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'What kind of Man are you? - Masculinity in Oliver Stone's JFK.

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> Women, womanhood and women's bodies represent the private; they represent all that is excluded from the public sphere. In the patriarchal construction of the difference between masculinity and femininity, women lack the capacities necessary for political life. 'The disorder of women' means that they pose a threat to public order and so must be excluded from the public world.
> Carole Pateman, The Disorder of Women (1989)
>
> 'I think you care more about John Kennedy than your family! All day long the kids are asking, "where's Daddy?" What am I supposed to tell your kids, Jim?'
> Elizabeth Garrison (Sissy Spacek) JFK

The release of Oliver Stone's JFK in 1992 unleashed something of a furore amongst professional historians. With attention unmatched by that accorded to any other film before or since, historians seized upon Stone's film as a highly contentious text. Even before the release of the film, the leak of a first draft to Washington Post national security correspondent George Lardner established the national importance of the film [1]. Assisted by the plethora footnotes provided by Stone in the annotated edition of the film's script [2] historians have taken Stone to task on issues such as his interpretation of NSAM 263 as 'proof' that Kennedy intended to withdraw from Vietnam, as well as the more complex details of the events surrounding Dealy Plaza on 22nd November 1963.

On a broader level, the release of JFK also provided an occasion for historians to reflect on the nature of historical film. Stone's decision to send 'information packs' to schools as a classroom 'back-up' to his film provoked the charge that he intended the film not as entertainment, but as education. Professional historians registered their disapproval at the possibility of audiences receiving Stone's film as 'historical fact.' As film theorist Robert Burgoyne noted: 'the debate over Oliver Stone's JFK has been framed to date largely within the discourse of historiography, with the greatest attention being paid to issues concerning the limits of fact and fiction and the erosion of the presumed boundary between documentary and imaginative reconstruction.' [3]

To debate JFK on these terms constructs a limited approach which restricts readings of the film. Most crucially, the focus of the debate is 'JFK as history', overlooking the relative unimportance of Kennedy himself to the film. Apart from a brief starring role in the opening montage and the repetitive, slow-motion shots of his head exploding in the courtroom sequence, JFK is largely absent. The central character of the film is the New Orleans District Attorney Jim Garrison (played by Kevin Costner) upon whose memoir, On the Trail of the Assassins Stone drew heavily [4]. The centrality of Garrison's character is emphasised in the poster for the film, and later the cover to the video edition. This shows Kevin Costner, with the text 'He's a District Attorney. He will risk his

life, the lives of his family, everything he holds dear for the one thing he holds sacred - the truth.'

It is the construction of the heroic 'Jim Garrison' as the central character in the film which is the subject of this paper. As film critics such as Richard Dyer, Liam Kennedy and Steve Neale amongst others have argued, the construction of white heterosexual masculinity in film has been, until recently, unexplored. Steve Neale, for example, has argued

> Only within the gay movement have there appeared specific discussions of the representations of men. Most of these, as far as I am aware, have centered on the representations and stereotypes of gay men. Both within the women's movement and the gay movement, there is an important sense in which the images and functions of heterosexual masculinity within mainstream cinema have been left undiscovered. It is thus very rare to find analyses that seek to specify in detail, in relation to particular films or groups of films, how heterosexual masculinity is inscribed and the mechanisms, pressures and contradictions that inscription may invoke. [5]

The effect of this failure to address heterosexual masculinity as a construction has been to 'normalise' the role. Dyer explains, 'The groupings that have tended not to get addressed in "images of" work, however, are those with most access to power: men, whites, heterosexuals, the able-bodied. The problem with not addressing them as such is that they then function as simply the human norm, without specificity and thus without a specifiable relation to power.' [6] Cohen and Hark elaborate that this failure to address the representation of white male heterosexuals contributes to the 'cultural; fiction' that 'masculinity is not a social construction.' [7] The extent to which white heterosexual men figure as 'the norm' is illustrated by Oliver Stone's seemingly unproblematic decision to use Garrison as the narrator of JFK. Stone's argument was that he was using Garrison to 'stand in for' about a dozen researchers (Riordon p. 355.) The researcher who first raised Stone's interest in making a film about the assassination was Ellen Kay, part-owner of Sheridan Square Press. Kay worked as a volunteer in Garrison's campaign to bring a prosecution in the Kennedy assassination and her press later published On the trail of the Assassins, as well as the newsletter 'Covert Action Information Bulletin.' Despite Kay's input, and the many female witnesses to the Kennedy assassination, Stone constructs a white male heterosexual as the central character in his film. Stone's assumption is that the use of a white male character as the narrative centre for his film constructs a universalist, not a specific, subject position.

