

Stone film has nation rehashing theories

Director's historical information scrambled



Brian Shellito/DN

It seems no matter where I go, I just can't get away from it. In restaurants, bars, on golf courses, everywhere, everyone wants to have the same conversation, and the conversation always goes nowhere. I'll pick up bits and pieces here and there:

Theorist one: "There's no way Oswald could have gotten off four shots in six seconds. The FBI tried, for Christ's sake, and they couldn't do it, even without aiming."



John Payne

Theorist two: "And they're trying to tell me a guy can defect to the Soviet Union during the height of the Cold War and come back less than a year later, no questions asked? The CIA was behind it all the way."

Oliver Stone's film "JFK," for all its flaws (perhaps because of its flaws) has a lot of people talking. It's good to talk, I suppose. And any movie that sparks discussion accomplishes more than most. What worries me, though, is what people are talking about. Legal scholars, assassination buffs and a lot of highbrow journalists seem intent on chastising Stone rather than talking about the subject of his movie — the assassination itself.

Of course, the criticisms are inevitable. If you haven't seen it yet, the three-hour-plus "JFK" is intriguing but packed with historical inaccuracies. As a documentary on the Kennedy shooting and the subsequent investigation by New Orleans District Attorney Jim Garrison, "JFK" is pulp. But then again, its critics are the only ones billing the film as a documentary.

Apparently, these same critics are afraid that the gullible American public will accept "JFK" as fact, a view that is more than a little patronizing.

In the film, which culminates in the 1969 trial of New Orleans businessman Clay Shaw for conspiring to kill JFK, characters are misquoted and often misrepresented. By Stone's own admission, the chronology of many events has been shuffled and events that never took place have been inserted to further what Stone calls the film's "greater truth."

Specifically: Garrison's Washing-

'JFK' casts doubt on Warren Commission with blend of fact, creative interpretation



"JFK"



By Steve Pearson
Staff Reporter

Across the country, director Oliver Stone's latest venture in politically charged cinema has generated nearly as much copy on newspapers' opinion-editorial pages as on the entertainment pages.

Like "Platoon" and "Born on the Fourth of July," "JFK" is a finely crafted film that carries Stone's personal ideological stamp.

"JFK," the cinematic equivalent of a persuasive essay, is an attempt to

Superb acting reinforces persuasive tone

cast doubt on the findings of the Warren Commission that investigated the assassination of former President John F. Kennedy.

The film centers on Jim Garrison (Kevin Costner), the district attorney of New Orleans who conducted an investigation into a possible conspiracy to kill Kennedy. According to Garrison's perspective, the investigation involved Cuban exiles, the FBI, the CIA, the military industrial complex and the Mafia. His investigation resulted in conspiracy charges being filed against Clay Shaw (Tommy Lee Jones), a wealthy homosexual.

The film has been widely criticized for blurring the line between fact and fiction. But placing these questions of its accuracy aside, the film is a stunning achievement.

The acting is superb throughout. Costner is back in top form as the obsessive Garrison, and handles the slight Southern drawl with much more

flair than his on-again, off-again British accent in "Robin Hood." And Jones dominates the screen with his dignified, yet foreboding portrayal of Shaw.

Gary Oldman's Lee Harvey Oswald is so convincing that viewers will have a tough time distinguishing between the authentic footage of the real Oswald and Oldman's portrayal. Sissy Spacek also turns in an excellent performance as Garrison's beleaguered wife.

Casting against the type and using some ironic casting choices pay off for Stone because they add to the richness of the film.

Joe Pesci's portrayal of David Ferrie, the flamboyant pilot who is defrocked from the priesthood because of his homosexuality, puts Pesci in line for another Oscar nomination. His performance as the bald eccentric, whose untimely death puts a hole in Garrison's case, is so convincing

that even his most devoted fans may have trouble finding Pesci in the character.

John Candy appears in the startlingly serious role of Dean Andrews, a subject of Garrison's investigation. One-time teen idol Kevin Bacon adeptly portrays an imprisoned homosexual questioned by Garrison. Ed Asner of "Lou Grant" and "Mary Tyler Moore" fame, who is known as an outspoken proponent of liberal causes, is cast as a conspirator in Kennedy's death. Perhaps the most ironic casting twist is that of the real Jim Garrison as Chief Justice Earl Warren, who presided over the investigation by the Warren Commission.

Walter Matthau and Jack Lemmon are also notable in cameo roles.

A dark palette of colors dominates the film, and many scenes were shot at low light levels, adding to the film's ominous quality.

The film's three-hour length, ex-

See JFK on 15

Tale of brotherly strife succeeds



"The Indian Runner"



By Anne Steyer
Senior Reporter

Adverse publicity has surrounded Sean Penn's turbulent Hollywood career from its very beginning, but the bad boy makes good with his directorial debut in this season's "The Indian Runner" (The Lincoln The-

atre, 1145 P St.).

Inspired by Bruce Springsteen's "Highway Patrolman," the film studies the relationship between two brothers, Joe (David Morse) and Frank (Viggo Mortensen), who live in a nameless town in Nebraska.

Joe is the solid, all-American son, a farmer who loses his land to the government only to turn around and work as a law enforcement officer for this same government. Brother Frank is the opposite, a returning soldier from Vietnam, tattooed, angry and a breath away from self-destruction.

The story begins with Frank's return from the war. After an altogether brief reunion with big brother Joe, Frank takes off for Ohio where he immediately gets into trouble and winds up in jail. He doesn't return to Nebraska until after some tragic family

events. He comes back with a hippie girlfriend (Patricia Arquette) in tow, aiming to take a shot at domestic bliss.

But Frank is not the man Joe is. A nine-to-five job, new curtains and impending fatherhood don't sit well on his shoulders. His self-destructive bent and warped self-worth destroy him, and those he touches, with nearly the same ferocity.

With "The Indian Runner," Penn is taking his first turn at both writing and directing. The story he has constructed is compelling. It adds new depth and insight to the weary story of conflict between family and self-determination. He sets up the story well, and where narration is usually annoying, it seems oddly appropriate in this film.

The look and feel of the film are as

compelling as the story. Penn uses unusual camera angles and employs some occasional staggered shots. Both are effective at adding to the discomfort already created by the raw emotion of the script. The music also lends a hand in this objective. The evocative score is peppered with sad, soulful songs of the '60s.

In addition to these fine backdrops, the acting is solid throughout. Both Morse and Mortensen bring an edge and depth to their characters. Arquette is charming as Frank's girl Dorothy. Valeria Golino exudes a sexy but comforting strength as Joe's spouse.

The Indian Runner of lore was a messenger, independent of time, space and danger, an envoy who becomes his message to deliver it. This pas-

See RUNNER on 15

How fast should you get to that movie?

Ratings on a 1-5 reel scale to the speed of celluloid are:

5 reels — Run

4 reels — Jog

3 reels — Racewalk
(See it if you've seen the others)

2 reels — Stroll
(Bring alternate entertainment source)

1 reel — Crawl

Scott Maurer/DN