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Jim Garrison And His War With the CIA

Earling Carothers (Jim) Garrison gained national attention in 1967 when as district attorney of New Orleans he claimed President John F. Kennedy was assassinated as part of a conspiracy. In the years that followed, Garrison was indicted as a bribe taker and a federal income tax evader, but was acquitted on both charges. He served 12 years as district attorney before losing the office in 1973. Garrison was interviewed in New Orleans by Washington Star Staff Writer Allan Frank.

Question: Since 1967, you've said that the Central Intelligence Agency has been engaged in large-scale domestic espionage operations. Have you been surprised by any of the recent stories about the CIA?

Garrison: No, nothing has surprised me. I felt ultimately it would come to the surface, but not so soon. At this point, it is safe to predict that they are going to find increasingly that their operation of domestic activities is going to surface as a major source of trouble. I think they are going to find that the domestic department was capsulated from the rest of the agency. Being capsulated makes it much harder for the rest of the agency to control. Where you have an agency that does not have the legal right to operate domestically, that part of the agency which is nevertheless engaged in domestic operations necessarily will be the most covert part of the agency.

Q: Do you believe that the CIA has been involved in domestic assassinations?

A: At no time did I even try to communicate that it was the CIA as a structure involved in the assassinations, but it was elements within the agency. Anyone who has any understanding of the agency and its compartmentalization would have to understand that John McCone — director of the Agency when President Kennedy was shot — has nothing whatsoever to do with the assassination and probably was the most surprised man in the world at all this.

Q: How many assassinations are you talking about?

A: I don't think it is possible for any individual to estimate without the results of a broad-scale inquiry. There might be a great number of
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individuals who were not well known but who were in the way of domestic operations objectives. If they were in the way, they would have been eliminated. To be responsible in your evaluation, all you can do is speak where some degree of hard data has become available, the murder of John Kennedy, the murder of Robert Kennedy, the murder of Martin Luther King. Each of them bears consistent earmarks of the involvement of government intelligence operations or men somehow associated with government intelligence activities. For example, by Nov. 22 (1963 when John Kennedy was shot), you have a pre-existing structure, an ad hoc group made up of a complex of individuals ranging from those still actively connected with the CIA to those whose connections were in the past to those who had one foot in the door and one foot out. That's why you have to consider it as an ad hoc group. The point is that having worked together on the Bay of Pigs invasion, the group as a whole has a homogeneous quality. It becomes irrelevant that some men may no longer be with the agency and some are. The unifying factor was their associations which grew out of their agency relationships.

Q: But are "agency relationships" the same thing as a conspiracy to kill? Is there no possibility of coincidence?

A: When you look at the assassination of Jack Kennedy, you see the relationships I'm talking about. Guy Bannister had one foot in the door and one foot out. David Ferrie was a contract employe of the CIA. Gen. Charles P. Cabell, who had been deputy director of the CIA during the Bay of Pigs and had been forced out by Kennedy, was from Dallas. His brother was the mayor of Dallas at the time of the assassination, at the time of the parade. His grandfather was the sheriff of Dallas; his father was the sheriff, then became mayor of Dallas. In other words, it's three generations of control by the Cabells in Dallas. The Cabell administration changed the parade route the day before the assassination. That's why there was total cooperation in the assassination by Dallas law enforcement agencies. In terms of reasonable probability. Gen. Cabell has to be

the highest ranking man to surface so far in connection with the assassination. It can't be regarded as just coincidence. It's an intellectual conclusion, he didn't come to me and confess. We arrested two men back in the 1960s and both were CIA-connected. One was David Ferrie, one was Clay Shaw. That's all we arrested. Now here we have on Dec. 21, 1973 a press release from Victor Marchetti which states that Clay Shaw was CIA. Would you call that a coincidence? It is not possible in terms of probability for me to be saying in 1967 when I was saying it publicly as a matter of record that the Central Intelligence Agency, or part of the Central Intelligence Agency, was involved in the assassination (of John Kennedy) and at the same time we had grabbed Ferrie and we had grabbed Shaw and were seeking to convict Shaw for his involvement. It is not possible for me to have been wrong and then for Shaw and Ferrie to turn out to be members of the CIA. It would demand too much coincidence.

Q: When you bring forward these views, are you still greeted as a crackpot?

A: Well, when I first started talking about these things in 1967, the national press largely treated me like I was a crackpot, a publicity seeker. The reaction was always: That's an outrageous conclusion. Now the climate is different. People are prepared to deal with what was once dismissed as outrageous. What I guess I failed to communicate was

my view that it wasn't the government but individuals who were behind this. I guess that's why the government closed its ranks so closely.