The extent to which white masculinity is received as natural and universal, rather than specific and constructed, can be see through a comparison of the critical reception to the character of Jim Garrison and the homosexual characters in JFK. In an article in The Advocate, David Ehrenstein argues that Stone uses homosexuality and gay men to represent disorder, corruption and the generic forces of evil. Labelling JFK 'the most homophobic film ever to come out of Hollywood', Ehrenstein asserts that Stone's film gives the impression that Kennedy was murdered by a 'cabal of homosexuality.' Stone was indignant at this criticism, pointing out that the villains responsible at the highest level for the assassination of Kennedy were all heterosexual. [8] This defence, whilst technically accurate, ignored the substance of Ehrenstein's critique. The heterosexual villains of JFK are vague, shadowy figures, viewed distantly in the proverbial smoke-filled rooms, their identity hidden in half-obscured name-plates and generic uniforms. The homosexual villains of the piece are not so coy, with gold-coated bodies, bizarre wigs, and choreographed orgies.

This is not to say that Stone's version of Garrion's character was accepted uncritically, but that the criticism was of a very different kind. Whilst it was understood by critics that the gay characters in the film represent a constructed representation of homosexuality, the character of Garrison was not widely understood as a representation of white heterosexuality, but rather as a portrayal of one specific white heterosexual - the 'real life.' Jim Garrison. Stone was therefore criticised for idealising Garrison, glossing over his flaws. [9] The constructed nature of the Garrison character as a white heterosexual male was never addressed. In other words, white male characters such as Garrison do not carry the 'burden of representation' with regard to white heterosexual masculinity. Whilst homosexual characters in the film are read and critiqued as 'generic', Garrison's character is specific.

Due to time constraints Stone acknowledged that he was forced to present a less than full picture of Garrison's life and personality. Instead Stone argued that the role of Jim Garrison in JFK was not intended as an accurate portrait, but rather as a narrative device, utilised in order to pull together disparate elements of an intensely complex plot-line. He explained, 'I wanted to use Garrison as a vehicle for a larger perspective, a metaphoric protagonist who would stand in for about a dozen researchers.' Stone recognised that this technique would result in the construction of a new, historically inaccurate 'Jim Garrison': 'I knew this would make Garrison somewhat better than he was and, in that sense, we'd be making him more of a hero.' [10]

The extent to which Stone's approach to the character of Garrison raises issues of white masculinity is apparent from the way in which his reading of On the Trail of the Assassins evoked the model of explicitly masculine heroics:

> When I first read Jim Garrison's book on the Kennedy assassination, very clearly imprinted was the soul of a gem. You have a prosecutor, an honest man who had served his country in World War II, and in Korea, with a family who believes in the American way. And there's something fishy going on in his backyard in New Orleans, so he does his job, it's his duty. And doing his job takes him into stranger, more bizarre circumstances again and again. [11]

In this reading of On the Trail of the Assassins Stone draws out all the key cultural indicators of white heterosexual masculinity: military service, head of a family, patriotism, role as breadwinner, occupational diligence. From his initial reading of Garrison's account of his investigation, Stone draws not a factual biography, but an evocation of a type. Stone is prepared to ignore details of Garrison's life (his womanising and drinking for example) to remain true to his idea of what Garrison represented. As he explained to his biographer, James Riordan, ' I was criticised for it, but it would have taken the better part of the film to show the destruction of his character…He lost more in real life than I showed. He started drinking more. He was womanising, but there was not enough time to deal with that.' [12] There is a direct parallel here with Stone's reluctance to explore the fundamental flaws of Kennedy. David Ansen of Newsweek asked Stone, 'You've said that it's a mistake to idealize Kennedy. Yet the movie does just that.' Stone responds, 'Again it was a question of do I have time ... my defence would be that there is a large issue at stake. Ultimately they [JFK and Garrison] were good guys.' [13]

From his reading of On the Trail of the Assassins Stone constructs a generic brand of both film and masculinity, arguing in the face of criticisms about his choice of hero: 'I feel I gotta go back to those movies I believe in … where my hero is facing certain

extinction, surrounded on all sides by enemy swordsmen, but by some shining light of inner force and greater love, turns the tables of fate and triumphs over all odds.' [14]

The casting of the role of Garrison was crucial in Stone's expression of this conception of the 'good guys', the kind of masculinity he wanted to convey. His casting notes reveal the extent to which the reputations of prospective actors were key in assigning the role. His assistant Risa Braman Garcia explained Stone's casting methods:

> We sit down with a list of characters and he'll tell us what he wants. Sometimes you have to do it on the fly. He'll give you a type or sometimes he'll refer to a living person like a psychiatrist a politician, a philosopher, a fictional character, or even an actor who is dead. Then we generate lists and he goes through them and picks people he likes or tells us when we're wrong. [15]

