

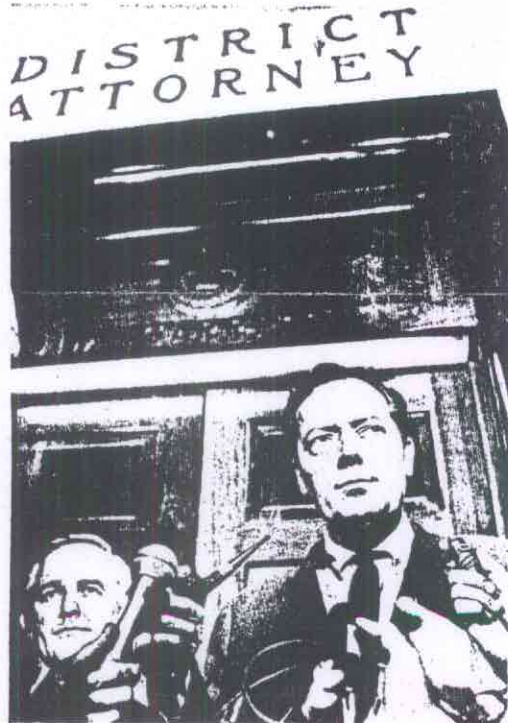
POSTSCRIPT

SHOTS IN THE DARK

by Edward Jay Epstein

WHEN Jim Garrison, the former district attorney of New Orleans, died, of heart disease, on October 21st, the obituaries called attention to two extraordinary events that occurred a generation apart—one in fact, one in fiction—and will be forever connected with Garrison, and with each other, in the popular imagination. The real event, which took place in 1969, was

mortality as a soft-spoken, truth-seeking district attorney who relentlessly investigates the Kennedy assassination and, despite all the obstacles thrown in his way by the federal establishment, heroically exposes the conspiracy responsible for killing the President. Although—or because—this fictive rendition excited enormous interest among the millions who saw it, and even led to the film's distributor's issuing study guides for a generation of young moviegoers unborn at the time of the assassination, the real Garrison, and his treatment of the truth, deserves not to be forgotten.



Jim Garrison: A career spent turning fact into fiction.

Garrison's prosecution of Clay Shaw in New Orleans for conspiring to commit murder in the November 22, 1963, assassination of President John F. Kennedy, which gave Garrison the distinction of being the only prosecutor ever to have tried someone for the Kennedy assassination. The fictional event was Oliver Stone's film "JFK," released in 1991, in which Garrison, played by Kevin Costner, achieved celluloid im-

vidence beyond a shadow of a doubt." Garrison's conspiracy thesis clearly contradicted the Warren Commission's conclusion that a lone gunman, Lee Harvey Oswald, had been responsible for the assassination. But, as far as I was concerned, that did not necessarily mean that Garrison was wrong. Two years earlier, in writing my master's thesis at Cornell, which became the 1966 book "Inquest: The Warren Commission and

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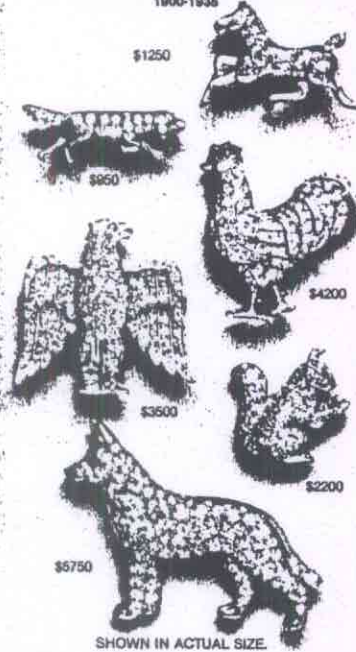
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the Establishment of Truth," I had examined the Warren Commission's staff records and found that its investigation, far from being the exhaustive examination it was taken for, had skimmed over unresolved issues. The commission, which had been appointed by President Lyndon Johnson on November 29, 1963, was determined to have its report out before the 1964 election. So in June of 1964, just three months after staff lawyers began their investigation at the assassination site, the commission instructed them that they were supposed to be "closing doors, not opening them." At that time, one yawning gap in the investigation was Oswald's activities in New Orleans in the summer of 1963. So I, for one, believed it to be at least possible that a local district attorney not hemmed in by the time pressures, the political considerations, and the national-security considerations that affected the Warren Commission might have uncovered hidden associates of Oswald's in New Orleans.

Garrison was born Earling Carothers Garrison in Denniston, Iowa, on November 20, 1921, but he legally changed his first name to plain Jim upon entering Louisiana politics, in the nineteen-fifties. He had previously tried his hand at being a pilot in the military in the Second World War, an agent for the Federal Bureau of Investigation in Seattle, and a lawyer in New Orleans. After running for a judgeship and failing to win, he ran as a reform candidate for district attorney in a five-man race in 1961, and was elected in a runoff. He quickly made a reputation for himself, strapping on a pistol and leading well-publicized raids on brothels, after-hours bars, and dice games in the French Quarter. "I am flamboyant," he bragged to the press. When the panel of eight judges who oversaw his office's expenditures refused to authorize any more funds for these forays, he suggested that they were under "racketeer influences," and, because of this unsupported charge, in February of 1963 he was tried for criminal defamation and convicted. Garrison appealed to the United States Supreme Court—on the ground that the state law on defamation of officials was unconstitutional—and won, thereby greatly expanding the public's latitude in levelling charges against public officials.

