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Sideshow: New Orleans D.A. Jim Garrison (above) last week charged retired businessman Clay Shaw (right) with plotting Kennedy's assassination



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ASSASSINATION:

History or Headlines?

The sinister summer of 1963 was a time of turbulence for New Orleans, that most Latin of major U.S. cities. Lee Harvey Oswald was on hand, one day posing as a member of an anti-Castro group, the next handing out pro-Castro leaflets. The streets were seething with Cuban exiles of every political stripe, and the city was simmering with their plots and counterplots. Probing that murky period last week, New Orleans District Attorney Jim Garrison was still seeking a conspiracy in the assassination of John F. Kennedy, still making headlines rather than history.

After three months of quiet investigation and two weeks of wide-ranging accusations, the district attorney narrowed his focus of attention. He indicated that

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he was zeroing in on a group of Cuban exiles and American eccentrics who first plotted the assassination of Cuban dictator Fidel Castro and then, incredibly, shifted their target to John F. Kennedy. Garrison has one key source for leads; the published testimony taken by the Warren commission. But unlike other commission critics who doubt that Oswald alone killed Kennedy, the burly, boisterous district attorney has all the powers of his office—to subpoena witnesses, to make arrests and to procure search warrants. He used those powers last week and made the most serious and precise charge of his self-perpetuating investigation. He arrested New Orleans businessman Clay Shaw. Then, in an application for a warrant to search Shaw's French Quarter home, he sketched the outlines of an alleged plot against Kennedy. The D.A. stated that Shaw, under the alias of "Clay Bertrand," met with Oswald and perhaps others, including an unnamed informant, to plan the assassination. They met, according to Garrison, in the apartment of David Ferrie, whose recent death was followed by Garrison's claim he had been about to arrest him (NEWSWEEK, March 6).

Extra Man: The Warren commission testimony briefly mentions a Clay Bertrand who allegedly sought a lawyer for Oswald on the afternoon of the assassination. But Bertrand was never even located, much less linked to Shaw, 54, a well-known figure in New Orleans. A large and stately man, with the bearing of a higher-echelon diplomat, Shaw is a wealthy businessman and real-estate speculator who was a decorated World War II hero and later became managing director of the International Trade Mart. His bachelorhood and old-world charm have made him the perfect "extra man" at dinner parties in the ante-bellum mansions of the city's uptown district. To most New Orleans citizens, he seemed one of the Establishment untouchables.

Not to Jim Garrison. After he was arrested, Shaw was questioned for several hours, and finally emerged from the D.A.'s office in handcuffs to be booked and then released on \$10,000 bond. The search of his apartment, according to the report filed in Criminal District Court, yielded little but apparently unrelated exotica: five whips, several lengths of chain, a black net hat, a black cape and hood. Shaw denied ever knowing Oswald or participating in an assassination conspiracy. "I never heard of any plot," he said. "I never used any alias in my life."

But Garrison continued right on in the cocksure vein that has made his investigation front-page news all over the world. His staff was busy running down leads in exile communities and in the homosexual world of his own city as well as of Houston, Dallas and Miami. When

staffers phoned in last week, they identified themselves with bingo-game code names—B-15, N-37. "It's the only way I can talk to my people without [the FBI] knowing my every step," Garrison told NEWSWEEK's Philip Carter and Hugh Aynesworth.

'Gay Boy': The D.A. insisted he already had proof that Shaw, Ferrie and Oswald were conspirators, but was still looking for a "gay boy" who resembled Oswald and actually fired the fatal shots. To all appearances, Garrison exuded confidence. "We've got it wrapped up," he said. "I don't think—I know!"

Skeptics doubted that Garrison knew anything very definite. In Washington, Attorney General Ramsey Clark announced that the FBI had found "no connection" between Shaw and the assassination. (Clark, declared Garrison,

would not "qualify for my staff.") And in Lima, Peru, touring Chief Justice Earl Warren said he knew of nothing to change his commission's conclusions.

Moreover, D.A. Garrison's decision to concentrate on homosexuals, a relatively vulnerable group, tended to produce a line-up of alleged conspirators that much of the public found difficult to take seriously. Ferrie, for example, remained a solid suspect in the Garrison gallery of calculated evil, but a laughingstock to exile militants. Last week Cuban exile leader Sergio Arcacha told of the time Ferrie took him to see a "two-man submarine" that Ferrie, a onetime airlines pilot, had constructed to harass Castro's shipping lanes. The little craft was made from an old B-25 gas tank, had no navigation instruments and no power plant but foot pedals. The sub rested for a time in a backyard and finally ended up on a garbage dump.

So, say Garrison's own growing gallery of critics, will the D.A.'s case.