

Scott Wilson
78 Toronto Ave.,
Massapequa, NY 11758

5/17/95

Dear Scott,

I'm more ^rtied than usual so I have to be brief. And thanks for the enclosures.

I don't know where Livingstone gets that kind of crazy ^ustiff. I've never been interviewed by R^uther and if I ever knew a Mark ^uPhillips he did not film me here and it had to have been many, many years ago. I also do not remember Livingstone not being viciously dishonest about me in his High Trash 2.

Garrison knew Perrin was dead. I ended his phony story to get around that. He never confronted me on any of that. Sciambra confronted him with my report and Garrison covered his own ass by f^uring Boxley as having done it and for the CIA!

Because the crime itself was ^unever investigated there are no lead for private persons to follow. What to do? I think the best we can hope for is to hope for the future and do what we can to make a full and factual record on what we do know and on what the government did and did not do.

And, of course, to inform others and not deceive them with theories or nonsensical pretended solutions.

We enjoyed your visit, too.

Thanks and best,

Harold

5/15/95

Dear Mr. Weisberg,

Enclosed please find various materials of interest, namely articles on Mailer's book plus a video on Kennedy scandals. I'm also sending photocopies of pages 521-524 of Livingstone's High Treason 2. During our last visit this past 4/29 I had asked you about a Dan Rather interview that you had appeared on at the time of the release of Stone's film. You had told me that you did not recall such an interview. The interview that I was referring to is mentioned on page 522 of High Treason 2. When I had seen you I had asked about an interview with Mark Crouch. This was incorrect, as you can see from what I've sent the videotaping was done by Mark Phillips. I did not see this interview so I was wondering what you could tell me about this from your perspective. I've outlined the pertinent paragraphs with yellow marker.

Could you also give me some info on Livingstone's background? Such as how he got started with assassination research or anything else you may know about him.

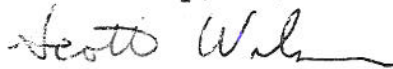
How did it come to pass that Garrison was going to charge Robert Perrin with being JFK's assassin? What was Garrison's reaction when you showed him that Perrin was dead before the Assassination?

Can you tell me what you believe regarding the death of David Ferrer? Do you think his death was the result of natural causes or was it foul play? When you worked on the Garrison investigation did you ever happen to meet Ferrer in person?

I had meant to ask this question during our last visit but I had never received the chance so I'll ask it now. In your opinion where should we be focusing our attention on the JFK case today and what should future scholars look for that is within reality to find?

In closing I want to say that I enjoyed our last visit very much and that I hope you can make use of the materials I'm sending on Mailer book.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Scott Wilson". The signature is written in dark ink and is positioned above the typed name.

Scott Wilson

"This isn't history, this is movie-making."

—Oliver Stone, to Elaine Dutka,
Los Angeles Times, June 24, 1991

CHAPTER 26

THE OLIVER STONE MOVIE *JFK*

"What this entire, relentlessly didactic and polemical movie does is make one wonder about Oliver Stone. To some observers, there is nothing to wonder about. In their view, Stone's entire cinematic oeuvre—*Platoon*, *Wall Street*, *Born on the Fourth of July*, and the rest—has been marked by dishonest renderings of history, simplistic moral constructs, and a kind of puerile fatuousness about the 1960s," the *Chicago Tribune* pontificated. "The danger is that Stone's film and the pseudo-history it so effectively portrays will become the popularly accepted version. After all, what can scholarship avail against Kevin Costner, Sissy Spacek, Donald Sutherland, et al on the big screen with Dolby Stereo?"¹ Having added its weight to the enormous crescendo that swept the nation about the film, the *Tribune* then said that "it's time that the documents and all the physical evidence from the Kennedy assassination—pictures, films, tissue samples, and the rest—be made public and available for examination. . . . If our history since November 22, 1963, demonstrates anything, it is the cleansing effect of public exposure and the corrosive effect—as in *JFK*—of secrecy."

Now begins the tale of one of the greatest brouhahas in American political, intellectual, and filmmaking history.

Harold Weisberg is the grandfather of assassination research and has now become respected by the same media that used to ridicule him. It is to him that much of the media turns when they have questions about the latest fad or theory put forth by buffs, writers, and others attempting to mine the rich vein of confusion and misinformation surrounding the case. For it is Weisberg, right or wrong, who sits in judgment upon all those charlatans and frauds, upon the earnest but misguided, or those who may have made a truly new discovery.

Weisberg worked with Jim Garrison at first until he was fed up and turned against him. Garrison had written the foreword to Weisberg's book *Oswald in New Orleans*, and otherwise thought highly of Weisberg's work, which was the first published detailed analytical criticism of the evidence in the assassination of the President. Weisberg wrote Oliver Stone.² "I told Stone about Garrison sometime before he started shooting film. I warned Stone in advance," Weisberg wrote me a week before the scheduled release of the forty-million-dollar film, when the hype from Hollywood was reaching a pitch.³ The movie by then had made the cover of *Life* and *Newsweek*, and every newspaper and magazine had written about it.

The day I received this letter from Weisberg, there he was on the *CBS Evening News* with Dan Rather,* who saw the assassination that terrible day in Dallas almost three decades before. Rather started off the program with this: "One of Hollywood's best-paid filmmakers mixes fact, fiction, and theory in a new film about the killing of John F. Kennedy. What happens when Hollywood mixes facts, half-baked theories, and sheer fiction into a big-budget film and then tries to sell it as truth and history?"

