

Mr. Michael Lerner, editor  
TIKKUN  
5100 Leona St.,  
Oakland, CA 94619-3002

3/24/92

Dear Mr. Lerner,

Please excuse my typing and try to understand what you may regard as my effrontery.

In two weeks I'll be 79. I have serious and quite limiting health problems. One requires that I sit with my legs elevated, the typewriter at the side.

The first of my six books on the JFK assassination was the first on the Warren Commission. They are factual, espousing no theoretical solutions. They prove with fact that there was a ~~is~~ conspiracy. Because the crime itself was never officially investigated there are no leads for private people to follow and thus one cannot, responsibly, say who did it.

The effect of all the unproven conspiracies alleged, including by Garrison in particular, has been to undermine all legitimate, factual criticism of the official mythology. It also has confused the people even more. This is clearly reflected in my mail, now from about 20,000 strangers, and in innumerable phone calls.

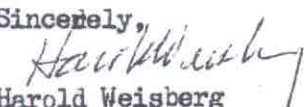
Those who theorize conspiracies and "solutions" and create still more confusion serve to protect the official miscreants. Innumerable instances are scattered through the third of a million pages of once-withheld official records I got by about a dozen FOIA suits.

The FBI in particular delights in picking and choosing from the wilder and more irresponsible <sup>checked</sup> conspiracies what is easily proven wrong and then generates paper showing this to be the case. It then distributes these studies and uses them to support it and the Warren Commission's conclusions and to allege that all criticism is unjustified.

I was shocked at what I read in your magazine, shocked that three of you as ignorant as you are about the subject matter, would write as you did, as partisans defending the most obvious, crudest commercialization and exploitation of all, giving no thought to your own reputations of to deceiving and misleading your readers. I was not shocked at Scott's many factual errors. Nothing new in that.

So, I began writing a letter to the editor several days ago. I finished it today. It grew and is too long for a letter and perhaps is as an article. I am not able to rewrite or edit it but I ~~can~~ send it to you <sup>nonetheless</sup> in the hope that you will consider publishing it, critical as it is of you. Less critical than it could have been, though. I realize what this is asking of you, how unpleasant and painful it can be. This would give you the opportunity to cleanse yourself and to demonstrate personal and professional integrity. If you <sup>decide</sup> ~~decide~~ to publish it, please feel free to edit it as you'd like but without making any factual changes on what it says. If you have any questions, please ask them. My health now requires that I not take any phone calls after 3:30 p.m. your time.

If you'd like my Stone correspondence I'll send it, as I will any documentation you request that is within my present capabilities.

Sincerely,  
  
Harold Weisberg

Editor  
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3/21/92

Your and your four intellectuals in your March/April <sup>J</sup>"JFK: The Assassination, the Movie and the Coverup," remind me that we are the people of Masada and the chassidim; of Yavneh and Bethar; of the Maccabees and the Judenrate - of widely divergent views.

If we are to resolve differences, if we are to come to understand controversies, we must be honestly informed about them. This you neither do nor intend to do. As a result you mislead and misinform your readers. You adopt the propoganda invented by Oliver Stone and along with him pretend that he is the victim of the CIA and its alleged "recipied" reporters who, with The Establishment, were out to get him.

You introduce your four learned irr~~e~~levances saying, ~~it~~ your paraphrase of what he lied in saying <sup>it</sup> over and over again, that you are "interested in the ~~no~~ political meaning of the depar~~e~~te attempts to discredit Stone's movie" ~~as~~ as part of " the continuing cover-up" of the JFK assassination and because of the imagined "need to w~~o~~ntain and repress the excitement <sup>and</sup> vitality" of the sixties, which has "never been fully extinguished."

<sup>stone and</sup> What you, in your collective ignorance, save perhaps for Peter Dale Scott, who was one of Stone's advisers, are really talking about is one ailing and infirm 78 year old ~~me~~ me.

<sup>NOT HIS "CIA,"</sup> I started the exposure of Stone's commercialization and exploitation of the great tragedy of the JFK assassination, <sup>on February 8, 1991, ...</sup> first <sup>at</sup> by warning him several months before he began shooting, ~~on February 8, 1991,~~ that in basing his movie on Jim Garrison's knowingly dishonest rewriting of his own fiasco he, like Garrison, would be perpetrating "a fraud and a travesty," <sup>I gave</sup> and when Stone did not respond, ~~by giving~~ a copy of the script and of my own records relating to my preventing still other atrocities <sup>y</sup> Garrison was about to perpetrate to George Lardner, of the Washington Post, in the hope that once given fair and responsible attention the story would carry itself.

It did, as it should have.

<sup>This is</sup> The center of the controversy <sup>what</sup> is not as Stone immediately lied in saying, Veit Nam.

On that false issue he skilfully used to prppagaddize his fraud and travesty I compare his credentials and mind.

Stone volunteered to go to Viet Nam to kill ~~the~~ the innocent. I was on the first of the protests again what we were doing, including that of the writers and editors.

As Stone told another <sup>of</sup> his advisers, his "Mister X" in his mythology, <sup>Fletcher Prouty</sup> he was using the JFK assassination as a vehicle for saying what he wanted to say about Viet Nam, and Fletcher Prouty, "Mr. X," was accomodating enough to put this in a letter I have.

If Stone had not begun by telling the world that by using Garrison's "On the "rail of the Assassins," the one trail to my personal knowledge Garrison never took, ~~as I told~~ Stone, to record their "history" for the people, telling them who killed their President, why and how, he'd have had the right to say anything he wanted to say in his movie.

Once he represented that his would be a non-fiction account of that tragedy he was ~~and~~ should have been subject to criticism because, as he knew, he was as big a liar as Garrison.

Neither has the right to rewrite this turning point in our history. Both did.

Compounding his nonstop lying by which he converted the <sup>of</sup> factual criticism of his carefully-designed commercialization and exploitation of the JFK assassination <sup>into purification of himself</sup> Stone on the one hand boasted that he was drawing on "all" that had come to light about it while on the other hand ~~alleging~~ that all official records were suppressed at least until the year 2039.

He and his advisers knew that I alone have about a quarter of a million pages of those allegedly "suppressed" records as the result of a series of Freedom of Information Act lawsuits, some precedental and one resulting in the 1974 amending of that Act to open CIA, FBI and ~~related files~~ other such ~~files~~ files. They knew also that I have always granted free access to these records to all writers. They had no interest in fact about the assassination.

Stone's sole interest was in the multitude of unproven and mostly untenable conspiracy theories presented as solutions to the crime of the century.

In addition to buying the rights to Garrison's <sup>indecency</sup> ~~atrocities~~-atrocities Stone also bought the right to Jim Marrs' uncritical and ignorant compendium of this nuttiness.

What a basis for telling the people their history, who killed their President, why and how!

Stone was and remained so grossly ignorant of the fact of the JFK assassination that in the minutes before ABC-TV aired him on "Nightline" ~~Janua~~ ~~Janua~~ January 22 he had to ask his "research coordinator," Jane Rusconi, how to respond to questions he expected to be asked!

The satellite was live before the show was aired, their animated consultation was on the satellite and I have a transcript of it.

