

Introduction

'Oliver Stone is still a mystery – to me too.'¹

'I don't want to make a silly movie. I don't want to make it for the wrong reasons. I have a storytelling sense and a sense of drama, and I want to continue.'²

Oliver Stone: the remaking of a maverick filmmaker

To examine the welter of publications about writer-director Oliver Stone over the last thirty years is to enter a netherworld where the divisions between fact and fiction, and truth and objectivity often blur, if not break down. Assessments of Stone populate the entire spectrum of writing – academic, popular, critical and journalistic – and run from near-deification to outright denunciation. The details reveal a filmmaker who has been exposed possibly more than any other artist in Hollywood's history to a spellbinding mixture of praise, speculation, conjecture, criticism and downright denigration. The titles alone tell their own story: *Oliver Stone's America: Dreaming the Myth Outward*; *Oliver Stone's U.S.A.: Film, History and Controversy*; and *Stone: The Controversies, Excesses and Exploits of a Radical Filmmaker*.³ Stone is not just a director, not just an artist, not even just an auteur. Rather, he has come to represent an adjective that says something about the era of Hollywood filmmaking that he has worked in, and even more about late twentieth and early twenty-first-century American history that he has repeatedly visualised and constructed on screen. All of it has been accompanied by a running commentary virtually unheard of with

regard to other filmmakers. '[H]e has attracted greater controversy and more passionate criticism than any of his contemporaries. The plaudits and condemnations come in almost equal measure,' confirm Andrew Pepper and Trevor McCrisken in their work on Hollywood's historical movies.⁴

Therefore, very few analyses of the man or his films begin without the words 'controversy', 'inaccuracy' or even 'outrage' and 'exploitation'. Albert Auster, talking of arguably Stone's two most provocative pictures, *JFK* (1991) and *Nixon* (1995), encapsulates the prevalent feeling:

The initial reception of both films by the American media was hardly what one might call restrained or polite. Even before film critics had their say, journalists, political commentators and assorted literati weighed in with critiques of the films.⁵

Auster rightly locates that recurrent historical period of the 1960s and early 1970s as a central philosophical component of the two pictures and of Stone's reevaluation of the country, right in the heart of the Cold War era. As he notes: 'Taken together, they presented Stone's mythic interpretation of American history and politics since the 1960s.'⁶ It is this analysis of the personal – not to say provocative – commentary allied to historical re-enactment in Stone's pictures which has been fused together for so long in assessments of the director, that one could be forgiven for thinking it was the default position of all critics on Stone, right from the off.

In fact, Oliver Stone's career was never as outrageously contentious as this when it started, neither was it even at the putative height of his artistic and commercial powers in the decade that spanned the late 1980s and early 1990s. From unlikely writing credits for *The Hand* (1981), which he also directed, *Conan the Barbarian* (John Milius, 1982) and *8 Million Ways to Die* (Hal Ashby, 1986), to the more lauded and/or cultish work for *Midnight Express* (Alan Parker, 1978, for which he won the Academy Award for Best Adapted Screenplay), *Scarface* (Brian De Palma, 1983) and *Year of the Dragon* (Michael Cimino, 1985), Stone's early career CV gathered together solid and praiseworthy credentials that lined him up as a filmmaker with something important (and occasionally outlandish) to say. The somewhat over-the-top nature of several of the features above certainly could have their extravagance and

virtuosity laid at the door of their respective directors, Milius, De Palma and Cimino: each of them an auteur, each coming out of the New Hollywood circle that emerged during the 1970s, and each with an outlook, sensibility and fascination for certain topics that Stone easily shared, and to which he subsequently devoted himself. All three were important influences on Stone's acculturation as a director. Indeed, the connection and mutual regard help explain some of the determinants that made their screenwriting protégé's career, if anything, even more flamboyant, extreme and ultimately successful, than their own.

Most obviously, Cimino's Oscar-winning *The Deer Hunter* (1978) set the benchmark for a grittier and more politically refined assessment of the Vietnam War that Stone built upon in a personal fashion, first with *Platoon* (1986), and then *Born on the Fourth of July* (1989). This latter production, which would later become the second part of Stone's trilogy about the conflict, echoed Cimino's own sense of despondency and fatigue with the war during the early 1970s, with his story hitting the screens more than a decade before Tom Cruise's Academy-nominated performance as real-life veteran, Ron Kovic.

De Palma's directorial influence should not be dismissed so easily either. For in the likes of *Dressed to Kill* (1980) and *Blow Out* (1981), there is the ghost of a homage to previous Hollywood genres and a hint of the violence and sociopathic behaviour that Stone would focus on in films such as *Natural Born Killers* (1994) and *U Turn* (1997). With Milius, there was a unifying of these themes and subjects. As a script contributor to some of the *Dirty Harry* series (1971–88), to the gangster movie *Dillinger* (1973), and as a writer on *Apocalypse Now* (1979) for Francis Ford Coppola, Milius produced a similarly conceived set of features, ideas and characters that he too wanted to bring to the screen in a particular way, just as Stone set out to do once his own career was well under way in the 1980s. Yet even in the midst of these shared dispositions, Stone's apprenticeship as a filmmaker had complex layers and a growing independent streak. Milius liked the *Conan* script but opted not to shoot it in the form that Stone had intended, and there was no collaboration between director and writer during production. In the case of *Scarface*, Stone had written the script before De Palma joined the project, although in this instance the director certainly did share

his writer's vision of making the movie almost operatically violent. Nonetheless, even with these addenda, the formative influences of Milius, De Palma and Cimino are unmistakable.

That Stone's reputation and influence superseded these directors in time is not merely a story about commercial viability or, indeed, better filmmaking – although with only a few exceptions from the other three, both assertions were true – so much as it was Stone's constant and uncanny ability for a decade or more to capture the zeitgeist of the American condition and make it cinematically vivacious, exciting and vital. Stone's name became a byword for controversy because of an accumulation of issues, debates and situations that thrust his politics, personality and pictures into the spotlight. Not the least of these confluences was the era itself. Often, when people speak of Oliver Stone's cinema, they do not associate it with the 1980s – and if they do, it is only perhaps to reflect on the fact that some of his best movies were made during that decade. Stone's oeuvre is seldom seen as a commentary on, or a reflection of, the age itself; but Stone should be linked more irrevocably with the era of the 1980s than with the 1960s or 1970s. Why? Because of the condition of the country, the fallout from the previous ten years of trauma, and most importantly, the overarching presence of Ronald Reagan during the decade.

Stone's disregard for Reagan is legendary, and it informed the most scorching indictments in his filmmaking during the decade. From the condemnation of Central American foreign policy in *Salvador* (1986), to the inexorable rise of 'shock jock' celebrity culture in *Talk Radio* (1988), by way of the financial 'masters of the universe' satire at the heart of *Wall Street* (1987), Stone took potshots at every angle of Reagan's political philosophy. That the man left the White House in 1989 as one of its most popular ever incumbents, and that films such as *Born on the Fourth of July* seemed to capture for some audiences the essence of Reagan's idealism (in as misguided a way as the appropriation of Bruce Springsteen's *Born in the USA* had been during the Republican president's 1984 re-election campaign), only confirms a need to reappraise the director, the films, the politics and the era more generally, especially in light of Stone's subsequent career.

