

by KERRY THORNLEY

"A young man approximating Oswald's description and using Oswald's name - we believe we have discovered his identity - engaged in a variety of activities designed to create such a strong impression of Oswald's instability and culpability in people's minds that they would recall him as a suspicious character after the President was murdered."

--Jim Garrison

(Playboy interview,
October, 1967.)

When the Majority Whip of the United States Senate prompts a playboy Southern DA to undertake an anti-Establishment investigation, those who are not half-mad with vengeance-driven post-assassination hysteria or half-blind out of political prejudice are prone to look for hidden motives. When a District Attorney whose harassment of homosexuals has been notorious in the past begins to name names in the New Orleans homosexual community, after announcing that he has "solved" the assassination - remarking by way of psychologically penetrating explanation on par with that of an Iowa farm boy that it would be hard to find NORMAL men who would plot to assassinate a President - many people are liable to suspect a frame job of some kind is in the making.

When a man who was until recently defending U. S. involvement in Vietnam gets up before a microphone in public and seriously asserts that one of the fatal shots fired in the assassination he claims to have solved came - at what could only have been a physically impossible angle - from a Dallas sewer, a few are likely to worry over the possibility that a Second Cover-up to the Kennedy assassination is in the making.

And when the Establishment press, Bobby Kennedy, the U. S. Attorney General and Johnny Carson attack this man in such a rude and crude manner that for what is probably the first time in history we have a Persecuted Prosecutor evoking the heart-throbs of the Great American Underground, one or two paranoid lunatics here and there might wonder why the Establishment has suddenly, overnight, abandoned the sophistication with which it has held the levers of power since the time of Alexander Hamilton in this country.

I must confess that until I was "Hereby commanded" to go to New Orleans in a subpoena initiated by a man who calls himself a "libertarian conservative," of all things, I myself entertained some of these highly paranoid fantasies. After all, isn't Mark Lane right when he says it is getting RATIONAL to be paranoid in this nation?

Well, I might as well come clean - as a matter of fact I kept entertaining these sick delusions even AFTER I got my orders to go, mainly because both Jim Garrison and his summons expressed the incriminating and false opinion that

I had been in close association with Lee Harvey Oswald (whom I had known in the service for three months) in New Orleans in 1963. And while I did not cling to these suspicions rigidly, I did turn them over and over in my mind, changing perspectives on them as the days passed.

No sooner had I decided to go and co-operate fully with Big Jim than Harold Weisberg, a former intelligence agent for the Federal government, rekindled my paranoia by coming up on the air in Tampa - calling from his goose farm apparently, in Maryland - and uttering what I can only in politeness call a number of half-truths and otherwise morally dubious remarks.

The people of Tampa were told by Mr. Weisberg, repeatedly, that my book published in 1965 on Oswald was "NOT a BOOK, but a PAMPHLET," and were also informed that the reason Mr. Garrison wanted to speak to me was because of my comment in my Warren Commission testimony that I'd once heard scuttlebutt that Oswald had a Secret clearance - a subject on which Garrison's office was later to display a conspicuous lack of interest. (Mr. Weisberg was not, however, the only Goosestepping Garrisonite to make this party-line assertion in the days prior to my visit to testify in New Orleans.) Most disturbing of all, however, were Harold Weisberg's prissy seat-of-authority-kissing comments that it was for Mr. Garrison, NOT me, to decide whether or not I ought to go to New Orleans. Why? Because Mr. Garrison is conducting an "official investigation!"

The Spanish Inquisition was an official investigation. Cotton Mather was conducting an official investigation. So was Joe McCarthy. And Mr. Johnson is conducting an official war - does that mean it is not for me to decide whether or not I ought to go to Vietnam?

I could not perceive a difference in principle between Mr. Weisberg's opinion that I should go to New Orleans because Mr. Garrison was conducting an official investigation and that of a certain mass murderer that he should be excused for his acts because he was "only following orders."

