

Garrison and the JFK Plot

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Does New Orleans DA

Really Have a Valid Case?

By RICHARD N. BILLINGS

Special to The Press

At a district attorneys' office convention in New Orleans in March the speaker at the main banquet was to be the host J.D.A., Jim Garrison. But when he was asked to lone down his charges of a federal conspiracy in the assassination of President John F. Kennedy, Garrison abruptly ordered the dinner canceled.

Affronted by the rash and petulant act, a local television station charged Garrison with "making New Orleans the laughing stock of the nation."

The Case of Jim Garrison is no laughing matter to the controversial district attorney, who is firmly convinced he has solved the conspiracy. It is no joke either to people who have observed him closely enough to realize how dedicated he is to this conviction.

Most especially, there is nothing funny about it to Clay



DAVID FERRIE
He Was a Suspect

Jim Garrison, the flamboyant New Orleans district attorney, is convinced the assassination of President Kennedy was the result of widespread conspiracy involving more persons than just Lee Harvey Oswald. Garrison also has repeatedly charged that there is a federal plot to conceal this conspiracy.

For more than a year, Garrison has befuddled the American public by firing off sensational accusations at a wide field of targets.

To separate fact from sensation, a top-ranking journalist of national reputation, Richard N. Billings, was assigned to investigate the Garrison affair. Billings has made it his special field of endeavor for many months. He is a former Life magazine reporter who is doing a book on Garrison.

Now he has completed an exciting and illuminating five-part report titled "Garrison and the JFK Plot." This is the first article in his series.



Jim Garrison

L. Shaw, a retired businessman who stands accused as one of the plotters.

Shaw, 55, is scheduled to go on trial this month, although legal maneuvers by his defense may delay the date. For the moment, however, it is sufficiently significant that such an astonishing event could ever take place.

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WITHIN A YEAR of the President's death on Nov. 22, 1963, the Warren Commission submitted an exhaustive report. It concluded in precise detail that Lee Harvey Oswald, a social misfit and once a defector to the Soviet Union, was the lone assassin.

Oswald, the commission had determined, was assisted by no one and motivated merely by a deep-rooted hostility, when he accomplished his deadly mission with two well aimed rifle shots.

An effect of the Warren Report, disclaimers by commission critics notwithstanding, was to set aside the nightmarish illusion of conspiracy. The verdict was sustained by the passage of time during which no positive alternative was developed.

Since Oswald himself was murdered two days after his arrest in Dallas, it was reasonable to assume no man would ever stand trial for the assassination. That was true until November, 1966, when Garrison decided to open his own investigation.

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AT THE TIME Garrison was a relatively unknown prosecutor, although he once made national headlines by running B-girls out of New Orleans strip joints.

Now, more than a year after his case first got public attention, his name is a household word synonymous with the assassination controversy.

He is the new American demagog with a vast following of people who by gut feeling have decided he just might be right.

But some of his most ardent supporters are shaken by the manner in which he has resurrected the conspiracy nightmare, for in the plot he has reconstructed Garrison implicates federal agencies, Warren Commission members, the Attorney General, even Lyndon B. Johnson.

That he can distinguish between accessories before and after the fact fails to mitigate his most outlandish charges, for when Garrison calls Mr. Johnson "the



District Attorney Jim Garrison, who stands 6-foot-6, insists that there was a widespread conspiracy to take the life of JFK. He's shown here at his desk in his New Orleans office.

one man who has prolieted most from the assassination," the meaning is insidiously clear.

"Garrison has said, "The best way to get from one room to another is to go through the wall."

For a battering ram lately he has taken to issuing statements that leave "little doubt he intends to impugn the national leadership.

Last December, he charged.

"Even before the Warren Commission was appointed, the command of the FBI and the President of the United States

had to know that there were a number of people shooing at President Kennedy and that the Dallas police scenario was completely false."

And more recently: "The main function of the Warren Commission was to conceal the assassination of the President by an ambush of CIA employees, and they weighed the commission with men who had big names but who could be counted on to help conceal the truth."

* * *

GARRISON IS a scatter shooter. He himself has said, "An awful lot of people

were looking at their watches at 12:25 that day." He has fired incriminating charges in all directions — at Cuban exiles, neo-Nazis, Southern racists, Texas right-wingers, California Birchers—to the point that he must believe the conspirators numbered in the hundreds.

Moreover, he has staked much of his case on fairly flimsy evidence: Questionable eyewitnesses, connected codes and photographs that prove only what he wants them to.