Stone's success aside, Hollywood was going through a broad commercial renaissance and expansion in the second half of the

1980s. Acquisitions of cinema chains, company mergers and an expanding breed of franchises tied into further products and merchandising all spoke of a newly-emerging global entertainment complex. While the artistic credibility of the New Hollywood cohort of filmmakers from a decade previously might have dissipated to some extent, the rehabilitation of Hollywood financially, and the soaring revenues of its most popular movies – starting with *ET* (Steven Spielberg, 1982) and continuing on through *Ghostbusters* (Ivan Reitman, 1984), *Back to the Future* (Robert Zemeckis, 1985), *Top Gun* (Tony Scott, 1986), *Fatal Attraction* (Adrian Lyne, 1987), *Rain Man* (Barry Levinson, 1988) and *Batman* (Tim Burton, 1989) – made the mix of commercial sensibility and political credibility a heady and successful concoction for directors such as Alan Parker (*Mississippi Burning*, 1988), Stanley Kubrick (*Full Metal Jacket*, 1987) and of course, Stone. *Born on the Fourth of July* ended up the forty-first highest grossing film of the 1980s, with *Platoon* only just behind in forty-third place. Together they earned more than \$300 million worldwide, in addition to critical adulation.

What linked these filmmakers together was that each was acutely aware that their films could remind cinemagoers of the consequences of the political era that they were living through, as well as synonymise that legacy with the New Right agenda of the 1960s, Civil Rights and Vietnam. Social and political dislocation remained pertinent for these directors, even though their films often became caught up in the maelstrom of high-octane, entertaining, feel-good pictures that attracted young people in particular back into cinemas during the decade, and which headed much of the box-office lists generated during that time. Stone was a vital component in that appraisal. As Frank Beaver describes it, Stone's films throughout the Reagan years carried a 'subtext of urgency ... suggesting a compulsive creator with a mission.'⁷

However, by the time the 1990s were underway, Stone's brand of politically and commercially engaging cinema seemed less attuned to the emerging popular mood. Allowing the pictures alone to do the talking for him became less viable. 'Stone [went] to great lengths to try and justify the historical perspectives he has placed on film and to answer the condemnations he has received,' suggest Pepper and McCrisken.⁸ Those efforts principally revolved around the mammoth accompanying books which acted as companions

to *JFK* and *Nixon*. Clocking in at more than 500 pages each, the books were less often remembered for having pro- and anti- voices, historicism and observations concerning the presentation of Kennedy's assassination and Nixon's fall from grace and then from office, than they were for being extended bids at convincing his audience that Stone was right about the historical theses that he presented in these pictures. Did the change in decades, and hence alteration in the political atmosphere, have something to do with the way that the films were conceived and the reception around them handled? Certainly, the Clintonian, post-Cold War 1990s seem a more halcyon interlude now, looking back: a coda to the 1950s where the imminent threat of total war was replaced by the strategic anxieties of individual campaigns.

As the Cold War ended, and even allowing for interventions such as Bosnia and Somalia, the 1990s could be seen retrospectively as a staging post: the calm before the storm of 9/11 and the Bush Doctrine that followed.⁹ In that temporary lull, Stone's attention did not waver, but arguably that of the American audience did; caressed first with the hubris that washed in after the first Gulf War and the embrace of Francis Fukuyama's 'end of history' thesis;¹⁰ and later with the celebrity scandals of O. J. Simpson and Michael Jackson, together with easy political distractions such as the Monica Lewinsky story.¹¹ Stone's history in *Born on the Fourth of July*, *JFK* and *Nixon* was wholehearted and demanding, but the end of the Cold War had untethered the USA and left the past not as prologue – as Stone's adopted Shakespearean quote from the end of *JFK* advised – but as just that: history. Was it any wonder that he lost traction in the mood of the times? Moreover, a related and potentially even bigger issue for him was the voguish style of cinema being employed.

The force of the truth/fiction, artist/historian binaries that swirled around the director in those years, for example, lost its force as audiences adjusted to the new world order and sought different and less contested cinematic narratives away from Stone's acerbic treatise. Pepper and McCrisken do a fine job of outlining many of the scholars and critics who supported Stone's agenda in the early 1990s. They argue that his politics could be seen as visceral and aesthetic, as much as it was ideological and historically authentic. Quoting Jack Davis, they identify Stone's talent for

making people 'experience history not on an intellectual level but on an emotional one'.¹² They go on to identify the danger in this approach too, which more often than not results in audiences 'feeling' history rather than 'thinking' about it – but was Stone at fault here? His media commentaries and book response with *JFK* and *Nixon* were designed to support his case, but they also seemed to suggest that he anticipated that danger, as well as a need to encourage a thinking and critical edge to the reception of his films.

The broader change that Pepper and McCrisken pointed to was real enough. As the 1990s proceeded and the new millennium dawned, reliving, feeling and experiencing the past became increasingly important to society at large, arguably more so than actually *studying* it. Indeed, who could argue that historians themselves, certainly on television and film, were not adopting a similar trick and making the study of history popular, if not populist, once more? The issue for Stone and his style of filmmaking was that much of this popular exploration of the past was being played out in Hollywood with the emphasis on not simply *feeling* the past, but *feeling good* about it: a trend solidly exemplified in popular pictures such as *The Last of the Mohicans* (Michael Mann, 1992), *Braveheart* (Mel Gibson, 1995) and *Apollo 13* (Ron Howard, 1995), as well as *The Patriot* (Roland Emmerich, 2000).

The waves of controversy rolling in for *JFK* and *Nixon* during the 1990s did not interrupt the idea that Stone should, could and did have provocative things to say about the past, and about academic as well as mainstream accounts of it. If nothing else, he strongly countered the idea that cinema was merely an entertainment medium, whatever its pretensions; ironically enough, an idea that probably sat far less easily with Hollywood executives in the 1990s than it had done a decade before. Nevertheless, there was a mismatch here. Stone's instincts were taking him in one direction towards historical enquiry and reassessment, while the country was moving somewhere else. Audiences who thought that indeed they had reached the end of history, were finding less use for contested versions of the past.

In the 2000s then, Stone's filmmaking altered along with his outlook in the wake of 9/11. That link between cultural influence through box-office vitality, political commentary by way of studio allegiance to the director's vision (Stone's relationship with

Bob Daly and Warner Bros. in the early 1990s was crucial in this regard), and just some unknown capacity to spot the trends and desires of wider society which then can be communicated through a story or historical period, were no longer as much of a vital confluence as they once were in Stone's filmmaking. *Alexander* (2004) and *World Trade Center* (2006) seemed perfectly in line with tastes and predilections for the return of the 'sword-and-sandals' historical epic and, after 2005, a harder-edged, more resonant assessment of the nation five years on from 9/11. These were productions that followed in the wake of successes such as Ridley Scott's *Gladiator* (2000) and Paul Greengrass's *United 93* (2006).¹³ However, not only did these films precede Stone's, they also garnered more critical and commercial attention and somehow seemed more fiery and resolute than his efforts. *Gladiator's* conventional 'honourable man seeks justice for himself and Rome' narrative was uncomplicated by any deeper historicism than a reconditioned and CGI-ed Coliseum, and played well with audiences both at home and overseas. On a reported budget of \$103 million, it took \$187 million at the domestic box office and a further \$258 million outside the USA. Nominated in twelve categories, the film won five Oscars.