He asked her, "Quickly. Head stuff," referring to the fatal shot, "What shall I say?" ~~At~~ About the "magic bullet," so impressive in his movie, albeit none of that new, he asked her not only what to say, "Anything, <sup>u/</sup> quick," he also asked her to explain "in what sense" it is "preposterous!"

About the former general counsel of the ~~H~~ House Select Committee on Assassinations, he asked her, "Jane, quick, Blakey," what should he say. When ~~of~~ one of Stone's other "experts," a man, said of G. Robert Blakey, "... let him call for opening the files" because "he's the one who's keeping the seals," or keeping those records suppressed," Expert Rusconi added, "He is the one." Stone asked her, "He is the one?" and she repeated this falsehood, "Yes..."

Rusconi even had to tell Stone to say "that one thing all researchers agree on is that the government hasn't told us the truth about what happened."

This flaunting of abysmal ignorance of fact about the JFK assassination and its investigations was a month after the film was released, when it was already a success, when it was already a Warren Report from the other side.

How one of your four fairies-and-needles boys, Scott, could have been an adviser to Stone and not have perceived his ignorance about the fact and that of those around him is not easy to see. <sup>and indifference to</sup> to explain.

Scott's

His contribution to your cover-up of what Stone pulled and your propagandizing in support of it is headed, "The Assassination and the Cover-up: What Really Happened?"  
Not fact but  
That, except for unproven and unprovable theories supported (if that is the right word) by repeated factual error that reflects factual ignorance by a supposed expert, is what you ~~do not~~ give your readers.

Some of it is pretty far out, referring to an ~~all-~~<sup>all-</sup>encompassing conspiracy that includes all but the Sisters of the Poor. Like Stone, Scott says that those who killed JFK and those in government who covered the crime up are all part of this single vast conspiracy. In involving Lyndon Johnson and his "financial backers" Scott says, "I'll go even farther ~~than~~<sup>than</sup> Stone and say" they are included in the conspiracy. His proof?

"At ~~least~~<sup>at</sup> one of these people ~~pre-~~<sup>pre-</sup>ciently brought a lot of stock in his own aerospace firm prior to the assassination, which to me is a clue that he knew the assassination was ~~emo~~<sup>emo</sup> coming."

One can as persuasively prove the moon is made of green cheese.

Michael Lerner's improvisations on the grim reality of ~~of~~ what Stone really perpetrated is typified by his ~~raising~~<sup>raising</sup> of Stone for making a hero of Garrison, who "embodies in the film that sense of empowered outrage that made him feel entitled to seek the truth and courageous enough to take ~~of~~<sup>of</sup> risks to change a reality he found appalling."

What is really ~~appal~~<sup>appal</sup> appalling ~~if~~<sup>if</sup> the ~~ignorance~~<sup>ignorance</sup> this reflects and ~~the~~<sup>Lerner's</sup> pontifications based on ignorance.

~~As to~~ Aside from what he ~~clibbed~~<sup>clibbed</sup> from books and then did nothing to advance what Garrison did was make it all up as he went. He had no factual basis for anything. Witness the ~~acquit~~<sup>acquit</sup>al of Clay Shaw ~~by~~<sup>by</sup> the jury that believed there had been a conspiracy ~~in~~<sup>in</sup> less than an hour.

How did Garrisons "seek the truth?"

As I told Stone in my February 8, 1991 letter <sup>of</sup> last year, when ~~his~~<sup>Garrison's</sup> staff had failed to talk him out of charging new Grassy Knoll assassin ~~in~~<sup>to</sup> commemoration ~~of~~<sup>e</sup> ~~that~~<sup>e</sup> its fifth anniversary, ~~two~~<sup>two</sup> of them asked me to try to prevent this additional ~~monstrosity~~<sup>monstrosity</sup>. My investigation did that. ~~In~~<sup>In</sup> Garrison's book and in ~~the~~<sup>the</sup> first draft of ~~in~~<sup>in</sup> Stone's

script this is not only inrecognizable - it is guised as a CIA plot to wreck Garrison when Garrison himself made it all up out of nothing at all.

<sup>One</sup> ~~As an~~ example, <sup>he</sup> he planned to charge <sup>R</sup> Robert L. Perrin with being a 1963 JFK assassin <sup>H</sup> ~~even~~ even though he knew Perrin had killed himself in New Orleans in 1962!

This is <sup>heroic</sup> ~~heroic~~, courageous, reflects a sense of outrage and seeks the truth, Lerner's words?

Todd Gitlin's irrelevant pontifications, which repeats the canard <sup>of</sup> that the factual criticism I <sup>1</sup> ~~started~~ started was "The Stoning of Oliver Stone," does criticize the movie for what does not exist: "its neglect of the Oswald-Ruby-Cuban-mob connections."

He swallows and holds down that assassination mythology while further reflecting the dependence that can be placed on what he says:

"Stone's sainted JFK tried and tried again, in camera, to kill Castro. Fact: Conspiracies are routine."

There is not a scintilla of evidence that JFK tried to have Castro killed or even <sup>that don't</sup> ~~wanted it~~ and in October, ~~197~~ 1962 he publicly guaranteed to protect Cuba from any invasion in the solution to the Cuba missile crisis. He had been negotiating with Castro <sup>officially</sup> on two levels when he was assassinated, <sup>at the</sup> United Nations and unofficially through the French reporter, Jean Daniel.

There remains Peter Gabel's "Spiritual Truth <sup>d/</sup> of JFK."

He begins by referring to one of Stone's contradictions of Stone, that <sup>+/</sup> the movie he <sup>never</sup> ~~never~~ stopped describing as factual is <sup>also</sup> a myth. Throughout his article, where it deals with fact about the assassination or the movie, which is not <sup>often</sup> ~~frequent~~, he shows that <sup>he</sup> he really knows nothing at all about fact and for his contribution <sup>he/</sup> does not need to. On the <sup>my</sup> simplest level he says that the Warren Commission published "twenty-six volumes of ~~testimony~~ testimony." Only 15 were <sup>of</sup> testimony. And he refers to what also does not exist. "the evidence marshaled together <sup>by</sup> conspiracy theorists." What they "marshal" is not "evidence," any more than what Garrison developed <sup>was</sup> any "evidence." Not one brought to light anything <sup>of</sup> that was both new and factual about the assassination or its investigations.

Gabel himself is so lost in the utter nonsense <sup>listened</sup> ~~palmed~~ off on <sup>of</sup> still-sorring people <sup>or</sup>

*he cites*

about ~~the assassination~~ that in the conspiracy-theory junk on which he depends is that "the phones in Washington shutting down just before the assassination," *proves a conspiracy.*  
They were overloaded by people <sup>phones</sup> calling <sup>each other</sup> people <sup>after</sup> after the assassination and that ~~it~~ not some imagined conspiracy, is what <sup>caused</sup> caused some of the phone circuits not to work temporarily.

The utter childishness of repeating this fiction is reflected by the fact that in an official conspiracy there was no need to shut the phones down at all.

