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Garrison Is Tarnished Despite Victory

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A week ago today, New Orleans District Attorney Jim Garrison walked into Judge Bernard J. Bagert's packed court to answer the demand: "Put up or shut up." He put up and nobody expects him to shut up.

Today, the towering, baggy-eyed DA can claim that he has distinctly embarrassed those critics who scoffed when he said he had evidence suggesting that President Kennedy died as the result of a conspiracy.

Judges Find a Case

The man has a case. A panel of three judges listened to it for four days and finally agreed it is strong enough to require an answer at a trial.

But Garrison cannot claim that the preliminary hearing of his evidence against Clay Shaw added glory to the reputation of his office or to the luster of Louisiana justice. Irrespective of beliefs about Shaw's innocence or guilt, you left the hearing feeling grimy, smeared by the proceedings.

No Lesson From Dallas

Too often, the players in last week's drama seemed to forget they were on stage because of the murder of a President of the United States. The awful example of Judge Joe Brown's courtroom in Dallas, where Jack Ruby went on trial, should have been enough. It was not.

In New Orleans, there was the spectacle of a judge shouting down attorneys like Lewis Carroll's Red Queen. Trooping to the stand came a junkie, a hypnotist and a man who had waited three years to voice his suspicions that Lee Harvey Oswald was the same man he said he heard plotting the death of Kennedy.

Law and the Assistants

And there was a district attorney who appeared in court only twice, both times to introduce witnesses who were certain to win headlines.

Even then, Garrison left legal



Jim Garrison
He silenced the scoffers

arguments to his assistants while he sat back puffing his pipe as if such dull distractions were beneath his notice. His assistants at least knew their law and handled themselves with dignity. The DA did not even stay to watch over his witnesses while they were being cross-examined.

Garrison could not find the time to take his seat in court when the judges handed down their decision. There was a feeling that the DA did not want to be around in case the judges ruled against him. He would have had to answer a lot of ugly questions.

Residents of New Orleans say,

"Don't underrate Jim Garrison—he's a smart operator." And there can be no doubt he has a stronger hand than he played in court.

The Addict Witness

But was it smart to present as his last witness, Vernon Bundy, a narcotics addict, to testify that he saw Shaw with Oswald on the shores of Lake Pontchartrain in the summer of 1963?

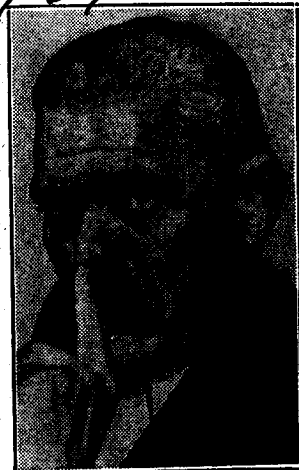
How credible is a man who admits he was trying to shoot up heroin at the time he says he noticed the two men together? Once again, it raised doubt about the judgment of the DA.

His staff had spent three days building up acceptance of his star witness, Perry Russo, who says he was present when Oswald, Shaw and an ex-pilot David Ferrie, now dead, discussed killing Kennedy. Then, apparently unaware of the revelation it would produce, Garrison tossed in a drug addict to clinch his case.

Affair Looks Cheap

Garrison's most loyal supporter might prefer to lose cleanly against Shaw than to drag testimony about heroin, and means of injecting it, into a case that springs from the death of a President. Suddenly, the whole affair looked as cheap and tawdry as a dime-store necklace.

The thought of other witnesses who may appear when Shaw, now in Southern Baptist Hospital for rest, goes to trial repels the most hardened truth-seeker however much he may distrust the Warren report and its conclusion that



Clay Shaw
He faces trial

there was no conspiracy. Garrison has had a dismaying array of kooks and creeps in and out of his office.

Another Celebration?

If he gets a conviction against Shaw, a man who is destroyed, win or lose, perhaps Garrison will throw a celebration party afterward such as he did after Friday's ruling.

What sort of man celebrates because he has taken a step toward proving that a President was the victim of a bunch of wierd misfits? It's not a moment for glee unless other ambitions are at stake.

Nobody expects a politically elected DA to shrink from publicity, but you can take too literally the saying, "Nice guys finish last."