Garrison was properly referred to in

New Orleans as the Jolly Green Giant, and when I met him for dinner, at Broussard's, I could see why. He stood six feet six inches tall, and had a self-conscious stoop that made him look even taller, as if he were larger than life. As he lumbered through the restaurant, he paused to shake hands with acquaintances at nearly every table. His welcome to me was extremely gracious. He began by saying solemnly that my book on the Warren Commission had helped shape his decision to launch his investigation. (I learned later that that was more or less the standard compliment he paid critics of the Warren Commission.) Fixing me with an intense, almost walleyed stare, and speaking slowly but with very careful articulation, he said that he traced his own intellectual development to two heroes: Ayn Rand, whose lone-wolf protagonist in "The Fountainhead" had exemplified to him the need for individuals of higher consciousness to act like supermen, and Huey Long, the assassinated governor of Louisiana, whose speeches attacking elite conspiracies had attracted immense popular support in the nineteen-thirties.

As dinner progressed, Garrison spelled out the conspiracy he had uncovered. His narrative was rich but episodic. Its central character was David W. Ferrie, a former airline pilot and self-styled soldier of fortune, who was bizarre even by the broad standards of the French Quarter. He had pieces of orange fur glued to his head, having lost all his body hair from the disease alopecia. He professed to be a bishop in a quasi-political cult called the Orthodox Old Catholic Church of North America, and he had worked as a free-lance pilot, a pornography trafficker, a hypnotist, and a gas-station operator. By the summer of 1963, when Oswald was living in New Orleans, Ferrie had also become involved in training anti-Castro guerrillas.

The day after the Kennedy assassination, Garrison told me, he got a tip to the effect that Ferrie had trained Oswald in marksmanship. Garrison detained Ferrie for questioning, but released him a few hours later, after the tipster, a private investigator named Jack Martin, who was known to have provided false leads in other cases, recanted his story. Three years later, after Senator Russell Long, of

Louisiana, told Garrison that he had doubts about the Warren Commission's version of the assassination, Garrison resumed his pursuit of Ferrie. Ferrie maintained that he had had no connection with Oswald, but Garrison found witnesses who established—to his satisfaction, at least—that Ferrie had been involved with Oswald through his anti-Castro activities. He was deeply suspicious of a trip that Ferrie had made to Houston the day of the assassination, and hypothesized that Ferrie had been Oswald's getaway pilot. (Ferrie said that he had been in Texas to go goose hunting.) By the time I saw Garrison, in April of 1967, he was asserting with absolute authority that Ferrie, "one of history's most important individuals," was intimately involved in the mechanics of the Kennedy assassination.

The trouble with this theory, in terms of its usefulness in a criminal prosecution, was that Ferrie had died some six weeks before Garrison outlined it to me. Garrison told me at dinner that just when he had been planning to rearrest Ferrie, in late February, his investigation

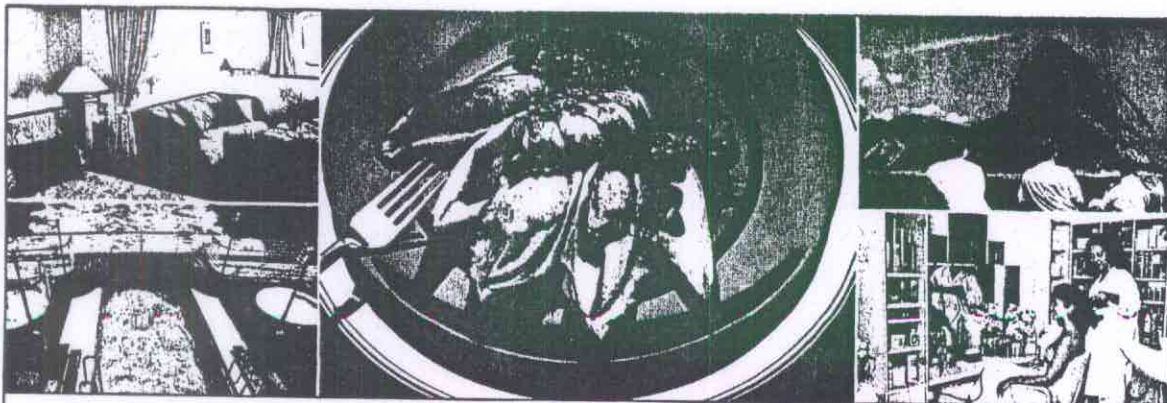
leaked to the press. However, on February 22, 1967, Ferrie's body was found in his apartment. (A few hours before he died, Ferrie had complained to George Lardner, of the *Washington Post*, that Garrison was persecuting him.) Dr. Nicholas Chetta, the coroner of Orleans Parish, concluded from the autopsy that Ferrie had died of natural causes—a cerebral hemorrhage brought about by the rupture of a blood vessel. Although Garrison suspected suicide or murder, he told me, he had not challenged the coroner's finding. Instead, a week later he had arrested a man named Clay Shaw for the assassination.

