



"JFK" star Kevin Costner in "The Untouchables"

'JFK' set to take shots at conspiracy theories

By David Kronke

GETTING A straight answer about "JFK" is nearly as difficult as getting one from a Warren Commission investigator back in 1964.

Ask someone in the know about Oliver Stone's upcoming project, due to begin shooting Monday at the former Texas School Book Depository, and you'll likely be greeted with a blank stare.

Perhaps the individual will retreat and phone Stone himself, then return with a

firm, "No comment."

Local contributors to the project speak in hushed tones, if at all, to journalists, and even though those surrounding the production curse the misinformation disseminated by the press, no one is offering to clear up the misconceptions.

"JFK," budgeted at \$40 million, is easily the most high-profile attempt to make sense of the myriad questions and theories sur-

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rounding the assassination since 1978, when the House Select Committee on Assassinations decided, well, yes, there probably was a conspiracy involved in President Kennedy's death. Boasting an all-star cast — led by Kevin Costner, Gary Oldman, Jack Lemmon, Sissy Spacek, John Candy and Glenn Ford — "JFK" is almost a conspiracy theorist's "We Are the World."

Castling Costner as former New Orleans District Attorney Jim Garrison — whose own investigation was roundly discredited — will lend new credence to Garrison's claims. But what can we expect from Stone's film?

Larry Howard, one of the film's researchers, declines comment but recommends three books as definitive in conspiracy theory background — "On the Trail of the Assassins" by Garrison (who, ironically, may play Earl Warren in Stone's film), "Crossfire" by local investigator Jim Marrs (who may be an extra in the movie) and "High Treason" by Robert J. Groden and H.E. Livingstone. Perhaps not coincidentally, these texts will form the basis of "JFK."

Background facts

For the uninitiated, some background is in order.

In 1964, the Warren Commission's report offered up such fodder as the "Lone Assassin" and "Single Bullet" theories. But the commission merely ingested information fed it by the CIA and FBI, ignoring or discrediting testimony suggesting shots were fired from the grassy knoll.

Many of the key witnesses to

the assassination died peculiar deaths within a few years after the assassination, including Jack Ruby, who died before giving his definitive version of the story. He nearly begged to be moved from Dallas to testify, but the Warren Commission declined. Ruby is said to have actually been relieved when he heard Oswald was dead — and that he himself was likely to get the electric chair.

Lyndon Johnson, sworn in as president an hour after Kennedy's death, ordered the body to be flown from Parkland to Washington without an autopsy. Evidence suggests Kennedy's body was surgically altered between leaving Dallas and arriving at Bethesda (Md.) Naval Hospital, where the autopsy was performed and legendarily botched.

A number of theories

Scores of books have suggested sundry theories, blaming the far left, the far right, neo-Nazis, oil men, Cuba, the Soviet Union, the mob, even Johnson. Few, however, pay much heed to Garrison's investigation.

Garrison's scenario failed to mention the Mafia — it called Ruby a "CIA bagman," but neglected to discuss his copious ties with the underworld. Many hypothesized that this was because Garrison himself had mob connections, and was intentionally leading the investigation away from Carlos Marcellino, a mob boss thought by some to have put a contract out on Kennedy.

Garrison charged that Oswald was merely a red herring introduced by a faction of the CIA working with anti-Castro Cuban exiles. Garrison fingered Clay Shaw, a prominent New Orleans businessman, as the mastermind behind the conspiracy. The arrest

had a festival atmosphere, especially when Garrison trotted out sexual paraphernalia from Shaw's home, which some felt was a gratuitous, unwarranted invasion into Shaw's private life.

Garrison bluffed his way into the trial, presenting tenuous evidence at a preliminary hearing linking Shaw with Oswald and a mysterious gent named David Ferrie, with the promise of more. Though it made him a celebrity, his investigation unearthed precious little pertinent information. In fact, a reporter who did an exclusive story on Garrison's evidence ended up agreeing to testify in Shaw's defense.

The trial's highlight came when a witness took the stand and testified he attended a party thrown by Shaw with Ferrie, and overheard the two discussing a plot to kill the president. Impressive, sure, but even more impressive was the cross-examination, during which the witness happily admitted he was wildly susceptible to being hypnotized and could never tell when he was under a spell.

Shaw was acquitted on the jury's first ballot.

But Garrison was not done with him, later charging him with perjury. Shaw died before his legal wranglings were resolved, his fortune demolished by legal expenses. Still, curious aspects about Shaw's background raised eyebrows (he was involved with the CIA) and Garrison's revelation that Oswald knew Ferrie

— who had ties to any number of names involved in the conspiracy, including mob boss Marcellino — raised more questions.

Arranged killing

Because Stone's film also uses "Crossfire" and "High Treason" as sources, it's likely the film also will explore pet theories much like "Reversal of Fortune," which examined theoretical possibilities in the Claus von Bulow case.

"Crossfire" suggests, "A consensus of powerful men in the leadership of U.S. military, banking, government, intelligence, and organized-crime circles ordered their faithful agents to manipulate Mafia-Cuban-Agency pawns to kill the chief," and proposes that Johnson may have been top dog. "High Treason" more or less agrees, though passing more on the Johnson connection. Both agree the assassination was arranged in order to return the nation's politics to the right.

Whatever Stone's film purports, it has a lot of convoluted territory to cover. Stone has said "JFK" will run "at least" three hours, and even at that length, it will only scratch the surface. Regardless, it may be the last best word on the events surrounding the assassination until the government files are allowed to be reopened — in the year 2039.

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