

Seeking Truth in New Orleans In the Middle of the Night

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"The sun was shining on the sea,
Shining with all his might;
He did his very best to make
The billows smooth and bright—
And this was odd, because it was
The middle of the night."

—Through the Looking Glass

IN NEW ORLEANS, it is still the middle of the night. District Attorney Jim Garrison's baroque investigation into the assassination of President Kennedy continues. And no one, not even Garrison, who claims to have found the truth even as he looks for it, knows when or where it will end.

Thus far, a civic leader has been indicted for conspiracy, an attorney has been accused of perjury, a minister's dimpled wife has been arrested as a maternal witness and a peripatetic night club operator wanted for questioning has been shouting that it is all a monstrous fraud.

JIM GARRISON

With a booming voice to match his 6-foot-7 frame, Garrison claims to have traced the President's death to a series of plots concocted in a world of homosexuals, Cuban freedom fighters and assorted screwballs.

It is a cast that defies credibility, and a "conspiracy" that so far seems to defy the cast.

A public official with a literary bent, Garrison, 45, insists that he has been able to make sense of it all. All you have to do, he has said, is know how to peer "Through the Looking Glass."

He has been straining his eyes day and night and he has made the world sit up and take notice.

Before his election in 1962, Garrison was known at the Orleans Parish courthouse as an assistant DA with a fondness for arriving at noon and quitting at 2) but since then he has made a career of assailing politicians and the press, and coming out on top.

He ridiculed the criminal court judges as "sacred cows," attacked the police for "brutality" and before long, Jim Garrison, who always admired the late Huey Long, was undisputed kingfish in a grimy stone courthouse where DAs before him had come and gone with astonishing rapidity.

But last September, Garrison suddenly found his image sagging in a public brawl with the prestigious New Orleans Crime Commission over a buxom Bourbon Street stripper named Linda Brigitte.

Miss Brigitte had twice been convicted of obscene and lewd behavior for her gyrations on a couch (at a second trial, when asked if she was still using the couch, she testified sweetly, "Yes sir, Jim Garrison gave me permission to use it . . . He saw the act and he said, 'Use the couch' . . .").

She was convicted nevertheless, but Garrison said prison for Miss Brigitte would be unfair for "an unjustly convicted, mother of small children" and won her a governor's pardon despite the Crime Commission's loud protests.

It was around the same time that Garrison told a reporter that he was "disgusted with politics" and intended to quit. At one point in the interview, reported in the magazine New Orleans, Garrison grumbled that he never even got any credit for cleaning up Bourbon Street.

"You must be getting, paranoiac about it," the interviewer joked, pointing out that Garrison had gotten plenty of publicity for the erstwhile crusade.

"Paranoiac! Paranoiac?" Garrison said, bristling, and called his chief assistant, Charles Ward, into the office on the double. "Do I get credit? Am I paranoiac?" he demanded of Ward.

Ward assured his boss that he wasn't paranoiac.

It took only a month for Garrison to perk up again. "Me quit?" he said in October. "Oh, no. People are talking about me running for governor. If McKethen's second-term bid fails, I'm a possibility."

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For reasons best known to himself, it was also in October that the District Attorney decided that the "truth" about the assassination remained untold by the Warren Commission but was still within his grasp. To Jim Garrison, there are no such things as questions that can't be answered or problems that can't be resolved.

DAVID W. FERRIE

Among the first to be called to answer was the late David W. Ferrie, a vain, nervous pilot who launched a career of instability as a dropout from a Catholic seminary where his superiors decided he was too much of "a paradox" for the priesthood.

Dismissed from Eastern Airlines in March, 1963, because of a record of homosexual arrests, Ferrie had been interrogated shortly after the assassination by Garrison's men, the Secret Service and the FBI.

Employed as a private investigator by attorneys for reputed Mafia kingpin Carlos Marcello, Ferrie had been sitting outside a Federal courtroom in New Orleans awaiting the outcome of the case against Marcello (acquittal) until several hours after the assassination in Dallas.

Then he left for Texas with two of his always present, always changing young companions, Alvin R. Beaubouf, then 18, and Melvin Coffey, then about 26.

LEE HARVEY OSWALD

The three didn't go near Dallas, but during their absence, authorities began receiving a wild array of second-hand reports about Ferrie: that he knew Lee Harvey Oswald and trained him to shoot, that he may have hypnotized Oswald, that he may have been stationed in Dallas as a "getaway pilot" for a presidential assassin.

