, he has been vilified through time. The failure of his case against Clay Shaw cannot be equated

with a full vindication of the Warren Report. To bring a case against the covert apparatus of this country was nigh impossible then, as it is now with Lawrence Walsh's failure to find the light of day against Oliver North and the Iran-contra plotters.

The issue of our times — as the media keep repeating — is democracy. Real democracy is not some illusion and must be based on truth told to the people. We applauded the Soviets when, in the name of democracy, they finally told their people the horrible truth of Stalin's murders, yet we ignore the murder of our President. Do our people deserve any less? If Kennedy was killed by a political conspiracy of his opponents and it has been covered up, then our so-called democratic system has betrayed us.

The real issue is trusting the people with their real history. The real issue is opening all the files of the House Select Committee on Assassinations, embargoed until 2029, today. The real issue is opening all C.I.A., F.B.I. and military intelligence files, held for all eternity, on Oswald, Ruby, Kennedy and Dallas 1963. All of them — without the crucial parts blacked out. Only then can we start to have a real democracy. "J.F.K." strikes a blow for that open debate. □

DEAR HAR, ANOTHER (B) CRAP OF NEWS ON JFK! 20 DEC '91
you were right on refusing to be part of this farce.
I suggest you capitalize on this movie by

Arts

advertising all your books giving the FACTS
on the JFK assassination. Y B1

"MAKE HAY WHILE
THE SUN SHINES"

FRIDAY, DECEMBER 20, 1991

I WISH YOU ALL SHALOM.

Joe

Review/Film

Oliver Stone's 'J. F. K.': When Everything Amounts to Nothing

By VINCENT CANBY

In one of the dizzying barrage of images with which Oliver Stone begins "J. F. K.," President Dwight D. Eisenhower is seen on television not long before he left office in 1961. It is one of Ike's finer moments.

There he is, the former five-star general, the man who salvaged the Presidency for the Republican Party, warning the American people to beware of the military-industrial complex, a vested interest that, one might reasonably suppose, was oriented more toward the Republicans than the Democrats.

"J. F. K." goes on for another three hours or so. Yet as busy and as full of exposition as it is, it never becomes much more specific than Ike. The conspiracy that, "J. F. K." says, led to the assassination of Eisenhower's successor, John F. Kennedy, in Dallas on Nov. 22, 1963, remains far more vague than the movie pretends.

According to "J. F. K.," the conspiracy includes just about everybody up to what are called the Government's highest levels, but nobody in particular can be identified except some members of the scroungy New Orleans-Dallas-Galveston demimonde. That the subject is hot is apparent from all the criticism the movie received even before it was completed. The ferocity of that outrage should now subside, in part because "J. F. K.," for all its sweeping innuendos and splintery music-video editing, winds up breathlessly but running in place.

The movie will continue to infuriate people who possibly know as much about the assassination as Mr.

Stone does, but it also shortchanges the audience and at the end plays like a bait-and-switch scam.

"J. F. K." builds to a climactic courtroom drama, the details of which it largely avoids, to allow Kevin Costner, the film's four-square star, to deliver a sermon about America's future with an emotionalism that is completely unearned.

What the film does do effectively is to present the case for the idea that there actually was a conspiracy, rather than the lone gunman, Lee Harvey Oswald, specified by the Warren Commission report. Beyond that "J. F. K." cannot go with any assurance. This is no "All the President's Men." The only payoff is the sight of Mr. Costner with tears in his eyes.

The film's insurmountable problem is the vast amount of material it fails to make coherent sense of. Mr. Stone and Zachary Sklar, who collaborated on the screenplay, take as their starting point Jim Garrison's book, "On the Trail of the Assassins."

Mr. Garrison, played in the film by Mr. Costner, is the former New Orleans District Attorney who, five years after the assassination, unsuccessfully prosecuted Clay Shaw, a New Orleans businessman, in connection with the Kennedy murder.

To give the film something resembling conventional shape, Mr. Stone has turned Mr. Garrison into what he describes as "a Frank Capra character," that is, a plain, dedicated down-home fellow called Jim, someone who represents "the best American traditions."

Like millions of Americans, the movie's Jim admires President Kennedy and mourns him when he is murdered. But Jim also comes to see Kennedy as the 20th century's great fearless dove, whose death might be traced, if only the facts were allowed to come out, to everyone who benefited from his

death. These would include corporations profiting from the Vietnam War, members of the Federal Bureau of Investigation, the Central Intelligence Agency, the Secret Service and, by clever indirection, even President Lyndon B. Johnson, Kennedy's Vice President.