I shall have considerably more to say about Roving District Attorney Weisberg in the future. For the present I'll only say this: He is an official idiot.

Weisberg's slander had the effect of changing my mind again, and an article in the "Los Angeles Free Press" indicated besides that Garrison's witnesses were being, among other things, shot at and thrown through plate glass portals. (It did not mention that the man who claimed to have been tossed through the glass was inebriated when it is supposed to have happened and that there is considerable scepticism both on the New Orleans police force and on Garrison's staff that he didn't just put his elbow through it.) I came to wonder why I should risk life and limb lending moral sanction, even indirectly, to people like Weisberg.

Meanwhile, though, there was a different force exerting influence on my mind, slowly quelling my paranoia about Garrison. I'd spoken to Bill Turner of "Ramparts Magazine" on the telephone and had indirect communication with Vincent Salandria, both of whom felt that if I had nothing to hide I had nothing to fear from Mr. Garrison - whom both seemed to regard as a paragon of rationality and honesty. (Later Bill Turner was to say he didn't want to "get involved," after my arrest, and Salandria was to express the opinion that if I was being unfairly charged, well, it was "poetic justice" because in 1964 I wrote a book on Oswald that failed to challenge the conclusions of the Warren Commission, a book which he had not yet read, by the way.)

Moreover, most of those friends of mine whose political opinions I happened to respect, did not share my distrust of Garrison - in fact, until I was arrested for perjury, they were

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among his admirers.

So I went to New Orleans feeling that if Mr. Garrison was sincere and that if he was not simply criminally incompetent, the explanation for his press-conference attack on me must - if I was not being framed by whoever REALLY committed the assassination - lie after all in that, by refusing to co-operate with him voluntarily, I'd challenged his ego to a duel of some kind. I now felt the thing to do was to get on his trip with him, his adrenalin bummer, and gently and tactfully help him down out of his paranoid hang-ups about me - just as I had been helped out of mine about him.

When I was there I did everything I could to avoid a clash of egos. I made excuse after excuse for Mr. Garrison. I explained to his investigators how I understood that they might be suspicious of me, and whenever they claimed to have witnesses to fictitious happenings, I made every attempt to offer suggestions as to how and why such witnesses might be mistaken through no fault of theirs OR mine. In order to prove to them my good will in this matter, I made repeated offers to submit to lie detector tests, questionings under truth serum, and examination under hypnosis. I further pointed out many lines of investigation by which they could prove to themselves the truth of my assertions on relevant matters. On top of all this, I made what I thought was the most creative and constructive suggestion of going out and rounding up everyone still in the Quarter who'd associated with me during the critical time period of September 1963, inviting them to attend a brain-storming session in Garrison's office in front of Garrison's eyes, in order that these many dozens of individuals and I - plus anyone Mr. Garrison might want to throw in - could endeavor to reconstruct my activities on a day-to-day, hour-by-hour basis. (Mr. Sciambra, who has apparently been assigned to my investigation and who acted as a go-between between me and The Greatest Man In America Today, told me that Garrison was not interested in accepting this particular offer "because he thinks you are lying or holding something back, or something.") I also offered, in answer to a question by Mr. Sciambra, to stay in New Orleans indefinitely, at the five-dollar-per-day expenses provided by law, in order to co-operate in whatever way was desired in further examination and investigation of my case. Not a single offer I made or agreed to was accepted.

Now as I've indicated I don't regard paranoia as necessarily a manifestation of insanity in the particular State society in which we all live, and from what Mr. Sciambra and other of Garrison's men told me, there seemed to be any number of what Big Jim would out of the corner of his mouth call "interesting coincidences" linking me with his conspiracy theory. (As it turned out, many of these - including the one which most blew my mind because it seemed most incriminating - fell apart under independent research later.) But just how do you confront absolutely rigid Total Paranoia?

There would be no point in even attempting here to cover all the bizarre details of my direct dealings with Garrison's crew in February of this year, but I want it on the record that I came away almost certain that no deliberate Second Cover-up was being fabricated by the New Orleans District Attorney and his staff.

