

Garrison Conspiracy Part 3/17/67

The scene unfolding in that courtroom in New Orleans is strange and sad. Strange because a man is swearing to events that stagger the imagination. Sad because those events touch the most sensitive part of the Nation's conscience in the most insensitive way.

The tale of Perry Raymond Russo and his encounters with Lee Harvey Oswald a few months before the assassination of President Kennedy is almost beyond belief. Under oath, Mr. Russo has said he heard Oswald and two other men plan to murder Mr. Kennedy. Yet, within the last month, Mr. Russo has twice denied to newsmen that he ever heard of Oswald until after the assassination. It seems strange, indeed, that his memory can change so sharply in so short a time. But it is just as strange to think that three men would plot an assassination in front of a fourth who had dropped in casually at a party. And it is incredible that the casual visitor would keep silent if he believed what he says he heard and would continue silent after one of the plotters committed the act.

Assuming that Mr. Russo's story is true — an assumption we are not about to accept — the manner in which District Attorney Jim Garrison is making it public is a disgrace. Mr. Garrison does have an obligation as a public official to prosecute those who have committed crime. But he also has an obligation as an American not to feed the rumor-mongers or to make political capital out of the death of a President. His failure to bring his so-called evidence to the Attorney General or to check it with the FBI makes his actions irresponsible, demagogic or worse. A wise prosecutor would have realized the need to handle so delicate a situation with dignity and finesse instead of with flamboyance and arrogance.

All that Mr. Garrison is likely to accomplish is to feed the imaginations of millions of Americans who want desperately to believe that Mr. Kennedy's death was the result of a great conspiracy rather than the individual act of a sick, lonely man.