Stone's casting notes for Garrison reveal that at various times he considered a host of actors for the part including Harrison Ford, Nick Nolte, Michael Douglas, Robin Williams, Michael Keaton, Mel Gibson, Gene Hackman, John Malkovich, Alec Baldwin, Robert De Niro, Dennis Quiad, Jack Nicholson, Robert Redford and Marlon Brando. [16] Choosing Costner, Stone was making a clear statement about the way in which he perceived Garrison's character. Stone's biographer Riordan explains:

> [James] Woods saw himself as perfect for the role of Jim Garrison. Though this may seem strange to those so familiar with Costner's excellent performance, it must be understood that Woods was envisioning a different type of film. Had it been a straight biography of Jim Garrison, flaws and all, Woods could have been the ideal choice; but since Stone was opting to focus on the assassination conspiracies and anchor the film with Garrison as a rock-solid centerpiece round which such a mad vortex could swirl, Costner proved the better choice. [17]

Costner himself shared Stone's vision of the role of Garrison as a constructed character rather than as a biographical portrait, explaining:

> If it would have been a biography of Jim Garrison I might not have done the movie … What we were going for was the emotional truth of what went down and if we focused all that much on who Garrison was, then we would lose that theme … Well JFK was never intended to explore who Garrison was and didn't come close to explaining who that man was. We just used him as a vehicle to communicate what happened. [18]

Selecting Costner, Stone was seeking an actor who could most effectively represent a specific type of white masculinity. Stone wrote to himself in his casting notes, 'Find a real person - new Gary Cooper, create him yourself. A James Stewart, like the old days.' [19] To his biographer, Stone expanded his reasons for choosing Costner, again making comparisons to Cooper and Stewart;

> Kevin was the perfect choice for Jim Garrison … because he reminds me of those Gary Cooper, Jimmy Stewart qualities - a moral simplicity and a quiet understatement. He listens well. He anchors a three hour eight minute movie in a very strong way. He guides you through it because you emphathize with him and his discoveries become yours. Through Kevin playing Jim you get on the fifty-yard line for the Kennedy assassination. [20]

Stone explained, 'In Kevin I found someone who had a sort of fundamental decency to him, integrity and I associate that with Jim Garrison ... Jimmy Stewart comes to mind, I kept thinking of Gary Cooper.' [21] As Robert A. Rosenstone points out, Costner's previous films brought a further dimension to the role of Garrison:

> A star like Kevin Costner, fresh from his award winning Dances with Wolves, cannot simply disappear into the character of Garrison. From his previous film he carries for many in the audience a strong feeling of the decent, simple, honest American, the war hero man who more than a century ago was critical of a certain kind of expansionist militarism in American life. [22]

Even before the opening of the movie, Stone established a certain model of white masculinity for Garrison: an honest, straightforward white male in conflict with militaristic, corrupt political cliques. The opening scenes of JFK quickly delineate this identity: the first time we see Garrison is in his office, establishing his professional status. Pictures of his family are displayed prominently on his desk. Garrison is also surrounded by pictures and memorabilia of his time in the military. The Kennedy assassination and subsequent cover-up are immediately represented as a threat to Garrison's identity as a white heterosexual American male, starting with his shocked reaction to the death of the President, 'God, I'm ashamed to be an American today.'

The central threat to Garrison's masculinity, however, is the undermining of the public, masculine, patriarchal realm of politics. I use 'patriarchal' here in its literal meaning, 'the rule of the father.' The model of the family as a metaphor for political life is not a new one. As Davies and Smith have pointed out:

> Family structures themselves are pregnant with significance at a wider social and cultural level. A long history of constructions of national identity predicated on familial structures, from the Pilgrim Fathers to the Daughters of American Revolution, means that representations of the American family are to a greater or lesser extent representations of American Society. In this context, representations of paternity take on a range of cultural and social significance. [23]

The family, and its function as a metaphor for politics are central to JFK. The brief references and images of Kennedy focus on this role as head of a family. The voice-over in the opening montage describes Jacqueline Kennedy purely in decorative terms as 'his beautiful and elegant wife.' There are numerous pictures of the president with his children, ending with the famous footage of his son 'John-John' saluting his father's coffin. Kennedy's role as a father is not constructed solely as a private role; he is also described as a father of the country. In his final speech to the jury, Garrison explains, 'we've all become Hamlets in our country - children of a slain father-leader.'

In JFK Stone argues that the Kennedy assassination replaced a patriarchial family model of politics with a closed, secretive government of secret cliques. Robert Burgoyne's reading of JFK argues that this contrast is apparent in the scene where 'Y', Garrison's anonymous government tipster, offers a version of the assassination as a coup d'etat: 'The organising principle of any society is for war. The authority of a state over its people resides in its war powers.' This line is contrasted with the background of the Lincoln memorial and the nearby playing children (some of the few African-Americans in the film).