By comparison, Stone's *Alexander* offered a more complex biopic of the enigmatic progress of Alexander the Great, incorporating all of the inevitable unanswered questions that history throws up along the way. The consumption by mainstream US audiences of the original 2004 release (it was subsequently re-edited no less than three times) was complicated further by Stone's decision to confront the issue of homosexuality with his central character. Be it in spite of (or because of) such a portrayal, the film did not fare well at the US box office, taking a mere \$34 million on a reported budget of \$155 million. (The film's nomination for six Golden Raspberry ('Razzie') awards¹⁴ did not help its profile either.) Overall, *Alexander* was rescued commercially by its performance outside the USA, where the reception was kinder and the picture made a further \$133 million.

In the comparison of *World Trade Center* with *United 93* – the story of the final moments of the commercial airliner hijacked by terrorists that was headed for Washington, DC, but which eventually crashed in a field in Pennsylvania on 11 September 2001 – the contention was one of aesthetics more than historicism. One could

have imagined Stone making a very similar film to Greengrass's with such a script and raw material. Instead, there was a perceived conventionality to his take on the attacks which, in *World Trade Center*, took the form of following in the footsteps of real-life Port Authority policemen John McLoughlin and Will Jimeno (Nicolas Cage and Michael Peña) as they battled into, got trapped in and then buried amid the collapsing towers on 9/11.¹⁵ The film follows their rescue and eventual rehabilitation, casting its gaze across the eyes of heroic first responders battling the fires and destruction of Lower Manhattan on that day.

Not for the first time, Stone's treatment of the subject-matter wrong-footed critics and supporters alike. The narrative sub-text in *Alexander* anchored the film around a bisexual leader immersed in a Middle East military conquest when the USA was engaged militarily in Iraq. Such analogous conflict certainly suggested to many a polemical intent. By contrast, *World Trade Center* was absent of polemics at a time when the Left was beginning to question the foreign policy direction taken by the Bush administration in the half-decade since 9/11. Therefore, taken together, the two films invited the ire of social conservatives on the one hand, and the disdain of liberal supporters on the other.

The latter seemed especially bitter. *The Onion* satirical publication took to 'revealing' *World Trade Center's* major conceit: that there was a 'single-plane' theory central to the tale of 9/11, and that Stone's film was about to unleash its story on an unsuspecting world which had not thought about the prospect of one plane crashing into everything!¹⁶ Can artists survive everything except ridicule? Was the story no more than an irreverent homage to Stone's previous power and force? After all, the director himself was no stranger to self-parody. He was perfectly happy in the 1990s to help fellow director Ivan Reitman concoct his fantasy 'presidential takeover by common man' story in *Dave* (1993), by playing himself appearing on *Larry King Live* and suggesting – rightly, of course, in the plot – that President Mitchell (Kevin Kline playing both parts) in the White House was no longer the same incumbent as he had been before his alleged collapse and hospitalisation. Time naturally mellows people and adds perspective and, notwithstanding the Reitman cameo, Stone could afford to be more generous in his position than once was the case. Nevertheless, the irreverence,

together with the emergence of a new generation of political filmmakers in the early 2000s, did seem to be marginalising a director who was once the fulcrum of polemical cinematic angst in Hollywood. Stone followed *World Trade Center* with his third presidential biopic, *W.* about George W. Bush in 2008, followed by a reprise of Gordon Gekko in *Wall Street: Money Never Sleeps* (2010), and a tour around the perils of drug dealing in *Savages* (2012). All three films had things to say about their subject matter, but all did so with noticeably more muted polemics than supporters and critics alike had expected.

Indeed, Stone's career since the turn of the millennium suggests a director less easily defined than his convenient monikers ('controversial', 'angry', 'polemical', 'political filmmaker') would have one believe. If it also suggests that Stone's position as a critical and commercial purveyor of political cinema is no longer as dominant as it once was, one might ask: what is left to say about Hollywood's most vociferous filmmaker of his generation? This book does focus attention on the period from the late 1990s to the middle of the second decade of the new century. However, it does so not counter-intuitively or to the exclusion of Stone's 'classic' era, but more as a coda to it: a rejoinder that adds weight and emphasis to the past, and to the overall assessment of the man and his films. It also realigns this later period (the second half of Stone's career, if you will) with the context of his early films, challenging some of the typical perceptions of commentators that have seen his work as flabbier and less insistent than the earlier years – simply not as provocative as the director was in his pomp.

Certainly, the aesthetic bravado that so infused *JFK*, *Nixon*, *The Doors* (1991) and *Natural Born Killers*, as well as the polemical responses that characterised *Salvador*, *Platoon* and *Born on the Fourth of July*, do seem sparser in the work after 1997. The topics seem more diverse too. From ancient historical epics to sports films, to recollections of 9/11, Stone appeared to scour the landscape of American (and world) history and culture in search of subject matter: this when polemics, rhetorical posturing and angry condemnations of US cultural, economic and political imperialism came as naturally to others as they had to him in previous times. However, as filmmakers are apt to do, Stone actually changed direction in the late 1990s – a central theme to be explored here – and

self-consciously moved away from some of the bigger questions and larger dilemmas which had occupied his filmmaking for two decades.

In seeking evidence of change within his film catalogue, the variances were as much to do with treatment as theme. Stone's desire to deal in issues and events of national and international importance was self-evident from the start. With the release of *Salvador* in 1986 and consolidated by *JFK* five years later, Stone had reached a point already where he found himself in the role of spokesperson for a nebulous array of liberal and left-leaning political interests in the USA. 'This critique of the establishment is part of who I am,' he admitted in interview, and reviewers found the cloak fitted him well.¹⁷ Critics at the time described the former film as 'thrilling', 'violent and gutsy' and 'a brand of left-wing machismo that's nearly extinct.'¹⁸ Stone said he liked the 'anarchy' in *Salvador*, and the camera's breathless intensity and kinetic energy certainly set a tone for all that was to come, both cinematically and ideologically.