It is likely Garrison has a sincere faith in even his most faulty "proof," for he is a profound partisan.

"An advocate can't afford to be objective," he has said privately.

But is he right? The battering ram and scaller shotgun have inflicted injury to possibly innocent victims. Two men have been charged with conspiracy, others with perjury and still others have been subpoenaed as material witnesses, their involvement implied.

Certain members of the underground of Warren Report critics, for which Garrison has become a spiritual leader, have begun to fear they helped "create a monster," as Garrison pursues additional players in the plot. The burden is on

him to make a case against the men charged, and if he does he could be absolved of his other distortions.

"Garrison may be 90 per cent all wet," a sometime friend of his has advised. "But if so, watch out for the other 10."

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THE PUBLIC Garrison today, irrefragable, overconfident and slanderous, is a man of marked contrast to the dis-trict attorney who quietly opened an investigation in the fall of 1966. For the first three months there were no public statements, no headlines, no charges.

In consistencies alleged by Warren Commission critics alerted Garrison to The Case, and although it is curious that he got interested so belatedly, he became a dissenter almost by instinct. He decided right away the FBI had eliminated the

possibility of conspiracy all too quickly.

By mid-December Garrison was privately confident he had discovered a plot, so confident in fact that he inadvertently indicated he might be holding a hidden trump card, a possibility that exists to this day.

It is known, however, that two principal factors formed the foundation for the investigation.

First, Garrison had certain knowledge of a conspiratorial atmosphere in New Orleans in the summer of 1963 while Oswald was living there.

The other one, and more important, he had a suspect, one David W. Ferrie, who had been arrested by Garrison shortly after the assassination only to be released by the FBI.

From the beginning Garrison has insisted that the idea of one assassin is im-



CLAY SHAW
Was One of the Plotters?

probable if not impossible. His more recent irrationalities aside, it must be said he started out by constructing a reasonably logical case, circumstantial though his evidence may have been.

THE LONE assassin theory, Garrison contended, pre-supposed that Oswald was an introvert. The Warren Report even cited as a motivating factor "his inability to enter into meaningful relationships with people."

In Garrison's opinion Oswald was anything but a loner. That summer in New Orleans, in fact, he was something of a public character.

He had courted publicity for his Fair Play for Cuba campaign, he had gone to jail for street fighting, he had joined in a debate on television, he had even marched into the district attorney's office one day to inquire into the effect of some exotic drug.

Oswald had in fact achieved enough notoriety by the time he left New Orleans in September to cause federal agents to keep a careful watch on him.

Details of the FBI file on Oswald prior to the assassination will be revealed in a later article, but it is interesting to note here that the bureau learned from Oswald's New Orleans landlady on Oct. 1 that he had left the city.

Ferrie's arrest on Nov. 25, 1963, was the result of a tip that he had taught Oswald in marksmanship. The FBI dis-counted the story, and the tipster, one Jack Martin, admitted later it had been stimulated by alcohol and his hatred for Ferrie.

But Garrison decided to look further into a possible Oswald-Ferrie link.

AS GARRISON pieced it together, Ferrie's career shaped up interestingly. A former airline pilot who had been fired for degeneracy, he had joined the Cuban anti-Castro movement to train guerrilla fighters.

Ferrie was a close associate of Sergio Arcacha, then chief New Orleans delegate of a Cuban organization called the

Democratic Revolutionary Front (FRD), and in October, 1961, they opened an office at 544 Camp St.

A third member of the cabal against Castro was W. Guy Banister, a former FBI agent who ran a detective agency around the corner from the FRD headquarters. Banister, who died in 1964, was a rightwing militant and a provider of arms to anti-Castro rebels in Cuba.

It was Garrison's early conjecture that Ferrie, Arcacha and Banister, along with others, redirected their anti-Castro operation and turned it against Mr. Kennedy.

By November, 1963, Arcacha was living in Dallas. But Garrison could produce no tangible evidence that would connect

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him with the assassination and he successfully fought extradition to New Orleans as a material witness.

Banister, Garrison learned, could have established he was in New Orleans on the day of the assassination, because that night he got into a public brawl with the tipster, Martin.

FERRIE ALSO was in New Orleans at the moment of the assassination. He was in a courtroom where mobster Carlos Marcello was winning a favorable verdict in a deportation hearing.

Ferrie had been working as an investigator for G. Wray Gill, Marcello's lawyer. That evening, while most of the country mourned the President's death, Ferrie attended a party to celebrate Marcello's victory.