Stone represents the assassination of Kennedy as having both narrow and broad political consequences. On a narrow level, the immediate political consequence was the

change in government and subsequent policy decisions. Stone's central thesis is that the assassination of Kennedy led directly to the escalation of US involvement in Vietnam. In an interview for Esquire, Robert Anson reported Stone's absolute belief in this thesis; ' "If Kennedy had been in office," Stone says flatly, "Vietnam would not have happened" ' [24] However, JFK also explores the political consequences of Kennedy's assassination on a wider level. JFK is concerned not only with how the assassination affected policy but also how is affected politics. The assassination of Kennedy and subsequent cover-up are represented as a challenge to the structure and order of politics itself. Stone has commented on the profound affect that he believes the assassination had. In the film itself, Garrison's summing up in his case against Clay Shaw is even more sweeping in its assessment of the consequences of the assassination: 'Just think what happened to our country … to the world … because of that murder … Vietnam, racial conflict, breakdown of law, thought control, guilt, assassinations, secret government, fear of the frontier.'

The confusion and disorder which was a result of the assassination is represented throughout JFK in gendered terms. As Garrison and Senator Long of Louisiana are on a plane to Washington they discuss the decline of America since the assassination - a decline represented by a confusion in gender roles. Long informs Garrison,

> We've bitten off more 'Vietnam' than we can possibly chew ... Sad thing is the way it's screwing up this country, all these hippies running around on drugs, the way young people look, you can't tell a boy from a girl anymore. I saw a girl the other day, she was pregnant - you could see her whole belly and you know what she painted on it? Love Child. It's fuckin' outa control. Values gone to hell Jim.

Garrison responds sympathetically, 'I sometimes feel things've gone downhill since John Kennedy was killed, Senator'.

Breakdown in gender roles in JFK is not limited to this brief assessment of the counter-culture. More centrally, JFK is concerned with the breakdown of the masculine sphere of government and politics. In his pursuit of his investigation Garrison is given numerous examples of the breakdown of the relationship between masculinity and the public political world. This is particularly striking when Garrison is attempting to build a case against Clay Shaw. Garrison clearly puts the obligations of the public sphere ahead of the claims of private relationships, telling lawyer Dean Andrews, 'I'm aware of our long friendship, but I want you to know I'm going to call you in front of a grand jury.' Andrews however, refuses to perform his public duty, responding, 'If I answer that question you keep asking me, if I give you the name of the 'big enchilada' y'know, then it's bon voyage Deano - I mean like permanent. I mean like a bullet in my head.' This refusal and fear is symptomatic of the crisis in public government which has occurred because of Kennedy's assassination. The public sphere of government has been corrupted and subverted by a private group; nameless, faceless, and unaccountable. The perpetrators of threats to and violence against witnesses are not named. They remain shady and hidden, identified only as being within organisations famed for their secretive, private nature: Cubans, the Intelligence services, the Mafia. These secret societies have mounted a threat to public government which has in turn threatened the masculine public role of American men.

The failure of American men to give public testimony against these organisations is highlighted when Garrison finds women prepared to take the stand. When Jean Hill is asked by Garrison if she will testify, in contrast to Andrews' avoidance and refusal, she

answers 'without hesitation', 'Damned right I would. Somebody's got to tell the truth around here because the government sure ain't doing it.' Andrews and other male potential witnesses have abdicated their role in the public realm, leaving women to fill the vacuum. Garrison's only other potential witness is also a woman, Julia Ann Mercer. Despite Mercer's willingness to testify, Garrison is unwilling to call her to the stand, seeking to protect her from the consequences of that action. In conference with his team Garrison is asked, 'We haven't tried to get Julia Anne Mercer in?' Garrison responds, 'No, she could get hurt. If you believe what's happening to these other people.' When pressed, 'She's the best damn witness we have!' Garrison insists, 'I just don't want to do it.' Garrison is similarly protective of his other female witnesses. Beverly, the witness to a prior relationship between Lee Harvey Oswald and his assassin Jack Ruby, explains her reluctance to testify, 'If they can kill the President, do you think they're going to think twice about a two-bit showgirl like me?' Jim responds sympathetically , 'I know the pressure you're under Beverly. Don't think I don't.' In seeking to protect his female witnesses, Garrison is seeking to protect the integrity of the masculine public sphere, which he defines in chivalrous terms as no place for a woman.