In other words it was, as Frank Beaver identifies, a 'primer' for *Platoon* and the films to follow, up to, including and beyond *JFK*.¹⁹ That interest in national events was maintained in *World Trade Center*, *W.* and *Wall Street: Money Never Sleeps* during the 2000s; however, the drama not only muted the explicit polemics, but also muted their inference. While *Platoon* focused on the minutiae of combat, audiences and critics alike proclaimed what they saw as wider messages about the futility of that war and, indeed, all conflict. In *World Trade Center*, meanwhile, Stone deliberately swayed away from the geopolitical aspects of the story and focused his efforts on individual courage and endurance. In *W.*, his treatment of former President George W. Bush was more nuanced and less scabrous than many of his supporters might have wished for: by Stone's reading, Bush was less malevolent than he was simply a man out of his depth. 'He's Peter Sellers in *Being There*. He just doesn't belong,' he explained.²⁰

Wall Street: Money Never Sleeps was less incendiary than its predecessor, and ended on a less critical note than some observers had expected, with the resurrected Gordon Gekko (Michael Douglas) from the first film seeking redemption in his new role as paternal servant and grandfather. It was a breath of optimism that seemed to negatively colour assessments of the film.²¹ The treatment of

drug cartels and cross-border violence was similarly restrained in *Savages*. Don Winslow's original book revolves around a kidnap and rescue set against the incursion of a Mexican drug cartel into southern California. Towards the end of the book, Winslow allows himself a brief moment of wider reflection in considering life in the 'Golden State': '[W]e made gods of wealth and health. A religion of narcissism. In the end, we worshiped only ourselves. In the end, it wasn't enough.'²² Stone regarded this as an unnecessarily pessimistic commentary, and chose to excise the references in the final screenplay. It was a decision and strategy that infused his other films of the time: an injection of guarded optimism running alongside a visibly changed use of stylistic palette. In *U Turn*, *Alexander* and *W.*, melodramatic visual motifs in combination with narrative pathos allowed Stone to move away from the realist and hyperrealist styles of his early years, instead offering a form of expression with pretensions to more classical dramatic preoccupations, and pushing questions of personal morality more to the fore.

Nonetheless, Stone's interest in politics had lost none of its fervour. Alongside shifts in approach to drama, he grappled with more steadfast political and historical topics in documentary filmmaking. *Comandante* (2003), *Persona Non Grata* (2003), *Looking for Fidel* (2004), *South of the Border* (2010), *Castro in Winter* (2012), *Mi Amigo Hugo* (2014) and the ten-part television series, *The Untold History of the United States* (2012), all confirmed a continuing appetite for challenging the establishment's political narratives, and disrupting what Stone saw as the mainstream media's collusion in the promulgation of those narratives.

Stone's style might lead one to think that his fast-paced editing, and ability to command hours of filmed and historic footage while making it plausible and visually engrossing, would align him with filmmakers who have adopted much of his technique for their own careers. From Michael Moore and Eugene Jarecki, to Errol Morris and Alex Gibney, contemporary documentary-makers owe much to Stone's cinematic construction of images and ideology. Indeed, the ambitions of these fellow documentarians – expressed notably in *Fahrenheit 9/11* (Michael Moore, 2004) and *Fog of War* (Errol Morris, 2003; both released after *Comandante*) – ran parallel to Stone's own desire for greater government accountability. Yet in the same way that a new and

distinctive style emerged in Stone's drama, so he moved in a counter-intuitive direction as regards the construction and delivery of his documentaries. Like Moore, he is present in the films, but restrained. In *Comandante* (2003), despite the stylistic continuity evident in the intercutting of archive footage, the somewhat sympathetic portrayal of Cuba's revolutionary leader Fidel Castro is more meditative and reflective than it is exhilarating and exhaustive. The argumentative force of the film lies not in its construction, but in the very act of giving Castro a hearing – a forceful statement somewhat confirmed by HBO's subsequent decision to drop the film from its schedule at short notice in spring 2003. Stone believed that the film offered some redress for what he saw as establishment bias in the mainstream media coverage of Cuba. HBO was less than convinced.

The ensuing licensing dispute between himself and the broadcaster as a result of the cancellation effectively prevented any transmission or US release: a state of affairs that received almost no coverage in the USA, and yet which brought the Bush administration's policy towards alleged 'un-American' expression and comment in the wake of 9/11, and the then nascent invasion of Iraq, into sharp relief.

HBO's own reasoning for its intervention to prevent the broadcast of *Comandante* was, in itself, revealing. HBO tried to justify the decision as an editorial issue – a need to include further material on dissident activity in Cuba, given the execution of three hijackers by the Cuban authorities in April 2003, it claimed – almost three months after the film had premiered at the Sundance Film Festival. Despite being peeved by the decision, Stone spun the request into a positive separate documentary – *Looking for Fidel* (2004) – which highlighted the dissident issue on the island.

Stone followed his work on Castro with *South of the Border*: a road trip of sorts unfolding first through an appraisal of the revival of Venezuela, then followed by a series of interviews with South American leaders giving their own impressions of the continent's economic conditions, as well as their assessment of the then Venezuelan president, Hugo Chávez. By this point, Chávez had long since taken over from Castro as the US government's Latin American nemesis; but, as with *Comandante*, the style is deliberately pensive and conventional, rather than confrontational

and acerbic. As he did in *Comandante*, Stone sought an alternative image of Chávez by way of political and cultural realignment. Stone's follow-up documentary, *Castro in Winter*, made his return to that island and pursuit of the Cuban leader a notional trilogy that formed another free-wheeling, if somewhat retrospective, discussion of the themes that echoed through *Comandante*. However, the film also transcended and penetrated a little more widely the cult of the last Cold War revolutionary.

Collectively, these documentaries shared a common revisionist goal to enlighten audiences about Latin American history, as well as to shine a light on US policy in the region. What they consciously reacted against was what Stone saw as an emerging entertainment, feature-film aesthetic tied to satirical polemics visible in, for example, Moore's *Capitalism: A Love Story* (2009) and Gibney's *Enron: The Smartest Guys in the Room* (2005). Stone did not dislike these films – indeed, he has spoken with admiration for the filmmakers – but he did see a way for his well rehearsed, frenzied and kinetic presentation to take a backseat, while reintroducing audiences to Stone-as-documentarian in the traditional sense, not just dogmatist for the sake of opinion. While some of this shift in his filmmaking philosophy might look like a contrarian at play, Stone has never felt obliged to simply meet the expectations of his audience – and in that regard, he is as much at odds with the world as ever he was in the 1980s and 1990s.

Nevertheless, the shift to documentary work was not driven by aesthetics alone. As Stone himself confessed, it was another way of meeting with, and handling, his political engagement. 'The move to documentary work is an effort to put pressure where I can best put it, even if it's a reduced impact,' he explained.²³ It is true that neither *Comandante* nor *South of the Border* generated anywhere near the tumult that accompanied the production and release of a movie such as *JFK*. That high watermark of activism in his career eventually saw Stone giving evidence in Congress to the Subcommittee on Legislation and National Security in April 1992: discussions that would lead to the establishment of the Assassination Records Review Board (ARRB), and the subsequent release into the National Archives of many previously secret government documents relating to the assassination of President Kennedy.²⁴

Therefore, while comparison to the later documentaries seems slight in their wider public and political impact, Stone's work in the 2000s not only continued his activism, but arguably reaffirmed basic tenets of a philosophy that possibly was more unpopular in the new century than it had been in the last.

