

Garrison's Melodrama Hard to Believe

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NEW ORLEANS — Jim Garrison's conspiracy case against Clay L. Shaw is turning into a melodrama at Mardi Gras. Like the district attorney himself, it is all somewhat gargantuan — and just as hard to believe.

In a bizarre sense, it is living up to its promises. All that is, except the main one: proving that a conspiracy, hatched in New Orleans by at least three conspirators, led to the assassination of John F. Kennedy. What is at issue now in New Orleans is the credibility of the case itself.

Garrison's case so far has given something to everyone. He has introduced surprise witnesses, some of them telling extraordinary stories; brought forth three people who swear they saw Shaw and Lee Harvey Oswald together, and laid the base for his conspiracy allegations.

After the first day and a half of testimony, Garrison had won the grudging respect of some of his critics. A lawyer who had started out extremely dubious of Garrison's case remarked after listening to some of the early testimony that he would hate to be in Shaw's lawyer's shoes.

Theme Struck Hard

Up to that point, Garrison's staff had struck hard and effectively against a central premise of the defense: that Shaw never knew, nor even laid eyes on, Oswald or the third supposed conspirator, David W. Ferrie, a former pilot who, like Oswald, is dead.

Witnesses were produced who said they had seen the three men in a small, rural Louisiana town in the summer of 1963. Oswald, they testified, had gone to Clinton, La., to register as a voter, in the hopes of getting a job in that area. He was accompanied by Shaw and Ferrie.

Just why Oswald would want to do that, or what possible connection it might have had with a later conspiracy plot, was never made clear at the

testimony was damaging to Shaw, for it flatly contradicted his claim that he had had no contact with the men.

Then Garrison's case began to unravel in dramatic fashion.

Bundy Testifies

It began Friday afternoon with the testimony of Vernon William Bundy, Jr., 30, who said he had been a narcotics addict since the age of 13, and only in the last three weeks was attempting to cure himself.

Bundy, in rambling, repetitive, and argumentative testimony, told of seeing Shaw and Oswald at a furtive meeting in late June, 1963. He observed them, he said, while he was sitting on a seawall in a deserted section of New Orleans, preparing to give himself a "fix" of heroin.

The reason he particularly noticed them, he testified, was because he was afraid they might be policemen. For the edification of his listeners, Bundy gave a lengthy and extraneous account of how he prepared his heroin and then "washed my outfit."

Later, he announced dramatically that he could "prove" that he had seen Shaw if the defense, judge, and prosecution were willing to indulge him in an experiment. They were.

Shaw Asked to Walk

He rose from the witness stand, walked to a chair, sat down facing a far wall, and asked Shaw to go to the courtroom door and walked toward, and behind, him. Shaw did — twice.

Bundy then said he now was certain Shaw was the same man he had seen nearly six years before because of the way "the gentleman moves his foot." Although he already had testified positively that he identified Shaw and pointed him out in the courtroom, he then acknowledged that until the demonstration "I wasn't completely sure."

- Tolson
- DeLoach
- Mohr
- Bishop
- Casper
- Callahan
- Conrad
- Felt
- Gale
- Rosen
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- Tavel
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- Holmes
- Gandy

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- New York Post
- The New York Times
- The Sun (Baltimore)
- The Daily World
- The New Leader
- The Wall Street Journal
- The National Observer
- People's World
- Examiner (Washington)

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Under cross-examination, Bundy also admitted that he had, indeed, stolen to get heroin in the past. A few minutes before he said he never had done so. With some confusion, he denied telling two fellow prisoners, on separate occasions, that he knew nothing about Shaw and Oswald.

That set the stage for the testimony of Charles Spiesel, a small, balding New Yorker with a fixed smile. Spiesel was a surprise witness — and a vital one for Garrison.

Meeting Described

While the courtroom spectators grew tense and still, he quietly told of meeting Ferrie in a New Orleans bar, of going to a party with Ferrie, where he said he met Shaw, and other men in a private apartment in the french quarter; of hearing nearly everyone there speak bitterly about John F. Kennedy, of hearing someone say, "somebody ought to kill the son of a bitch", of hearing Shaw and Ferrie discuss a possible airplane escape for a would-be assassin, of the men arriving at a restaurant that the best way to kill the president was with a high-powered rifle with a telescopic sight.

When he completed his testimony for the state, Shaw's position looked bleak indeed. Then quickly, under cross-examination, Spiesel's credibility was destroyed.

F. Irvin Dymond, Shaw's chief counsel, brought out that Spiesel had filed a suit claiming New York City policemen hypnotized him, subjected him to mental torture, and forced him out of the city. He also had filed another suit against a psychiatrist and others charging they had hypnotized him to get "confidential information" from him.

Spiesel, by his own words, said he believed he was being subjected to conspiracy. And

he said he believed, among other things, that he had been hypnotized on and off during 1963, 1964, and 1965.