The lack of order represented by confused gender roles in the public sphere is mirrored by the disorder and disruption of Garrison's home life. The role of Garrisons wife is a crude stereotype of domestic femininity. In an interview with Lance Murrow and Martha Smilgis for Time, Stone was asked, 'Isn't Garrison's wife, the character played by Sissy Spacek, simplified in the film?' Stone defended himself, 'I didn't misinterpret his wife at all. That's the way she was. Garrison's invesigation threatened her family life. They had five kids and he was not home. We didn't practice politically correct feminism to try to make her into something she was not.' [25] Like the gay characters in the film, the stereotyped domestic femininity of Liz Garrison is deployed purely as a foil to the heterosexual masculinity of Jim Garrison. Stone explained, 'She gave importance to the domestic side of Jim's life and the toll that took on him, that made him a man, not just a symbol.'

The scenes depicting the home life of Jim Garrison are crucial in representing the difficult but essential public duty of masculinity. Throughout JFK Stone manipulates events to show the intrusion of the Kennedy case into the Garrison's home. Whilst Garrison watches the initial reports of the assassination in public space, at a local bar, his interest in the case and his re-involvement in it are shown within the private space of the home. Garrison initially dismisses his interest in the case, following a television report that the FBI had released David Ferrie (Garrison's suspect and connection to the case). Garrison concludes, 'The FBI must know something we don't. Let's get on with our lives.'

The concept of 'getting on with our lives' however, is central to Stone's analysis of the collapse of political masculinity after the Kennedy assassiniation. Garrison's growing interest in the case, and his belief in his obligation to pursue the truth, is constantly hindered by his wife's efforts to draw him back into the private sphere of their domestic life. Garrison's interest in the case represents an intrusion of the public world into the private space of the home. Garrison is seen, for example, watching Lee Harvey Oswald's press conference during a family dinner though in fact the press conference was held at midnight. [26] The television news, connecting the public, political world to the private domestic space, draws Garrison out of the home, but it provokes an opposite reaction from his wife. Liz Garrison refuses to be drawn into the case, prioritising and defending the claims of domesticity. Her criticisms of Jim's involvement in the case become more pronounced as Jim becomes more obsessed. When Garrison brings the

investigation into the home with his detailed reading of the Warren Report, Liz continually attempts to distract or deter him. Whilst Jim reads the report, Liz moves around him, concerned with serving dinner. She refuses to understand his interest in the case, arguing 'Honey, that was three years ago - we all tried so hard to put that out of our minds' and then tells him, 'You're the DA of New Orleans. Isn't the Kennedy assassination a bit outside your domain?' Finally, Liz attempts to lure Jim away from his perusal of the Warren Report by tempting him with sex: 'I'll give you one hour to solve the case ... until the kids are in bed.' [She kisses his ear from behind.] Then you're all mine and Mr Kennedy can wait 'till morning ... Mama warned me what would happen if I married such a serious man.' Garrison seems to respond to her approach but in fact is unable to tear himself away from the report, running down the hallway in order to get back to his study of the volumes. The clock later shows him reading at 3am.

From the beginning of Garrison's interest in the Kennedy case, Liz is depicted as a hostile and unsupportive partner. She defines the investigation as an intrusion into the private realm of her domestic space. Garrison's obsession with the case, however, allows him no respite. When Garrison wakes from nightmares of the assassination, an infuriated Liz attempts to put his growing obsession with the case into the context of their 'normal' domestic life: 'Honey, it's 4.30 in the morning, I have five kids awake in an hour …. These books have gotten to your mind … Are you going to stay up all night every night? For what? So you'll be the only man in America who's read all 25 volumes of the Warren Commission?' Garrison, however, explicitly rejects the argument that the Kennedy Assassination is something they should 'put behind them', telling his wife, 'Dammit Liz, I've been sleeping for three years.'

Garrison's investigation into the Kennedy assassination takes place entirely in his private time. Garrison repeatedly schedules meetings with people to discuss the case in 'private' hours. The initial meeting with his staff to investigate the time Lee Harvey Oswald spent in New Orleans takes place on a Sunday. His later meeting with two staff members at the scene of the Free Cuba Offices and Guy Bannister's headquarters takes place at 7.30 Sunday morning. After announcing to his co-workers that they will be pursuing the Kennedy case, he wryly informs them 'I'm going home where I can get a decent day's work done.' Finally the intrusion of the Kennedy case into the private time of the Garrison family causes a domestic row. Jim schedules a meeting with New Orleans businessman Clay Shaw, whom he suspects of involvement in the conspiracy to assassinate Kennedy. Liz is horrified to discover than this interview will take place on Easter Sunday, when she and Jim traditionally take the children to Antoine's, a local restaurant. She remonstrates with Jim, pressing on him the annual, ritual nature of their restaurant excursion: 'But Jim, we're going to Antoine's with the kids - like we do every year.' Jim apologises, but asserts she hadn't told him they were going out. 'Easter Sunday', Liz responds.

