

Eastwood's Jewel

by G. Murphy Donovan



“Believe nothing until it has been officially denied.” –
Claude Cockburn

Not many things get better with age. Clint Eastwood might be the exception.

At age 89, Eastwood still manages to redeem a film industry that usually panders to liberal tropes or adolescent morons. His latest offering is a biopic about Richard Jewell and the Centennial Park bombing at the 1996 Atlanta Olympics.

Albeit 25 years in the making, *Richard Jewell*, in 2020, is a pitch perfect and timely film treatment of dirty cops and fake news in America. Jewell, once a security guard at the '96 Olympics, discovered a pipe bomb, alerted authorities, and was subsequently falsely implicated with incendiary headlines and

televised slander by the FBI and the press for a crime he did not commit.

A dirty cop, probably an FBI agent, leaked Jewell's name as "a person of interest" to an *Atlanta Journal Constitution* reporter, Kathy Scruggs.



That leak, and the media blitz that followed, tortured Jewell and his mother for nearly a decade. The real bomber, Eric Rudolph, was eventually caught, but only after two more bombings.

Rudolph was convicted and jailed eight years hence with little press fanfare by the FBI or media.

The Eastwood film, coming as it does midst the fake news campaign against Donald Trump, serves to remind us that

corruption at the FBI and in the media are still with us.

Alas, the “controversy” about the film does not revolve around FBI or press corruption.

Trump era media now has its knickers in a knot over “slut shaming.” The *AJC* has sued Eastwood for slandering and/or damaging a dead journalist’s reputation. The real crime here is that the *Atlanta Journal* can still put the word *Constitution* on its masthead.

Apparently, the Scruggs character, played by Olivia Wilde, comes off, to some sensitive souls, as a press bimbo who might have traded sex for privileged information.

If truth or reality matters; media colleagues, not Eastwood, have portrayed Scruggs as both drug addled floosy and now, much too late, as a victim. In fact, the **facts**, as reported by Kathy’s press contemporaries, support the Eastwood read on the FBI, the *Atlanta Journal Constitution* – and Kathy Scruggs.

Ms. Scruggs, by many accounts, was a troubled soul in the very active attractive body of an ambitious Georgia junkie. Her persona in the newsroom, and at cop saloons, was defined by; noise, big hair, potty mouth, hooters, couter and pins.

Indeed, one officer alleged that you could tell how badly Kathy wanted a story by “the length of her skirt” at any cop cluster.

Beyond alcohol, she was known to be dependent on at least four prescription drugs to deal with a potato sack of emotional kinks. Surely, women who do cop bars for professional reasons might exploit a gullible gumshoe by any means. Many reports, including those from her family, claim that Ms. Scruggs relished her loud, “hard living,” white trash reputation.

Indeed, Scruggs died at the age of 41 from a morphine overdose. Her toxicology report is a matter of public record.

The real crimes in 1996 were toxic ambition and fake news at any price. The misdemeanors today are now maudlin *déjà vu* and necrotic irony.

The same scribblers that trashed Richard Jewell and family now come to the defense of an erstwhile news bimbo that helped create the original AJC bombing fraud. Ironically, Eastwood and Wilde are being accused of “slut shaming” or defaming an innocent girl incapable of defending herself.

Indeed, the 1996 Atlanta bombing reporting excess is now blamed on the FBI leaker, a dirty cop still at large. The belated defense of Kathy Scruggs by the Atlanta, indeed by the national press, is a transparent feint, another attempt to make fake news the story.

The authentic message of Eastwood’s film is FBI and media incompetence. The slut shaming hoax just serves to remind us that some editors never learn.

Scruggs promoted a racy reputation with cops and colleagues alike. Kathy took that reputation to an early grave, only to have her sad tale disinterred by the integrity of Eastwood and Wilde’s art.

Painful as that echo may be, the back story of the actress playing Scruggs tells an even more encouraging tale than Eastwood’s candor.

Olivia Wilde, the lass who plays Kathy in the *Richard Jewell* film, is a direct descendent of Sir George Cockburn, the British admiral who burned Washington and Baltimore in the War of 1812.

Olivia Wilde’s much married grandfather was Claude Cockburn, an English journalist, a leading member the Communist Party in Great Britain, and an alleged member of the now defunct European *Comintern*.

Olivia's parents are Andrew and Leslie Cockburn, distinguished authors/journalists on the American left. Wilde's mother ran for Congress in Virginia on a liberal (D) ticket in 2018. Her uncles on her father's side are both British journalists. Christopher Hitchens use to babysit Olivia when the Cockburns lived in Georgetown. Olivia chose the stage name "Wilde" as homage to Oscar Wilde.

In short, Ms. Wilde's antecedents on the political, and politically correct, left are impeccable.

Given her distinguished fish wrap lineage, what are the chances that Olivia Wilde would accept a role that misrepresents or slanders a "real" journalist in Atlanta? Indeed, what could Clint Eastwood and Olivia Wilde have in common *except* all the truth that good art allows?

Nevertheless, thinking about Wilde and Eastwood making art together is still a little like trying to imagine Karl Marx and Adam Smith sharing a byline.

Eastwood's *Richard Jewell* is thus the iconic ironic film gem of the decade. As they say on the left coast, the flic has Oscar buzz; as does the cast, including Olivia Wilde. With her portrayal of Kathy Scruggs, Olivia has graduated to the Hollywood "A" list. The slut shaming imbroglio might even serve to jack up tepid ticket sales.

Even if the Eastwood film dies from candor on the big screen, *Richard Jewell* will still be must see TV on small screens and in film schools for a generation.

With pairings like Clint and Olivia, hope still floats in Hollywood.

G. Murphy Donovan usually writes about the politics of national security.