When he left the witness stand, far more than his own credibility had been destroyed. Garrison's own case stood close to being discredited for placing such reliance, and such vital testimony, on such a witness.

In his opening statement, the district attorney had made much of how he would prove that witnesses overheard Shaw, Ferrie and others discussing killing the President at a private party in New Orleans. Spiesel was his witness.

His testimony was crucial in another sense. Garrison's star witness, the one he has counted on to prove that a conspiracy did take place, is Perry Raymond Russo.

Nearly two years ago, Russo had testified in the preliminary hearing against Shaw. He was present, he said, in a meeting between Oswald, Ferrie and one "Clem Bertrand," a supposed alias Garrison claims was used by Shaw. He said he heard them discuss an assassination plan which called for killing the president by "a triangulation of fire." They also discussed means of escape, he said.

In court then, Russo identified Shaw as the man who used the name "Clem Bertrand."

Russo was the key to Garrison's case. But he is a controversial witness. He testified to being under psychiatric care. And, it was brought out later, he had testified while under the effect of sodium pentothal and hypnosis.

In their opening statement, Shaw's defense had called Russo "a liar—a notoriety-seeking liar whose name does not deserve to be mentioned among honest and just people."

Coming back to back with Spiesel, Russo's testimony and credibility raise harsh questions about the type of investigation Garrison has conducted, and the kind of witnesses he believes worthy of decent respect when it comes to adding to the nation's knowledge about the murder of a president.

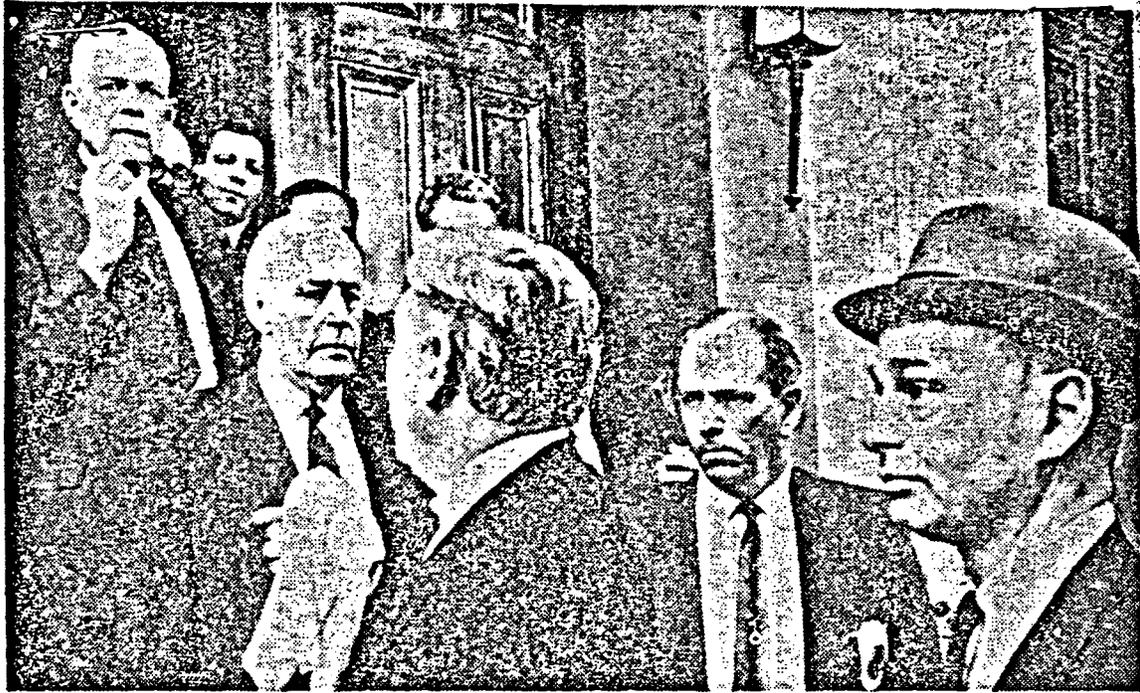
Motive Awaited

Beyond that, Garrison so far has not established a single motive for Shaw conspiring. Neither his statement, nor the testimony to date, give any hint of why he thinks Shaw, a respected businessman and patron of the arts and a self-professed admirer of John F. Kennedy, would want to commit such a crime.

The trial may go on as long as two months, with many more witnesses to be called, films and slides to be shown, and more points made. But at this writing, Garrison's case remains, to say the least, shaky.

When he announced his startling news two years ago that he had "solved" the Kennedy assassination, Jim Garrison was pressed for more facts to back up his claim. He then quoted from Alice in Wonderland to point out the truth is not always what it seems at first glance.

His case today continues to grow, as Alice said, curioser and curioser.



-Associated Press

Clay Shaw (upper left), on trial for conspiring to kill President John F. Kennedy, leaves court in New Orleans after Charles Spiesel (far

right), a witness for the prosecution, testified yesterday. The judge in the case, Edward Haggerty Jr., holds handkerchief.