Stone said that his movie tells "the spiritual truth" so Gabel, without question, says that it does. It holds no truths, despite your efforts and those of your four literati, who in varying degrees are ignorant of the established fact about the assassination and its investigations to tell your readers the exact opposite, <sup>that it does of all</sup> and the ~~misstating~~ <sup>misstate</sup> by all four of the crux of the controversy.

Ignorant or worse, Gabel also quotes Stone as saying the opposite of what he had been proclaiming for months, that "~~the~~ movie is a myth."

All-wise and all-knowing, your four ignore Stone's public record, that except when he had to appear to give a little or when for other purposes it served his immediate interest, Stone <sup>insisted</sup> ~~insisted~~ that his movie would tell the people their " " " " history and who killed their President, " " " " why and how."

All four ignore what does not serve to advance their personal agendas. This is no way to inform your readers about <sup>this major</sup> ~~the~~ controversy now become international. It is not journalism. ~~It~~ It is propaganda.

In his movie and in his enormous number of statements about it once I began exposure of its deliberate dishonesty, Stone was a remarkably effective propagandist. As in writing about "Stone's Technique" in Vogue (Entertainment, 1/17/92) Steve Daly observed, "Ennoble the cause, damn ~~its~~ its opponents. These are the prime rules in crafting propaganda" which Stone uses "to sensational effect."

Thus I became the CIA and those who reported <sup>Stone</sup> ~~accurately~~ <sup>on him</sup> were "a lot of paid-off ~~journalists~~ <sup>journalists</sup>...with their recycled political theories...a thousand and one vultures" who "want to come down and just peck out my eyes and rip my guts out," as he told The Texas

Monthly (12/91) p. 164)

Why? Because "There would be a revolution if the truth comes out about the assassination," as he told ~~the~~ JFK-bashed Andrew Kopkind. (Vogue, <sup>1/92</sup> 1992, p. 66) "They would lynch ~~the~~ <sup>major</sup> congressmen who covered it up, and they would start a new government, somewhere west of the Mississippi."

The covering up, as anyone at all familiar with the official JFK assassination investigations at all knows, was <sup>most of all</sup> by the FBI and the Warren Commission. Stone <sup>too</sup> knew this, but fact and truth did not serve his purposes in that interview so, consistent with his personal definition of "history" and with damning his opponents, Stone made this up and got away with it.

His, or at least one of his definitions of "history", as quoted by Robert Sam Anson in Esquire (11/91, p. 93) is "a bunch of gossip....What is history? Who the fuck knows."

If nobody knows what history really is, how can anyone, including Oliver Stone, record it as <sup>from</sup> at the outset he promised his movie would do?

Historian Stone - and make no mistake about it, he has said over and over again that he is a historian and wants to be remembered as such, that he hopes it will be his "legacy" - knew from my February 8, 1991 letter that he would be making a film of a "fraud and a travesty." (See for example Mother Jones, March/April 1991; USA Weekend February 22-24, 1991) He knew he would be criticized.

He knew before he started shooting in Dallas that George Lardner of the Washington Post was working <sup>on</sup> a story. So, considering himself "a person who's taking history and shaping it in a certain way," (Esquire November 1991), as he did in the script that ~~rew~~ rewrites this history, he decided to do this also by controlling press access.

<sup>with Dallas' approval,</sup>  
Quite literally, he took and kept control of Dealey Plaza, the assassination area, and his paid guards prevented <sup>and others from</sup> Lardner's <sup>even</sup> visiting the Grassy Knoll when there was no filming.

He also began to ease off on his description of his movie as history but he never stopped making that misrepresentation.

Talking about his movie to the Dallas Morning News (4/14/91) he said one of its importances is that it "would get this history lesson out there."



After other references to it as history, when he finished shooting in Dallas and moved to new Orleans, he was interviewed for the Times-Picayune by David Baron. (4/24/92) Knowing New Orleans would be friendly to him he slipped back closer to his original assurance. He described his movie as "the larger story, which is why Kennedy was killed and how we think it was done and who did it."

Milking his false pretense of filming history ~~taxi-cab~~ at every opportunity, after the movie was done he grumbled to GO (1/91), "Some people will say we're fiction. I would have avoided all this bullshit if I'd said this is fiction from the first get-go."

But if he had, as he well knew, he'd not have caused this major controversy that assured him even greater wealth and added honors. He could not have <sup>gotten</sup> bought all the free advertising he and his movie got if he had begun by telling the truth.

To <sup>truth</sup> which, as his record on this movie alone leaves without question, he is a stranger.

But as he insisted throughout that his movie was completely factual, ~~writing~~ as <sup>wrote</sup> (7/28/91) Richard Bernstein of the New York Times ~~writes~~ "Every point, every argument, every detail in the movie, he (Stone) says, has been researched, can be documented and is justified," so also did he tell <sup>Monthly</sup> the Texas Observer (12/91) after the movie was in the can, in its words, "he won't give an inch about the factual accuracy of JFK. Stone says his movie portrays history."

This, not Viet Nam and not the agendas of your issue's pursuers of personal agendas in terms of <sup>lover</sup> Stone's propaganda - really, his lies - is the real issue.

He said he would record our history in his movie when he knew before he started shooting that he would not and could not from Garrison's disgraceful dishonesties and the stupidities and ignorances in the fictions in Marris' Crossfire.

In some ways it is an awfuller truth that he never intended to record the truth about the JFK assassination.

For, as he told Prouty, he was using that great tragedy as a vehicle for saying what he wanted to say about Viet Nam.

As fiction, he had that right. As non-fiction he did not. He described his movie

from the ~~fix~~ "first 'get-go'" as non-fiction.

<sup>As</sup>  
~~So~~ Daly F Daly put it, he ennobled his caused and ~~d~~amned its opponents, those he  
could not ~~sucker~~, sucker.

You were so willing to be suckered!

You owe your trusting readers the admission of this, the truth.

sympathetic—but not completely accepting—audience. “A lot of what’s written about current events in the newspapers is a lie,” says L.A. moviegoer Linda Weinberg, 45. “So give Oliver Stone a chance to lie too if he wants to.” “It makes me really mad that they only present one side of the Kennedy killing at my school,” says 14-year-old Daniel Kirschner, a student in the Chicago suburb of Arlington Heights. “This film makes me want to learn more.”

Stone hopes the point-counterpoint of the debate will yield “a synthesis of informed public opinion”; at the least, the arguments are sure to go on for a while. Two more movies—*Ruby*, starring Danny Aiello, and *Libra*, based on the 1988 Don DeLillo novel about Oswald—are in the works. Even politicians are getting in on the debate. On Dec. 19, *JFK* was shown to members of Congress at a screening organized by Frank Mankiewicz of the powerhouse D.C. PR firm Hill and Knowlton, hired by Warner Bros. One result has been new calls for the release of sealed records from the 1977 House Select Committee on Assassinations investigation. Rep. Lee Hamilton, a Democrat from Indiana—who *hasn't* seen *JFK*—has been pushing since last March for release of the records. “They ought to be made available so people can make up their own minds,” he says.

Asked about the controversy recently, President Bush reiterated his faith in the Warren Commission, comparing conspiracy theories to rumors that Elvis is alive. Stone promptly fired off a statement to *Daily Variety* virtually accusing Bush of being part of the cover-up. In his 30 years in the “executive branch establishment,” Stone writes, Bush “has had ample opportunity to stonewall the American people.”