The most constant symbol of Garrison's affiliation to the public sphere is represented by television. Through television, Garrison is able to involve himself in the public sphere even when physically located in the domestic. Theorist Lynn Spigel has argued that television serves an important function, 'caught in a contradictory movement between private and public worlds, and it often became a rhetorical figure for that contradiction.' [27] Stone uses the television in JFK as the route by which public life is projected into the private realm. Shots of the television show it as dominating the Garrison house, often serving as the only source of light into an otherwise dark and enclosed space. On the night of Kennedy's assassination, Garrison is shown watching television at home. The family are all in the same room, with the television dominating the scene. Garrison's preoccupation with the public world via television is illustrated through a threat to the

safety of his children. While Garrison is absorbed in watching a television report, his daughter Virginia receives a phone call offering to put her in a beauty contest. Virginia is happily divulging information regarding her personal appearance and her route to school when Liz snatches the phone.

Garrison's response to this situation demonstrates his refusal to pay attention to the risk to his domestic life in pursuit of a public agenda. Garrison advises his wife to ignore the call, insisting there is not a risk. Liz is furious with his lack of concern, interpreting it as a lack of emotion. In the argument that follows, the conflict between Garrison's domestic family role and his public political involvement is made clear. Not only does Liz accuse Garrison of neglecting his role as the protector of the family, she argues that her husband's public role is in fact bringing danger and risk into their domestic life: 'How do you even know what goes on in this house anymore? You're too busy making speeches, stirring up every crazed Klansman in Louisiana after us!'

Stone's directions for this scene illustrate his crucial divisions between masculinity and femininity. They contrast Liz's feminine emotionalism with Garrison's stoic masculinity. Liz is described as 'hysterical' and 'screaming', her motivation expressed succinctly as 'Liz freaks out.' In contrast, directions for her husband inform him, 'Jim controls himself' as he orders his wife to, 'Get a hold of yourself.'

Liz's accusations to her husband are framed as questions about his masculinity, with his failure in the domestic realm representing his wider failure as a man. Liz places the blame for this failure squarely at the feet of Garrison's involvement in political issues: 'You and your government! What's the matter with you? Don't you have any feelings? Your daughter! What kind of a man are you?' (my italics). Liz appeals to her husband, contrasting the change in his priorities since his involvement in the Kennedy investigation; 'Jim, before this Kennedy thing, nothing mattered to you in this life more than your children.' Jim tries to force Liz to recognise the value of what he is doing but she is unable to appreciate the importance of public events in the face of a threat to her domestic life; 'Oh, I don't know anymore! I believe there was a conspiracy, but not the government. I just want to raise our children and live a normal life! I want my life back!' Garrison's response is an indictment of the suburban lifestyle which suborned public and political interests to the drive to suburban consumption; 'You can't just bury your head in the sand like some ostrich, goddamn it Elizabeth! It's not just about you and your well-being and your two cars and your kitchen and your T.V. and '"I'm jes' fine, honey." while our kids grow up in a shit-hole of lies!'

The dispute between Liz and Jim represents a wider conflict regarding the place of American men and the nature of their masculinity. In the years following the Second World War American men were increasingly encouraged to embrace 'togetherness' and their domestic function as their central role. In his work on homosexuality in Cold War America, Robert J. Corber argues that compulsory heterosexuality was enforced as a 'model of masculinity that stressed domesticity and co-operation gradually became hegemonic.' [28] The new direction of American Mass production demanded not only new male workers but also new male consumers who partook of suburban life, giving themselves an active role within the family. This increasing tendency to locate American masculinity within domestic space worried some commentators [29], who saw the traditional American Man - the frontiersman, aggressive, independent, denizon of the public world - being replaced by a passive, feminised occupant of suburbia.

Stone's JFK in its depiction of Jim Garrison shares this concern over the location of masculinity. Liz and Jim's arguments centre on the contested arena of masculine space.

Liz asserts that Jim has an important role within the family, which he is neglecting in his pursuit of Kennedy's assassins. Jim however sees his activities in the public realm as his primary function. Garrison's determination to pursue his investigation is opposed with his commitment to and involvement with domestic life. Liz reminds Garrison that in his determination to pursue the case, placing himself in the public realm, he is sacrificing a private role: 'You're missing most of your life, Jim, and you don't even know it. The kids are missing out too. It's not just you making the sacrifice here honey.'