Jim Garrison radiates the vibrations of a sincere man who, whatever reservations one may have about his abilities to do so, appears genuinely interested in solving the Kennedy assassination. Further, the hysteria which prevails among his workers would, if faked, certainly rate at least an Acad-

emy Award. On top of which it is only fair to add that while Mr. Garrison is indeed a powerful Louisiana DA with a somewhat dubious record from the standpoint of the arch civil libertarian, he is neither a machine politician nor the sort of man known for accepting bribes.

On the other hand - even though he claims to be a DA whose sympathies are always on the side of the individual against the State, he does not for reasons of conscience which ought logically to extend from such feelings, appear to be on the verge of renouncing his political career or even of resigning his commission in the National Guard. Still, as he is quick to point out, there are certainly no obvious or immediately foreseeable political advantages in the course he IS following.

One formerly pro-Garrison Commission critic is now of the opinion that Mr. Garrison's actions can be explained by giving him credit for an unusual amount of stupidity combined with an ailing ego which finds nourishment earning the dubious admiration of the more reckless and less respon-

sible members of the critical community. "On the other hand," this individual remarked to a formerly pro-Garrison reporter over the phone recently, "maybe he's just nuts." The reporter said that in the past he had himself been reluctant to consider this because it seemed just to simple. "...but I must admit it's a hypothesis which accounts for all the known facts."

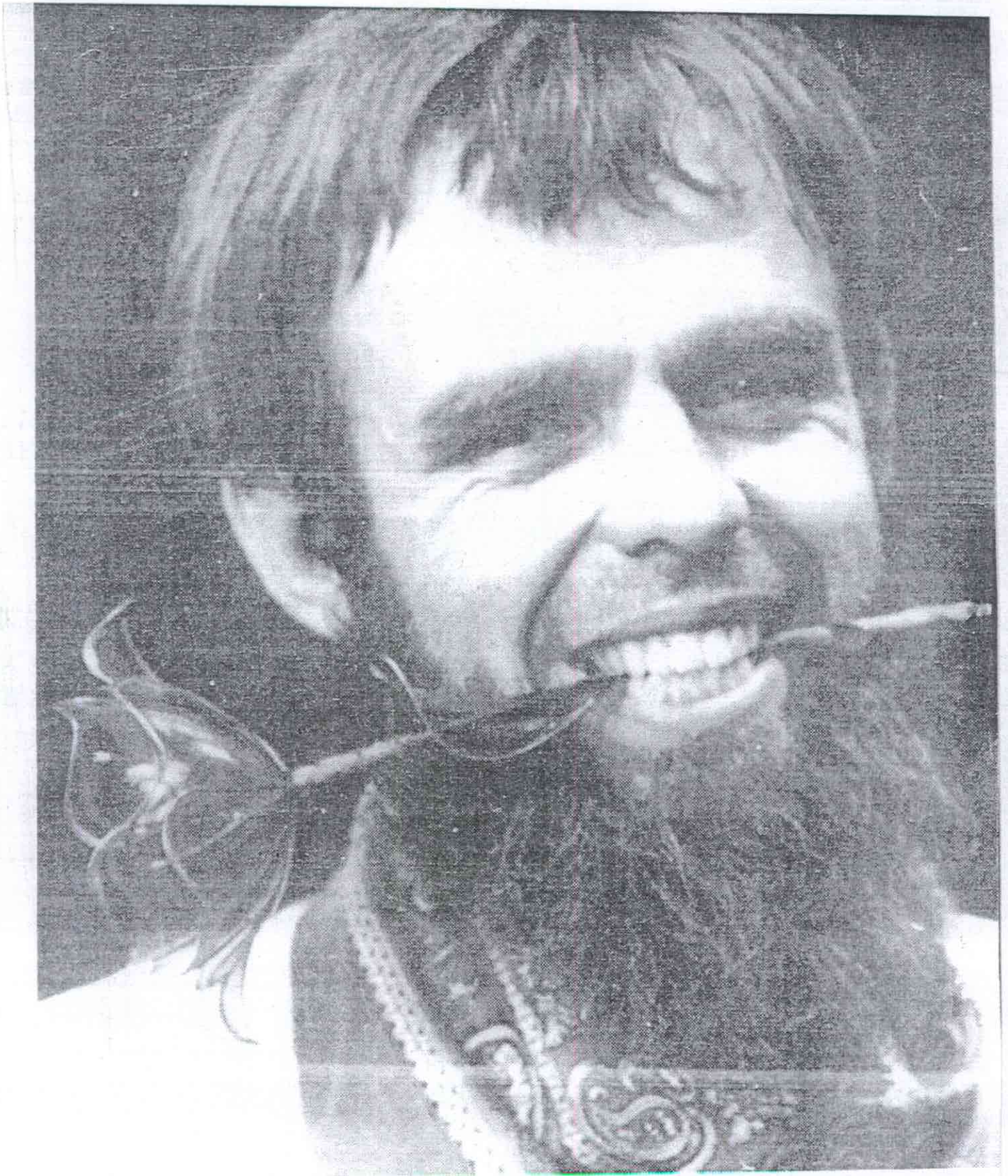
That there are unknown facts, which cannot be revealed until Clay Shaw goes on trial, is something of which the Goosestepping Garrisonites have made much - certainly too much when, like Elliot Mintz, they have asserted (without themselves knowing) that Mort Sahl in his capacity as one of Garrison's investigators KNOWS who committed the Kennedy assassination, etc. Once upon a time there prevailed in the Great American Underground the civil libertarian premise of innocence until guilt was proven. Today those who stand by this principle of old are accused of, yes, PREJUDGING GARRISON!!! Apparently Anglo-Saxon law applies to those accused of lesser crimes than Presidential assassination, with Roman Law coming into operation for accused conspirators and known rightwingers. How this courtroom cheering section is able to distinguish itself from the mob outside the Texas Theatre in Dallas might make a good theme for a masters thesis on the psychological roots of American fascism.