No matter how many files are opened or how much evidence is reconsidered, it's probably too late to expect a definitive resolution of the Kennedy mystery. By now the urge to find dark conspiracies behind every national crisis is so imbedded in our culture, it may never be extirpated. And that is the deep cultural craving that *JFK* exploits and satisfies so well. —Allen Barra and Ty Burr; additional reporting by Giselle Benatar, Terry Catchpole, David Kronke, Cindy Pearlman, and Michael Swindle; research by Paul Foglino



The pristine Single Bullet. Stone takes aim at the Warren Commission view that it passed through both JFK's and John Connally's bodies.



Not sure who's lying in *JFK*? Stone offers plenty of clues to his opinion. When alleged conspirator Clay Shaw denies ever having met several gay suspects, Stone dashes his credibility by cutting to the above shot of Shaw (second from right, played by Tommy Lee Jones) cavorting with those same party boys.

#### STONE'S TECHNIQUE

# Camera Obscura

**E** NNOBLE THE cause, damn its opponents: Those are the prime rules in crafting propaganda, that worrisome tool used for centuries in the service of wars, religious crusades, political campaigns, and now, to sensational effect, Oliver Stone's *JFK*. The movie is an intricately stacked deck, a barrage of visual and aural cues geared not to help viewers reach their own conclusions about the mountain of conflicting Kennedy-assassination evidence but to affect their hearts and minds on a visceral, almost subconscious level. Here's a primer on Stone's cinematic tools of persuasion.

**Mixing Varied Film Stocks.** *JFK* opens with a 3½-minute MTV-paced salute to Kennedy, a torrent of images from actual newsreel and home-movie footage, mostly in black and white. Yet as this prologue builds to a Dealey Plaza replay, Stone begins to blend in staged black-and-white footage, much of it shot on 16 mm or 8 mm film for an authentically fuzzy look. As the movie begins weaving to-

BY STEVE DALY

# The SHOOTING of JFK

*In his controversial new film, Oliver Stone solves the most traumatic mystery of our era. Is he right? Does he care? Or is history just another Oliver Stone movie?*

BY ROBERT SAM ANSON

*What is history? Some people say it's a bunch of gossip made up by soldiers who passed it around a campfire. They say such and such happened. They create, they make it bigger, they make it better. I knew guys in combat who made up shit. I'm sure the cowboys did the same. The nature of human beings is that they exaggerate. So, what is history? Who the fuck knows? —OLIVER STONE*

**I**N THE BAR OF THE WESTIN hotel in downtown New Orleans, just blocks from where the plot to kill the thirty-fifth president of the United States may or may not have been hatched, Oliver Stone is a little upset. Actually, more than a little upset. He is in the midst of a colossal rant, biting back at "the Doberman pinchers of the establishment," otherwise known as those members of the national press intent on "destroying" his still-aborning film, *JFK*.

## MOVIES Thirty years later, Hollywood is unleashing five new films that deal with **the Kennedy assassination**. Could it be a conspiracy? wonders ANDREW KOPKIND

**T**he shiny stretch limousine with its top down turns sharply around a green urban plaza and speeds toward a railroad underpass. From the backseat, the handsome man and his glamorous wife wave at the cheering crowds along the roadside. An older couple in the car also acknowledge the acclaim. And then the shots ring out; they fracture the November noon, annihilate the waving man, and change forever the history of this century.

The picture is almost as vivid now as it was in 1963. It is a searing image, imprinted on the minds of Americans as the mythic symbol of a world that suddenly went crazy. For the assassination of John F. Kennedy is more than a historical event. It is a personal point of passage for everyone old enough to remember that day in Dallas, and whether a fan of the president or a foe, everyone remembers—and feels the wound. Moreover, the scar is still raw, nearly three decades after the social skin was broken. Despite a blue-ribbon investigation, congressional hearings, and countless books and articles, the questions around and about the assassination have not been answered, and justice has not undeniably been served.

The Kennedy myth abounds in the cultural product of the intervening years, from Andy Warhol's painted photographs to the volumes of reminiscences by Camelot's knights; from semiotic odes to irreverent satires; from TV miniseries and trading cards to supermarket tabloids and velvet wall hangings. But now a new spate of films are moving through the Hollywood pipeline that in one way or another revisit the scene of what must be the single most spectacular crime of our time.

Oliver Stone's *JFK*, the mother of all conspiracy movies, is out this month. *Ruby*, starring Danny Aiello as the man who shot Lee Harvey Oswald and thus aborted the process of discovering the wider circumstances of Kennedy's assassination, is to be released in February. And Oswald's fictionalized story, as imagined by novelist Don DeLillo in *Libra*, is currently in production.

But that's only the beginning of assassination mania and the Kennedy revisitation. The topic turns up in such diverse movies as *Slacker*, a droll series of vignettes featuring episodes and conversations with dozens of blank post-adolescents in Austin, Texas. One of the most memorable miniscenes presents a monologue by a certifiable assassination nut who tries to impress a girl in the library stacks by his knowledge—or counterknowledge, as slacker science should be called—

of the conspiracies around Oswald. Those days in Dallas are also the background context for *Married to It*, the new romantic comedy with Beau Bridges, Cybill Shepherd, and Stockard Channing, and *Love Field*, with Michelle Pfeiffer and Dennis Haysbert. Even more can be expected as the thirtieth anniversary of the assassination rolls around next year.