Central to the disputes between Garrison and his wife are their different views of fatherhood. The wellbeing of the Garrison children is their ultimate and mutual aim. However they differ sharply on defining the children's best interest. For Liz the best interest of the children is in having a father who is an active and reliable presence in their home, but for Garrison his quest to bring Kennedy's assassins to justice is vital for the future of his children. Moreover, whilst Liz locates their children strictly within the domestic sphere, Garrison forges links between his family and the wider nation. Indeed, whilst Liz asserts that Jim's preoccupation with the Kennedy assassination has a detrimental effect on his role as a father, Jim believes that his attempts to bring the assassins to justice are essential, not for his personal satisfaction but for the future and security of his children.

Liz first invokes this opposition, accusing Jim of 'caring more about John Kennedy than your own family!' ' All day long the kids are asking "where's daddy?"' Liz tells her husband, 'What am I supposed to tell your kids, Jim?' Garrison's response links his involvement in the Kennedy case with the health of the political nation, asserting that the preservation of this nation is as crucial to his children as domestic 'quality time' with them: 'How 'bout the truth? I'm doing my job to make sure they can grow up in a country where justice won't be an arcane, vanished idea they read about in history books, like dinosaurs or the lost continent of Atlantis.' Liz retorts 'That sounds dandy, but it sure doesn't replace a father and a husband on Easter day.'

Film critics such as Tania Modleski and Fred Pfeil have argued that during and after the 1980s Hollywood films represented the importance of 'hands-on' fatherhood as a component of masculinity. Davies and Smith explain, 'The emphasis on paternity and the proliferation of representations of white males as fathers in films from the late 1980s on, often function as relatively new strategies for reproducing white patriarchal hegemony by annexing personal qualities hitherto typed as "feminine".' [30] In films such as Parenthood for example, men are able to learn to express their 'feminine side', or as Fred Pfeil puts it, their 'sensitive guy' natures, by an expression of fulfilment in the private sphere through active and emotional fatherhood.

This kind of 'new masculinity' however, is very specifically not the kind embodied by Garrison. His view of his function as a father is entirely public. When the children are upset by their parent's arguments Garrison's (appalling) attempt to comfort them contains a reference not to the security of the domestic setting, but to the dangerous elements of public life; 'Telling the truth can be a scary thing. It scared President Kennedy, but he was a brave man.'

The closing scenes of JFK with Garrison's final speech to the jury and the entrance of his wife and son into the courtroom, represent a reassertion of the patriarchal model of politics. [31] The moment when Garrison looks up in the courtroom to see his wife usher one of their children (significantly their son Jasper) into the cheering seats offers some form of resolution to the film. The late entry by the wife into the public realm signifies acceptance and approval of the masculine public voice. Liz finally recognises the truth

of her husband's work, and assumes the role of supportive female. The scene in the courtroom offers the resolution to the conflict between Liz and Jim. Not only does Liz recognise the righteousness of her husband's cause, but in bringing Jasper to see his father in the courtroom she is implicitly accepting Jim's argument regarding the well-being of their children.

In depicting Garrison's domestic life, Stone argued he was seeking to make him a 'man, not just a symbol.' In doing so, he shifts the topic of the film from a narrow exploration of the mechanics of Kennedy's assassination, to a broader portrayal of the results of that assassination. More specifically, Stone's concern with what makes Garrison 'a man' reveal his concern with exploring issues of masculinity. The subject of JFK, therefore, goes beyond a narrow 'historical' account of the assassination, or speculative explorations of the assassins. JFK addresses the construction of the political realm, the public sphere of government, and the role of gender in that construction.

Other Articles on Kennedy and Film

- **[De]constructing John F Kennedy ?; Herschensohn's "Years of Lightning; Day of Drums"** by Emma Lambert (University of Birmingham) - Issue 4

