

More Shots in Dealey Plaza

Oliver Stone returns to the '60s once again with a strange, widely disputed take on the Kennedy assassination

By RICHARD ZOGLIN

Did Lee Harvey Oswald act alone? Were three shots fired in Dealey Plaza on that awful afternoon in November, or were there more? Was there a large-scale, sinister conspiracy behind the assassination of John F. Kennedy, or just one troubled little man with communist sympathies and a Mannlicher-Carcano rifle?

Unanswered questions about the Kennedy assassination have nagged the nation for nearly 28 years, rousing emotions, inciting speculation, provoking arguments. It

in 1969 put New Orleans businessman Clay Shaw on trial for complicity in Kennedy's murder. (The case ended in a quick acquittal.) Stone's script, a version of which was obtained by TIME, is based largely on Garrison's 1988 book, *On the Trail of the Assassins*. Garrison is considered somewhere near the far-out fringe of conspiracy theorists, but Stone appears to have bought his version virtually wholesale. One need look no further than the actor who will play Garrison: Hollywood's reigning all-American hero Kevin Costner.

In the early draft of Stone's script (co-

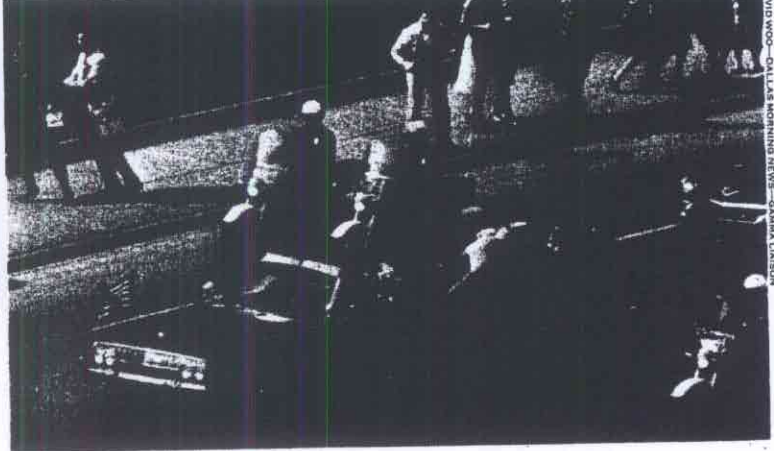
Lyndon Johnson in office so that the Vietnam War could be escalated. "This was a military-style ambush from start to finish," Garrison tells his staff later, "a coup d'état with Lyndon waiting in the wings."

David Belin, former counsel to the Warren Commission and author of two books on the assassination, calls the script "a bunch of hokum." By ignoring key pieces of evidence and misrepresenting others, Belin says, Stone casts doubt even on issues that are relatively clear-cut, like Oswald's murder of Dallas police officer J.D. Tippit. (Oswald was identified as the gunman at the scene by at least six eyewitnesses.) "It is a shame that a man as talented as Stone has had to go to such lengths to deceive the American public," says Belin.

In his article for the *Post*, George Lardner Jr., who covered the Shaw trial and now specializes in national-security issues,



Stone took great pains to re-create the assassination scene in Dallas, with Steve Reed and Jodi Farber portraying the President and the First Lady. But seven—not three—shots ring out, and conspirators seem to be hiding under every bed.



was probably inevitable that Hollywood would step into this minefield sooner or later—and probably inevitable that the man leading the charge would be Oliver Stone, filmdom's most flamboyant interpreter of the 1960s (*Platoon*, *The Doors*, *Born on the Fourth of July*).

Stone is only halfway through shooting his movie about the assassination, for which he has staged an elaborate re-creation of the event in Dallas. But already the film (at least an early draft of the script, which Stone has tried to keep secret) has come under vigorous assault. The *Washington Post* attacked the movie's "errors and absurdities." Experts on the assassination have voiced outrage at Stone's version of events. Stone has responded with dark hints of a conspiracy to discredit his movie. And who said the '60s were over?

The hero of Stone's film, scheduled for release in December by Warner Bros., is former New Orleans district attorney Jim Garrison, a wide-eyed conspiracy buff who

written with Zachary Sklar, who edited Garrison's book), we learn that Oswald was just a pawn in an elaborate plot that ranged from seedy gay bars in the French Quarter to the corridors of power in Washington. We meet bizarre characters like David Ferrie, a homosexual ex-airline pilot with a homemade wig and greasypaint eyebrows who claimed involvement in the conspiracy but died before he could testify. We witness shadowy meetings between Oswald and Jack Ruby before the assassination. We are told that as many as seven shots may have been fired at Kennedy from three different directions—none of them by Oswald.

The killing was planned, Garrison discovers in the film, by a coalition that included the Mafia, the CIA and other protectors of the military-industrial complex. In a key scene, the crusading D.A. has a rendezvous in Washington with a mysterious unnamed figure who describes how security for the President's visit to Dallas was slackened. It was all part of a plot, he tells Garrison, to eliminate Kennedy and put

called Garrison's investigation "a fraud" and attacked the script for such dubious scenes as one in which Ferrie is murdered by two mysterious figures who force medicine down his throat. (The New Orleans coroner ruled that Ferrie died of natural causes, though two apparent suicide notes were found.) Lardner also ridiculed the film's attempt to explain away Garrison's botched prosecution of Shaw by inventing a Garrison aide who turns out to be a mole for the Feds aiming to sabotage the case.

Even critics of the Warren Commission find fault with Stone's version of events. Harold Weisberg, author of *Whitewash*, one of the earliest attacks on the Warren Report, calls Stone's script "a travesty" that dredges up bogus theories and unfounded speculation. Among them: the suggestion that three hobos arrested near the assassination site were involved (they were vagrants who had nothing to do with the assassination, says Weisberg), and Garrison's "discovery" that the route of Kennedy's motorcade had been changed at the

Cinema

last minute (a phony charge, says Weisberg, that was based on conflicting descriptions of the parade route in the Dallas *Morning News*.)

