

Garrison Obsessed With Need

(This is the last in a five-part series of articles examining the investigation by New Orleans District Attorney Jim Garrison into what he believes was a plot to murder President Kennedy. This final article raises the question: Is Garrison's drive an obsession with the riddle of the assassination?)

By RICHARD N. BILLINGS

(Special to The Press)

On a national television show recently Jim Garrison was asked whether he really believed the U. S. government was concealing facts that would prove the Kennedy assassination was the climax of a conspiracy. "Why don't you ask Lyndon Johnson?" was the New Orleans District Attorney's caustic reply.

That Garrison would make such a remark is no longer surprising, but the enthusiastic applause of the studio audience came as a shock. It confirmed the extent of Garrison's success, now that he had decided to take the case to the American public.

THE SOPHISTICATED way to treat a demagog like Garrison is to ignore him. This is what most of the national news organizations are doing in the futile hope that he will simply burn himself out. The National Broadcasting Co. took a different approach some time ago. It sent Walter Sheridan, an experienced Washington investigator, to New Orleans to assess the situation.

Garrison, of course, decided that Sheridan was a spy for the Washington Establishment, which he was not, though he did communicate directly with his old friend and boss at the Justice Department, Robert Kennedy. Sheridan decided Garrison was a phony and that the case was a trumped-up fraud, and NBC produced a one-hour report that implies just that. It was an honest attempt to set the record straight, but Sheridan fell into the same pitfalls that Garrison is wont to do, he relied on witnesses whose testimony can be shot to pieces.

An example is Dean Andrews, the lawyer-witness who since has been convicted of perjury by Garrison. Andrews said on the NBC program he had fed Garrison some imaginary names, "just to see how far the cat would go." One of the names was Richardo Davis, a supposedly non-existent man.

In actual fact Richardo Davis is a Cuban now living in Houston. In 1963 he was instrumental in setting up an anti-Castro training camp in Louisiana, and he may well have a great deal of information that is pertinent to Garrison's investigation.

NBC also revealed it had located the "real Clay Bertrand." The network said he was a prominent homosexual who lived in New Orleans. A man named Eugene Davis later volunteered he was the man NBC had found. Davis vehemently denied he had ever used the name, Clay Bertrand.

THE UPSHOT of the NBC expose was that the network was compelled to give Garrison half an hour of equal time. Judging by the response he received by telegrams the next day, the prosecutor used his rebuttal to advantage, although he said nothing that would enlighten the curious. Perhaps he didn't have to, for by that time two-thirds of the American people, according to a Harris poll, were not believing the Warren Report.

Another way to contend with Garrison has been to dismiss him as a certifiable nut. Proponents of this approach find comfort in the fact that during the Korean War he was discharged from the Army because of mental instability.

Garrison may have his irrational moments, but he's not a psychopath. He could be a paranoid personality, that is an apt description of any man who spends his time and day brooding about the assassination. As one of his assistants puts it: "We're all obsessed with the case. I can't think of anything else. I dream about it at night, and the next day I can't separate the dream from reality."

If anything, this kind of obsession will sustain Garrison rather than destroy him.

IT ALSO IS POPULAR to regard Garrison as an ambitious public official who has latched onto the assassination for the immediate political advantage. Politics and politicians are transitory, so the theory goes, and Garrison will forget the assassination, as soon as another issue comes along.

Again there is a fallacy, for Garrison's motive is much more personal than it is political.

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to Solve the Riddle

"Mine is a perfectly selfish motive," he allows. "It is the satisfaction of solving the riddle nobody else has been able to solve. There is a certain satisfaction in bringing to light a truth that's been hidden."

Contending with Garrison has been Washington's problem for some time. Officially, the federal government won't admit he's worthy of concern, while in fact the FBI watches every move he makes. Agents trail him whenever he leaves New Orleans. (There is a story on

the West Coast that the way to find Garrison when he comes to town is to call the FBI.)

Attorney General Ramsey Clark has been quoted as saying Garrison should be prosecuted, because he "took a perfectly fine man, Clay Shaw, and ruined him just for personal aggrandizement." But the Justice Department has given no indication it really intends to make a case against the New Orleans prosecutor.

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