In the confused aftermath of the assassination, it must have sounded good. Ferrie was a pilot. He had played around with hypnotism for years. He knew how to handle a rifle (although not, he insisted to the FBI, a telescopic sight).

And for years, he had been active in Civil Air Patrol units, some reportedly counterfeit, where he could serve as a molder of young men. Oswald was briefly a member of the CAP in New Orleans in 1955, although Ferrie said he never met him; adding shortly before his death that Oswald was in a different unit.

Even before Ferrie got back to New Orleans, Secret Service agents in Dallas were alerted about him as they were questioning Marina Oswald. Over the phone, it came across as "Ferry." Did she say "Mr. Ferry?" She said she

JACK S. MARTIN

From there on, the reports began to crumble. Ferrie's trip (to Houston and Galveston) was checked out thoroughly. The FBI traced the rumors to Jack S. Martin, 51, sometime private detective and courthouse hanger-on who had known Ferrie for several years and even reportedly ordained Ferrie into an obscure and dissident Catholic sect (Martin was a bishop).

The Secret Service reported that Martin had "every appearance of being an alcoholic" and added that he admitted calling Garrison's office with his tales during a drinking spree.

Secret Service agents also said that Garrison's men, even then, were reluctant to share their information and sought to shield the identity of informant Martin. (Also known as Edward Stewart Suggs, Martin has told at least one acquaintance that a murder charge was lodged against him in Dallas in 1952 and later dropped.)

PATRICK L. MARTENS

Ferrie turned himself in for questioning at Garrison's office. Booked with him on charges fabricated to hold them were Beaubouf, who recently inherited Ferrie's possessions, and Patrick Layton Martens, now 25, who had moved in as Ferrie's roommate five days before the assassination.

A cellist in his senior year at Southwestern Louisiana State University now, Martens told investigators then that he knew of no association between Ferrie and Oswald. Last week, Martens was subpoenaed before the Orleans Parish grand jury at Garrison's behest, but apparently with no different results.

For his part, Ferrie acknowledged to the FBI in 1963 that he had been sharply critical of President Kennedy for the failure of the Bay of Pigs Invasion and that he might have stated on occasion that Mr. Kennedy "ought to be shot."

But he said he never meant that it should actually be done, a qualifier that seems believable enough in light of Ferrie's lifetime history of outrageous talk and pitiful performance. (He once was linked with an outfit called the Omnipotents, a teen-age club with the avowed purpose of planning an invasion of Cuba; on other occasions, Ferrie is known to have suggested, apparently with a straight face, raids on Castro's shipping lanes in a homemade submarine equipped with foot pedals and bombing Cuba with drone planes from the safety of a mother ship with none other than David Ferrie in the pilot's seat.)

The FBI is understood to have interviewed 19 persons about Ferrie. It failed to turn up any positive sign that Oswald and Ferrie knew each other. The Government concluded that Ferrie had nothing to do with the assassination and closed the books, in the process excluding from the public record some 55 pages sprinkled with rumors and allegations about Ferrie's homosexual tendencies.

Summoned again after Garrison started his investigation last fall, Ferrie found himself quizzed once more about his activities in 1963. "I was the first one they questioned," he said in an interview with me shortly before his death. "It was Martin's list they were using."

DAVID F. LEWIS

Garrison has scoffed at suggestions that he would rely on Martin's information. But it seems clear that this, plus the paperback attacks on the Warren Commission, is largely what he started out with. Associated with Martin is David F. Lewis, a flappy-tongued freight handler who once worked as a private detective in the Guy Bannister Detective Agency in downtown New Orleans where Martin used to hang his hat as a private detective.

Ferrie and various Cubans are said to have met there and elsewhere to talks of various anti-Castro schemes. Despite reports by both the FBI and the Secret Service that he recanted, Martin still insists that Ferrie knew Oswald. Lewis has chimed in that he knew Oswald, too.

The DA, however, has assiduously sought to avoid identification with the Martin and Lewis team. Nor has he made any recent reference to Miguel Silva Torres, a 26-year-old Cuban who was serving three concurrent nine-year terms for burglary in Angola State Prison until Garrison had him moved to the Orleans Parish Prison Jan. 30 in connection with his investigation. Torres once lived a block from Oswald's old New Orleans address on Magazine Street, but what he may have told Garrison remains unknown.

Instead, the District Attorney has been grasping for new leads, searching for "proof" that might perhaps be more satisfying in a courtroom.