When I asked what Shaw had to do with the assassination, Garrison's reply was elliptical. "It's exactly like a chess problem," he said. "The Warren Commission moved the same pieces back and forth and got nowhere. I made a new move and solved the problem." He explained that the abrupt arrest had been timed to prevent Shaw from destroying any of his personal papers, and immediately afterward Garrison's men had gathered them up from Shaw's home, in the

French Quarter. Garrison now offered to make this "important evidence" available to me.

EARLY the next morning, I went, with a research associate, Jones Harris, to the District Attorney's office suite, in the Criminal District Court Building, where Garrison had left word with an assistant district attorney named James C. Alcock that I "should start going through the evidence." Alcock brought in six cardboard cartons, which proved to contain such personal effects as letters, photographs, manuscripts, checkbooks, address books, calendars, blueprints for the renovation of houses in the French Quarter (one of Shaw's civic projects), and a Mardi Gras costume. Before leaving us alone with this material, Alcock said that the District Attorney's staff had yet to examine it fully. Even though a judge's order had forbidden disclosure or discussion of the evidence in the case, Garrison apparently had no compunction about turning it over to a journalist to peruse.

None of this material, as far as I could



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see, had any bearing on the conspiracy Garrison had described to me the night before, but Jones Harris discovered a striking coincidence: a five-digit number in Shaw's address book also appeared in Lee Harvey Oswald's address book. Oswald's book contained the number "19106" preceded by the Cyrillic letters "ДД," or "DD." Shaw's book contained an entry that read "Lee Odom, PO Box 19106, Dallas, Tex." If that match proved to be more than a coincidence, of course, it could provide a connection between Shaw and Oswald. Immediately after being apprised of this discovery by Harris, Garrison announced to the press that he had linked Shaw to Oswald. He stated without equivocation that Shaw's and Oswald's address books contained the identical entry "PO 19106" (a statement that was untrue), that this number was "nonexistent" (a fact that he had not determined), and that the number was a code, which had been deciphered and had produced the unlisted telephone number of Oswald's killer, Jack Ruby, and "no other number on earth" (statements that were also false). When Garri-

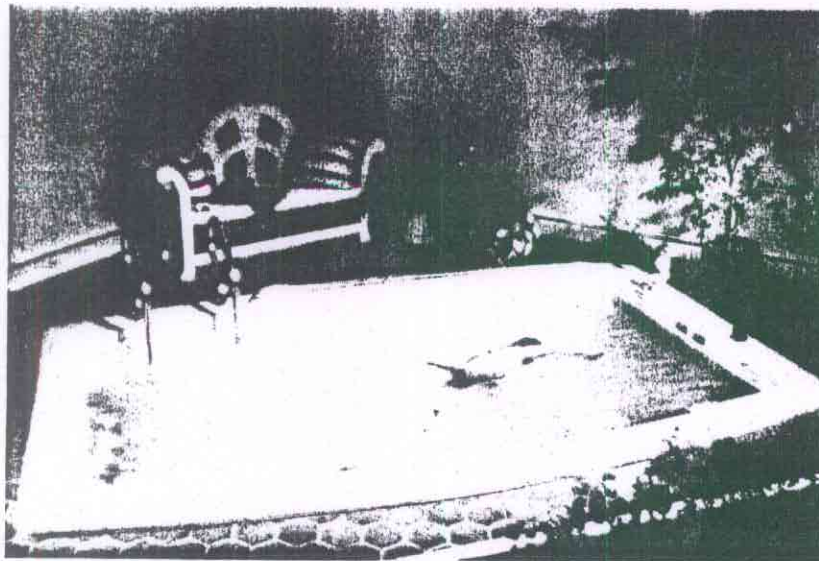
son was asked by a reporter how "PO 19106" had become Ruby's telephone number, "WH 1-5601," he replied, without missing a beat, that one simply rearranged the phone number's digits by alternately taking one from each end of the number (so that it became "PO 16901") and subtracted 1300.

It turned out that the post-office box 19106 in Dallas not only existed but had been assigned to Odom, the man listed in Shaw's address book. Shaw said that Odom had got in touch with him in 1966, in the hope of promoting a bloodless bullfight in New Orleans, and had left him his calling card, which accounted for the entry. In any case, Odom's post-office-box number could not possibly have been the number in Oswald's address book, because that box number had not existed in Dallas until it was assigned to Odom, in 1965; and, of course, Oswald had died in 1963. When Garrison was confronted with his false statements, he attempted to divert attention, first by saying that he wanted to find out "how many bullfights Mr. Odom has actually produced," and then

by claiming that he had also found in Oswald's address book a number that, on being decoded, yielded what he said was the unlisted number of the Central Intelligence Agency in New Orleans—the same number that, at the time, was listed in the New Orleans telephone directory under "Central Intelligence Agency."

GARRISON'S unconventional methodology also accounted for the conspiracy charge at the center of his case against Clay Shaw. His allegation was that Clay Shaw, under the alias Clay Bertrand, had met with David Ferrie and Lee Harvey Oswald in Ferrie's apartment on a single occasion in September of 1963 and, in the presence of a fourth man, Perry Raymond Russo, plotted the assassination of President Kennedy in Dallas. Ferrie and Oswald were now dead, and Shaw unequivocally denied that he had attended such a meeting (or, for that matter, that he knew either Oswald or Ferrie), so Garrison's only possible witness was Russo, a twenty-five-year-old insurance man from Baton Rouge, who in 1963 had been in the

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pornographic-film business with Ferrie. But when Garrison announced, on February 23, 1967, that he had "positively solved the assassination," he had known nothing about Russo's story.

