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Decades after, '60s sway remains

By Rene DeCair
 Emerald Associate Editor

Director Oliver Stone's soon-to-be released movie about President Kennedy's assassination is advertised as "JFK — the story that won't go away."

And like *The Doors*, Stone's previous film about a 1960s event, it's counting on public interest in that famous decade to bring in box-office dollars.

And many people — including '60s activists and '90s activists — believe public fascination with the era that "won't go away," goes beyond the music and the assassination drama.

"The '60s was a time of cultural experimentation after a time of cultural oppression," said Jack Whalen, University associate professor of sociology.

Whalen, himself an anti-war activist in the '60s and involved in neighborhood organizing in Philadelphia, said the decade changed things culturally, such as the way people dressed and thought about how they lived. "And once that has happened you can't put the genie back in the bottle."

But the genie hasn't only enthralled those who lived through that time.

Howard Brotine, co-director of the University's Survival Center, which works on many environmental issues, said there is an interest in the '60s among the present college generation because a lot happened then.

"I think there's always going to be nostalgia," Brotine said.

"It's one thing to be wearing tie-dyes, listening to Jimi Hendrix and doing acid," he said. "But when you get into activism it's a whole different thing."

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remembered for some of its downfalls, such as the Bay of Pigs invasion, "but he wasn't around long enough to alienate groups of society the way most presidents do," Southwell said.

Questions about Kennedy's death remain unanswered for Jack Whalen, associate professor and head of the sociology department at the University. The news of Kennedy's murder was a rude awakening for him.

"Being young, I guess, I was so stunned by the idea that someone could shoot the president," said Whalen, who was 14 at the time. "Now I'm surprised if someone doesn't take a shot at a president during his term."

Oswald

Lee Harvey Oswald, the 24-year-old ex-Marine who was charged with Kennedy's killing, told police he was innocent of the crime. He never went to trial because nightclub owner Jack Ruby shot and killed Oswald Nov. 24.

In the Warren Commission report, Oswald is quoted as telling police, "My wife and I like the President's family. I am not a malcontent. Nothing irritated me about the President."

The Warren Commission determined that he had committed the crime, basing its conclusions on several factors. Eyewitness testimony was given by people who had seen him Nov. 22 in the Texas Book Depository in Dallas where he was employed and from where he was alleged to have fired his rifle.

The Commission determined that he may have been motivated by a number of factors. He attempted to defect to the Soviet Union in 1959 and was apparently a devout Marxist. He was also a member of the "Fair Play for Cuba Committee," at a time when tensions between the U.S. and Cuba were at an all-time high, with the Cuban missile crisis and the Bay of Pigs invasion that occurred in the 1962 and 1963.

Was Connally the target?

A twist on the theory of Oswald's motives



Archive photo
 An anti-war protest on campus during the late '60s is just one aspect of that era that fascinates people even decades later.

"There is a lot of stuff I wouldn't want to repeat," Brotine said. "A lot of people tried to tune in, turn on and dropped out. In my opinion, people should have tuned in, turned on and kicked some ass."

Lisa Lawrence, director of the Black Student Union, echoed Brotine's sentiments. Black student activists also use the '60s actions as a guide and as a motivational force, she said.

"I believe our generation is going back to the '60s," Lawrence said. "(We're) becoming more aware of our culture and our history ... and becoming proud to be black."

"But we have to take into consideration that the times have changed," she said.

In the '60s, Lawrence said, black students were fighting to gain rights they never had in this country. "In the '90s we're fighting for something that's being taken away from us," she said.

Lauren Kessler, associate professor of journalism and author of the book, *After All These*

Years: '60s Ideals in a Different World, said that although the '60s was a long time ago "it's not like dead history."

Kessler, a '60s activist and current activist in the women's movement, said the political concerns of the earlier era, such as the environment and racism, remain today.

"They were not solved then," Kessler said. "So there is a continuous thread of concern."

Whalen, who taught a class on activism, said when many of his students looked at films of the '60s, they liked what they saw and felt something was missing in their lives.

"A lot of them seemed to wish they could have lived then," Whalen said. But he tried to tell them not all was rosy then.

"Don't over-romanticize the events of that generation," Whalen said he would tell students. "I would urge people to find new ways to make this society live up to its democratic promise."

emerged in 1989 with the publication of James Reston's book *The Great Expectations of John Connally*. Connally was the governor of Texas in 1963 and was in the front seat of the Kennedy's limousine in Dallas on Nov. 22.

Reston writes that Oswald was Kennedy's assassin, but that he was aiming for Connally and not the President.

Oswald had received an "undesirable" discharge from the Marine Corps in January 1962. The action, Reston writes, was prompted by Oswald's request for Soviet citizenship and his threat to turn military secrets over to the Soviets.

During that same month, Oswald wrote to Connally, who had resigned six weeks earlier as the Secretary of Navy. Oswald requested that Connally, a fellow native of Fort Worth, "repair the damage done to me and my family."

Connally responded by writing that the matter had been turned over to the new Secretary of the Navy. Oswald felt spurned, Reston writes, and resented Connally's indifference.

Oswald's wife, Marina, testified before the Warren Commission three times. During her final round of questioning, she made the following statements:

"I feel in my own mind that Lee did not have President Kennedy as a prime target when he assassinated him."

She was then asked who the target was. "I think it was Connally," she replied. "That's my personal opinion, that he was shooting at Governor Connally. I don't think he had any idea concerning President Kennedy."

Reston also writes that a Dallas lawyer named Carroll Jarnagin testified that he overheard a conversation between Ruby and Oswald in Ruby's nightclub Oct. 4. Jarnagin reconstructed the conversation on paper and mailed an account of it to J. Edgar Hoover at the FBI.

Jarnagin recalls that the two spoke of Oswald receiving a payment "after the job is done," discussing where it should take place and the possible consequences.

"Are you sure you can do the job without hitting anybody but the Governor?" Ruby reportedly asked.

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