Acting in concert with them or at their behest, though in ways that remain undetermined, are ultra-right-wing fanatics represented in the movie by Clay Shaw (Tommy Lee Jones), some unidentified Cuban exiles and a former F.B.I. man named Guy Bannister (Ed Asner). Also involved are various fringe types like David Ferrie (Joe Pesci), a pilot for hire; the small-time mobster Jack Ruby (Brian Doyle Murray), and Oswald (Gary Oldman), whose place in the conspiracy has become utterly mysterious by the time the movie ends.

"J. F. K." begins with a promise of intrigue and revelation, though it soon becomes clear that Mr. Stone is Fibber McGee opening the door to an overstuffed closet. He is buried



Kevin Costner as Jim Garrison in "J. F. K." Warner Brothers

under all the facts, contradictory testimony, hearsay and conjecture that he would pack into the movie.

What is fact and what isn't is not always easy to tell. Though one character is officially listed as having committed suicide, the movie allows us to see him being forced to take lethal pills. This is not speculation. Anything shown in a movie tends to be taken as truth.

The movie sees everything through the

bespectacled eyes of the tireless Jim. "J. F. K." suffers with him when the Donna Reed character, Jim's wife, Liz (Sissy Spacek), says, "Honestly, I think sometimes you care more about John Kennedy than you do your own family!"

Jim has missed a luncheon at Antoine's with Liz and the children. Some things, such as Presidential assassinations, require terrible sacrifices from those who would investigate them.

"J. F. K." is suitably aghast when Jim goes

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to the Lincoln Memorial in Washington to meet a man who identifies himself only as X (Donald Sutherland) but who is obviously high in the military-industrial complex. X is the one who, in a very long omnibus sort of monologue accompanied by images that jump all over the world, suggests that Jim check into the participation in the conspiracy of everyone who stood to gain from Kennedy's death.

Says Jim in his golly-gee-whiz manner, "I never realized that Kennedy was so dangerous to the Establishment!"

The movie rushes frantically on, its unsubstantiated data accumulating while Jim becomes a victim of a caustic press and a vicious, self-serving Establishment. Little by little Mr. Stone seems to identify Jim with John Kennedy. When X says of the conspiracy, "It's as old as the Crucifixion," it suddenly appears that the film maker would elevate Jim and John to an even higher pantheon.

By the time "J. F. K." reaches the Clay Shaw trial, most uninformed members of the movie audience will be exhausted and bored. The movie, which is simultaneously arrogant and timorous, has been unable to separate the important material from the merely colorful. After a certain point, audience interest tunes out. It's a jumble.

"J. F. K." rivets in the manner that was intended in two sequences: its presentation of the evidence about the number of bullets fired at the Kennedy motorcade and its presentation of the so-called Zapruder film, the record of the assassination itself. But even in these latter sequences, the movie remains an undifferentiated mix of real and staged material.

Mr. Stone's hyperbolic style of film making is familiar: lots of short, often hysterical scenes tumbling one after another, backed by a soundtrack that is layered, strudel-like, with noises, dialogue, music, more noises, more dialogue. It works better in "Born on the Fourth of July" and "The Doors" than it does here, in a movie that means to be a sober reflection on history suppressed.

Some of the performances are



Warner Brothers

Sissy Spacek

J. F. K.

Directed by Oliver Stone; screenplay by Mr. Stone and Zachary Sklar, based on the books "On the Trail of the Assassins" by Jim Garrison and "Crossfire: The Plot That Killed Kennedy" by Jim Marrs; director of photography, Robert Richardson; edited by Joe Hutshing and Pietro Scalia; production designer, Victor Kempster; music by John Williams; produced by A. Kitman Ho and Mr. Stone. Running time: 188 minutes. This film is rated R.

Jim Garrison.....	Kevin Costner
Liz Garrison.....	Sissy Spacek
David Ferrie.....	Joe Pesci
Clay Shaw.....	Tommy Lee Jones
Lee Harvey Oswald.....	Gary Oldman
Lou Ivon.....	Jay O. Sanders
Bill Broussard.....	Michael Rooker
Jack Martin.....	Jack Lemmon
Senator Russell B. Long.....	Walter Matthau
Colonel X.....	Donald Sutherland
Willie O'Keefe.....	Kevin Bacon
Guy Bannister.....	Edward Asner
Jack Ruby.....	Brian Doyle Murray

a worthy cause. The cause may well be worthy; the film fails it.

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"J. F. K." is rated R (Under 17 requires accompanying parent or adult guardian). It has some scenes of violence and bloodshed and a good deal of vulgar language.

good, all by actors who get on and off fairly fast: Mr. Jones, Mr. Pesci, Mr. Asner, Jack Lemmon (as a feckless crony of one of the New Orleans suspects) and Kevin Bacon, who plays a male hustler.

When Walter Matthau turns up for a brief, not especially rewarding turn as Senator Russell B. Long, "J. F. K." looks less as if it had been cast in the accepted way than subscribed to, like