Russo's involvement with the case began when he appeared on a local television program the same night and told an interviewer that he had been acquainted with Ferrie, and that Ferrie had once mentioned to him how easy it would be to assassinate a President. Garrison developed Russo's bland story into one that had Russo saying he had witnessed the plot unfold. The day after seeing Russo on TV, Garrison dispatched Assistant D.A. Andrew (Moo-Moo) Sciambra, a former pugilist, to Baton Rouge to interview him. Russo's story, according to a lengthy written report submitted by Sciambra, contained virtually nothing that would validate Garrison's claims. Russo did not recall any meeting at which Ferrie, Oswald, Shaw, or anyone else had discussed assassinating President Kennedy, and when Sciambra showed him some photographs of Shaw he said that he had seen Shaw on only two occasions, and on those from afar: once at a political rally for Kennedy, and once in a car at a gasoline station.

Although this testimony left a gaping hole in Garrison's new theory, Garrison realized that Russo might be induced to fill in his story. On February 27th, he had Russo drugged with sodium pentothal and reinterrogated. While Russo was in a semiconscious state, Moo-Moo Sciambra introduced the subject of Clay Bertrand by asking Russo "if he could remember any of the details about Clay Bertrand being up in Ferrie's apartment." Under such prompting, Russo gradually began to expand his story. Next, Garrison had him hypnotized. A Dr. Esmond Fatter, whom Garrison hired for the task, told Russo to imagine a television screen in his mind: "There will be Bertrand, Ferrie, and Oswald. . . They are talking about assassinating somebody." By the time Garrison finished these "verifying tests," as he called them, Russo had become his sole witness to the assassination plot.

The fact that Russo's testimony was hypnotically induced would eventually be exposed in court, Garrison realized, since the defense had a right to examine all the accuser's statements, but he artfully man-

aged to stretch out the interval between the charge and the trial for more than twenty-two months while he engaged in a wide range of diversionary actions. At one point in 1967, for example, he had a man named Edgar Eugene Bradley, who was a fund-raiser for a California fundamentalist religious broadcast called "The Twentieth Century Reformation," arrested on the charge of conspiring to kill the President, even though, as Garrison's own bewildered staff confirmed, he had not a scintilla of evidence against this person other than an anonymous letter that accused a man named Eugene Bradley, who may or may not have been the one Garrison arrested, of making inflammatory comments about President Kennedy. During the course of his pretrial "investigations," Garrison also issued arrest warrants for three journalists, from whom he had previously sought publicity: he accused Walter Sheridan, of NBC, of "public bribery"; David Chandler, of *Life*, of "perjury"; and Richard Townley, of WDSU-TV, in New Orleans, of "intimidation of a witness."

Garrison also used this pretrial period, in which he had become the focus of national attention, to appear on network television programs. On the "Tonight Show," in January of 1968, when he was asked by Johnny Carson to reveal the new evidence that he claimed to have he reached into a black briefcase and pulled out some old news photographs he had obtained from the *Dallas Times Herald*, which were taken at the Texas Book Depository soon after the assassination and showed nothing more than a group of bystanders, at least two of whom worked in the building, being questioned by policemen. "Here are the pictures of five of them being arrested, and they've never been shown before," Garrison said, holding up the blurry prints, and he added, "Several of these men arrested have been connected by our office with the Central Intelligence Agency." It turned out later that he had not even determined the identity of the bystanders he was referring to, much less their organizational affiliations. He then told Carson, "An element of the Central Intelligence Agency of our country killed John Kennedy." By this time, what Garrison called "the forces behind the conspiracy" had proliferated considerably. When he began his investigation, in December of



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1966, he had told Senator Long that only a few insignificant men were involved—meaning Ferrie and a few of his bizarre associates. After Ferrie's death, the conspiracy began to expand. He told me in early 1967, after he arrested Shaw, that the group included "perverts"—both Ferrie and Shaw were homosexual—and anti-Castro Cubans. Then, as he went from interview to interview, the conspiracy escalated to include oil millionaires, Dallas policemen, munitions exporters, paramilitary reactionaries, White Russians, elements of "the invisible Nazi substructure," and C.I.A. agents.

When the trial finally began, on January 21, 1969, Shaw's defense lawyer, Irvin Dymond, made short work of the credibility of Garrison's only witness to the conspiracy that was at issue. Moo-Moo Sciambra's memorandum describing Russo's pre-hypnosis story showed that Russo had originally excluded Shaw from any meeting in Ferrie's apartment he had witnessed. Moreover, during cross-examination Russo himself admitted that he had told Lieutenant Edward O'Donnell, of the New Orleans Police Department, that Shaw was probably not the man he had seen in Ferrie's apartment. This admission was made after Shaw had been arrested. Then, there was the matter of "Clay Bertrand," which Garrison said was the alias Shaw used when he met Russo. But at the trial a lawyer named Dean Andrews acknowledged that it was he who had introduced the name Clay Bertrand into the investigation, after the assassination, when he was interviewed by the Secret Service. Andrews now stated under oath that the name Bertrand was a fiction he had made up to protect the identity of another person, who was not Clay Shaw. So how could Russo assert that Clay Bertrand was the name Clay Shaw was using in September of 1963—unless the name had been fed to him by the prosecution?