Meanwhile, Stone's unflattering description of US President Barack Obama as a 'snake' to a group of foreign correspondents in Tokyo in August 2013, merely underscored the fact that the political Left enjoyed no conciliatory privileges either in his continuing desire to challenge aspects of the myth of American power and exceptionalism.²⁵ And the subsequent confirmation by Stone in June 2014 that he would film the story of National Security Agency (NSA) whistle-blower Edward Snowden – arguably the biggest political controversy of the twenty-first century so far – underlined the point. No one seemed very surprised that Stone should take up this cause; indeed, *Entertainment Weekly* simply wondered why it had taken him so long to pick the project up.²⁶ The leaks by Snowden to the *Guardian* and *Washington Post* concerning mass surveillance exactly a year before had sent shockwaves through Congress and the Obama administration.²⁷ Making a connection between Stone and the story seemed natural, and news that he was developing a film out of the Snowden revelations suggested that Stone had recaptured the zeitgeist – or maybe that it had caught up with him. A 2006 address for the David Lean Foundation delivered to the British Academy of Film and Television Arts (BAFTA) in London confirmed that Stone had been on the case long before Snowden had become the centre of attention. 'The right to any privacy at all has been sacrificed on the altar of our "national security",' he declared in the speech, already aware of the intrusion into many parts of the citizenry's private records, and accounts that would only really become newsworthy and revelatory in the early 2010s.²⁸

That Stone should be so attuned to the activities going on in the darker reaches of the national security state so early, and so continuously – both at home in America and abroad – should not really be a surprise. He has been a filmmaker whose persona has always taken on that of the 'guerrilla fighter', who forged his career out of the trauma and devastation of Vietnam. That connection to his past anchors the first objective of the assessment here: that this is a critical and discursive reassessment of

all of Oliver Stone's films and career. That the focus preys on the period from the late 1990s onwards especially, is not merely the convenience of highlighting a phase of his career that has been less detailed by critics so far. It is to lay claim to the fact that Stone has been broadly assumed, conditioned and stereotypically pigeonholed as not the same filmmaker after this time as he was in the first half of his career. We argue this to be true to an extent, but with disclaimers. Politically, socially and in terms of his belief in the power of cultural appropriation to galvanise the public to arms and to demands, he is very much the same filmmaker that he was at the beginning of his career, when those feelings in him were conditioned by the experiences of the 1960s. As the Snowden project demonstrates, they continue to inform his cinema to the present day, but aesthetics have undoubtedly shifted. By utilising many of the typical forms and functions of film studies, engaging along the way with notable theories, critical discourse, historical analysis and methodology, we seek to show how and why that changing artistic appreciation is essential to understanding not just the second phase of his career, but the whole of it. In this pursuit a number of conceptual themes are aired: the nature and role of melodrama; narrative construction and the 'happy ending'; the commercialisation of the auteur brand; and the relationship between history and drama.

A further key objective and component of the book – using Oliver Stone as a major touchstone for the changes wrought over the period – is to reassess the changing nature of the film industry, Hollywood – if not America more generally – and what filmmaking, industrial practice, forms of censorship, institutional organisations and media outlets contribute to and say about the state of cinema in America today. The story of Hollywood filmmaking since the final collapse of the studio system has been to recognise change, diversity and the establishment of new practices and functions in the industry. Film studies approaches have given some flavour to that, while primarily promoting the reading and deconstruction of the films: the work of scholars such as Linda Ruth Williams, Steve Neale and Barry Langford are all notable in this regard. Meanwhile, a number of industry historians and analysts, including for example Jon Lewis, Thomas Schatz and Ronald Brownstein, have focused on the structure of Hollywood more particularly, examining and advancing debates about finance,

censorship and political influence – all issues we outline here – but not always with close recall to a particular filmmaker, or set of films working within the heart of this ever-changing system. By calling upon Stone’s career, which has spanned much of the New Hollywood period and beyond, the book is in a position to comment on both his importance and the changing industry’s form and function.

Nothing in Hollywood travels far without reference to money, and as a backdrop to this book’s exploration of the transitions in Stone’s career, it is worth noting at the outset that the second phase of it has been associated with a perceived decline in his stock as a commercial filmmaker. Yet figures suggest that this ‘decline’ is not realised in financial earnings or studio neglect for his abilities as an artistic, even visionary director. Total US and foreign exhibition revenues for all of Stone’s directed work is in the region of \$1.58 billion, of which some \$700 million has been earned in the period after *Nixon* in 1995. These figures include the \$167 million total earning for *Alexander*, a worldwide gross only exceeded in his career by *JFK* (see Table 1). While this overview may be slightly skewed owing to likely underreporting of the independently distributed *Platoon* (which industry insiders as well as Stone himself believe may well have earned more money not officially recorded), there is certainly evidence here of a continuing level of commercial performance during the 1990s and 2000s by which few industry professionals would be disappointed, and at which some critics would be surprised. As for studio relationships, Stone has worked with Paramount on *World Trade Center*, with Fox on *Wall Street: Money Never Sleeps*, and with Universal on *Savages*, always on his own terms. His ownership of the projects in all cases has never been in doubt. There has even been a revival of sorts in his old relationship with Warner Bros., which was responsible for his major movies of the 1980s and 1990s. In what must be something of a record, Stone, with encouragement from the studio showing a loyalty to their director that few others command, completed his fourth editorial pass at *Alexander* with a version titled *The Ultimate Cut*, bringing to an end a near-decade-long desire and struggle to shape this personal epic to the best of his abilities.

The auteur credentials that have produced loyalty and respect from studios and actors alike are augmented by other industry insiders also who know him. He has built and retained a reputation