Mark Phillips, the CBS reporter, continued: "On a Hollywood sound stage, Oliver Stone, two-time Oscar winner, is adjusting history, creating his version of how and why John F. Kennedy was killed. It's a version that differs dramatically from the Warren Commission account of one deranged gunman acting alone." Phillips explains that Stone says the murder was over Vietnam.

Mark Phillips goes on, videotaping in Weisberg's basement, where Weisberg has scores of file cabinets filled with thousands of FBI documents released to him over the years. "Weisberg says: 'Jim Garrison's investigation was a fraud. And Oliver Stone hasn't produced history as he says, but he created another fiction.'" George Lardner, Jr., had a few weeks before written in the *Washington Post*: "Garrison's investigation was a fraud."⁴ Lardner, though, acknowledges "that a probable conspiracy [in the assassination] took place."⁵

What do people mean by history? The battle is on for *who* is going to

* During a TV broadcast, Dan Rather had reversed the direction of Kennedy's head snap when he was struck with the fatal bullet, saying the head went forward rather than rocketing backward, as it does, when he narrated the Zapruder film decades before. The television viewer was not allowed to actually see the film; Rather told us what he wanted us to think was on it.

define just what that history is. The Warren Report is not writ in stone, not yet "history"—it's still only an opinion or a theory—and history is written by the winners. Nobody has won just yet.

Rather's real purpose seems to be to turn the public away from any criticism of the Warren theory. He used Weisberg, twisting and distorting some of his key points. I agree with Weisberg that Stone does not have the right to change the history of what happened in those years, just as Stone's original script had Jim Garrison waving an autopsy picture of President Kennedy at the jury and saying, "This is the finally released and official autopsy photo." The pictures have never been released. It is this sort of false representation that got Stone into trouble with most of the research community, or at least with those of us whom he either couldn't buy or did not try to deal with. He thereby alienated the very people who might have kept his movie straight, and instead rounded up the usual suspects, the disinformation specialists in the research community, the has-beens.

Was the movie intended to be a vindication of Garrison somehow? Vindicating what? Why make a movie centered on Garrison's personal life? As a vehicle to discuss the conspiracy that murdered Kennedy? As a metaphor, as Stone said—a composite? But if the film doesn't talk about what Garrison's investigation did to a lot of people's lives, in most cases—if not all—those completely innocent of anything having to do with the investigation, what good is it? If it does not talk about Kennedy's life and work, what good is it? Does it describe what Kennedy went through that morning to get out of bed and get into his back brace? The pain he lived with? Instead, they hired a nobody to play Kennedy, and a terrible actor to play Garrison.

Does this movie have any connection with the realities we have touched upon? Stone deifies and tries to vindicate Garrison by overlooking the man's serious flaws and what was wrong with what he did. When asked about this, Stone says that he did not have time in a three-hour movie to get into questions of character. Pardon me, but isn't that what movie-making is about, aside from storytelling? Character? A true artist can demonstrate character on the silver screen in a trice.

Dan Rather had one final word at the end of his television news broadcast: "And now the public is going to live with the pain and the uncertainty of that dark day in Dallas once more. For much of Stone's audience, this powerful movie by a skilled artist is the only version they'll know. Call it art or call it history, it's bound to make an impres-

sion." Stone had the last word, saying, "It's only a movie. They can go in and you can either believe it or not."

There are many problems with all of this.

The Problem

The issue has been raised as to whether or not Oliver Stone had the right to make his film without public discussion beforehand, then to release that film and subject it to normal criticism. Most people in the media don't think so, and neither do I.

Stone chose to make various and conflicting public statements beforehand, such as in his *Dallas Morning News* interview,⁶ and an interview in New Orleans.⁷ In Dallas he said that "I am making a movie first and foremost. I'm not doing a school lesson here, and I don't have a documentarian's responsibilities. I have a dramatist's responsibilities to an audience." Wrong. This is what got him into deep trouble with Harold Weisberg, Jon Margolis of the *Chicago Tribune*,⁸ and George Lardner of the *Washington Post*,⁹ who insists that Garrison is a fraud to being with. Who or what that history (of the assassination) is has not been made clear, and that is what we have been arguing about all these years. The real issue is that neither Stone nor anyone else has the right to make composite characters out of Perry Raymond Russo, as he does in the film, "metaphors" out of Jim Garrison, and so on. He has to tell the truth. We make the rules, not him.

"I've taken the license of using Garrison as a metaphor for all the credible researchers," Stone said. "He's an all-encompassing figure."¹⁰ This statement is guaranteed to make enemies of those who do not want to be lumped together with Garrison, and thus discredited. In a sense, Garrison certainly is a metaphor, since we have all have had some of the problems he had when the sky fell in on him as a result of his own excesses, but only a few other big-name critics of the Warren Report actually engaged in hoaxes, and to put all together as one composite figure certainly does distort the reality of who and what Garrison and the others really were, each different in their own way, and each just as dangerous.

To renounce a "documentarian's responsibility" is to renounce his integrity, his citizenship, his caring. Perhaps Stone felt trapped, having publicly committed himself to Garrison and Garrison's story, then realizing that there was something wrong with it. It was the Hollywood