Despite the apparent collapse of his case, Garrison had his assistants darken the courtroom and screen—ten times—the famous amateur film of the assassination made by Abraham Zapruder, so the jurors saw, over and over again, the gruesome scene of Kennedy's head being shattered by a bullet. Garrison's assistants also called a parade of aural witnesses, who testified that they had heard shots—or the echoes of shots—coming from different directions. He also pre-

sented, as a surprise witness, an impeccably dressed New Yorker named Charles I. Spiesel, who testified, matter-of-factly, that on a trip to New Orleans in May of 1963 he had found himself at a party where the assassination was being plotted by most of the same characters Russo had presumably seen at Ferrie's apartment. Under cross-examination, however, Spiesel admitted that he had for sixteen years been the victim of a vast conspiracy, in which the conspirators—who included policemen, his own psychiatrist, and some fifty hypnotists—followed him around New York, tapped his phones, caused him to make errors in his business, prevented him from having normal sexual relations, kept him under their hypnotic control, and were so proficient at assuming the identity of his relatives that he had repeatedly fingerprinted his own daughter to make sure she was not an impostor.

Garrison himself rarely appeared at the trial; he didn't show up even for the testimony or the cross-examination of the man he had accused of conspiring to kill the President. When he finally made his closing statement, a disjointed twenty-five-minute speech, he mentioned the defendant's name only once. Borrowing from Kennedy's celebrated inaugural address, he exhorted the jury, "Ask not what your country can do for you but what you can do for your country."

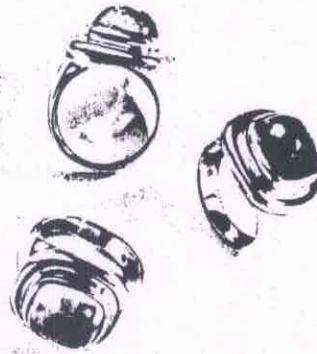
It took the jury less than an hour to reach its verdict: Shaw was not guilty. Two years to the day had elapsed since Shaw's arrest, and the cost of his legal defense had nearly bankrupted him. Although he left court on March 1, 1969, an acquitted man, he was not yet free of Garrison. Two days later, Garrison rearrested him and, in order to circumvent double-jeopardy restrictions, attempted to try him for perjury. Eventually, a federal court intervened, and quashed a new indictment that Garrison had obtained. Shaw died in 1974. So ended the part of Garrison's activities that involved legally testable evidence—an episode that the *New York Times* called "one of the most disgraceful chapters in the history of American jurisprudence."

THE ensuing press attacks on Garrison missed both the point and the power of his appeal. His crusade, which did not end for some twenty years (when it was enshrined in the movie), was not

about forensic evidence—Shaw served merely as a convenient means to an end—but about something far more tormenting to his public: the conspicuous *absence* of evidence. Garrison concerned himself not with what existed and could be verified and tested by accepted procedures but with what was missing from the investigation, which he endlessly reeled off like a litany: the X-rays and autopsy photographs of President Kennedy's body (they had not been examined by the Warren Commission); four frames of the Zapruder film (they had not been published in the Warren Report); classified documents in the National Archives (they were to remain unavailable to the public for seventy-five years); the President's brain (it had vanished from government custody); bullets at the scene of the assassination (they had not been found); missing witnesses (or dead ones).

The very fact that such pieces of evidence were missing from the public record enabled Garrison to speculate at every opportunity about the systematic suppression of the true story of the assassination and the power of the forces behind this cover-up. Playing on the public's concern about and repugnance against government secrecy in a democracy, he asked why something would be kept from the public if it had no sinister implications. Once he had focussed the attention of his audience on missing evidence, he needed to take only a single rhetorical step in order to draw the most sinister connection between that and the succession to power. For example, he asked in an article he published in the magazine *Ramparts* in 1968, "Who controls the C.I.A.? Who controls the F.B.I.? Who controls the Archives where this evidence is locked up for so long that it is unlikely that there is anybody in this room who will be alive when it is released? This is really your property and the property of the people of this country. Who has the arrogance and the brass to prevent the people from seeing that evidence? Who indeed? The one man who has profited most from the assassination—your friendly President, Lyndon Johnson!"

While Garrison was certainly not the first to attack the dragon of missing evidence, he proved to be far more imaginative than earlier crusaders, such as Senator Joseph McCarthy, in using this mode of inquiry to project a vision of a grand

