

# DID THE PLUMBERS PLUG JFK TOO?

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Late in the afternoon of Tuesday, January 9, 1968, I picked up the phone to learn from a wire service reporter that I had just been accused of helping to assassinate John F. Kennedy.

A few weeks earlier I had turned down a telegraphed invitation from New Orleans D.A. Jim Garrison to act as a friendly witness in his controversial assassination probe. Garrison had wanted me to call him using the name of "Winston Smith"—the main character of Orwell's 1984. Suspicious that Garrison's investigation was a fraud designed to further muddy the waters around JFK's murder, and anarchistically antagonistic to the coercive powers at the DA's disposal—I soon worked my way to a high position on Garrison's shit list.

Now he was issuing a subpoena for my appearance before the Grand Jury, the wire service reporter told me. What's more, he was telling the press that I had committed perjury before the Warren Commission in denying that I had seen Oswald in New Orleans in 1963.

That was neither the beginning nor the end of my adventures connected with the mystery of John F. Kennedy's death. The real start was my acquaintance in 1959, in the Marine Corps, with Lee Harvey Oswald. That led to other things—my testimony before a Warren Commission lawyer, and my writings on Oswald (in agreement with the Warren Report until the mid-sixties, and increasingly critical of the lone-assassin theory thereafter). Then—in terms of Garrison's theories—there was my anti-Kennedy Ayn Randism in New Orleans in the early sixties. That was a definite black mark in the DA's view, although Garrison himself had been an Ayn Rand freak before he became an assassination buff.

Garrison, in fact, evidently began his investigation of the assassination with a Communist Conspiracy theory. The probe itself was suggested to Garrison by a big Louisiana oil tycoon, Joseph Rault, Jr., and Senator Russell Long. Long had been identified with the oil interests since he came to the Senate two decades earlier—owning substantial oil and gas holdings himself. A popular assassination theory attributes JFK's murder to his rumored plans to drop LBJ as Vice President in 1964 and call for an end to the oil depletion allowance.

In other words, Garrison's investigation of the JFK assassination was the brain child of people who, logically, should have been suspects in the probe. Instead, they gave it private financial support.

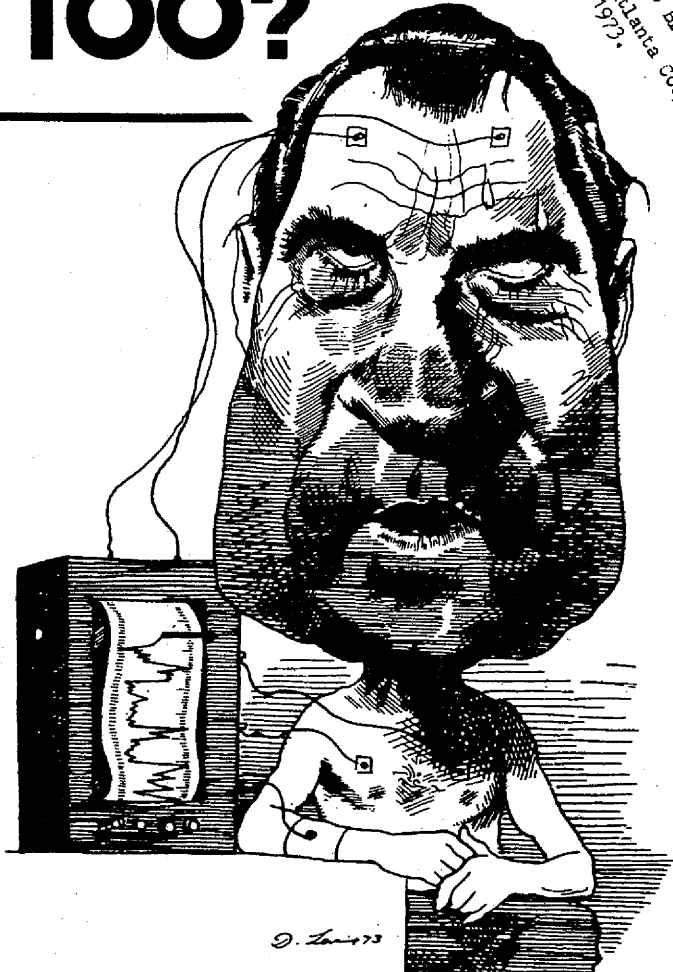
By the time of my subpoenaed involvement, Big Jim Garrison had abandoned whatever notions he started out with concerning Communists. By this time he was pointing his finger in the other direction—at extreme rightists, at anti-Castro Cuban refugees, and at the CIA (a more likely lot, to be sure).

