

# In Defense Of Earl Warren

## Grandson disputes film's 'cheap shot'

BY SAM WHITING  
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The night before he was shot to death in Dallas, President Kennedy and Jackie had dinner with Chief Justice Earl Warren and his wife. Several days later, Warren delivered the eulogy while the assassinated president lay in state in the Capitol rotunda.

So it slightly galls St. Helena real estate agent Jeffrey Earl Warren to see his grandfather tainted by the broad conspiracy sweep of Oliver Stone's controversial film "JFK."



Earl Warren

"Papa Warren would have been the first to defend Oliver Stone's right to make any type of film he wants," says Warren, 43, who grew up on a St. Helena ranch, starred on the high school football team and now runs the small realty firm started by his father. "But I found it very sad that he opted for the obvious cheap shot that nobody can defend against."

This "cheap shot" springs up through suggestions that everybody from Vice President Lyndon Johnson to Chief Justice Warren either helped plot the assassination conspiracy, knew about it, covered it up or was too

dumb to figure it out.

As perhaps the most trusted individual in America, Chief Justice Warren was reluctantly drafted by President Johnson to lead a distinguished team of investigators into the assassination. The Warren Report, which concluded that Lee Harvey Oswald acted alone, has since been challenged as a whitewash. But Jeff Warren knew his grandfather too well to believe he would stop short of the truth.

"Earl Warren never gave in to pressure," he says, noting his grandfather's great moral decisions on landmark civil rights cases, and his most famous quote: "Everything that I did in my life that was worthwhile, I caught hell for."

"It is totally beyond belief," says Warren, "that he gave in to something he couldn't substantiate, believe and live by."

Still, Warren acknowledges, there was something about the Warren Report that bothered Papa Warren.

"The only time he ever got mad was about the Warren Commission," he recalls. "There was something about it he didn't like."

He had prosecuted the facts but may have become suspicious over the



BY ERIC LUSE/THE CHRONICLE

Jeffrey Earl Warren of St. Helena believes the movie 'JFK' could sully the entire career of his grandfather, Chief Justice Earl Warren, by suggesting he botched the Warren Commission.

years that all the facts weren't presented.

"If the Warren Commission contains flaws and inaccuracies," Jeff says, "it's not because they were in cahoots with the FBI and the CIA but because these agencies withheld information. That's what really burns me."

It may have burned his grandfather as well. He never wanted to talk much about the case. But he did turn once to Jeff's mother and say, "I can tell you point-blank, Margaret, Lee Harvey Oswald killed the president."

Any further questions were referred to Page D5, Col. 1

# Grandson Takes on Film

He calls it cheap, arrogant

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red to the 26 volumes that line a bookshelf in the family's rustic ranch house, where his mother still lives. His father, James, died in January.

"He'd say, 'Read the entire report and then we'll talk about it.'" That usually cut short the discussion.

"That's 26 volumes of mice' type," Warren says. "Who was going to read it?"

Warren never did, but he would wager that Stone, who plays loose and fast with the facts throughout the film, never did either.

Warren trusts his grandfather's research. At 72, Chief Justice Warren went down to the Texas School Book Depository and walked Oswald's steps, establishing that he could have done, within the given time, all the sordid things that the film maintains he couldn't possibly have accomplished. This includes firing off all three shots at the motorcade, then descending several flights to the lunchroom, where he was seen minutes after the shooting.

"The route that Stone took to get to his truth was the polar opposite that Papa Warren took to get to his truth."

## 'This Is Going to Be Ugly'

When Warren heard the film would be made, he said to his mother, a former national junior tennis champ, "Oh, this is going to be ugly, this is going to be awful."

He could see an entire career of good administered by Chief Justice Warren reduced to three hours of theory. But that is the price of public service, even for someone as revered as the chief justice, who died in 1974.

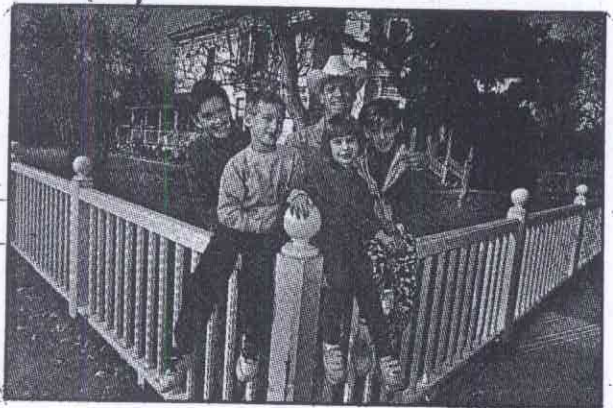
Warren would have let it slide until he read that Jim Garrison, former real-life New Orleans district attorney, would portray the chief justice in a cameo. This was going too far.

"I was flabbergasted to read that Garrison would play Papa Warren," he says. "It would be like having Sirhan Sirhan play Bobby Kennedy."

Well, maybe not quite that severe, he admits, but it gets Stone's point across that it makes "a mockery of a good man."

Warren fired off a letter to Stone, accusing him of a "total lack of class in this cheap and arrogant publicity stunt." But before the letter was sent, one of Stone's Hollywood producers came to St. Helena to look at property. Warren gave him more for his time than just the listings, and sent home a message or two to his pal.

Warren wasn't planning to see the film, then fig-



BY ERIC LUSE/THE CHRONICLE

Jeffrey Warren, with wife Cindy and children, J.J., Cody and Casey, at their St. Helena home.

ured, "I can't avoid it."

1991 is the 100th anniversary of Earl Warren's birth, and the family has been in a reflective mood. Warren keeps a huge poster of Papa Warren in his den, along with framed, autographed portraits, and Papa Warren's library. He has hung onto every piece of correspondence, including a seven-page letter he wrote in 1969, when he was a Berkeley radical, questioning all forms of authority, including his grandfather, the highest authority in the land.

But now he is a pillar of his hometown, living in a century-old restored Victorian with his wife and three children. When he drives he pleasantly allows tourists and old folks to cut in front of his Jeep with the wreath on the grill. He is keeper of the good Warren name.

"We downplayed it while he was alive," he says, "but since his death I'm like a Zionist. I really don't want people to forget that at one time there were people who had a sense of honor and integrity."

So a few nights before Christmas he went alone to see the film in Napa. The good news was the theater was half-empty. The bad news was that the audience bought Stone's story line. In the climax, when the judge announces that Garrison, as played by Costner, had lost his conspiracy suit, one viewer screamed out "F--- you" at the judge.

## One Near Leap

Warren nearly leaped from his seat when Garrison accused Chief Justice Warren of committing perjury, making him as much of an accomplice as Oswald himself.

Papa Warren, he says, would have had one word for the film: "disgraceful." Warren has a few more words to share with Stone, and after seeing the film, is polishing his letter.

"Just to let him know that somebody knows his movie is like a junk bond," he says.

By sullyng the name, he says, Stone will further erode the landmark civil rights decisions of the Warren Court, which are under heavy enough attack from the Reagan-Bush court as it is.

"If you total the points in Earl Warren's life, 98 percent has nothing to do with the Warren report," he says, "but he's gonna get nailed for the 2 percent."