Table 1 Oliver Stone: theatrical releases

| Title | Release date | Rating | Distributor | Opening theatres | Widest theatres | Opening weekend | Opening weekend average | Domestic cume | Foreign cume | Worldwide box office |
|--|--------------|--------|------------------|------------------|-----------------|-----------------|-------------------------|---------------|---------------|----------------------|
| <i>The Hand</i> | 24/4/1981 | R | Warner Bros. | 183 | 183 | \$566,736 | \$3,097 | \$2,447,576 | – | \$2,447,576 |
| <i>Scarface**</i> | 9/12/1983 | R | Universal | 996 | 1,008 | \$4,597,536 | \$4,616 | \$44,668,798 | \$20,476,000 | \$65,144,798 |
| <i>Salvador</i> | 23/04/1986 | R | Hemdale | – | – | – | – | \$1,500,000 | – | \$1,500,000 |
| <i>Platoon</i> | 19/12/1986 | R | Orion | 6 | 1,564 | \$241,080 | \$40,180 | \$137,963,328 | \$15,000,000 | \$152,963,328 |
| <i>Wall Street</i> | 11/12/1987 | R | 20th Century Fox | 730 | 989 | \$4,104,611 | \$5,623 | \$43,848,069 | \$42,158,932 | \$86,007,001 |
| <i>Talk Radio</i> | 21/12/1988 | R | Universal | 6 | 653 | \$50,298 | \$8,383 | \$3,628,372 | \$104,008 | \$3,732,380 |
| <i>Born on the Fourth of July</i> | 20/12/1989 | R | Universal | 4 | 1,434 | \$172,021 | \$43,005 | \$70,100,195 | \$90,000,000 | \$160,100,195 |
| <i>The Doors</i> | 1/3/1991 | R | TriStar | 840 | 1,236 | \$9,151,800 | \$10,895 | \$34,416,893 | \$31,883,000 | \$66,299,893 |
| <i>JFK</i> | 20/12/1991 | R | Warner Bros. | 1,164 | 1,395 | \$5,223,658 | \$4,488 | \$70,405,498 | \$140,000,000 | \$210,405,498 |
| <i>Heaven and Earth</i> | 25/12/1993 | R | Warner Bros. | – | 781 | \$379,807 | – | \$5,864,949 | \$18,100,000 | \$23,964,949 |
| <i>Natural Born Killers</i> | 26/8/1994 | R | Warner Bros. | 1,510 | 1,904 | \$11,166,687 | \$7,395 | \$50,292,625 | \$41,600,000 | \$91,892,625 |
| <i>Nixon</i> | 20/12/1995 | R | Disney | – | 977 | \$1,608,174 | \$3,129 | \$3,681,765 | \$6,400,000 | \$20,081,765 |
| <i>U Turn</i> | 3/10/1997 | R | Sony | 1,230 | 1,311 | \$2,730,440 | \$2,220 | \$6,682,098 | \$9,078,582 | \$15,760,680 |
| <i>Any Given Sunday</i> | 22/12/1999 | R | Warner Bros. | 2,595 | 2,595 | \$13,584,625 | \$5,423 | \$75,530,832 | \$27,596,000 | \$103,126,832 |
| <i>Alexander</i> | 24/11/2004 | R | Warner Bros. | 2,445 | 2,445 | \$13,687,087 | \$5,598 | \$34,297,191 | \$33,300,000 | \$167,597,191 |
| <i>World Trade Center</i> | 9/8/2006 | PG13 | Paramount | 2,803 | 3,021 | \$18,730,762 | \$6,334 | \$70,278,893 | \$92,691,347 | \$162,970,240 |
| <i>W.</i> | 17/10/2008 | PG13 | Lionsgate | 2,030 | 2,050 | \$10,505,668 | \$5,175 | \$25,534,493 | \$4,588,565 | \$30,123,058 |
| <i>South of the Border</i> | 25/6/2010 | NR | Cinema Libre | 1 | 12 | \$21,545 | \$21,545 | \$174,203 | \$278,131 | \$452,334 |
| <i>Wall Street: Money Never Sleeps</i> | 24/9/2010 | PG13 | 20th Century Fox | 3,565 | 3,597 | \$19,011,188 | \$5,333 | \$52,474,616 | \$85,246,476 | \$137,721,092 |
| <i>Savages</i> | 6/7/2012 | R | Universal | 2,628 | 2,635 | \$16,016,910 | \$6,095 | \$47,382,068 | \$33,849,451 | \$81,231,519 |
| Total | | | | | | | | \$791,172,462 | \$792,350,492 | \$1,583,522,954 |
| Average | | | | | | | | \$39,558,623 | \$44,019,472 | \$79,176,148 |

Source: Data provided by Ixtlan Inc., 12233 W. Olympic Blvd., Los Angeles CA 90064, USA.

as a director who is not for hire: someone who, in the words of former Warner Bros. President Bob Daly, ‘follows his passion as opposed to following the dollar’.²⁹ Despite this, Stone has a reputation for sticking to budget. Moritz Borman, who has produced several of Stone’s films, including *Alexander*, *World Trade Center*, *W.* and *Savages*, recalls how Stone’s versatility and pragmatism as a filmmaker contribute to this financial diligence. During the shooting of *Alexander*, when a sandstorm threatened to delay filming the Battle of Gaugamela in Morocco, Stone simply incorporated the new backdrop into the shoot.³⁰

Moreover, he has retained his reputation for long working days, especially during shoots. Eric Kopeloff, producer of *W.*, *Wall Street: Money Never Sleeps* and *Savages*, has identified in Stone a daily commitment to getting things done however long it takes, and a drive that is intolerant of anyone not willing to put in the same amount of effort.³¹ The production people who work for him do so out of an unqualified respect for someone they see as a true professional – someone for whom the role of director is not just a job. Paul Graff and Christina Graff, Stone’s special effects team for *Wall Street: Money Never Sleeps* and *Savages*, and award-winners themselves for their work on TV series such as *Boardwalk Empire* (HBO, 2010–14), see Stone’s *modus operandi* while on set as keeping people slightly on edge, as Paul Graff observes:

He rumbles like a bowling ball and he shakes everything up and puts people out of balance – and as people regain their balance, there is energy that is harvested for the project. He never knocks somebody out or knocks them over; he just knocks them hard enough so that they are out of their comfort zone, and as they regain their balance they are struggling, slightly on edge. If you do that to a lot of people, you can lead that energy. That’s Oliver Stone – shaking things up.³²

Nevertheless, there have been some adjustments personally and professionally. Borman notes that Stone appears calmer and more reflective than in earlier years. Tod Maitland, who worked as Stone’s sound mixer on *Talk Radio*, *Born on the Fourth of July*, *The Doors* and *JFK*, and then returned to the fold on *Wall Street: Money Never Sleeps* and *Savages*, concurs with Borman’s assessment: ‘In the early years, Stone appeared to introduce new elements during the shoot just to add to the chaos.’³³ During the same period, social activities off-set were

equally high octane; but Maitland has observed the emergence of a more serene director, both on- and off-set.³⁴

As these associations and assessments demonstrate, the profile that Stone has built for himself in the second half of his career – as a political documentary-maker, critic of the establishment and advocate for a wide range of Left-leaning causes – in no way has tarnished his reputation as an auteur, or his allure as a seminal director. Indeed, Stone's regular appearances on television shows such as Bill Maher's *Real Time* (HBO) merely seem to confirm the synergies between his role as a filmmaker and political commentator. Among the select list of contemporary political filmmakers – including Michael Moore, George Clooney, Paul Greengrass and Michael Winterbottom – Stone's political critique is arguably the most wide-ranging. He is someone without formal political affiliations who is not afraid to offer policy assessments of Afghanistan, Iran, Israel and Latin America, as well as broader assessments of deficiencies in US foreign policy and the fallacies of empire. If there is something of the contrarian in this persona that confounds supporters as much as it riles opponents, then these qualities seem to add to the appeal of his auteur brand, rather than weaken it.