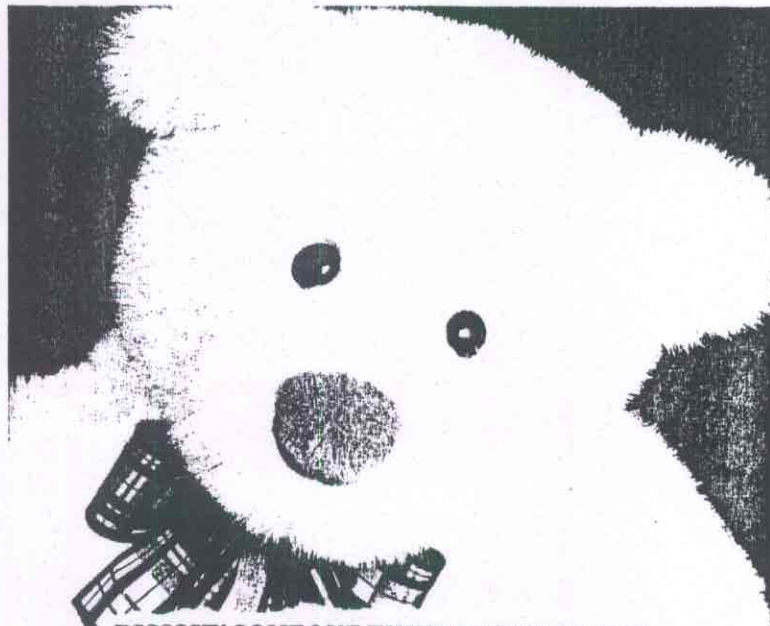


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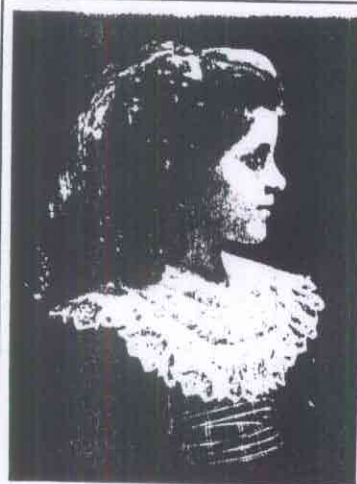
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conspiracy. Consider, for example, how he deduced President Johnson's participation in the conspiracy from what might have been a stray pebble. On one occasion, Garrison held up two newspaper photographs taken about ten minutes after the assassination. In the first one, an unidentified man in a dark suit is looking toward the curb on the street near the spot where President Kennedy was shot. Garrison announced that in this photograph he could discern, partly concealed in matted grass by the curb, a pebblelike object. His staff later concluded from a photographic enlargement that the object might indeed be a pebble. (The object is not apparent to the naked eye.) He



then identified this object as a .45-calibre bullet, the one "which killed John Kennedy, which has markings on it that would show [that] the automatic gun from which it came [was a] handgun." He then deduced from the position of this "bullet" that the assassin must have been in a sewer in front of the President, and not in the Texas School Book Depository behind the President, as the Warren Commission had concluded. Even more amazing, from the second photograph he presented, which showed only the man walking away from the curb, Garrison deduced, first, that the man, who wore a dark suit, had to be "a federal agent" and, second, from the man's closed fist, that he had "the bullet clutched in his hand, the bullet that killed John Kennedy." Garrison never explained how he could know that a bullet was in a closed hand, or know its calibre, but he announced that since this .45-calibre bullet (or pebble) had been conspicuously missing from the inventory of the Warren Commission's evidence "the bullet which killed John Kennedy, which fell in the grass with pieces of the President's head, was in the hands of the federal government ten minutes after the President was dead." There was more: "This means that the federal government knowingly participated in framing Lee Oswald," and "Lyndon Johnson had to know this."

The gunman in the sewer was not the only member of the conspiracy that Garrison had derived from missing evidence in his protracted media campaign. He had previously posited a team of fourteen additional assassins, firing from four

different spots, two of whom were probably assigned to pick up all the cartridge cases. (This was to explain why they were never found.) Since four frames of the Zapruder film had not been published in the Warren Report, he deduced that these missing frames revealed the telltale marks of a stray bullet on a street sign (the sign was also missing). When *Life*, which owned the Zapruder film, published the missing frames and they showed no traces of a bullet-scarred sign,

Garrison suggested that the markings had been airbrushed out. Since a spectator at the scene, who fainted twenty minutes before the motorcade arrived, had not been identified in the Warren Report, Garrison

claimed that this spectator had simulated an epileptic fit as part of a paramilitary diversionary action. The man involved in this supposed diversion turned out to be Jerry Boyd Belknap, an employee of the nearby *Dallas Morning News*, who had been taking medication for a head injury suffered in a car accident.

Because the autopsy X-rays of the President's body—such X-rays are often the best evidence of the path of the bullet, or bullets—were locked away in the National Archives, and not even the Warren Commission had examined them, Garrison reasoned that they showed the President to have been shot from the front in a crossfire, and not from the back, as the Warren Commission concluded. Since all tangible evidence of this "crossfire"—automatic rifles and .45-calibre pistols used by the assassins, cartridge cases ejected at four sniper nests, stray bullets, communications equipment to coordinate the gunfire, entry wounds in the President's neck—had vanished, Garrison concluded that the conspiracy possessed the "hidden machinery" necessary "to remove all stain and make it appear to have been something less." This capacity brought him back to the C.I.A. He asserted that it was "incinerating" evidence—that the Warren Commission had failed to obtain "a secret C.I.A. memo on Oswald's activities in Russia" because the memo had been "destroyed" the day after the assassination. (The fact is that the "secret C.I.A. memo" appears in Volume XVIII of the Warren Commission's twenty-six volumes of published testimony and evidence; only a State Department copy

of the memo had been destroyed, in a photocopier.) Garrison cited, as his clincher, the ultimate missing evidence: the "consistent refusal of the Federal government" to provide "any information" about the C.I.A.'s role in the assassination.