Later that night he started out on a mysterious journey.

At 9 p.m., Ferrie said later, he and two young men decided to drive to Texas for some ice skating and goose shooting. They went to Houston and then to Galveston, heading back for New Orleans Sunday night.

When they reached Ferrie's apartment, district attorney's detectives were already there.

Ferrie, having learned from Gill by phone he was wanted in connection with the assassination, ducked the detectives and spent the night with a friend, but the next day he turned himself in.

Ferrie insisted they had shot geese, but his companions both testified they didn't even take guns along. They did, however, go ice skating at the Winterland rink in Houston on Saturday afternoon, and from

there they went to Galveston for a night on the town.

A GARRISON assistant talked to the manager of the skating rink, who said he remembered Ferrie well.

The manager explained, "He came up to me, flapping his arms and screaming, 'I'm Dave Ferrie. I'm from New Orleans, and I'm here.'"

The manager also said that instead of skating, Ferrie stood close to the public telephone.

This strange peregrination the weekend after the assassination nominated the unfortunate pilot as Garrison's suspect No. 1.

Garrison devoted most of the early investigation to Oswald's short career in New Orleans. He found little that would alter history in terms of fact, but in terms of emphasis and interpretation, he was making progress.

While the Warren Commission noted nothing significant in the New Orleans period, Garrison insisted these points come clear:

- Oswald used the Fair Play for Cuba Committee as a cover to mask his true political allegiance.

- He was in contact with any number of individuals — Latins, intelligence agents, anti-Castroites — whose identity never comes clear in the Warren Report.

- He scrupulously covered his tracks by using aliases, giving false information on job applications and lying to authorities.

Oswald's role with regard to Cuba is an enigma at best. He conned his "Fair Play" branch had 35 members, when it really consisted of just himself and his fictitious alter ego, A. J. Hiddell. Moreover, his "Fair Play" activities

were very occasional, though he saw to it that each one was well attended by publicity.

TWO INCIDENTS prompted Garrison to suspect unusual relationship between Oswald and the Cuban exiles.

On Aug. 8 he visited a clothing store managed by Carlos Bringer, New Orleans delegate of the Cuban Student Directorate. He told Bringer he had learned guerrilla tactics in the Marine Corps, and he wanted to train Cubans to fight Castro.

Bringer insists he figured all along it was a Communist trick, a suspicion that was confirmed when he encountered Oswald passing out anti-Castro leaflets.

A fight followed, and Oswald, Bringer and two other Cubans were arrested. Garrison insists it was all part of the act.

MORE CURIOS is the fact that on some "Earl Ray" handbills Oswald made a rubber stamp imprint that read "J. H. Hiddell, President, 544 Camp Street, New Orleans." The FBI had "vagrated" that address before Oswald returned from Russia, but unless Oswald had some contact with the anti-Castro allies, it's difficult to understand how he discovered the address.

Main Warren Commission witnesses testified they had seen Oswald with Latin Americans, and there is one shot, stocky Cuban who shows up not only in New Orleans but in Mexico City and Dallas as well.

Garrison, furthermore, has witnesses who will swear that Oswald hung around Banister's office with Ferris and unidentified Cubans.

There is one important early witness who probably won't testify at the trial, for Garrison has since convinced him of

perjury. He is Deart Andrews, a man who was cooperating with Garrison at the beginning.

Andrews said he recognized Oswald in rubber cases and that Oswald would come to his office accompanied by partners and by homosexuals. These associations in themselves suggest a picture of Oswald's life that was never developed by the Warren Commission.

ANDREWS is more interesting for the fact that it was he who told the Warren Commission about the elusive Bertrand. Describing a phone call he received the day after the assassination, Andrews testified "and a voice I recognized as Clay Bertrand's asked me if I would go to Dallas (and defend Oswald)."

Andrews was evasive, but he did say Bertrand was "the one who calls in behalf of my (homosexual) kids normally either to obtain bond or parole for them."

The FBI tried to locate Bertrand, getting little help from Andrews, whose memory is erratic.

Garrison didn't press Andrews for the identity of Bertrand, and he was surprisingly general in his response to a question in January, 1967.

"Just who is this Clay Bertrand? The name was asked."

"He is a man who lives in the French Quarter. His real name is Clay Shaw, but I don't think he's too important," was the reply.

TOMERROW, Perry Raymond Russo links Clay Shaw and Lee Harvey Oswald as co-conspirators in JFK's assassination.

(Chicago Daily News)