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'Plot' Belongs in a Suspense Novel

NEW ORLEANS — Here we go again with another "plot" in the story of the Kennedy assassination.

This New Orleans mystery is either a desperate bid by a local district attorney to grab the national spotlight or else the weirdest unraveling of a tangled web in the history of political conspiracy.

Take your pick, but for the moment my guess is that in the end nothing will be proved, but that the already existing suspicions will be strengthened, and the legend of an unsolved plot will persist.

Death stalks the Kennedy case. Of the three men whom District Attorney Garrison named as involved in the plot, two are dead, Oswald himself and Dave Ferrie, the air pilot who recently died, either naturally or by his own hand, depending on who is guessing. The third, Clay Shaw, has been arrested and the D.A.'s operatives have seized some of his papers and effects.

Anyone who complains that life has lost its drama, and been flattened out in a computer age, might try to think of something more dramatic than the arrest of a wealthy and distinguished real estate man, a pillar of the New Orleans community, usually

regarded as a Stevensonian liberal, on the charge of having been involved in a plot against Kennedy's life. Here in New Orleans it brought the kind of gasp of astonishment that one recalls when Alger Hiss was first accused of being part of the Communist spy apparatus.

You walk down Magazine Street and gaze at the house that Oswald lived in, where he kept pro-Castro literature and practiced his rifle shooting in the summer of that fateful year, 1963.

You walk past the little branch library, named after a man called Bonaparte who once willed his grandiose dreams, where Oswald used to check out a series of books which define the profile of man determined to be a pivot of history.

Brooding on Oswald in this frame the theatrical becomes the appropriate in a case where nothing is impossible.

The assumed action in the case one constructs from Garrison's statements is pursued in the shadowy borderlands of homosexual ties and political intensity. If Garrison fails to establish the identity of a "Clay Bertrand," a name which he alleges to be an alias for Clay Shaw, then

his whole conspiracy will tumble like a humpty-dumpty.

If he makes it stick, then he could not only get the nomination for lieutenant governor, which he has been gunning for, but could make a leap into the national picture as Nixon did in the Hiss episode. If this happened, it would be the first political career growing out of the investigation into Kennedy's death.

It all seems highly unlikely, except that my New Orleans friends tell me it is dangerous to write off Garrison either as an adventurer or a blunderer. He has established himself here as a man you had better not tangle with, because he fights hard but knows how to land on his feet.

In this case however, where the trail is so cold and the shadows so tenuous, one's guess is that he may have overreached himself.

To trust Garrison's scenario you must believe that both the FBI and the Warren Commission staff botched their inquiry into the New Orleans end of the assassination story, and botched it intolerably. You must also give some credence to the wild story going the rounds, that Castro believed the CIA had tried to mount an assassination plot against him, and that out of a cold rage he had sent out orders for Kennedy's death that reached the miserable little New Orleans group—if indeed there ever was one.

I happen to like political suspense stories as well as the next man. But this one belongs in the pages of John Le Carré or Len Deighton or Michael Gilbert, not in American history.

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