In his book "A Heritage of Stone," which he wrote less than a year after the Clay Shaw trial (and in which he does not even mention Shaw), Garrison explains why many others failed to detect this enormous conspiracy. He sees Americans inhabiting the same country but living in two different realms of consciousness. The first realm is naïve and innocent, a place where everyone is duped by "the glitter of the official lies." In this realm, he says, "an individual cannot cope with the unseen forces of the superstate," because "his perception is limited by his assumption that things are as they appear to be and by his belief that he is living in a world in which evil is easily recognized." So, believing that what they see, hear, and read corresponds to reality, these Americans fail to realize that "an intricate contrivance of men for the clandestine production of illusion had become . . . a manipulator of America." He further explains, "The main reason for the inability of the American people and the press to recognize the conspiracy to kill President Kennedy was the fact that its operations all occurred in another dimension, a dimension which generally is not known to exist in our nation."


This second dimension, or realm, is both evil and manipulative. In it an "invisible government [that] begins and ends with deception" appropriates power to itself through assassinations, and conceals from the populace "government force that is as criminal as the Germany of Hitler or the Russia of Stalin." This "power elite," supported by "the military-industrial complex," was the hidden sponsor of the Vietnam War and the nuclear-arms race. To assure its invisibility, this elite employs technicians capable of inflicting on its enemies "heart attacks, falls, shootings by 'deranged' men and dozens of other kinds of misadventures." It engages in "thought control" over the media and, in the case of those who escape this "concentration camp of the mind," it stage-manages in the media "massive discreditation." This explains why "anyone seeking to inquire into the meaning of the assassination found him-

self in an enchanted maze which steadily led him away from reality."


Garrison, having broken out of this enchanted maze and penetrated deep into the other dimension, portrays himself as battling to wrest from the invisible elite the dark secrets that perpetuate its power. His weapon in this struggle is the missing evidence that he but not others can see and interpret.

WITH such a rarefied view of reality, Garrison did not need to modify his position when, midway through his twenty-year quest, much of the evidence that he had complained had been suppressed was made public. In 1978, a specially convened House Select Committee on Assassinations conducted its own investigation. Unlike the Warren Commission, in its more limited effort, the Select Committee delved into some of the deepest recesses of the C.I.A., the F.B.I., and other government agencies. It also addressed the issues raised by Garrison and other critics of the Warren Report (including me), by appointing various panels of independent experts to analyze crucial evidence that had been missing from the Warren Commission's investigation. Most notably, it cleared up the mystery surrounding the autopsy results by empanelling nine leading forensic pathologists—one of them Dr. Cyril H. Wecht, a respected critic of the Warren Report—to examine the complete set of X-rays and photographs taken of the President's body at the time of the autopsy and also the original Zapruder film of the assassination. These experts had among them experience in performing more than a hundred thousand autopsies.

The panel first established the authenticity of the autopsy photographs by having forensic scientists compare them with Kennedy's pre-mortem dental records and medical X-rays. Satisfied that the autopsy photographs were authentic and had not been tampered with, the committee went on to resolve discrepancies proceeding from the original autopsy by questioning most of the medical personnel involved both in the emergency attempt to prolong the President's life at Parkland Memorial Hospital, in Dallas, and in the autopsy performed at the Naval Medical Center, in Bethesda, Maryland. The panel also reexamined the medical records of Gov-



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ernor John B. Connally, of Texas, who had been seated in front of the President, and had also been wounded in the fusillade. The panel then examined the autopsy X-rays and photographs; such X-rays often provide clear evidence of the path of a bullet, because as a bullet advances through the body it may well do progressively more damage. The panel was thus able to determine that one bullet hit the President in the upper right of the back—two inches lower than the Warren Commission's diagram had placed it—and that a second bullet entered the right rear of the President's head near the cowlick area and exited from the right side of the head. These doctors took into account a frame-by-frame analysis of the Zapruder film, which showed that the President's head had moved backward at the time of impact, not forward, as might have been expected; but, because of possible neurological reactions to the head wound, they decided that there was no relationship between the direction that the head moved and the direction from which the bullet struck it. So, although they disagreed as to the precise sequence of the shots that hit President Kennedy and Governor Connally, they concluded, as the Warren Commission had, that all the discernible wounds suffered by the two men had been caused by shots fired from behind them.

Moreover, a panel of firearms experts ballistically matched the identifiable fragments of the bullets found in the limousine with the rifle found at the Texas School Book Depository. And a study done for the committee, using a technique called neutron-activation analysis, in which even a billionth of a gram of elements found in bullet lead can be analyzed by bombarding them with neutrons in a nuclear reactor, concluded that the composition of all the traces of bullet fragments recovered from the President and from the murder scene matched that of the unfired cartridge found in the chamber of the rifle in the Texas School Book Depository, purchased earlier that year by Lee Harvey Oswald.

In the light of the methodical and open nature of this examination, there was no mystery left if one believed that the evidence was what it purported to be. One gun, from one site, the Texas

School Book Depository, using one lot of ammunition, had killed Kennedy. While it remained possible that someone else had fired another rifle and missed Kennedy entirely (as the House Assassinations Committee itself suggested in its final report), according to this no longer missing evidence the President was shot from behind, not by teams of assassins in a crossfire from the front (the grassy knoll), the side, underground (the sewer), or a building other than the book depository, as Garrison had suggested.