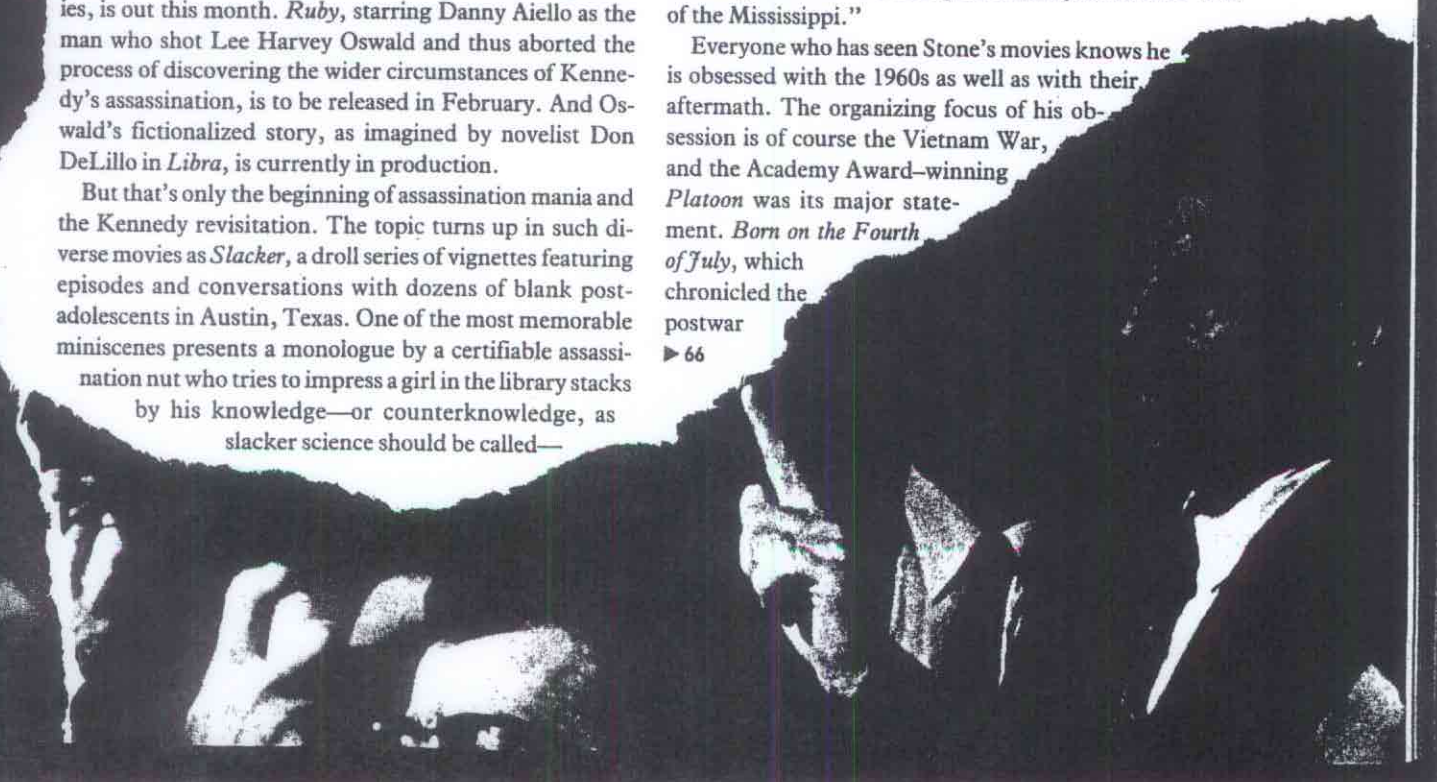
For Oliver Stone in particular, as well as the more deliberate of his fellow assassination maniacs, the Kennedy movies are not merely idle pieces of nostalgia but a return to the scene of the crime, as much in the genre of time-travel fantasies as they are of political thrillers. In movies and literature there is a purpose to the journey, and it is almost always to fix something that broke long ago—or will go haywire in the future—and thus restore history to what should have been its normal course.

From H. G. Wells to Steven Spielberg, the notion of a writer or a director playing God with human events is a compelling conceit. *JFK* does not specifically require its characters to cancel the assassination. Stone rather wants to expose the inconsistencies and contradictions of the "official" lone-assassin theory of the killing and suggest a wider conspiracy. But his deeper drive is to make America whole again by locating and then re-creating the tragic moment when it came apart. It is, on many levels, a dangerous task.

"There would be a revolution if the truth came out about the assassination," Stone told me one night in an improbable *nouvelle* Italian pizzeria in the heart of New Orleans's French Quarter, where the movie was being shot. "They would lynch major congressmen who covered it up, and they would start a new government, somewhere west of the Mississippi."

Everyone who has seen Stone's movies knows he is obsessed with the 1960s as well as with their aftermath. The organizing focus of his obsession is of course the Vietnam War, and the Academy Award-winning *Platoon* was its major statement. *Born on the Fourth of July*, which chronicled the postwar

► 66



was stung by the early criticism, which he said was based on the first draft of a script that had since undergone major revisions. And he answered the charges with a detailed defense of his theory and Garrison's evidence.

As long as the assassination remains a public issue, the facts and their interpretation will remain in dispute. It is now almost impossible to tell whether the studies of the case constitute knowledge or counterknowledge. Whole tracts may be written on whether Oswald, on his way to the movies, shot Officer Tippit just after Kennedy's murder. Who can tell whether "Clay Bertrand," who called a New Orleans lawyer to arrange representation for Oswald, really was Clay Shaw? Were the "tramps" spotted and briefly detained by Dallas police near the grassy knoll just after the shooting part of the plot or merely tramps? And was one of them E. Howard Hunt, of Watergate infamy, in tramp drag?

Such speculations, which were fascinating to only a few for these many years, may soon be household topics. If Stone et al. are true harbingers of a Kennedy revival, the arguments of a rather rarefied group of buffs, nuts, and scholars could gain a new national currency. Just why it should all surface again at this time, after so many years of low visibility, is another imponderable that still begs to be pondered.

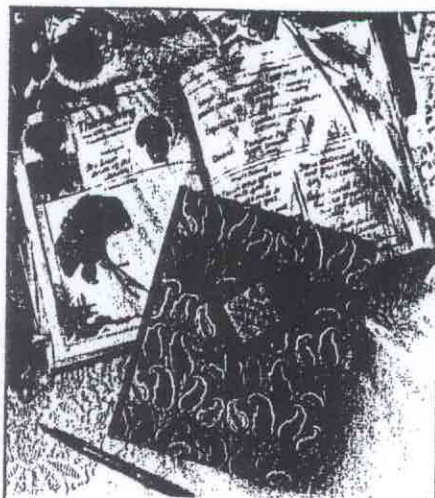
For one thing, the generation of Americans for whom the assassination was the first traumatic world event is now coming into early middle age. It is a point when people for the first time feel they have "arrived" somewhere in life, and they may look back to see the landmarks that led them to where they are. They think of television shows they saw as teenagers, they remember their partner at the senior prom, they recall leaving home, finding a first job, starting a family. Oliver Stone—as well as many of the people he hopes will see his movie—is at that forty-something age when the past becomes detached from the present and may be seen clearly for the first time as prologue to the rest of life.

More than that, the post-Vietnam generation of Americans continues to have the sense that something went wrong—terribly, terribly wrong—in some strange season many years ago, and it appears that nothing will set it right. There may be no connections in fact, but in many minds the assassination of John Kennedy is tied to the assassination of his brother Robert and to the killing of Martin Luther King. And those deaths are inextricably bound up with Vietnam, with racial strife, and with the counterculture of the 1960s: in other words, with the material of Stone's films. It's as if America took a wrong turn and got lost: government betrayals, economic dysfunction, interethnic hatred, scandals, and a certain sense of social devolution have not been cured by wars in Central America or the Middle East, nor by investment banking, crystals, or health clubs.

Stone believes that he has found the worm in the apple of American history, the original sin that started the deterioration and decay of the last thirty years—virtually all of his adult life. It is there in the six seconds of the Zapruder film, as the limousine swings into Dealey Plaza.

"They killed Kennedy because he was rocking the boat, he was rocking the establishment on all fronts," Stone told me. "I don't think he was a saint, and I don't think he would have saved us from all the bad things that happened. I believe that he was a good man who had integrity. He was the leader of our generation. People like me, we believed in him, he was our Godfather. I don't believe that he would have escalated the war in Vietnam the way Johnson did. They knew that, the people who wanted the war. And he paid for it." ●

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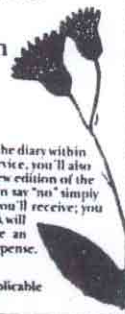
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"It's important that we get this history lesson out there."

