

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

what does it mean?