

Com

Some Think He's Down

Stone glorifies Kennedy in

As I understand the life's work of film director Oliver Stone, he intends that his movies will elevate John F. Kennedy to a sort of celebrity sainthood without the usual rigmarole of miracles certified, good works catalogued and references submitted by friends and co-workers not related by blood or marriage.

Leonard Larsen

Stone, as I also understand it, is not quite satisfied that the nation's response to the assassination of JFK in 1963 was only instant enshrinement of the slain president at Arlington National Cemetery and official subscription to the myth of Camelot.

There are guilty men and women, living and dead, who sent the martyred president to his tomb and they still haven't been brought to book, Stone keeps telling us in his movies, first "JFK" and most recently "Nixon."

What Stone is clearly getting at — as dozens of other theorists before him — is his own Hollywood creation of historical fact that President Kennedy was killed by conspirators who gunned him down because they knew Kennedy planned to end the war in Vietnam.

"They"? Who's "they"?

Well, for sure, in Stone's history, "they" were the CIA, the FBI, the Soviet KGB, the Mafia, the military-industrial complex, the Warren Commission, Jack Ruby, the Dallas Police Department, Lyndon B. Johnson and the evil circle around him, teams of doctors and nurses, assorted generals, colonels and corporals,

telephone operators and media operatives who covered up the plot.

Among the probable but not-yet-confirmed conspirators, as I understand what Stone's saying in his movies, is a you-pick-'em band that varies according to time, circumstances and personal preferences but might include right-wing religionists, the Daughters of the American Revolution, the Ku Klux Klan and surviving members and staff of the House Un-American Activities Committee.

That's a short list, of course, that doesn't contain a threatening collection of ghosts serving among the conspirators that would include but not necessarily be limited to Joe McCarthy, John Foster Dulles, Gen. Douglas MacArthur, Westbrook Pegler, William Randolph Hearst, Fritz Kuhn, George Lincoln Rockwell, Earl Browder, Father Coughlin and Snow White's wicked stepmother.

And now there's President Nixon — Stone's nutty, drunked-up, vengeful, sorrowing, conscious-stricken Richard Nixon.

Stone's first installment in the march to sainthood for President Kennedy — "JFK" — was about the Kennedy assassination, the unpunished conspiracy and the noble but slightly out-of-focus New Orleans prosecutor who uncovered the plot but was made to look like some publicity-seeking fool.

This time around, in a long accounting of President Nixon's trials and travails, Stone tells us the Nixon spookiness was because of his own feelings of guilt that he — as vice president — somehow set the

right Un-American

both 'JFK' and 'Nixon'

machinery in motion that created the conspiracy that killed President Kennedy.

The reviews of Stone's latest fantasy — "Nixon" — have pitted Stone's adoring cultists against damn-it-to-hell historical fact-minders who assert the film's creator has got no business doing what he's doing.

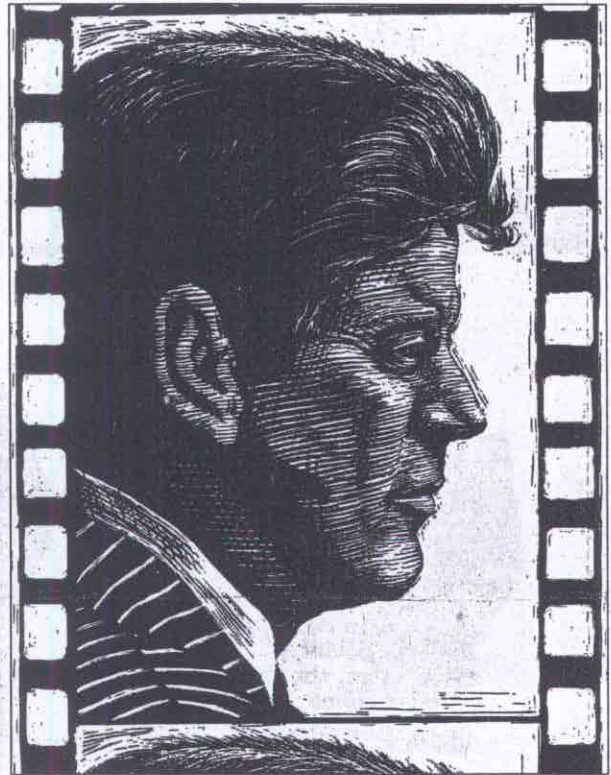
Stone's fans are inclined to view little inaccuracies in both "JFK" and "Nixon" as excusable excursions that help move the story. And after all, they ask, what's the harm? It's only a movie.