The Dallas Morning  
News

4/14/91

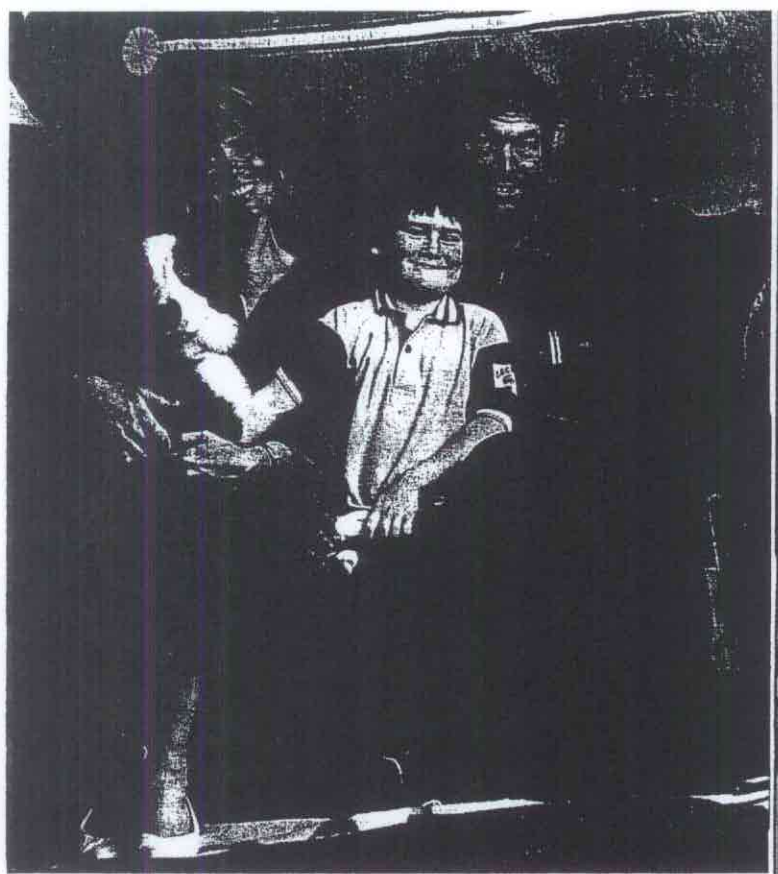
cial "facts" are open to dispute, with everyone from coroners who were on the scene to forensic specialists from across the country arguing over the veracity of the autopsy photos and the correct interpretation of Abraham Zapruder's horrifying 5.6-second film of the mortal wounding of Kennedy. Much of what passes for evidence—such as the "magic bullet" that struck Kennedy, changed directions twice and then hit Governor John Connally Jr., who'd been sitting in front of Kennedy—defies logic.

Depending on whose "expert testimony" you care to listen to, Kennedy was killed by three, or as many as seven, shots fired by one or more gunmen positioned at the Book Depository and/or across the street, on the now-historic grassy knoll. If there was more than one shooter, there was a conspiracy of some kind, and consequently also a cover-up. The whos and whys are awfully iffy. But Stone isn't the only one persevering in this tangled terrain: A recent five-part documentary on the A&E Cable Network, *The Men Who Killed Kennedy*, and several forthcoming books claim to shed new light on who assassinated Kennedy and why.

It would seem that just about the only Americans with any faith in the Warren Commission's 1964 report concluding that Oswald had acted alone were the seven members of the commission, and even that's questionable. A poll of the Clay Shaw jury in 1969 found that the majority believed that there had been a conspiracy but just didn't think Garrison had the goods. In 1979, a House investigation committee concluded that Kennedy was "probably assassinated as the result of a conspiracy" and that further inquiry was merited, but its recommendation was never followed up. Harrison Livingstone, coauthor of two recent books about the Kennedy assassination, has summed up the situation this way: "Both Stone and Garrison are well-meaning men bringing charges without the evidence. They're trying to tell the truth, but the road to hell is paved with good intentions."

"Some people will say we're fiction," grumbles Stone. "I would have avoided all this bullshit if I'd said this is fiction from the get-go." It makes critics queasy when Stone says his composite characters and condensed chronology are "faithful to the spirit of events." But as Zachary Sklar, the editor of Garrison's book and the coauthor, with Stone, of the JFK screenplay, argues, "Since nobody agrees on anything, nobody is distorting history. The only official history is the Warren Commission report, and that nobody believes."

Stone, an expression of exquisite pain on his face, patiently defends his methods. No, he is not going to stamp all over the Kennedy legacy in his combat boots. In fact, he is going Zen, using an open-ended technique called Rashomon, after the Japanese film classic that juxtaposed different scenarios of the same event. It's a subtle, suggestive approach, with the speculative sequences set off in sepia tones, theoretically leaving the audience to arrive at its own conclusions. But then again, subtlety is not this guy's strong suit. Stone drops some heavy hints about who Kennedy's murderers might have been: high-ranking members of the CIA, the military-industrial complex and the Pentagon. In



*The man's man at rest: Stone with his wife, Elizabeth, and their son, Sean.*

the final scenes, he chases his government-conspiracy theory all the way to the Pentagon, suggesting that Kennedy had been assassinated so that war could be waged in Vietnam.

"I believe the Warren Commission [finding] is a great myth, and in order to fight a myth, maybe you have to create another one," says Stone. "The Warren Commission [report] was accepted at the time of its release for its soothing Olympian conclusion that a lone nut committed this murder. I suppose our movie is a countermyth: that the man was killed by larger political forces, with more-nefarious and sinister objectives."

He stops short of naming names. "I don't know who did it," he says in a half-whisper. "I have a feeling about what happened. I have a *feeling*. I'm more concerned in a way with why Kennedy was killed than who or how." He pauses before adding "The 'why,' though, is key."

Oliver Stone was 17 when John Kennedy was assassinated, and it affected him profoundly. "The Kennedy murder was one of the signal events of the postwar generation, my generation," he says, lapsing into his pulpit voice. "Vietnam followed, then the bombing of Cambodia, the Pentagon Papers, the Chile affair, Watergate, going up to Iran-Contra in the Eighties. We've had a series of major shocks. And I think the American public smells a rat that's been chewing on the innards of the government for years."

Something much more personal than politics is eating at Stone. "I'm a child of distortions," he says. "I grew up reading fake history. I'm still groping my way, trying to figure it out, to see the truth, to (continued on page 137)



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# The Man Who Shot

# "JFK"

Director Oliver Stone turns his obsession with all that is shameful and unresolved in American history to the mysteries of the Kennedy assassination  
By Jennet Conant

When Pauline Kael, the legendary critic for *The New Yorker*, announced her retirement last year, she listed as one of her reasons for leaving that she couldn't bear to watch another Oliver Stone film.

She hadn't even seen *The Doors* yet.

Ending a twenty-three-year career rates as a mild reaction compared to the effect two or three hours alone in a dark room with an Oliver Stone film has had on some folks: The Turks reviled him for what they perceived to be the negative stereotypes in *Midnight Express*. Chinese-Americans organized nationwide protests and boycotts over the racism in *Year of the Dragon*. And the Cubans put out the unwelcome mat in Miami due to the sadism in *Scarface*. And those were just his screenplays. His early directorial efforts were no more popular—1981's *The Hand* was a low-budget horror pic about a severed mitt with murderous tendencies that one critic found so offensive, he immediately hailed Stone as the Antichrist of moviemaking.