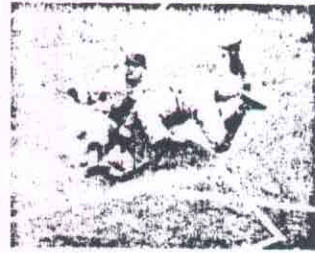
Not surprisingly, Garrison continued to focus on the evidence that was still missing rather than on what had been revealed (and was now ipso facto suspect), since he could without fear of refutation sketch out on the former whatever design he envisioned. So he deftly moved from the subject of the autopsy X-rays and photographs to that of the President's brain, which had been returned by the government in 1965 to his brother Robert F. Kennedy and then, presumably, buried in the President's grave. In "On the Trail of the Assassins," his third book, which was published in 1988, Garrison wrote, "The brain, which is still missing . . . might have shown from what directions the head shots came"—and thus slipped back in, through the polemical pluralization of "direction" and "shot," those conspirators who could not be discerned by the examination of the X-rays and autopsy pictures. The ghoulish idea that the President's brain was "missing" from the National Archives—as if that were the

proper repository for Presidential remains—could intensify the public's torment over government secrecy. Garrison also continued hammering away at the documents still sealed in the National Archives—ominously mentioning their cryptic titles—and citing "the order to conceal assassination evidence for 75 years by the federal government."

Actually, there was no such order. Many investigative files are withheld by law for seventy-five years—a number chosen arbitrarily to exceed the life span of persons likely to be mentioned in government reports, and so to protect their privacy—but in the case of the Warren Commission material President Johnson requested that this requirement be waived whenever possible and ordered all documents opened to the public except



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those containing the names of confidential informers, information damaging to innocent parties, and information about agency operating procedures. A million or so pages were then made available to the public. Moreover, even the documents that remain classified under these guidelines contain no secrets other than those which the C.I.A., the F.B.I., the State Department, and other agencies voluntarily turned over to the Warren Commission. So even if all this information were released one could still call for "missing" files—that is, those that were not delivered to the Warren Commission.

NONE of Jim Garrison's legerdemain, or his insights into the demonology of the second dimension, had much effect on his political career. After his debacle in the Shaw trial, after he was denounced by a local newspaper for being "a man without principle who would pervert the legal process to his own ends," and after it was disclosed that he had been discharged from the military for psychiatric reasons, he still easily won reelection in 1969 to a third term as district attorney, with a respectable fifty-three per cent of the vote. When he was denied a second shot at Clay Shaw, he more or less gave up on the prosecutorial route, and quietly dropped the dozen or so collateral indictments against critical journalists, defecting employees, and recalcitrant witnesses—including a perjury case against Dean Andrews, the lawyer who had fabricated the name Clay Bertrand. So, in the end, no one went to prison because of Garrison's conspiracy case. He thereafter concentrated his efforts instead on television talk shows and media interviews.

Near the end of his third term, in 1973, Garrison found himself in the dock as a defendant, being tried on federal charges of accepting bribes and conspiring to protect illegal pinball gambling. Although, acting as his own attorney, he won an acquittal for himself, he lost his subsequent bid for reelection to a fourth term that year—no doubt because he himself had been indicted as a conspirator. Returning to private life, he wrote a fast-paced assassination thriller, "The Star Spangled Contract," which demonstrated his talent for creating fiction. Retaining his flair for politics, he successfully campaigned in 1978 for a seat on Louisiana's Fourth Circuit Court

of Appeals. While on the court, he tried his hand at film acting, playing a New Orleans judge in "The Big Easy." For most of the world outside Orleans Parish, however, he had become a discredited man. His prosecution of Clay Shaw was almost universally regarded, even by his former staff members, as a mistake—a mistake that ruined the life of an innocent man. His repeated media fabrications, such as the pebble that became the "missing bullet," had left him with only an insignificant audience of true believers. Even assassination buffs found that his demagogic obsession with missing rather than existent evidence had made him a menace to any serious inquiry into the facts surrounding the assassination.

Garrison's apocalyptic vision of a secret elite operating from the second dimension might have faded into obscurity if it had not been for Oliver Stone, who read "On the Trail of the Assassins" in 1988 and decided it had potential. He later remarked to Robert Sam Anson, in *Esquire*, "It read like a Dashiell Hammett whodunit. It starts out as a bit of a seedy crime with small traces, and then the gumshoe district attorney follows the trail, and the trail widens and widens, and before you know it, it's no longer a small-town affair. That seemed to me the kernel of a very powerful movie." He paid Garrison two hundred and fifty thousand dollars for the rights to the book, and hired him as a guide to the other dimension.

So, a generation after the trial of Clay Shaw, Garrison rose from the ashes, phoenixlike, in Hollywood. He was once again reunited with Perry Raymond Russo, the star witness he had hypnotized into recalling an assassination plot; this time, both were actors in Stone's "JFK,"—Garrison as Chief Justice Earl Warren, Russo as a barfly. In this final incarnation, Garrison achieved in fiction what he had failed to do in fact: he found a worldwide audience of millions for his proclamations of the existence of a secret elite that through its assassinations and coups d'état had accounted for ten years of war in Vietnam. Through the medium of the movie, Garrison may yet incorporate in the popular imagination (or, at least, among those in the audience confused by Stone's blurring of fact and fiction) all the claims and outright delusions he derived from missing evidence, hypnosis, and encounters with forces from the second dimension. ♦