Stone's critics, as they were well-represented on a recent Sunday talk show by columnist George Will, are fearful of Stone's impact on the nation's understanding of history and they worry — or Will does — that Stone's views are downright anti-American.

Most of us, I suspect, can't get that worked up about Stone's movies and his mission that don't seem to be half so serious as either he or George Will think they are.

But there is this: Stone and other murder-plot theorists seem to have accumulated a crowd of conspirators in the Kennedy assassination that is now about the size of Chicago and its immediate suburbs. Next time around I hope Stone shows how an assassination plot has been kept secret in a crowd that size and how many people have been eliminated to keep the secret. And do I know any of them?

► Leonard E. Larsen writes commentaries for Scripps Howard News Service, 1090 Vermont Ave., N.W., Washington, DC 20005.



A political prediction: '96

Looking back from the future at the election year of 1996, one thing will be clear to all — clear, even, to TV's Talking Head pundits who forgot to mention it in their ritual New Year's predictions:

This time next year, we will be looking back and telling each other that, of course, 1966 was The Year of the Independent.

Martin Schram

That's wisdom that was probably missed by dedicated channel surfers who caught wave after wave of media punditry during the New Year's break. Instead, they heard the conventional Talking Head wisdom that 1966 will be Bill Clinton vs. Bob Dole — no one else need apply, it's already a done deal.

Here's that shallow wisdom, in depth:

Dole will lock up the Republican presidential nomination ex-

traordinarily early, by the end of March. Clinton, of course, will have no real opposition within his own Democratic Party. So America will be assaulted by the mother of all presidential campaigns — eight months (that will seem like 80) of unstoppable campaign-babble. That's what the polls are saying now.

But wait. Listen for a change to the rest of what voting Americans have been telling pollsters. They've been saying they don't like "Washington" — especially its government. Even members of their own parties say they are turned off by both President Clinton and Sen. Dole.

So you ask: Why, then, must the notion of a two-man race between Washington's two politically mobile monuments be taken for granite?

The answer: It doesn't. The notion of a race limited to these two

isn't etched in stone. We are entering a year of presidential nominating conventions that may be as politically unconventional as any we have seen.

Here, by way of a public service, is what will happen in the election year of 1996:

■ There will be a mini-collapse of Dole's surefire, it's-all-wrapped-up-early nomination. Republican voters, panicked by their own ennui, will cast about desperately for someone who is more common, less Washington-man. They'll give surprising support to likable semi-conservative Lamar Alexander (who's got a memorable resume but takes faceless photos), free-trader Steven Forbes (who's got a bottomless bankroll) and Pat Buchanan, who has suddenly emerged as the world's only left wing-sounding neo-protectionist-right winger.

■ Next, most powerful political

is year of independents

pressure will build in several stages — all targeted at a familiar reluctant warrior: Gen. Colin Powell.

■ Dole will mount a massive effort (public and private) to convince Powell to become his vice presidential running mate. His best argument: Dole promises to serve just one term, meaning the nomination can virtually be handed over to Powell in 2000. But the problem is that deep down, Powell knows he will never be happy running as a Republican, especially a neutered No. 2, where he will feel he must modify or evade saying what he really thinks on issues sensitive to the far right, such as abortion, gun control, etc.

■ Pressure will also build for the retired general to run as an independent. Backers will include disenchanted but still famous pols Paul Tsongas, Lowell Weicker and yes, Sam Nunn.

Time out for a private word to readers: Virtually all pundits will tell you nobody can run as an independent and win the presidency. Tell them they are wrong. Powell can decide late to run as an independent (as Ross Perot did) and win decisively as Perot couldn't once voters figured out that his siren song was all looney tunes, no solutions.

Powell will weigh anew these pleas that will reach crescendo proportions. He will understand that he, alone, will not need big money to win. In fact, the less money he accepts from special interests, the more votes he'll get.

Bottom lines: (1) Dole-Powell will beat Clinton-Gore, decisively; but don't expect Powell to say yes. (2) Powell the independent can run and win; but he'll waver, lean yes, then say no again after one last midsummer's nice dream. (3) Perot will make sure somebody mounts a

strong independent challenge; Connecticut's ex-senator and governor Lowell Weicker will likely run. If not, Perot will manfully overcome his shyness and run himself.

Masses of middle Americans who don't like Clinton the man will withhold their votes from Dole the Washington pol (if he runs with anyone but Powell) and vote independent.

And that is how Clinton — never really popular politically, never really decisive as a shaper of domestic policy, never really respected as chief executive or commander-in-chief — will become the first Democrat since FDR to win re-election.

► Martin Schram writes a weekly column for Scripps Howard News Service that focuses on the intersection of the news media, policy and politics.