

In 'JFK,' Oliver Stone Trashes the Truth

OLIVER STONE'S new movie about the Kennedy assassination, "JFK," has already received plenty of attention. It is bound to be controversial, as I can attest from my knowledge of some of the events described.

The hero is Jim Garrison, played by Kevin Costner. The real Jim Garrison conducted a weird investigation of the assassination 25 years ago, when he was district attorney of New Orleans. I was employed by Garrison as a researcher on the case. Mort Sahl, the satirist, also had credentials issued by the D.A.'s office. A funny movie could truthfully be made.

As a result of Stone's movie, more people than ever are likely to disbelieve the Warren Commission's "lone gunman" conclusion. This doesn't bother me. There are valid reasons to suspect that there may have been another gunman. Oswald was behind the president, but an amateur movie made at the scene shows that Kennedy was flung violently backward by the shot that killed him. I am told that this film has been incorporated into Stone's, and that the Dealey Plaza scene in Dallas has been brilliantly reconstructed.

Still, it's important that a

distinction be drawn between doubting the Warren Commission and believing the scriptwriter's Garrison. Many students of the assassination are concerned that glamorizing someone as reckless as Garrison might undermine legitimate skepticism about the official findings.

Stone seems nonchalant about all this. In a recent Esquire article, Robert Sam Anson quotes him as saying that Garrison's attempt to "force a break in the case" was "worth the sacrifice of one man (Clay Shaw)." Stone added: "When they went onto the shores of Omaha Beach, they said, 'We're going to lose five, ten, fifteen thousand people to reach our objective.' I think Jim was in that kind of situation."

Stone actually admires power in the abstract. He told Penthouse that he had no hope for politics because by the time you get elected, you have "made so many bargains that you don't have any power."

At the same time, Stone is immensely suspicious of government power. And rightly so. In particular, he is right to be suspicious of the kind of power exercised over citizens when

governments appeal to patriotic sentiments when going to war. But, like so many on the left, he seems incapable of understanding that the only antidote to such power is a steadfast and principled resistance to its encroachment, not admiration for its expansion when exercised in order to promote noble-seeming goals.

Stone's position seems to be that good ends do justify dubious means — provided those ends are defined by a high-minded elite. I knew Garrison quite well, and I'm sure he was, like almost everyone else one has ever met, well-intentioned. No doubt he had persuaded himself that Clay Shaw was guilty as charged. But meaning well is no defense. Garrison, when I knew him was, amusing, charming and well-read, but also dangerous, because he had a cavalier and completely irresponsible attitude toward power. I hate to end up sounding like a liberal, but it's a good thing the media kept an eye on him as they did.


Los Angeles Times

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**The Question Man
 is on vacation**

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WHO SAID WHAT



"You, too, can make an Oliver Stone movie. Your primary motivation is to keep remaking the '60s until you get it right."

Film critic and National Public Radio correspondent Elvis Mitchell during a piece on the director on tomorrow's edition of PBS' "Edge."

Oliver Stone: Film it again. ■

"Basketball is a business, pure and simple. If you want to have fun, go to the YMCA."

Pat Riley, coach of the New York Knicks, former coach of the L.A. Lakers, in New York magazine.

— COMPILED BY MARK LUNDGREN

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