Q: What happens now?

A: Well, first off, I'm not going public, not granting a lot of interviews although people are calling me all the time. Now people — cabdrivers to lawyers — are stopping me on the street and saying, "You're right. You said it first."

Q: Do you see any similarities between Watergate and the assassination?

A: Yes, above all, the Kennedy scenario, like the subsequent scenarios for Robert Kennedy and Martin Luther King, was an intelligence scenario, replete with false sponsors, obstacles, red herrings and scapegoats. There is always the well-established scapegoat whom the public is allowed to have only a brief view of



JIM GARRISON

'Nothing has surprised me'

before he's snatched away forever.

Q: Do you have any evidence that CIA employes were involved in the shootings of Robert F. Kennedy or Martin Luther King?

A: I did not have occasion to investigate those assassinations. That's why I limit myself to the observation that the pattern of an intelligence operation in every instance is most systematic and obvious as is the pattern subsequent to each assassination of coverup and concealment of the federal government.

Q: What did you think about the shooting of George Wallace?

A: The shooting of Wallace indicated that Nixon was descending and McGovern was rising. In the Gallup poll before the shooting, Nixon was down to 44 percent and McGovern had risen to 41 percent. Wallace had the swing vote. A 2 percent drop by Nixon and a 2 percent rise makes McGovern president of the United States. So what happens? Wallace gets crippled and removed from the race and his 13 percent support naturally goes to the conservative candidate - that shooting was Nixon's landslide. I don't have any detailed data on the George Wallace case except that it contains to some degree evidence of the intelligence format. As an example, you have "The Diary" of the scapegoat which frequently seems to surface in domestic intelli-

gence assassinations. These diaries are essentially phony and serve the function of misleading anyone interested in a serious inquiry. You have the Lee Harvey Oswald "Diary" and the Sirhan Sirhan "Diary" and Arthur Bremer's "Diary."

Q: And James Earl Ray?

A: In James Earl Ray's case,

there's no diary but other patterns which are offsetting. For instance, his exotic travels — Mexico, Canada, England, Portugal. That's rather a lot for a drifter, isn't it? And you have the radio reports of the white Mustang — the sort of things that are likely to have been planted to preoccupy investigators, while the man who actually accomplished the assassination probably was departing by an unmarked government plane.

Q: But what's the point, what's behind it?

A: Assassinations actually are very simple, they're just made to look complex. Jack Kennedy was an old-fashioned ambush. They complexify the situation. It makes the people dizzy and they throw up their hands. It's now well established with no question whatsoever remaining that Robert Kennedy was shot only in the back. The autopsy — as well as the grand jury testimony of coroner Noguchi — shows that Kennedy was killed by a pistol shot a few inches behind his right ear, yet the only man arrested and serving time was a man who was standing well in front of him and missed Robert Kennedy completely with his shots. There's no widespread curiosity, no serious concern about the fact that the murderer of Robert Kennedy is free and in the streets today. As long as a scapegoat is grabbed that satisfies public curiosity, at least in the United States of today. Most people don't mind at all that the actual assassins are allowed to go free. It's part of the national isolation from reality. It's a basic affliction of the country today which previously developed out of the cold war and the overwhelming complexity of it.

Q: Do you think Lyndon Johnson had anything to do with the coverup you talk about?

A: I don't like to speculate but you can come up with informed speculation that Johnson was of such character that it would have been unnecessary to consult with him. The men handling the assassination would know in advance that they could count on him to conceal the intelli-

gence involvement because Johnson had never indicated any hesitation in lying or fooling the people whenever it suited his purposes. Once you understand that intelligence operatives act on a need-to-know basis, it becomes perceivable as a probability that it was not necessary that Johnson know because they could count on his co-operation in any case. In the final analysis, what's important is not whether he knew before but the obvious fact that he had to have known afterward and that he did everything possible to initiate the coverup and protection of the assassins who made him president.

Q: How important do you think Gerald Ford's role on the Warren Commission is to his current role as President?

A: Well, I guess you want an on-the-record answer. I'll put it this way: I could not regard it as completely irrelevant.

Q: Do you expect any of what you see as the involvement of Shaw and Oswald with the CIA to come out this summer during the congressional hearings?

A: Yes, I do. I know that by now a number of competent critics of the government coverup have become well aware of Shaw and Oswald's involvement with the CIA. But you must remember that Oswald was a victim, just like Jack Kennedy. While Oswald worked for the CIA as a low level employe, he was not a part of the assassination. They knew him, he knew them. That's why they were able to use him, knowing he had worked for the government in Russia for 30 months. They knew he was a natural patsie. They're still thinking of Lee Oswald leaning out of the depository window.