The best argument I have heard for the theory that Garrison is both sincere AND right - in spite of screwball "corkscrew codes" and post-office-box paranoia - is that after so much floundering around he could not possibly have failed to uncover something somewhere. Personally I wonder if he didn't have this same optimistic ace-up-the-sleeve hope in mind when, one year and a half-dozen theories ago, he announced having "solved" the assassination. What this assumes, however, is some measure of competence on the part of a criminal investigator who has, in my own experience, so far only succeeded in making Fearless Fosdick look like Sherlock Holmes.

A man who "never discusses his cases with anyone," Jim Garrison let it become an open secret in the critical community shortly after my arrest that he was toying with the possibility that I might be the Second Oswald.

This should not have come to me as the surprise it did. I was misled, I guess, by Mr. Garrison's comments on the Second Oswald in the Playboy interview, as these did not apply to me. Further, I reasoned that - contrary to all appearances - some kind of gesture toward an investigation aimed at finding out the facts (instead of persuading potential witnesses of my guilt) had been made or was being made.

But I should have realized that on the last day of my forced participation in the Battle of New Orleans, Assistant District Attorney Jim Alcock's joking about there being a slight physical resemblance between me and Lee Oswald, to which I readily responded in good humor, was not simply idle, friendly chatter.



THE GENTLEMAN ABOVE IS KERRY THORNLEY...LOOK MUCH LIKE A DOUBLE OF LEE HARVEY OSWALD TO YOU?

I must admit, though, he did make it rather pointed - finally coming right out and saying, with a grin, "Maybe you're the Second Oswald."

"I FEEL like the Second Oswald," I snapped back. won-

dering when they were going to handcuff me and escort me through the basement of the police building.

What are Garrison's motivations? Why don't you ask Mr. Garrison?