The emergence of a filmmaker-political pundit is part of the story of Stone explored in this book. It is a development that is much more than an evolution of a new media presence for a well-known director; not just a move away from a defence of individual films and debate about related issues towards being a comfortable talk-show staple. Stone reflected on his future career as far back as the mid-1990s, identifying an important transition that would carry him through the subsequent phases of his life:

The work has been compassionate, but I don't feel that I've been a particularly compassionate human being. That is the greatest lesson I have to learn. I was always willing to expose myself to discomfort and uncertainty, but now I'm trying to expose myself more to love and compassion. I no longer have the feeling that I have to justify my life by my work.³⁵

Stone's coming to terms with his own past did not play out as merely an extended interlude and cinematic swerve between *Nixon* and *U Turn* in the 1990s; rather, it has unfolded slowly and

continuously since that time. His pain at the break-up of his parents' marriage when he was fifteen, his contemplation of suicide as a teenager, his determination to reject the world at Yale University that was on offer to him, his enlisting in the US army for front line service in Vietnam in 1967, his feelings of alienation after active service, his effort to succeed in Hollywood and reconcile the elation of success and the depression of rejection, his decision to end his marriage to Elizabeth Stone in 1993 and his response to the pressure induced by criticism of *JFK*, *Heaven and Earth* (1993), *Natural Born Killers* and *Nixon* have not been simply airbrushed out of his psychology. However, these elements of a life and career have been shifted out of their earlier alignment. They no longer generate the same propensity to illuminate only the darkness within him. In conversation during the research for this book, Stone reflected on his early career success, observing that: 'With few exceptions there is a point where a man's life reaches a zenith and he doesn't know it, and no matter what he does after that he can never approach that again.'³⁶ Yet he qualified this acknowledgement of the passing of the artist's quintessential 'moment in the sun' by further ruminating that: 'I'm still the same person, and the work endures, and I hope that people will eventually notice it.'³⁷

Undoubtedly, Stone's outlook has been leavened both by his engagement with Buddhism and a new marriage to Sun-jung Jung in 1996. While Stone's personal work schedule, his continuing willingness to face combative questioning about his documentary work and his broader political opinions seem to attest to an acceptance of – even desire for – pressure, this gradual personal realignment means that the scrutiny that was in earlier years self-directed via his films, has become more genuinely focused on the machinations of the political world that he sees around him. All of this has nurtured new routes towards personal and professional expression, and invited a new mix of influences to come to bear on Stone's dramatic work. Those influences are investigated in this book.

So, while on the surface one might be left to wonder whether Stone's second-half career is as vital or insistent as that which went before, and therefore how worthy of discussion it might be, we believe it is potentially more worthy, precisely because of the changes and evolution which have gone into his filmmaking during the two decades after the release and reception of *Nixon* – a

film he has long felt personally connected to and which, after its commercial failure, prompted a re-evaluation in him.

On one level, and for some critics, the collection of films in the second half of his career might add up to a filmmaker not quite capturing the zeitgeist or polemical force of previous times. *Alexander*, *World Trade Center*, *W.*, *Wall Street: Money Never Sleeps* and *Savages* were all subject to such assessment. However, with lesser productivity and alternative directions to pursue, Stone arguably has forged a new path that is more resonant and challenging than ever it was in the halcyon 1980s and early 1990s; and all this even while the decision to film *Snowden* (2016) allowed media commentators to dust off their favourite descriptors again, inevitably embracing words such as ‘contentious’, ‘controversial’ and ‘politicised’.

Despite such obvious and convenient markers for his personal, professional and political stances, Stone’s career development actually has followed particular and very tailored liminal concepts, and thus this book is organised around five key and interrelated themes for his work: war, politics, money, love and corporations. Each theme foregrounds a subset of Stone’s filmography, as well as drawing on distinct aspects of his personal and professional development, including production practices and industry relations. Each theme also highlights particular questions and perspectives in film theory and textual analysis, and draws out equally pertinent aspects to do with the operation of Hollywood and the broader entertainment industry. The allocation of films to chapters is not arbitrary, but neither is it definitive. Inevitably, films are subject to multiple readings. *Alexander*, for example, could be readily incorporated into readings that foreground politics, war and love. The choice here to privilege that film within the discussion of love merely denotes the particular resonances that this aspect of the film has for the overall argument being advanced about Stone’s development as a filmmaker. In pragmatically responding to that preference in argument, the book also picks up the film in shorter references elsewhere, as required. The same rubric is applied to many of Stone’s other feature films and broader work.

Chapter 1 is about war, and the fire from which Stone emerged. The experience of combat in the jungle of Vietnam radically changed the worldview of the young romantic, and provided the motivation that drove his early career in film. The chapter takes

Platoon as its starting point, before considering how ideas of ‘just war’ and the ‘War on Terror’ have informed the construction and reception of later films such as *World Trade Center* and *W*. Chapter 2 follows the logic of Stone’s development from war into his engagement with American politics. A review of *JFK* provides the essential platform from which to understand Stone’s evolving critique of the political establishment, honed in a series of documentaries that include *Comandante*, *South of the Border* and the *Untold History* series and in later feature films such as *W*. The chapter also deals with questions of the representation of history and the debate – we might say ‘argument’ – between a range of historians and filmmakers about how cinema might best deal with the relationship between drama and history, concluding with an appreciation of how Stone’s critique of the security state articulated over several years has influenced, and finally found expression in, the decision to dramatise the Snowden story.

Chapter 3 deals with money, and begins by revisiting the original *Wall Street* (1987) before exploring how both *Wall Street: Money Never Sleeps* and *Savages* have allowed Stone to offer critical perspectives on the American Dream in the twenty-first century – and where (if anywhere) it fits into the American psyche. With retribution rather than justice at their moral core, these two later films blur the lines between Stone’s personal optimism and his pessimism about the state of the financial markets and ‘War on Drugs’, as only two examples of the American twenty-first-century condition. In Chapter 4 the focus shifts to that largely unexplored aspect of Stone’s filmography: the theme of love. This analysis draws on several of Stone’s early films including *Wall Street* and *Heaven and Earth*, before a detailed exploration of *U Turn*, *Alexander* and *W*. is undertaken. Stone’s use of pathos and melodrama is discussed, as is the prominence of the roles offered to, and underappreciated importance of, female actors in his films. Chapter 5 on corporations begins by exploring Stone’s longstanding critique of the media industry, with reference first to *Talk Radio* and then *Any Given Sunday* (1999).

We then trace the evolution of a broader assessment within Stone’s work that has been increasingly concerned not just with media corporations and their relationship with government, but also with the ways in which the post-9/11 rhetoric about national

security has seen ever-closer ties between defence, information technology (IT) corporations and the government. This has led Stone inevitably to critique and explore the close links between US political ambitions of global dominance – the extension of the ‘American Century’³⁸ – and the international commercial ambitions of US corporations. The chapter explores the evidence for this development with a further discussion of Stone’s documentary work, as well as revisiting the narratives in *W., Wall Street: Money Never Sleeps* and *Savages* before returning to the *Untold History* series: a piece of work that stands as the most comprehensive statement yet of Stone’s position on the condition of the USA in the middle of the second decade of the twenty-first century.