The death of Ferrie Feb. 22 propelled the search. A failure but not without sparks of brilliance, Ferrie saw himself as standing in the investigation's way, a bar, if he played it right, to what he felt was a "witchhunt."

Ferrie died at 49 of a cerebral hemorrhage, perhaps brought on by stress, the coroner ruled and the police agreed.

Undaunted, Garrison called it the suicide of "one of history's most important individuals," and calmly suggested there were more to come.

Ferrie's greatest worry, apparently, stemmed from his deep-seated and often-expressed conviction that justice was not to be found in a courthouse. This feeling stood out in a bitter note found in his apartment, typed in a mood of depression, but no one knows when.

"When I was a boy," Ferrie said, "my father preached you were innocent until proven guilty. (There is) no greater lie. A man on trial has flat got to prove his innocence. Truth and falsehood, right and wrong have no place in the courts. All the state needs is evidence to support a conviction. If this is justice, then justice be damned."

Two days later, with newsmen pouring into town, Garrison outdid himself by announcing to the world that the assassination had been "solved beyond any shadow of a doubt." Oswald, the DA declared to a French newsman, was "a decoy, a victim and a fall guy." And, Garrison said to reporters who piled into an elevator with him, "It's my personal belief that Oswald did not kill anyone that day in Dallas."

At the news conference, Garrison also allowed that "Life magazine has helped me in several instances" during the investigation, although he said it would be unfair to single out Life for special mention since other news media had helped, too.

He denied any plans to announce his findings in a magazine article, although the New Orleans States-Item subsequently said that it was his original intention to do so, under his own byline, until news of the investigation spilled out.

PERRY/RUSSO

All of that was on Feb. 24. Not until the next day did Garrison's men meet their star witness, in Baton Rouge: Perry Russo, 25, insurance salesman and college graduate.

Once under psychiatric care for unspecified problems, Russo learned of Ferrie's death on television and finally, he later testified, it dawned on him that the David Ferrie he had known since 1960 was the same David Ferrie that the papers were saying Garrison was investigating. With Ferrie dead, Russo decided to write a letter to Garrison.

The pace picked up. Hypnosis, sodium pentothal (so-called truth serum) and two-way mirrors came into play. Russo had told a television newsman that he didn't know Lee Harvey Oswald "until television of the assassination."

But under questioning by Garrison's men—his memory supposedly sharpened by sodium pentothal and hypnosis—he recalled a party in Ferrie's flat in mid-September of 1963 that wound up with Ferrie, a "Leon Oswald" and a "Clem Bertrand" plotting to assassinate the President.

"Mr. Russo regressed very beautifully," said the doctor-hypnotist, who testified that he put Russo into a "time tunnel" back to September, 1963.

Enter "Leon Oswald," beatnik with a beard. The FBI never uncovered any evidence to suggest that Lee Harvey Oswald affected such poses—and Oswald's wife, Marina, told investigators that her husband had spent the night away from home only once, in July, during their six months in New Orleans in 1963.

Russo, however, said he tentatively selected a photo of Lee Harvey Oswald, handed to him by Garrison's men in Baton Rouge, as Ferrie's "roommate." Brought to New Orleans Feb. 27, Russo said he grew "positive" after Garrison's men drew a picture of a bearded, unkempt Lee Harvey Oswald for him.

CLAY SHAW

The identification of "Clem Bertrand" was done Gangbusters style. Garrison's men drove Russo to the French quarter home of businessman Clay Shaw and sat in the car and waited.

Neighbors of Shaw say they're sure they saw what looked like a tommygun on the lap of one of the DA's men during the vigils that week.

Eventually, Russo, posing as a Mutual of Omaha salesman, got out of the car and knocked, bringing Shaw to the door. Russo said it was "Clem Bertrand."

Shaw, a 54-year-old bachelor and socialite who pioneered the 33-story International Trade Mart in New Orleans, was subpoenaed to Garrison's office the next day, March 1. His questioners, according to friends of Shaw, did not advise him of his rights. Shaw got the message before long. Garrison's men reportedly told him they had evidence of a meeting with Ferrie and Oswald.

"Gentlemen, I thought I was coming down here to help you," Shaw reportedly replied, apparently referring to Oswald's distribution of Fair Play for Cuba leaflets outside the old Trade Mart in 1963, "but this is getting serious. I think I'd better get a lawyer."