Endnotes

1. George Lardner visited the set of the film in Dallas and subsequently published an attack on the film in the Washington Post entitled, 'On the Set: Dallas in Wonderland. How Oliver Stone's Version of the Kennedy Assassination Expolits the Edge of Paranoia.' (Washington Post May 19th, 1991.). [back]
2. JFK. the Book of the Film: the documented screenplay Oliver Stone and Zachary Sklar, (New York, Applause Books, 1992) [back]
3. Robert Burgoyne, 'modernism and the narrative of nation in jfk' in Vivian Sobchack, The Persistence of History. Cinema, television and the modern event. (Routledge, New York and Lonodn, 1996) p.111 [back]
4. Film historian Robert Rosenstone explains, 'The story is not that of President Kennedy but of Jim Garrison, the heroic, embattled, incorruptable investigator who wishes to make sense of JFK's assassination and its apparent cover-up, not just for himself but for his country and it s traditions.' Robert A. Rosenstone, Visions of the Past. The Challenge of Film to our idea of History. (Harvard University Press, Cambridge Ma, 1995) p.123-4. [back]
5. Steve Neale, 'Masculinity as Spectacle. Reflections on men and mainstream cinema.' In Steven Cohan and Ina Rae Hark, Screening the Male. Exploring Masculinities in Hollywood Cinema. (Routledge, London and New York, 1993) p.9. [back]
6. Richard Dyer, The Matter of Images. Essays on Representation (Routledge, London and New York, 1993) p.4. [back]
7. Steven Cohen and Ina Rae Hark, Screening the Male. Exploring Masculinities in Hollywood Cinema (Routledge, London and New York, 1993) p.3 [back]
8. Stone argued that his explicit depiction of a homosexual orgy at Clay Shaw's New Orleans mansion, were solidly based in fact, pointing to a 1954 FBI document, which described Shaw as given to sadism and masochism, explaining that one year Shaw painted himself gold for Mardi Gras. Stone's use of 'government documents' as a touchstone of absolute truth, is, given the message of JFK, somewhat disingenuous. Jeff Yarbrough, 'Heart of Stone.' The Advocate, April 7th 1992. [back]
9. These flaws include Garrison's departure for the Army with a recommendation of psychotherapy, and his alleged relationships with organised crime. [back]
10. James Riordan, Stone: A Biography of Oliver Stone (Aurum Press Ltd.London, 1995) p.355. [back]
11. Riordan, p.357. [back]
12. Riordan, p. 359 [back]
13. JFK: The Book of the Film. p.294. [back]

14. Cited in Robert Sam Anson, 'The Shooting of JFK', Esquire, November 1991. [back]
15. Riordan, p.361. [back]
16. Ibid, p.363. [back]
17. Riordan, p.370 If the persona of James Woods as an actor would have brought a certain meaning to the role, so too would one of the other leading candidates, Harrison Ford. Scripts for JFK went out simultaneously to Ford and Costner. Ford however, publicly stated that he believed there was no conspiracy involved in the assassination,and, Riordan reports, turned the script down. Given Ford's starring roles in the two film adaptations of Tom Clancy's pro-CIA novels, JFK may have represented too radical a political departure. (Riodan p.363) [back]
18. Riordan, p.406. [back]
19. Riordan, p.362. [back]
20. Riodan, p.368. [back]
21. Ibid. The illusion to Stewart was not missed by reviewers and critics of JFK. Robert Steel's review of the film was entitled, 'Mr Smith goes to the Twilight Zone.' Film historian Robert Brent Toplin, argued, 'Stone made the New Orleans investigator…look like Jimmy Stewart in Mr Smith Goes to Washington - a decent common man who tries to do right but is frustrated by powerful political scoundrels. JFK's Garrison looks like he belongs in a Frank Capra movie.' Toplin then complains that this vision of Garrison is glaringly inaccurate; 'JFK's tendency to portray Garrison as a man as honest and genuine as Jefferson Smith in Mr Smith goes to Washington contrasts glaringly with the district attorney's record in public office.' Robert Brent Toplin, History by Hollywood. The Use and Abuse of the American Past (University of Illinois Press, Urbana, 1996) p.54-56 [back]
22. Robert A. Rosenstone, Visions of the Past. The Challenge of Film to our idea of History. (Harvard University Press, Cambridge Mass, 1995) p.127. [back]
23. Davies and Smith, p.23. Davies and Smith explore how issues of paternity are central to Stone's 1987 film, Wall Street [back]
24. Robert Sam Anson, 'The Shooting of JFK.' Esquire November 1991 [back]
25. Lance Morrow and Martha Smilgis, 'Plunging into the Labyrinth', Time December 23rd 1991. Stone went on to add (perhaps for the sake of 'politically correct feminism') 'What we did - you could fault me for it - was put a woman D.A. into his staff. He did not have a woman D.A.' [back]
26. Notes prepared by Mark Zaid for 1993 Kennedy Assassination Course, Hudson Valley Community College, NY. http://mcadams.posc.mu.edu/robins.ht [back]
27. Lynn Spigel, 'The Suburban Home Companion: Television and the Neighborhood Ideal in Postwar America.' (pp185-218) in Beatriz Colomina, Sexuality and Space (Princeton Architectural Press, 1992, New York, New York) p188. [back]
28. Robert J. Corber, Homosexuality in Cold War America. Resistance and the Crisis of Masculinity (Duke University Press, Durham and London, 1997) p.5. [back]
29. See for example, C. Wright Mills, White Collar (1951) [back]
30. Jude Davies and Carol Smith, Gender, Ethnicity and Sexuality in Contemporary American Film (Keele University Press, Keele, 1997) p.18. [back]
31. The public representation of a reconciliation between Garrison and his wife obscures the fact the Garrisons marriage in fact ended in divorce in 1978. [back]