I went before his Grand Jury, testified, and was promptly charged with perjury by Garrison, for denying any association with Oswald in New Orleans four years earlier. Upon my arrest, the news media were told by Garrison that I had been a "CIA employee" in 1963 involved in a "clandestine operation" in New Orleans with Oswald.

By this time it was difficult for me to dismiss the New Orleans DA as an agent for big oil who was simply out to provide the Kennedy assassination with a second cover-up. It would make some sense—but not much—for, say, the FBI and the oil interests of Texas and Louisiana to try to pin the murder of JFK on the CIA and Cuban refugees. More probably, it seemed at the time, Garrison was sincere but not very sane.

My reason for doubting his sanity—aside from matters involving my own case—was the extremely bizarre nature of his assassination theory. It was peopled by Cuban refugees left over from the Bay of Pigs. Former CIA agents, and one character who wore an outlandish red wig. In short, it had a cast of participants similar to those who were involved on an operational level in the Watergate bugging.

Until recently, it seemed very improbable that such a motley crew—if it existed at all—would be able to get away with a top-level political assassination. For in order to do so, it would certainly require the full protection of powerful elements in the American ruling class.



I could not imagine such a group enjoying such protection that someone like Earl Warren could be maneuvered into fronting for it. Since the first few weeks of revelations presented to Senator Sam Ervin's Committee, my imagination has grown richer, however.

Now, looking over my shoulder, I am beginning to think that Jim Garrison was on the right track. He blew his case, essentially, by arresting the wrong people. As for the organizations involved and the general types of people, he may well have been right on. The major distortion in his theory was perhaps that the Kennedy murder resulted from a "New Orleans based conspiracy"—a necessary assumption for Garrison to make, as anything else would have been outside his jurisdiction and hence beyond his authority to investigate.

Garrison lost his credibility and became a national laughing stock with the Clay Shaw trial. He was hard put to present any convincing evidence of Shaw's guilt and the jury unanimously acquitted Shaw after deliberating for less than an hour. My own case became bogged down in the wake of the Shaw debacle and never came to trial.

When Jolly Green Giant Garrison fell the ground shook for miles around. He took with him the reputations of a number of Warren Report critics who somewhat uncritically supported him, and wound up discrediting the movement to discredit the lone-assassin theory.

One of the few Warren Commission critics to remain standing after Garrison's fall was Sylvia Meagher. Ms. Meagher had refused to support Garrison because of "increasingly serious misgivings about the validity of his evidence, the credibility of his witnesses, and the scrupulousness of his methods." But Sylvia Meagher also noted that Garrison "in accusing anti-Castro Cuban exiles and CIA agents of complicity in the assassination, has postulated a theory which has much in common with the hypothetical construct elaborated in Chapter 21 (pages 384-386)" of her own monumental and scholarly work, *Accessories After the Fact: The Warren Commission, the Authorities & the Report* (Bobbs-Merrill, 1967).

Anyone interested in examining in detail the many striking parallels between the modus operandi of the elusive JFK killers and the White House "plumbers" should compare the information in her book with any detailed analysis of the Watergate revelations. If Howard Hunt and Gordon Liddy were not personally involved in the assassination of John F. Kennedy—and the subsequent frame-up and murder of Lee Oswald—then it must have been people very much like them, politically and temperamentally. The complete set-up is there in both crimes, too—the CIA connections, the underworld connections, and the employment relations with members of the ruling elite.

I am not suggesting that Nixon hired Hunt and Liddy to kill John Kennedy in 1963—although that is certainly a possibility. More probably, Hunt and Liddy—or people like them—were hired, as Garrison suggested last year, "by the powerful military chieftains of the Pentagon—with the notable exception of the Marine Commandant, General David Shoup, who remained loyal to him—in concert with dominant elements of the Central Intelligence Agency."

As for Garrison's motives, looking back I think they were by-and-large honorable. Possibly he launched his investigation as an unknowing pawn of the oil interests. But when the evidence led him to the doorstep of the military-industrial complex, he followed it. Unfortunately by that time he was in over his head—and it was as easy for the assassins to sabotage his investigation as it was, more recently, for people like them to scuttle the Presidential aspirations of Muskie, McGovern, et al.

None of us will ever know the full truth about the John Kennedy Assassination and the Garrison probe until there is an adequate investigation by a Senate panel such as the Watergate Committee, or by some other group with equal scope of jurisdiction. It is time now to find out just how long Watergate-style "capers" have been going on and to what extent they have shaped US policy.

—kerry thornley