Stone, with some justification, has objected to his film's being dissected even before it is finished. The criticisms, he says, are based on the first draft of a script that has been substantially revised. (The Ferrie murder scene, for example, has been eliminated.) Stone compares the *Post's* attack on his film to the Hearst newspapers' efforts to suppress *Citizen Kane* five decades ago. "This is a repeat performance," says Stone. "But nothing is going to stop me from fin-

ishing this movie." The director insists, moreover, on his right to make a movie that expresses his view of a critical historical event. "William Shakespeare made Richard III into a bad guy. Now the historians say he was wrong. Does that mean Shakespeare shouldn't have written *Richard III*?"

Stone appears to have less tolerance for others who want to do the same thing. According to Hollywood sources, the director has worked hard to block a movie based on Don DeLillo's 1988 book, *Libra*, a fictionalized account of the assassination. "Stone has a right to make his film, but he doesn't have a right to try and stop every-

one else from making their films," says Dale Pollock, president of A&M Films, which has been trying to make the DeLillo movie.

Stone maintains that the controversy is not something he has courted. "I'm not making this film for money," the director says of his lavishly publicized epic starring Hollywood's hottest leading man. "I want to pay homage to J.F.K., the godfather of my generation." But if his film turns out to distort history, he may wind up doing more harm than homage to the memory of the fallen President.

—With reporting by Hays Gorey/
Washington and Martha Smilg/Los Angeles

Smiles (and Yuks) Of a Summer Night

By RICHARD SCHICKEL

SOAPDISH

We sometimes forget that besides providing merriment for us yokels, show business performs an even more valuable social function. It provides livelihoods and a home for thousands of certifiable lunatics. The savings to our overburdened health-care system are simply incalculable.

Case in point: the cast and staff of *The Sun Also Sets*, a soap opera of transcendent tackiness. Its reigning diva is Celeste Talbert (Sally Field), so insecure that she must periodically journey to New Jersey shopping malls so she can be fawned over by her fans.



Field and Kline in a flat-out farce

Supporting player Montana Moorehead (Cathy Moriarty) is scheming to supplant Celeste, and has enlisted snaky, horny David Barnes (Robert Downey Jr.), the show's line producer, in a plot to bring back Jeffrey Anderson (Kevin Kline), once the soap's leading man and the star's lover. Reduced to playing Willy Loman at a Florida dinner theater, he is eager for a comeback. This presents a practical problem: Jeffrey was rather definitely written out of the soap when his character was decapitated.

In the Robert Harling-Andrew Bergman script, loopy life contrives to imitate trashy art with marvelous fidelity. There are moments when the plot of *The Sun Also Sets* seems marginally more realistic—or anyway more temperate—than the lives of its performers. For *Soapdish* is something the movies rarely attempt: a flat-out farce, all slamming doors, thrown objects, misplaced emotions and terrific timing by a wonderful ensemble of actors. Field has an unsuspected gift for comic malevolence, and Kline has a way of putting a soft, almost endearing spin on egomania. No one has ever acted bad acting better than these two, and cool Michael Hoffman is a director who never misses the point or rattles on past it.

Show biz may be full of nut cases, but it has this saving grace: an ability to pull itself up short, take a hard look in the mirror and bust out laughing. When the danger of inside jokiness is

avoided, the result can be *Tootsie* or *Noises Off*. Or *Soapdish*.

CITY SLICKERS

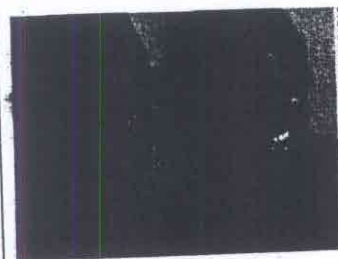
Late thirtysomething and first mid-life crisis loom for three urban types lovingly played by Billy Crystal, Daniel Stern and Bruno Kirby. What better cure for their variegated blues than a dude cattle drive? Joining with other frustrated fantasists, they move a herd from point A to point B under the supervision of a hilariously traditional cowman (Jack Palance). The script acknowledges a structural debt to *Red River*, but its spin is strictly Lowell Ganz and Babaloo Mandel: sharply turned observations on contemporary angst blended with agreeable sentiments by *Parenthood's* writers. O.K., it would be nice if this film paused to sniff the locoweed, but director Ron Underwood yippee-ki-yos the yuppies quite smartly along a pretty fresh trail.



Yuppie-ki-yo: Crystal as dude

HUDSON HAWK

By common consent, it's *Ishtar* for the '90s, an overpriced, overproduced comedy that has critics blustering moral outrage. But if you can see past the thicket of dollar signs surrounding *Hudson Hawk*, you may discern quite a funny movie—sort of an *Indiana Jones* send-up with a hip undertone all its own. Bruce Willis is the title cat burglar, recruited against his will to steal the secrets of alchemy from the various sites where Leonardo da Vinci long ago secreted them. His employers, Richard E. Grant and Sandra Bernhard, are viciously funny caricatures of excessive wealth; his sidekick is a streetwise Danny Aiello. Sacred cattle, ranging from the CIA to the Vatican, are prodded by the Steven E. de Souza-Daniel



Willis, Aiello: burglar and buddy

Waters script, and director Michael Lehmann's action set pieces are intricately developed. In other words, *Hudson Hawk* is a high-budget movie full of low-budget eccentricity. Any movie in which a heavy is caught reading Dr. Seuss books just can't be all bad. ■