Shaw got a lawyer. He also got arrested, apparently after a fuss over lie detector tests that his attorney would let him take only under certain conditions. He was booked on a charge of conspiracy to murder John F. Kennedy.

That night, Garrison's men swooped into Shaw's apartment with a search warrant and carted off all sorts of paraphernalia, including whips, chains, a black net cap, cape and hood—their relevance yet to be explained.

Russo, meanwhile, had been standing in another room of Garrison's suite during the questioning, peering at Shaw through a two-way mirror.

He again identified him as "Clem Bertrand," and left the courthouse, pausing on the way to tell a television interviewer, "Clay Shaw? No, I don't know Clay Shaw." He testified later that he did not want to make the identification to "someone who was not legal."

DEAN ANDREWS JR.

The Warren Commission had heard of a "Clay Bertrand" from jive-talking Dean Adams Andrews Jr., an attorney who said "Bertrand" had called him after the assassination and asked him to go to Dallas to defend Oswald. Andrews also said he assumed it was "Bertrand" who had sent Oswald to him for legal help earlier in 1963, the first time in the company of some "gay kids . . . Mexicanos . . . They wish."

Andrews, however, told the FBI that "Bertrand" was 6 feet 1 or 2 with brown

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hair; then later described him before a Warren Commission attorney as about 5 feet 8 with sandy hair and weighing between 165 and 175 pounds. The FBI never found "Bertrand" and noted that Andrews—who said he met him only twice—was under sedation in a hospital when "Bertrand" is said to have called him after the assassination.

It would be difficult to remember Shaw, a silver-haired giant of a man (6 foot 4, over 200 pounds) as 5 feet 8 with sandy hair.

Andrews snubbed Garrison's efforts—lie detector, "truth serum" or "time funnel"—to improve his memory. For his pains, the portly lawyer has now been indicted for perjury by the Orleans Parish grand jury, where Garrison called him to answer questions last month.

The rest of the thrice-hypnotized Russo's story, brought out at a preliminary hearing on Shaw's arrest, ranged from the incredibly precise to the surprisingly vague. Ferrie, Russo said, was wearing "a general's hat" over his kinky red wig and mascaraed eyebrows. "Bertrand" had on a maroon sports jacket. Oswald was wearing "a dirty pullover."

Sandra Moffett

The witness, however, couldn't recall what Sandra Moffett—the girl he maintains he took to the party—was wearing. Russo also testified that he

stuck around Ferrie's apartment after the party was over, and heard the plotting only because he was waiting for a ride home. But he couldn't remember, in the end, he did get home ("I think I caught a bus, I'm not sure").

Vernon Bundy

At the hearing, Garrison called only one other "substantive witness." His choice, an admitted narcotics user housed in the Orleans Parish Prison, left many in the courtroom open-mouthed. The addict, Vernon Bundy, 29, swore that he saw Shaw and Oswald together on the New Orleans lakefront in June or July of 1963—just as Bundy was about to send his spirits soaring over Lake Ponchartrain on a heroin-colored cloud.

Garrison has said privately that witnesses he relies on have to pass two of his "big three"—lie detector, sodium pentothal and hypnosis—but it was not stated whether Bundy took any of these, or what the results were.

Bundy did not tell his story to the DA's office until the third day of the four-day hearing, conducted by a three-judge panel beneath a huge, tattered American flag in a glass case, a memento of Chief Judge Bernard J. Bagert's World War II days aboard an LST. It was specially installed, with floodlights, on the eve of the hearing.

The judges concluded the hearing by dismissing the Warren Commission's

report as "hearsay" and ordering Shaw held for trial.

Since the extravaganza began unfolding, Garrison and his men have given off an aura of complete confidence, of having touched all bases, but it is apparent that this is somewhat of an exaggeration.

For example, when asked by reporters about Russo's party "date," Sandra Moffett, William Gurvich, a nattily dressed private detective serving as Garrison's special aide, smiled, expressively squashing his thumb on a wooden partition, and replied, "We've got her right there."

If indeed she was, she seems to have squiggled away. Now Lily Mae McMaines, the wife of a part-time minister in Omaha, she said she was never at the alleged party and didn't even meet Ferrie until 1965. Picked up in Nebraska last week as a material witness, she faces extradition.

In the past week, Patrick Martens also told reporters that he never heard Ferrie mention either Shaw or Oswald. "I knew pretty well everyone," he said, "but I never heard him mention them."