All five chapters then describe an auteur, an industry and a political culture that have been in constant flux. For Stone, the period since the mid-1990s has been one of personal change and a less self-critical outlook on his career, if not life; an aesthetic shift to include melodramatic flourishes alongside the established realist and hyperrealist cinematography; and a professional diversification into documentary work. In all of this, a distinct ‘auteur’ brand has taken shape as an increasingly detailed political critique has emerged: one that has moved from the film-specific platform established with the likes of *Salvador* and *JFK*, to a much broader locus that has rounded on the ‘American Century’, the myths of empire and American exceptionalism. In the same period, the industry itself has become increasingly corporatised and – many would contend – averse to contentious content on screen. Somehow despite such moves, Stone has remained within the movie colony as a contrarian working on his own terms. What seems increasingly certain in assessing Stone’s whole career is that his ‘auteurist presence’ is a unique one in Hollywood. He is unquestionably the foremost political filmmaker of the last thirty years, and for that reason alone his career, films and dramatic history are an important critical legacy of the way that concerned social and political filmmaking has shifted, and how Hollywood has adapted to those evolutionary tendencies. Oliver Stone has seared his name into the national consciousness in a way that few artists in any era, let alone the present one, could hope to emulate. The following pages demonstrate how and why that ubiquity aligned itself with the most provocative filmmaker of recent generations.

Notes

- 1 Chris Salewicz, *Oliver Stone: The Making of His Movies* (London: Orion Books, 1997), p. 118.
- 2 Interview with Oliver Stone, Santa Monica, CA, 19 August 2013.
- 3 Susan Mackey-Kallis, *Oliver Stone's America: Dreaming the Myth Outward* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1995); Robert Brent Toplin (ed) *Oliver Stone's U.S.A.: Film, History and Controversy* (Lawrence, KS: University of Kansas Press, 2000); James Riordan, *Stone: The Controversies, Excesses and Exploits of a Radical Filmmaker* (New York: Hyperion, 1995).
- 4 Andrew Pepper and Trevor McCrisken, *American History and Contemporary Hollywood Film* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2005), p. 131.
- 5 Albert Auster, 'Oliver Stone's Presidential Films' in Philip John Davies and Paul Wells (eds) *American Film and Politics from Reagan to Bush Jr* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2002), p. 65.
- 6 Auster, 'Oliver Stone's Presidential Films', p. 67.
- 7 Frank Beaver, *Oliver Stone: Wakeup Cinema* (New York: Twayne, 1994), p. 181.
- 8 Pepper and McCrisken, *American History*, p. 132.
- 9 The 'Bush Doctrine' refers to a range of foreign policy principles adopted under George W. Bush's presidency. The term was first used by vice-president Dick Cheney in a speech in 2003. See U.S. Department of Defense, 'Vice President Tells West Point Cadets "Bush Doctrine" is Serious', *DoD News* (3 June 2003). Available at <http://archive.defense.gov/news/newsarticle.aspx?id=28921> (accessed 1 March 2016).
- 10 Francis Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man* (London: Penguin, 2012; first published 1992).
- 11 In October 1995, former professional footballer and actor O. J. Simpson was acquitted of murdering his wife Nicole Brown Simpson, and her friend, waiter Ronald Lyle Goldman, in June 1994. In late 1993 singer-songwriter Michael Jackson had faced allegations of child sexual abuse. Reports in 1998 of an extra-marital relationship between Monica Lewinsky and President Bill Clinton eventually led to impeachment hearings. All three cases received enormous media coverage.
- 12 Pepper and McCrisken, *American History*, p. 155.
- 13 *United 93* was released in April 2006, three months before *World Trade Center*.
- 14 The first Golden Raspberry Awards ('Razzies') were hosted in 1981 by publicist J. B. Wilson as a tongue-in-cheek way to recognise the worst in Hollywood cinema. The Razzies have continued annually, one day before the Oscars.
- 15 David Holloway, *9/11 and the War on Terror* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2008), p. 86.

- 16 'New Oliver Stone 9/11 Film Introduces 'Single Plane' Theory', *The Onion* (8 August 2006). Available at <http://theonion.com/articles/new-oliver-stone-911-film-introduces-single-plane,2017/> (accessed 6 December 2015).
- 17 Interview with Oliver Stone, Santa Monica, CA, 19 August 2013.
- 18 Beaver, *Oliver Stone*, pp. 79, 81.
- 19 *Ibid.*, pp. 80–1.
- 20 Interview with Oliver Stone, Santa Monica, CA, 8 December 2011.
- 21 Lisa Schwarzbaum, 'Wall Street: Money Never Sleeps', *Entertainment Weekly* (25 September 2010). Available at <http://ew.com/ew/article/0,,20428073,00.html> (accessed 6 December 2015).
- 22 Don Winslow, *Savages* (London: Arrow Books, 2010), p. 291.
- 23 Interview with Stone, 8 December 2011.
- 24 Final Report of the Assassination Records Review Board (30 September 1998). Available at <http://archives.gov/research/jfk/review-board/report/arrb-final-report.pdf> (accessed 1 March 2016). Also Congressional Record, 102nd Congress (1991–2), 25 June 1992, H5307. Available at <http://thomas.loc.gov/home/LegislativeData.php?&n=Record> (accessed 6 December 2015).
- 25 Maria Puente, 'Director Oliver Stone Says Obama Is a "Snake"', *USA Today* (16 August 2013). Available at <http://usatoday.com/story/life/people/2013/08/16/director-oliver-stone-says-obama-is-a-snake/2665239/> (accessed 6 December 2015).
- 26 Nicole Sperling, 'Oliver Stone's Next Target: Edward Snowden', *Entertainment Weekly* (2 June 2014). Available at <http://insidemovies.ew.com/2014/06/02/oliver-stone-edward-snowden/> (accessed 6 December 2015).
- 27 Xan Brooks, 'Edward Snowden NSA Whistleblowing Story to Be Filmed by Oliver Stone', *Guardian* (2 June 2014). Available at <http://theguardian.com/film/2014/jun/02/edward-snowden-nsa-film-oliver-stone> (accessed 6 December 2015).
- 28 Oliver Stone, 'David Lean Foundation Speech', 6 September 2006. Available at www.bafta.org/sites/default/files/uploads/transcripts/2006_david_lean_lecture_by_oliver_stone.pdf (accessed 6 December 2015).
- 29 Interview with Bob Daly, Santa Monica, CA, 18 October 2010.
- 30 Telephone interview with Moritz Borman, 18 August 2011.
- 31 Interview with Eric Kopeloff, Santa Monica, CA, 21 October 2010.
- 32 Interview with Paul Graff and Christina Graff, Venice, CA, 8 December 2011.
- 33 Maitland also believes that 'Stone's abilities as a director stem in part from his being immersed in the real world, as compared to other Hollywood directors who tend to live in a bubble.' He suggests that it is this exposure to outside people that helps Stone shape his characters. Interview with Tod Maitland, Santa Susana, CA, 11 August 2011.

- 34 Interview with Tod Maitland, Santa Susana, CA, 11 August 2011.
35 In Riordan, *Stone*, p. 521.
36 Interview with Oliver Stone, Santa Monica, CA, 7 December 2011.
37 *Ibid.*
38 Henry R. Luce, 'The American Century', *Life* (17 February 1941), pp. 61–5.