

Film Critic Resigns Over 'JFK' Review

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The "JFK" controversy has claimed its latest victim.

Pat Dowell, the film critic for Washingtonian magazine, wrote a brief, laudatory review that gave the Oliver Stone movie 3½ of a possible four stars. But Jack Limpert, the magazine's editor, yanked Dowell's review from the February issue.

When Limpert refused to change his mind, Dowell resigned, ending a 10-year relationship with Washingtonian.

Dowell said yesterday that a critic's work should not be killed because of "someone else's idea of political correctness. . . . It just put me in an untenable position. An editor must look into his conscience and determine whether he is exercising editorial judgment or merely personal bias."

But Limpert said: "'JFK' was a special case. It drew such a bizarre picture of Washington, the place, that I didn't want to run a review that said it was a brilliant movie when I thought it was an extremely dumb movie. . . . I just thought, for anybody who knows Washington, it was an absolutely preposterous movie."

The Stone film has sparked a massive media debate over its contention that President Kennedy was killed by a conspiracy involving the Mafia, the CIA, the Joint Chiefs of Staff, the Dallas police and others. But Dowell may be the first person to lose a job over the contretemps.

Dowell's suppressed review said, in toto: "If you didn't already doubt the Warren Commission report, you will after seeing Oliver Stone's brilliantly crafted indictment of history as an

official story. Is it the truth? Stone says you be the judge. R."

Dowell, who reports on movies for National Public Radio, also reviewed "JFK" favorably for WETA-FM, Army Times and two sister publications.

No Washington melodrama would be complete without an exchange of letters:

In a Jan. 7 note, Limpert told Dowell that "rather than try to edit the review of the movie, I thought it was fairer to you just to take it out. . . ."

"I hope it will be another 10 years before we cross this bridge again and I hope you'll continue to call them as you see them," he said.

Dowell wrote back Jan. 16 that Limpert's suggestion "won't do me much good . . . if the way *you* see them determines whether my call gets into print." She said Time, Newsweek and The Washington Post "have all sputtered in protest about JFK's controversial speculations, but those editors felt no need to soften, censor or omit the rave reviews of the movie by their film critics. . . ."

"I cannot in good conscience keep my job at the price of tailoring my evaluation of a film's merits to fit someone else's idea of political (or cinematic) correctness. Such dishonesty would be a disservice to my readers—to *your* readers. And I would hate myself in the morning." Dowell said she could not keep writing for the magazine unless her review, by then cut from the February issue, ran in March.

Limpert replied the following day: "I respect your strong feelings and accept your resignation. My job is to protect the magazine's reputation. . . . You see it one way and I see it the opposite way and let's go our separate ways."

Limpert said he has hired Jayne Blanchard, who was laid off as film critic for the suburban Journal papers, as Dowell's replacement. He said the March issue will take a broader look at how movies and television portray Washington, but that he has an understanding with Blanchard that she will not review "JFK."