Ten years, six movies and three Oscars later, Oliver

Stone with Costner, whose casting as Jim Garrison has fueled skepticism about JFK.



"Every point, every argument, every detail  
in the movie, he (Stone) says, has been  
researched, can be documented and is justified."

Richard Bernstein  
New York Times  
July 28, 1991

ered up, to keep things hidden. And to scoff at Garrison is easy. But the Warren Commission is the official story, and the official myth, and its foundations, as painted by its apologists in the press, are tainted, deeply tainted. There's too many loose screws in there."

The attacks began last February, when Harold Weisberg, an assassination researcher and author, sent Stone a scathing letter. Calling Garrison's investigation "a tragedy" and any film based on it "a travesty," Weisberg wrote Stone, "As an investigator, Jim Garrison could not find a pubic hair in an overworked and under-cleaned whorehouse at rush hour." Weisberg says he didn't receive a reply from Stone. But soon he knew plenty about the movie; somehow he obtained a first draft of the screenplay (now in its seventh draft) and sent it to his old friend George Lardner, Jr., who reports on national security issues for the *Washington Post*.

And on May 19 most of the *Post's* Opinion section was filled with a story titled ON THE SET: DALLAS IN WONDERLAND: OLIVER STONE'S VERSION OF THE KENNEDY ASSASSINATION EXPLOITS THE EDGE OF PARANOIA. The story was illustrated with a cartoon of Stone framing a shot in JFK's limousine, while Jack gets his face powdered and Jackie talks on a portable phone. Asking "Is this the Kennedy assassination or the Charge of the Light Brigade?" Lardner blasted everything in the script from the number of shots fired in Dealey Plaza to the sudden, mysterious death of David Ferrie (the early script had two Cubans forcing medicine down Ferrie's throat, while Lardner, who claims to have interviewed Ferrie on the night of his death, concurs with the coroner's ruling of natural causes) to Garrison's courtroom summation ("It was a military-style ambush from start to finish, a coup d'état, with Lyndon Johnson waiting in the wings"). Stone says he threatened the *Post* with a lawsuit for copyright infringement. "They got a stolen screenplay, which they quoted from out of context and wrongly," he says. "They diminished the commercial value of a private enterprise."

But what irritates Stone most is Lardner's attack on his central thesis—the Vietnam war as motive. Wrote Lardner: "There was no abrupt change in Vietnam policy after JFK's death."

"Absolute horseshit," says Stone. "From the get-go, Johnson, in NSAM 273, escalated the war in Vietnam by calling for covert warfare, which Kennedy never had."

Stone brands Lardner "a committee journalist, a lethargic journalist" and accuses him of defending the CIA and the Warren Commission. Replies Lardner: "Is he still raising that junk? He doesn't learn very good, does he? I got a cor-

rection in the New Orleans *Times-Picayune* [in which Stone called Lardner 'a CIA agent journalist']. Stone thinks any criticism of him must be part of a conspiracy. His complaints are not only groundless and paranoid, they smack of McCarthyism."

Many other voices have reported from the Stone front. Rosemary James, formerly with the New Orleans *States-Item*, covered the Clay Shaw trial and believed Garrison's investigation to be a disgrace. ("Now comes a gullible from La-La Land who wants to regurgitate all that garbage.") The *Chicago Tribune* noted that Warner Books, a division of Time-Warner, is paying Garrison \$137,500 to reissue his book. ("Speaking of conspiracy theories, what are the odds that this transaction will influence *Time* magazine's review of the book or movie, considering that Warner Bros. is distributing the film?")

Stone counters with references to the CIA: "They bring down governments. This is their job. Why isn't it conceivable that an outlaw organization such as the CIA that does this abroad would do it domestically?" Others support Stone by citing CIA document #1035-970, dated April 1, 1967, a month and a half after Garrison's investigation was made public. The document advises how to combat critics of the Warren Commission: "... employ propagandist assets to answer and refute attacks of the critics. Book reviews and feature articles are particularly appropriate for this purpose."

But if the CIA is so determined to suppress the truth, and if it could kill a president, then why would the agency allow a Hollywood director to expose its darkest deeds? "I got a lot of light on me," he says. "To kill me would point the finger at something a little bizarre, wouldn't it?"

He cradles his head in his hands. "They don't kill you anymore," he says. "They poison your food. You get sick. You don't die. You get sick, and you get incapacitated for a year or two... and you get strychnine laced in your system. Or else they simply discredit you in the media, which is probably a more sophisticated way of doing it, like they did Garrison, you see. They just made fun of him. They ridicule you as a beast. As a monster. As a buffoon. And they do a good job of it. And the movie has to overcome."

Stone had Camelot's phones debugged in Dallas and Los Angeles. "No, we didn't find anything," he says. "But, of course, they're into satellite taps now. You don't have to go into the phone system." Listening to Stone, one senses a trace of resignation. Could this be a retreat from the defiant anarchist who told the *Los Angeles Times* in late 1989, "The vandals are at the gate. We have a fascist security state running this coun-

try... Orwell did happen. But it's so subtle that no one noticed. If I were George Bush, I'd shoot myself."

Stone calls JFK "a potential minefield; I've bitten off a lot." And so Oliver Stone is editing, which he calls the most intense experience of his career. "I wrote a lot of research material into the script, and I'm finding out the line as to what I can use and what I can't use now," he says. "I'm pulling out a lot of things that I felt would be in the movie. It's always a painful retreat for me. I'm in my 'Napoleon returns from Moscow' phase, where I try to basically get out whole."

But while Stone concedes that he doesn't have all the answers, he won't give an inch about the factual accuracy of JFK. Stone says his movie portrays history. "Oh, yeah," he says. "I feel we're very close... I cannot include everything I would like to include. I don't even use half of the incriminating evidence that we have, because of time. But I definitely feel that our film is close to the mood and texture of the time and to the true feelings of Oswald. We don't come out with a strong who and how. What we come out with is a why. And I think we get very close to the truth of what really happened. The true inner workings."

And what is the truth? "One would have to wonder about the behavior of the Dallas police that weekend," says Stone. "Chief Curry's and Will Fritz's motivations are still highly questionable, as was Mayor Earle Cabell's. I always found him to be rather strange. Especially his testimony right after the murder. Bland. Dismissive. He buys very quickly into the lone-nut assassination theory. And also you have to realize that he's the brother of Charles Cabell of the CIA, who was a deputy chief to Allen Dulles, who hated Kennedy. You have H. L. Hunt's bizarre behavior, leaving Dallas minutes, minutes, after the Kennedy assassination, as if it were a preplanned exit. As if. You have to wonder about them allowing Jack Ruby to be around all weekend like that. You have to wonder about the security on Lee Harvey Oswald, who had killed the president. Why was there no record of the investigation? Dallas police, as you know, at that time had a very shady reputation for corruption."