Garrison has yet to unfold his theories in full detail, but it seems clear that he is searching for another "gunman," or perhaps two, whom he presumably thinks were most probably situated on the "grassy knoll" ahead of the President's car when he was shot.

The favorite skulking spot for Warren Commission critics who insist on Oswald's innocence, the "grassy knoll" angle grew out of the hazy impressions of a few spectators. But it is all heady stuff and Garrison, convinced that his cause is just, is pursuing it full-time.

Julien Buznedo

The cast is far from complete. Russo said there were two Latin types named "Manuel" and "Julien" at the party. Garrison apparently thinks one was Julien Buznedo, a Bay of Pigs veteran now living near Denver, who knew Ferrie in New Orleans; the DA has a picture of him with Ferrie.

Buznedo says he was working at a restaurant in Latonia, Ky., and moved to Colorado in 1963. He said he spent only a few weeks in New Orleans in 1962 and hasn't been back.

As for "Manuel," Garrison has been looking for a Manuel Garcia-Gonzalez since January on a narcotics charge packing a \$50,000 bond, but has yet to turn him up.

Arcacha and Novel

Sergio Arcacha Smith, a former Cuban exile leader in New Orleans, and Gordon Novel, a nightclub operator, have also been staying out of the District Attorney's reach. Novel, who has said he suspects Garrison wants to ask him about Arcacha, has been flitting around the country denouncing the investigation as a fraud.

Arcacha, who knew Ferrie well and seems to have been the pilot's main entree to the Cuban community in New Orleans, has had one confrontation with Garrison's men, in Dallas, where Arcacha now lives.

It ended in a scene when Arcacha insisted on having either Dallas detectives, the FBI or an attorney present. Gurvich, who made the trip with another Garrison aide, reportedly blew up and the two left without posing their questions.

"Mostly because it was none of their business," Gurvich declared later. "It's our case. This isn't the poverty program. We don't give anything away."

Arcacha says he left New Orleans in 1961, never met Oswald, denies any role in the assassination and says he was at work, in Houston, that day. Just how he might fit into Garrison's scheme of things is uncertain, except perhaps that he worked until recently for an air conditioning company.

Among the "grassy knollers," a green Ford pickup truck with "Air Conditioning" lettered on the side—which one witness says she saw illegally parked near the grassy knoll on the morning of the assassination—is a piece de resistance.

The witness, Eva Mercer, said a man wearing a gray jacket, brown pants and plaid shirt took "what appeared to be a gun case" out of the back of the truck and walked toward the grassy knoll—all this, incredibly, with three Dallas police officers supposedly standing nearby twiddling their thumbs.

With such circumstantial bits and pieces carefully culled from the thousands of pages of Warren Commission testimony and reports, Garrison is building his case. So far it is open-ended. Russo said the "plot" Ferrie described called for two or three gunmen, leaving Garrison free to allege that there were one, or two, besides Oswald.

Russo said Ferré once tried to hypnotize him, leaving Garrison free to allege, or not to allege, that Oswald had been hypnotized. The District Attorney has an intricate house of cards in his hands and he apparently intends to play them one by one, first bringing Shaw to trial alone, then, presumably, another and another as he cements his case against each.

The DA is not without critics in his home town. Aaron Kohn, managing director of the New Orleans Crime Commission and admittedly no fan of the District Attorney these days, charges that Garrison's public record in the past few years shows "a pattern which reflects his ability to blind himself to facts and values inconsistent with his impulsive conclusions."

In the current investigation, however, Garrison has vowed to win convictions. "Anyone who bets against me," he has said, "will lose." And in New Orleans, where rumors are savored like wine, he may be right.



SANDRA MOFFETT
... not quite under the thumb.



WILLIAM GURVICH
... a thin thumb.



DEAN ANDREWS JR.
... consulted under sedation.



JUDGE BAGERT
... a flag under glass.



GORDEN NOVEL
... staying out of reach.

Investigation of the Garrison Case in New Orleans, La.



JIM GARRISON
... peering at the Looking Glass.



'LEON OSWALD'
... a bearded beatnik.



DAVID F. LEWIS
... flappy-tongued freight handler.



DAVID W. FERRIE
... vain, nervous pilot.



CLAY SHAW
... "I'd better get a lawyer."



PERRY RUSSO
... the star witness.



JACK RUBY
... *His deed set the stage.*

LEE HARVEY OSWALD
... *Was he hypnotized?*



AARON KOHN
... *no Garrison fan.*