Many of Stone's revelations came in Dealey Plaza. "I discovered the true geography of the place," he says. "I felt it. I smelled it. I felt the concept of echoes. I got a sense of how many shots could actually do it. I got a sense of the difficulty of shooting at Kennedy, at a moving target, handling a Mannlicher-Carcano in that environment. I saw the motorcade, reconstructed it. And I sensed the sheer pressure that the assassins must have been under—Oswald, if he in fact pulled the trigger, the difficulty of hitting somebody

like I  
wrote up  
to Stone  
Lardner

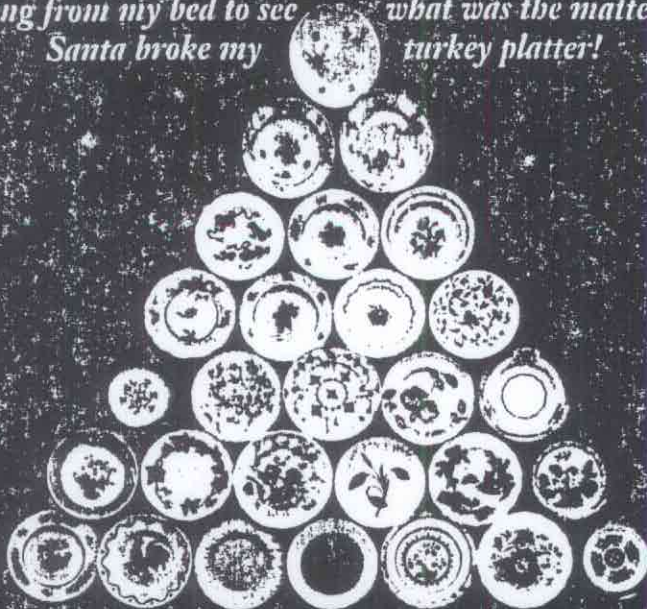
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### "A Thousand and One Vultures"

"I'M FIGHTING THE BATTLE OF MY life," says Oliver Stone. He is sitting in a conference room at Lantana Center in Santa Monica, California. In the adjoining editing rooms, kids in jeans and JFK-theme T-shirts work frantically on 650,000 feet of film to give birth to *JFK*. The editing-room walls display an autographed portrait of a newly inaugurated Lyndon Johnson and an ancient panorama of Dealey Plaza, while film reels cover every inch of desk and floor.

Stone always looks haggard—his wrinkled white shirts, red socks, and harried demeanor have become part of his persona—but now the pressure is palpable. His brow is sweating. His eyes are red and glassy. His wispy black hair shows the effect of his hands having run through it. His entire being exudes exhaustion—the result of his year-long war with a hostile press, combative assassination buffs, and zealous defenders of the Warren Commission, all of whom have attempted to portray Oliver Stone as the biggest assassination buffoon since Jim Garrison. As Gary Oldman says, "This is not *Home Alone*."

"There's a thousand and one vultures out there," groans Stone, "crouched on their rocks, saying, 'Ah, here comes Stone.' They want to come down and just peck out my eyes and rip my guts out. I'm such a target in a way, because I've attacked big things. And now I've got not only the usual Hollywood vultures on my tail, I've got a lot of the paid-off journalist hacks that are working on the East Coast with their recycled political theories, who resent the outsider, the rebel with a different theory."

He leans back in his chair and stares. "Are you gonna attack me, Mark?" he asks. "Are you after me, Mark? . . . Is your editor cool? Is this gonna be a rip job on me?"

"I think it's pretty ugly," he continues. "I think the press is motivated, in part, by fear. Fear of new facts. Or fear of a new spirit emerging about this Kennedy issue. There's a desire to keep things cov-

# STONE'S



*'I'd like to leave a legacy that I was a good historian as well as a good dramatist.'*

— at left with wife Elizabeth, son Sean and Bernice

# XMAS

significant threat to that structure."

The man drawn to these lurid pop-history tales is himself a contradictory character, half obsessive intellectual, half movie buff enamored of such escapes from reality as *Flashdance* and *Pretty Woman*. A moody conversationalist who doesn't always speak in a straight line, Stone appears to be both an antidote to Hollywood and an embodiment of it. What other director has made a horror movie starring Michael Caine (*The Hand*, 1981) and also donated money to build a clinic in Vietnam?

In the past 5 years, Stone has won the Academy Award for best director twice (for *Platoon* and *Born on the Fourth of July*), and his movies have earned hundreds of millions of dollars. With luxurious houses in Los Angeles and Santa Barbara, Calif., plus an apartment in Palm Springs, at age 44 Stone already has eclipsed the affluence of his father, a New York stockbroker from whom he rebelled at age 19 by dropping out of Yale and enlisting in the infantry.

Born close to the Establishment and sent to prep school like George Bush, Stone tore up his ticket to privilege for a chance to fight, kill and die in Vietnam alongside teenagers from small towns who had never finished high school.

Why he did this had something to do with personal demons, but he concedes it also had to do with the times — the wrenching social upheavals of the 1960s that he is revisiting in *The Doors*.

The era in which he came of age was "about experiencing everything," Stone recalls during a conversation on the patio of his red-tile-roofed hacienda in the hills above Santa Barbara. "It wasn't about limits and laws. It was about breaking through to the other side, to experience life fully, unlike our parents, who grew up in suits and ties, had strict moral codes, rigid social behavior. We looked at our parents, and what did we see? We saw divorces and addictions, we saw Vietnam and we saw Kennedy being killed.

"The social structure was shifting beneath us like an earthquake. And we had nothing to hang on to."

Some children of the '60s look back on that time with a mixture of fondness and chagrin. Many of them, now parents themselves, wince at the thought of the drugs they indulged in and the innocence they brought to the hard battleground of politics. Not Stone.

As his wife of 10 years, Elizabeth, putters in the kitchen, and their 6-year-old son, Sean, watches Saturday morning cartoons in front of a big-screen television set, Stone looks profoundly puzzled at the idea that some people think the '60s have been overrated.

**CHELL**  
Vietnam film -stalking Sgt. the face of a soldier and ke the pain!" ber of people 5 years later it man who did Vietnam vet- rom the pro-

times that he has been assembling on film, Stone is telling America to face up to some harsh realities instead of living in a world of beer commercials, game shows and government lies. This is hardly what we expect from the folks who keep us entertained at the movies, which makes Stone's Oscar-winning achievement as a director and screenwriter that much more remarkable. He is an outsider working on the inside, a political left-winger making melodramas for the masses, a grunt who conquered Hollywood.

to be another hopped-up ride across the dark frontier: a biography of Jim Morrison, the reptilian rocker from the '60s who, like Sgt. Barnes, regularly courted death in his sex-powered songs and managed to find it at age 27 in a hotel bathtub in Paris. Later this spring, Stone begins work on a film that will focus on his most ominous subject yet: the assassination of President Kennedy, who he believes was killed not by lone gunman Lee Harvey Oswald but by "the military-industrial complex," which feared

"... describes himself as a "cinematic historian," but insists: "I don't believe in official history. I don't accept the scenario of the JFK assassination we've been given,..."

Mother Jones  
March/April 1991

"I consider myself a person who's  
taking history and shaping it in a certain  
way."

Esquire  
November, 1991